

*Gender Bias and Cultural Constraints  
in The Bride Price*

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## Chapter II

### **Gender Bias and Cultural Constraints in *The Bride Price***

*The Bride Price* represents the poignant power of ethnic traditional beliefs particularly the practise of bride price. The author anchors upon two important themes in this novel: the marriage between an Igbo girl and an Osu is strictly prohibited and the bride price holds a great significance in the traditional African marriage. Bride price is the money paid by the bridegroom in exchange of the bride's fertility to the bride's father. If the bridegroom's family fails to give the bride price, then according to the traditional belief the death of the bride becomes unavoidable. Emecheta explains that the practice of bride price turns a woman into a commodity right from her birth and its devastating role in the life of the protagonist Akunna. Her name itself suggests that she is a dependent, Akunna means "a father's wealth" (TBP 10) and her eleven-year-old brother, Nnanndo means "father is the shelter" (TBP 28). The story takes place after the civil war in Nigeria where all the complex system of traditional practises is in the favour of men.

*The Bride Price* is a semi-autobiographical novel. In Igbo society boys were educated while education for girls was considered as unnecessary. The only purpose of educating girls is to increase the bride price that would be paid by the groom to the bride's parents. According to their custom, the novelist Buchi Emecheta was also denied education while her brother Adolphus went to school. Her ardent desire to get educated made her to the visit the Methodist School without the knowledge of her parents. When her parents came to know their daughter's keen interest in getting educated, they allowed her to go to school.

Emecheta's father was a railway worker who suddenly passed away when she was nine years old. Her education becomes a question mark once again, as the total family was shattered. Her brother was sent to their uncle who lived in another part of the city, following the traditional norms her mother had to marry her father's elder brother. Buchi, on the other hand was sent to live with her mother's cousin in Lagos, where she struggled to complete her secondary school education. She dreamt of continuing her education but she was forced to marry as marriage was considered to be the ultimate goal for a woman in Igbo society. The life of the protagonist in *The Bride Price*, Akunna has similarities with the life of the novelist. Emecheta suffered by the sudden death of her father; likewise the protagonist also suffers due to the death of her loving father. In this novel, Emecheta shows "How numerous indigenous African customs and superstitions oppress and degrade the female" (Bazin 184).

The protagonist Akunna is thirteen years old and lives in Lagos and is introduced as her father's darling daughter living a life surrounded by happiness and contentment. Akunna's father Ezekiel Odia works in a Nigerian Engine factory, her mother Ma Blackie, is a woman with a smiling face, and her little brother Nna-nndo is two years younger than her. Lagos is the capital of Nigeria and it is known for its modernity. Lagos is an urbanized city and relatively distant from traditional villages. Even though the family were not luxurious but their life was without pressure and anxiety, Ma Blackie was always smiling; Ezekiel was courteous in his occupation and among the acquaintances; Akunna and Nnanndo her brother was confident and strong-minded. Akunna has a unique attachment to her father, "... a kind of closeness to which she could not give name" (TBP 10). As her name represents, she is her "father's wealth ... 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" (TBP 10).

Akunna is luckily pampered by her parents, though in their society girls are not considered as important. Akunna is thin and often vulnerable to disease. Her parents and her relations call her as an "ogbanje"— a living dead (TBP 9). The writer explains the meaning of “ogbanje” as a baby or small child who refuses to stay alive, as it keeps getting born and then dies soon thereafter. Though Akunna’s family is living in Lagos, yet Akunna is tradition bound. Her only dream and aim is to make her father feel proud by fetching him a good bride price by marrying the person of her father’s choice.

... 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. She would have her marriage first of all solemnised by the beautiful goddess of Ibuza, then the Christians would sing her a wedding march - "Here comes the bride" - then her father Nna would call up the spirits of his great, great-grandparents to guide her, then after all that, and only after all that, she would leave her father's house. (10)

Accustomed to societal norms, Akunna is ready to accept her role as a dutiful daughter. In spite of being born in a patriarchal community where female children are undervalued, Akunna’s father loves her specially and in turn she likes to show her love by accepting to have an arranged marriage so that her bride price would please her father. This is the role ascertained

to every woman in her society and a woman is expected to bring in wealth to her family in the form of a good bride price and then she would fetch wealth to her husband's family in the form of children, preferably male heirs as expected by societal norms.

When the story begins, Akunna and her brother, Nnanndo arrive home from school as usual in the afternoon and were awestruck to find their father, Ezekiel Odia standing in the middle of the their one-room apartment. He informs them that he is going to the hospital and will be back for the evening meal. The children know that his foot was injured during his service in World War II. During his departure he reminds them that they should always remember that they are his children. He says Akunna –“always remember that you are mine” (TBP 12) and she and her brother “should try to be a glory to his name” (TBP 12), because they were his life. Although disturbed and worried about her father’s health and his abnormal behaviour, she likes to question him, yet Akunna remains silent because in “... Nigeria you are not allowed to speak in that way to an adult, especially your father. That is against the dictates of culture” (TBP 11).

Ma Blackie was not there in the house when their father left the two children for his treatment. Ezekiel, Akunna’s father was disappointed as he has only one son, so he wanted his wife Ma Blackie to consult the local tibia – the village doctor for her infertility, and has sent her to his native place where she would do some sacrifices to their ancestral river Goddess. When she departs he reminds Ma Blackie that her husband had “... paid this heavy bride price, he had had their marriage sanctified by Anglicanism” (TBP 9).

Both the children waited for the arrival of their father. When her father does not return home for supper as he had intimated, Akunna pacified herself that he might be

asked to stay there for a day or two and calmed down as per their culture her “neighbours would look after them . . . in that part of the world everyone is responsible for the next person” (TBP 14). Akunna feels deceived when she learns from her relations that her father is not coming home. She was disappointed by the words of her father whom she had trusted truly and waited eagerly for his return. But the second thought made her to forgive her father. “He responded as much as their custom allowed — for was she not only a girl?” (TBP 17)

The next morning their uncle Uche and Uncle Joseph came to assist the children. It was almost more than three weeks later, on one fine day when the children are busy with their routine tasks their relatives started to arrive one after another slowly, and nobody said anything directly to her. The arrival of relatives made Akunna afraid that something frightful has occurred to her father but she does not ask direct questions. “Good children don't ask too many questions” (TBP 15). So she followed the direction of her uncles and aunts as they organize the funeral rites. She was ultimately informed about the death of her father through the conventional art of storytelling. The children realized that their father had died in the hospital due to illness.

Akunna realised that she has lost the soul which loved her so dearly. Nigerians give preference to sons rather than daughters. Akunna’s father showered her with affection; she could feel that the loving attachment between herself and her father has been annihilated by their father’s unexpected death. She has lots of things in her mind to convey to the crowd of relatives but remained silent. During the rituals performed during the funeral, her brother who was younger than her was consulted while she was neglected; thus the

novelist brings forth the gender disparity that existed in conventional Ibuza. They were confused whether to choose the traditional burial or to follow the Christian norms of burial.

Emecheta represents the clashes that existed between traditional societal norms and the influences of British colonization. At the end they consulted Nnanndo, the only son to decide if Ezekiel has to go to heaven as a Christian or go down into the earth to the Ibuza god. Nnanndo, who is two years younger than Akunna chooses his father's after life destiny and eventually fearful of offending any of the Gods, as the Ibo people follow the traditional norms of both cultures. So during the burial ceremony, Ezekiel is mourned as per their traditional Igbo religion and also by the Christian religion, to identify him with the two religions that he embraced in his lifetime.

Ezekiel's railway department had sent their own special funeral car, with Nigerian Engine Factory painted on the side in gold and his colleagues laid him in the car. Nnanndo and his sister followed the car, and after them came the singers from the Christian church and the mourners followed with their death songs and dances. Their neighbour had never seen such a long line of mourners.

All through the funeral rituals, Akunna experience the apprehension of being fatherless. One of her aunt informs her "Nobody is going to buy you any more [clothes]," (TBP 38) and her relatives commented, "The pity of it all ... is that they will marry her off very quickly in order to get enough money for Nnanndo's [Akunna's brother] school fees" (TBP 38). Then she consoles Akunna thus, "This is the fate of us women. There is nothing we can do about it. We just have to learn to accept it" (TBP 39). Akunna's role at

the funeral was to lament and cry throughout the funeral, because women were expected to express more emotion. According to the conventional norms of the Igbo society it is the father who is believed to be one's provider and protector.

It is so even today in Nigeira, 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, infact a non-existing family, such traditions do not change very much. (TBP 28)

If the father is dead then it is inferred that they have lost their parents, as their mother is only a woman and could not protect them. Women are not given any power in the society and family, their job is just to bear children and take care of their husband. The sudden and shocking incident makes Nnnanndo to lament, "We have no father anymore. There is no longer any schooling for me. This is the end" (TBP 28)

Though Akunna's mother is alive yet they were treated as orphans. Ma Blackie startled by the information that her husband was sick, she meets the tibia and promises that she will continue her worships in Lagos and then intimates her brother-in-law Okonkwo and she immediately returns to Lagos. She was informed about the sudden demise of her husband in their own traditional way by her neighbours. They stayed in Lagos for few days after their father's death. They decided to return to their native place, Ibuza because life in Lagos is quite expensive. Akunna and her brother were totally upset as they are not in a position even to guess about their future. A family without a father is considered to be orphaned, and the children realized that their lives will no longer be the same.



Ma Blackie and her two children were ready to set out for their home town, Ibuza. This was the only thing to be done, when the head of a family was no more. Life in Lagos, like life in all capital cities, cost a great deal of money, and was not possible without a bread winner. In the Odia family, the bread winner had gone, so his dependants had to go back home to fend for themselves as best they could. There was nothing else to do; they had to go. (TBP 52)

Once they reach their ancestral village, Ibuza, they meet two young men on bicycles, one of whom is Chike, the handsome young headmaster of the local school and another person a distant relative of her mother. Akunna was quite amazed by the hospitality and the helping tendency of the people. Soon they were welcomed by her cousin Ogugua who is about her age. She is the daughter of Okonkwo's first wife, Ngbeke. Akunna was filled with lots of thoughts, and she walks down the dusty road towards her village along with her cousin Ogugua who narrates the nuances of the village life.

Ogugua was sure that Akunna might not have known about the customs of her people. Akunna exclaims, "It's just like the stories you read in books" (TBP 65), forgetting that now she has become one among them. They saw a group of women gossiping and laughing, when they recognized Akunna's mother they started to reveal their sorrows. Akunna is astonished by this abrupt and sudden change in their emotions. She is not ready to accept the bicycle ride that is offered to her and refuses to undress to take a bath in public. She is gauche in her new surroundings unable to accept the thought of men looking at her when bathing naked in the stream. As she is not accustomed to conventional ways, transition is hard for Akunna.

According to the custom when the head of the family dies, it is the duty of their father's family to inherit them. As per the custom, Okonkwo, the brother of Akunna's deceased father is indebted to receive them and he accepts the responsibility of taking care of them. He has several wives already, but due to his brother's death he eventually marries Ma Blackie. Ma Blackie becomes Okonkwo's fourth wife and she lives with him. Akunna's cousin says "You still don't know the customs of our Ibuza people? Your mother is inherited by my father, you see, just as he will inherit everything your father worked for" (TBP 64). Male relatives who take care of children after the death of one's father are considered to be respected as their own father; as per their African traditional practice, a hut was built for Ma Blackie to mourn for her deceased husband. After completing nine months of mourning, she was declared as the wife of Okonkwo. During the bereavement period, she is not provided with the basic things, she is made to wear dark clothes, had to keep her hair uncombed and was not allowed to meet anybody. African patriarchy insists severe norms for widows like Ma Blackie.

The position of women in Africa today- both within the wider society and within religion - is normally prescribed by what is deemed to be beneficial to the welfare of the whole community of women and men. Unfortunately, most of the prescribing tends to be carried out by male authorities, and the resulting role of women tends to be circumscribed by an unchanging set of norms enshrined in a culture that appears to be equally unchanging. (Oduyoye and Musimbi 10)

Okonkwo had an inherent desire to earn the title Obi, a chief for his commune. In order to win this title he needs to present expensive gifts to the Gods and also satisfy his people by spending magnificently for the welfare of the society. So he is in need of

money for winning this title. He readily and greedily accepts Akunna and her family with a self-centred motive. He immensely believes that Akunna could be married off to a man who could afford to pay him the highest bride price because unlike his daughter Akunna has gone to school and is educated. He was happy that Akunna would serve his purpose by fetching him a lot of money by means of bride price. Another important reason is that Akunna's father Ezekiel has made economic necessities for his family and so he need not spend anything further.

Ma Blackie invests a part of their money in palm oil trade and soon started a small business of her own. Since Ma Blackie was economically independent and the thought of Akunna fetching good bride price made Okonkwo to ensure her brother's education. Okonkwo also accepts to Ma's decision of sending Akunna to school because he believes sending Akunna to school and providing her education considerably increase the amount of her bride price and also she and her mother would feel happy that he will not be a block to their interest, this cunning plan would definitely fetch him what he desired for and so he decides that if "Akunna had to be allowed to stay in school so that she could be married to a rich man, from one of those newly prosperous families springing up like mushrooms all over Ibuza" (TBP 75). He plans that, "Akunna and Ogugua will get married at about the same time. Their bride price will come to me, you see the trend today, that the educated girls fetch more money" (TBP 75). When he receives money by means of bride price by getting his daughters married at the same time he could easily win the title of Obi which he is yearning for.

Akunna and her brother Nnanndo are allowed to go to school and to remain together with their mother. Though they are together, the shift from urban Lagos to rural

Ibuza makes Akunna feel lonely. She had attended school in Lagos and her education and urban life style made her feel as an outsider in Ibuza. She feels as if she is trapped between two contradictory cultures as the traditional laws of Ibuza are new to her. Though Akunna and her brother tried hard to adjust to Ibuza traditions, they continued to possess a feeling of estrangement. Akunna, who was pampered by her parents in Lagos finds it difficult to adjust to Okonkwo's polygamous family structure. Her Mother Ma Blackie was engulfed in the happenings of Okonkwo's household and seldom pays attention to Akunna. The pregnancy of Ma Blackie through Okonkwo makes Akunna feels lonelier. Ngbeke, Oknokwo's first wife is envious of Ma Blackie and her children. She believes that Ma Blackie is clever so she is against Akunna being educated because she fears that Ma Blackie would claim Akunna's bride price for Nnanndo's education.

Education enlightens Akunna and her brother to differentiate between the reality and superstition that exists in their society. Akunna's step-brother and step-sister's believe that "school was where you sent the family slaves, ... not a place for the children of a free man." (TBP 74). In the ancient days, when Christian schools were started, the local free men were not ready to send their children instead they sent their slaves to school to please the white men.

According to Igbo people, only slaves are sent to missionary schools. Okonkwo's considered that these missionary schools are a threat to their ancestral grandeur and convention. So people like Okonkwo and their sons who are tradition bound are not ready to accept the education provided by the missionaries. The natives are not ready to follow the new culture due to the fear that it may affect their traditional practices and also consider that intrusion of Christianity as a means of intimidating them. They considered their

customs as indestructible and they believe that violating their traditional practices will result in death. Though Akunna was allowed to go to school she has an inherent fear about her future. Being brought up in the urban set up she doubted what would happen to her after her marriage. If her father was alive she might have been married to an educated person in Lagos, but now they were under the care and support of her step-father, she does not know who he will choose for her and what kind of life that she would lead after her marriage,

...what she feared was the type of man who would be chosen for her she would have liked to marry someone living in Lagos, so that she would not have to work on a farm and carry cassava. She had heard stories of how strenuous farm life could be for a woman. She had heard that a farmer husband did not give housekeeping money, as her father had given her mother. (TBP 52-53)

Akunna did not have friends to share her thoughts. Her mother is not of great help to her. "Akunna knew that there was a kind of bond between her and her father which did not exist between her and her mother" (TBP 17). It was almost two years since their arrival to their native village. She has almost accustomed to all the norms and customs of her people. Though her vision of her native place has been widened there is no change in her character. Her simplicity and her elegant manners made her stand away from the crowd of other native girls. Right from her arrival she captures the attention of her twenty-four-year-old school teacher Chike Ofolue. He was attracted and fascinated by her charm and intelligence. He has never met a girl who is so timid when compared to the arrogant native girls of her age. He stands as a moral support to her and soon becomes the only solace to Akunna. Though she is informed by her cousin, Oguagua that the Ibuza women are not

allowed to associated with the slave born. “You must be careful,” one of Akunna’s cousins tells her, referring to Chike, “that man ... he’s not one of us ... No decent girl from a good Ibuza family is allowed to associate with him. My father would rather see his daughter dead than allow such a friendship.” (TBP 70)

When colonization started, the Ibo traders and land owners sent their slaves to the missionary schools to please the missionaries thus the descendants of those slaves held most privileged position in the region. The slaves gained more advantage through education and rose to chief position in society, but they were not allowed to enjoy an equal status with the free born. There is always an unbridgeable gap between the free born and the slaves. Chike Ofulue, an Osu descendant of slaves, teaches in the white men’s school and his father Ofulue was “... a member of the Native Administration the people had never allowed him to become a chief for, they reasoned, the day a slave becomes a chief in this town, then we know our end is near” (TBP 84). Though the descendants of slave, they were educated and were holding an honourable position, but they are not provided with certain rights and they are not treated with dignity. “Chike had all the university entrance requirements...yet some reason or other had been found to refuse him a Federal Scholarship” (TBP 85). Though Chike is educated, handsome and professional he is not accepted by the free born girls, though they like his elegant manners his social status as a slave remains a disadvantage.

Akunna is not in position to scrutinize about his ancestry. His consideration and kindness towards her made her to long for is affection. Chike is unlike the other men who try to dominate and enslave women. He, on the other hand, falls in love with Akunna because he had never seen a girl so frightened and timid. Fifteen years old Akunna falls in love

with Chike who is an Osu. Osu's are considered as outcasts as they belong to the descendants of slaves. So according to tribal custom, such a friendship between Akunna and Chike, is strictly forbidden. Although Chike's family is wealthier to offer a generous bride price, Okonkwo will not agree to the proposal because of his inferior status.

Hence the conventional standards make Chike an ineligible suitor to Akunna in spite of his academic qualification. One day when she was at school, Akunna begins menstruating and her family would plan to get her married if it is intimated to them. It is Chike, who understands her situation, brings two aspirin tablets and a glass of water and after giving her tablet, provides her his big woollen jacket so that no one can see the stain on her dress. He also brings her sanitary napkins with a little booklet explaining what to do. Chike warns her not to inform anybody about her attainment of maturity until the examinations are over. Her mobility would be restricted with the first signs of menstruation as the girl children could be kidnapped by cutting a lock of hair by any man to make her his wife forever. The other customs to be followed were,

. . . She must not go to the stream, she must not enter a household where the man of the family had either the "Eze" or "Alo" title - her uncle Okwonko had the latter; if she went into such a house the head of the family would die and the oracle would discover who the culprit was. She might not be killed in broad daylight but Ibuza people had ways, psychological measures, to eliminate those who committed the abominable *alu*. (TBP 93)

This incident draws Chike closer to her; he feels that he should protect her. According to their custom young men will approach Akunna's father and will negotiate

Akunna's bride price. When Akunna understands her situation, she is afraid and also feels embarrassed of her condition. She was afraid that anything would happen to her since she has attained puberty and anyone can cut a piece of her hair and carry her away to make her as their wife and she goes home feeling "So many things had happened to her in one day, so many things she did not understand" (TBP 99).

So Akunna at first concealed about her puberty in order to delay the expected quarrel. She did not want her marriage to be arranged by her step-father so she decides not to reveal the fact of her attaining menarche. The lovers start meeting secretly by the river Asaba. Ibuza was a small village and their meeting soon spread around and Akunna is strictly warned by her step-father. As the free-born people did not attend the schools established by the missionaries. These slaves who attend the school adapted to the new religion and were provided with job opportunities. When Chike's father got the news, he is worried that the traditional constraints might restrict his son from marrying Akunna. He calls his son and warns his son Chike but Chike was resolute in his love for Akunna. Chike's father Ofulue understands his firmness and counsels him thus, "... Don't spoil that girl ... There is no worse fate for any woman in this town than that of one who arrives at her husband's couch polluted" (TBP 100). He assures Chike that he would definitely talk on his behalf with Akunna's family and settle their marriage in the proper way. Chike's father further warns him to stay away from Akunna, as he does not want his son to entangle himself in problems as their society will not approve a marriage association between Chike and Akunna.

Chike's father, though a slave, is much more civilized than the free born illiterate and barbaric, Okonkwo. During one of their meeting, Akunna asks Chike to inform her relatives thus: "Tell my people that you want to marry me" (TBP 98). Chike is stunned to



hear Aku-nna's words. She also adds "I always say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing. You are the only person I know who I am not afraid of" (TBP 98). It is clear from her words that she is not in position to voice out her thoughts in her household; it is only when she was with him she is able to voice out her thoughts freely.

Akunna's secret of attaining maturity which she hides even from her mother is disclosed when she goes out along with her friends in search of firewood. She consults her friends whether she could cross the stream in her "unclean" condition, thus her secret is revealed. While crossing the stream, Akunna prays to the God of the stream to forgive her for the terrible sin she was committing. "Her secret is out when her step-sister hears about her menstruation. She finally reveals that she has her period, young men come to court her and Okonkwo receives several offers ... the Nwanze family, the Obiajulu family, and the Chigboes of Umuokpala" (TBP 110).

Ogugua comments that if they get to know about her mensuration many men will ask for her hand in marriage and she will fetch her family a good bride price which will make everyone happy. Akunna becomes conscious that everything will be different for her from that moment onwards. When the young girls around her begin to prepare her, the young men and their fathers started bargaining bride price with Akunna's stepfather. Akunna is able to understand the hindrance of her newly embraced womanhood. Akunna is quite upset over the thought that she would not be able to teach for a year or two before she got married as she has intended to, and she is also sure that she will be compelled to marry a stranger, and her family will never accept Chike as her life-partner eventhough he is ready to pay a heavy bride price.

When Okonkwo was informed about Akunna attaining maturity, he immediately arranges for a celebration thinking, “Now the entire bride price would come to him” (TBP 115). Akunna’s stepfather orders her that she must marry the man of his choice; and she must forget Chike. “He was telling her, not in so many words, that she could never escape. She was trapped in the intricate web of Ibuza tradition. She must either obey or bring shame and destruction on her people” (TBP 116). She is broken to hear the words of her stepfather whose words she should abide by without any protest. She feels trapped, “She was beginning to feel that it was unjust that she was not to be allowed a say in her own life, and she was beginning to hate her mother for being so passive about it all” (TBP 116).

Akunna is not able to show her protest in anyway other than by refusing to eat the food cooked to celebrate her attaining womanhood. However, she bows to traditional practice of allowing young suitors to fondle her breasts. Many young men of the village, including Chike come to visit her with presents. It is a socially accepted practice of breast squeezing by the teenage boys, never caring about the objection and pain of the female:

Their custom allowed this. Boys would come into your mother’s hut and play at squeezing a girl’s breasts until they hurt; the girl was supposed to try as much as possible to ward them off and not be bad-tempered about it. So long as it was done inside the hut where an adult was near, and so long as the girl did not let the boy go too far, it was not frowned on. (TBP 117)

Akunna takes two tablets that Chike has brought for her in order to overcome the pain, prays to God that she should marry Chike if not she should die, then goes out to

meet the young men. She accepts all the tortures with silent tears. Akunna questions “What kind of savage custom was it that could be so heartless and make so many people unhappy?” (TBP 122).

Chike steps in to rescue Akunna when the suffering becomes unbearable. Chike becomes aggressive while protecting Akunna from other young men and attacks Okoboshi, a boy from a neighbouring village when he misbehaves with Akunna. The sudden reaction of Chike revealed his affection and their love affair to her family members. When the entire household of Okonkwo started to blame her for being in love with Chike, an outcast, her mother Ma Blackie joins with the entire household to reject Chike though she knows that her daughter’s happiness depends on marrying Chike. One of Okonkwo’s wives states if the relationship of Akunna and Chike is true, it would be the greatest insult to their family honour.

Akunna is astonished by Ma Blackie’s attitude and reaction. She thinks if they disapproved Chike then it is unjust to accept his presents and other gifts. She could not understand the fact that her mother suddenly disapproved Chike. “Ma Blackie cried and cursed her fortune in being saddled with such a daughter” (TBP 122). She doubted whether her mother has just used Chike for her personal benefits, “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?” (TBP 122). When she realised her mother’s selfish motive behind her outward appearance, she hated her mother for being so passive about to all that had happened.

Days passed after the incident and Akunna was able to come out of her house and was moving with her friends. It was the time of Christmas. There was a general and

steady acceptance of Christianity by the traditional Igbo people. The novelist highlights the festive spirit thus:

Christmas was a very important time of the year for everyone. Schools were closed and teachers were on holiday ... The majority knew that this approaching Christmas would be their last Christmas in their father' homes. Akunna's age group were marking the occasion this year with a dance to entertain their people...They all spent the evenings learning their special aja dance. (TBP 102)

Akunna along with her stepsister and friends was practising the Christmas dance in the place where they were approved to do their practise. All of a sudden the arrogant suitor, Okoboshi's crude and repulsive family members stole into the village and kidnapped her and carried her away. Custom does not considered this as erroneous for a man to kidnap a woman and forcing her to marry him. This scene indicates how women were treated as marketable products. The custom gives permission that an Ibuza boy can abduct a girl whom he likes by cutting a lock of her hair. "Many girls cropped their hair very close, those who wanted long hair wore a head scarf most of the time" (TBP 103).

Ironically, at the same moment her examination results was published and Chike gets the news that she has passed her exam. Chike hopes that it is the right time to take this matter to his father and believes that his father would meet Akunna's uncle, Okonkwo to ask for Akunna with the offer of the bride price of hundred pounds. On the other hand, Okoboshi and his family members tried to convince Akunna in all possible ways by threatening and sometimes by speaking affectionately. Akunna was fully confused and did not know how to react to the sudden shock. Her mind was insensitive and was broken

to the extent of committing suicide rather than being the wife of Okoboshi. Innately she believed that she would be saved and she hears Chike's whistle. It is a hint to her that he will surely come for her rescue. She tried to save her virginity with a deep sense of courage. Later she remembered all that she said to Okoboshi "... she knew that the line dividing sanity and madness in her was very thin. Out came the words, low, crude words, very hurtful and damaging even to herself" (TBP 138).

Eventually after the abduction of Akunna, her people hear the threatening sounds and wedding music. There was utter confusion but soon they find out that the timid Akunna was found missing. This sound of gun shots was heard by Chike too, immediately a thought flashes through the intelligent mind of Chike that, "they have kidnapped Akunna for their son Okoboshi" (TBP 129). When the news of the kidnap spreads like wild fire, the villagers, dazed and bewildered, begin to search for Akunna though they are aware that their search is a waste. Okoboshi's family used the last straw to kidnap her. If a man cuts a curl of the girl's hair, she would become his wife and the men would not be blamed for abducting the girl, because it was their custom.

Important members from the Obidi family came to meet Okonkwo after the abduction to formally inform him that Akunna was sleeping calmly in their home. Though Okonkwo initially protested and shouted, at last, agreed to a small bride price as he could not do anything beyond his tradition. At Okoboshi's house, his mother convinced Akunna that "No girl from a good family like yours could possibly marry a slave" (TBP 134). His sister advises and threatens her to accept her brother or else he would be forced to rape her. Either Akunna's uncle or her mother could have prohibited this forceful marriage but none of them raise any objection. They gave importance to wealth and recognition than

Akunna's happiness. Akunna feels mentally exhausted by the customs. She made up her mind and ready to face whatever may come, "If she ever got out of this alive, there was no man for her but Chike, slave or not slave ... A kind of strength came to her, from where she did not know she knew only that, for once in her life, she intended to stand up for herself, to fight for herself, for her honour, this was going to be the deciding moment of her existence" (TBP 136).

Akunna notices that was cynical in his attitude. She discerned that he hated her. She could understand hatred in his eyes. On her wedding night, when Okoboshi tries to make love; she tries to defend her chastity.

She laughed like a mad woman ... Look at you, she sneered ... shame on you.

Okoboshi. You say your father is a chief — dog chief 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 the son of a slave ... you think I am a virgin. I tell you a better man has been have before you. I have slept with him many times. (TBP 138)

Akunna's words irritated him and he refused to touch her. She tells Okoboshi that she has lost her virginity to Chike. In doing so, Akunna puts herself in a dangerous situation.

Her uncle would surely kill her on sight ... but if she was forced to live with these people for long, she would soon die, for that was the intention behind all the taboos and customs. Anyone who contravened them was better dead ... and when you were dead, people would ask: Did we not say so? Nobody goes against the laws of the land and survives. (TBP 141)

When Okoboshi reveals this information to his family members they are shocked to know that she had relationship with a slave. Okoboshi and his family decided to hurt the sentiments of Akunna's family members. The next morning, as per their custom, they send an empty pot to Okonkwo to prove symbolically that his daughter was not a virgin which makes him dishonoured. Akunna was provided with a dirty torn skirt and was driven to fetch water from the nearby stream. She was totally broken and thinks that now Chike will also reject her. If Akunna goes back to her home, her uncle would pitilessly slay her since she has broken their laws. Suddenly to her amazement, Chike comes there and rescues her and they elope to Asaba. Chike has already made arrangements with the help of his friend Ben Adegor, who was a school teacher. Akunna did not want to live by accepting their crude customs and tradition; she believes in Chike and takes courage to flee from all these norms. She had made her mind to live for herself.

In a traditional society like Ibuza, people accept having extra-marital relationship with the slaves but marriage is not acceptable. The new colonial rule eradicated the system of slavery but the natives were not ready to accept the descendants of slaves and were considered to be inferior to other people. "To her society, vaunting fornications with an Osuis the last straw and the stain on her family and friends is indelible" (Mezu 7). The next morning, the elopement of Akunna and Chike spread like a wild fire throughout their village, which in turn brought disgrace to her family. Okonkwo's anger knew no bounds; all his dreams of her bride price have been shattered, added to it now it is a great dishonour to his family pride.

At Ughelli, the two begin a happy life together. Adegor and his wife understood the difficulty of the young couple and helped them to cope with the situation. Akunna

was very happy and thank God and prays for everything that has been provided to them. She also prays to retain their happiness for a longer time. Chike adores her and decides to marry her. He was firm that no matter what Okoboshi and his family had done to her. He said that he would marry her, even if she has lost her virginity to Okoboshi. To support his thoughts, Chike's father advises him not to blame Akunna for whatever has happened without her consent. Chike is overjoyed when Akunna tells him that she has defended her chastity by taunting Okoboshi.

Akunna is much delighted when Chike informs that his father has given his consent for their wedding and has provided them a wedding present of hundred pounds. As planned, their wedding takes place at church according to Christian custom. The loving couple shared their joys and sorrows equally and set themselves a perfect example of matrimony. Lloyd W. Brown commenting on their marriage says, "... it is the ceremonial climax of her rebellion against entrenched sexual roles and other social customs which she perceives as limiting and demeaning" (52).

Akunna becomes a teacher and Chike is employed as the manager of the oil company. They have enough money and are delighted with happy turn of events. Chike provides strength and encouragement to Akunna. He takes care of her further studies and assists her to be an independent individual. Chike sends money to educate her brother and also to her mother so that she could be independent. The generosity of Chike makes Akunna feel so happy and she praises him as, "Oh! Will you do all that for me? I will serve you until I die. I will be a good wife to you and love you in this world and next world, until the end of time" (TBP 149).



Akunna does her best to represent that her love is precious and could not be estimated by any amount of bride price. Emecheta explains about the taboos followed in the society, victimization and enslavement of women in this novel. Akunna was not able to understand the foolish norms, she struggles to create an identity for herself amid the dictate of patriarchy, challenging the irrational and unwanted traditional beliefs of the society and her family, and she marries a slave descendant. Katherine Frank comments, “... it is a romantic love story in the Romeo Juliet pattern ... set in modern Nigeria exposing the crushing force of a traditional society” (2).

At Ibuza the people consider that Akunna has brought a shame to their commune. Okonkwo feels dishonoured and in turn reprimands Ma Blackie and divorced her. Initially, Ma Blackie considered herself fortunate that her children were allowed to attend school by her new husband and for being a clever business woman, that she is able to manage with the money her husband has left her, but she could not maintain a good relationship with her daughter because of the cultural norms that prevailed. At the end of the story, when she comes to know about the the curse that Okonko has placed on her daughter’s, she tries her best to save her daughter. She pays the witch doctor to counteract the curse and then prays to the God to save her daughter while delivering her child.

Akunna’s happiness is short lived soon as she becomes anxious about the old superstitious belief that “If the bride price is not paid the bride will die in child birth” (TBP 154). So she urges Chike to inform his father to pay bride price to her stepfather Okonkwo. Chike immediately informs his father to meet Okonkwo and to pay their bride price. Chike’s father offers to pay the bride price to Okonkwo. Chike’s father tried even to increase the amount that they have planned already, Okonkwo becomes more furious

and rejects the bride price offered by a slave. He is not ready to acknowledge their marriage. He is not able to suppress his anger, he is not happy only with punishing by not getting bride price, but he goes to an extent of taking vengeance using black magic by making a doll in the image of Akunna and piercing it with a needle. His sole intention is to destroy Akunna completely.

Akunna becomes pregnant at the age of sixteen. Right from her pregnancy she falls sick often. One day, she feels too sick that she could not continue her work, she goes home and is about to deliver her baby. The doctor warns Chike that she was too young for pregnancy and is anaemic. He prepares Chike for the worst. Chike's father visits them and consoles the two young frightened souls. Akunna started to believe the ancient superstition and says to Chike's father: "I know my uncle does not want ever to accept the bride price, he calls me back in the wind, when I am alone ... I don't want to die, father" (TBP 163). She also pleads Chike: "Please my husband, don't let him take me! Please don't, please!" (TBP 164). Chike tries his level best to console her and to protect her. Chike immediately takes her to the hospital; there Akunna dies in childbirth. Chike christens his baby as Joy. Akunna's death is a result of her delicate health combined with her inherent traditional belief. The life of Akunna makes it clear that even education in Africa fails to lift the veil of superstition from women particularly.

Fate or destiny is based on the function of social institutions and the shaping patterns of cultural traditions. In the woman's experience, fate is, therefore, the collective will of the community. In a subjective and much more crucial sense, the fate of each woman is ultimately determined by the extent to which she accepts or rejects that collective will. (Brown 49)

Okonkwo remained unchanged throughout the novel, he remains authoritative. He is the quintessence of male chauvinism. He displays his authority even over Ezekiel when Ma Blackie is afraid to return to Lagos fearing that Ezekiel could get angry of her early return. Okonkwo consoles her commandingly; “If Ezekiel blames you for going back without finishing your treatment,” Okonkwo tells Ma Blackie, “tell him I said you were to do so. Remind him, in case he has forgotten, that I am the eldest and first son of our father. It is for me to say the word, and for Ezekiel to obey” (TBP 49).

His commanding power does not change till the end of the novel. He represents himself as the head and leader of the entire household and never comes down from his position. He firmly believes in tradition. The people of Ibuza are custom oriented and never change themselves at any costs. It is not easy for Okonkwo to understand the love and affection of Akunna and Chike. It is family prestige and the notion that she has violated the norms of their society that hurts him.

Akunna is courageous to break the norms and was ready to elope with her lover Chike but she becomes a prey to the tradition and was afraid of certain superstitious practice in spite of being educated. She becomes psychologically upset by her uncle’s threat of using black magic against her. The taboos and superstitious beliefs that are followed for centuries overpower Akunna’s desire to live; she dies shortly, leaving a daughter. Her death is medically reported as it is purely due to her young age pregnancy, under nourishment and tender physique. The people of Ibuza believe that Akunna’s fate was due to her insubordination to their norms. Katherine Frank observes, “Despite her education and bravery in defying her family and village, and despite the sustaining power of the love of Chike, Akunna is ultimately destroyed by traditional society” (11).

Chike respects women and takes care of his loving wife to his fullest. They both ran away from all prejudice dreaming for a new world filled with love for each other. They had no materialistic expectations between them; rather their emotional bond unites them as a family. Ironically Akunna's tragic fate is used as a perfect intimidating anecdote to persuade and frighten young women to obey the traditional standard and the patriarchal power.

Every girl born in Ibuza after Akunna's death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold over every girl that would continue to exist, even in the face of every modernization, until the present day, why this is so is, as the saying goes, anybody's guess. (TBP 168)

The novel proves that liberation of women could not be thought of in the places like Ibuza. Akunna had strong will power to go against the customs set in their society. Even educated people find it difficult to overcome the superstitious practices. Akunna's death is primarily because she starts believing in their traditional practice which ultimately destroys her peace of mind. Chike could not console her and change her attitude or pacify her. Akunna fights against the society and achieves a great victory by marrying her lover Chike. But the brutal, scornful customs of her society engulfs her and she became a victim to these evil forces.

Emecheta being born and brought up in the same society is well aware of the strict and inherent significance of their tradition. Through the story of Akunna, the

novelist demonstrates the life of an aspiring young woman who tries to fight against discriminations and wretched matrimonial practises. She tries to achieve individuality and independence but, Akunna dies in childbirth, as if to prove the superstition that a woman whose bride price is unpaid will not survive the birth of her first child. Akunna represents the individual juxtaposed between tradition and modernity. Emecheta's explains the strongly held belief "resulting in fear and fatalistic surrender"- "or using modern medical terminology". "The book thus ends with the defeat of what is clearly portrayed as progressive forces, but this somewhat surprising defeat only helps to highlight the injustice of the situation." (Petersen 161-62)

The novelist likes to bring about some reformation in their society. The theme of slavery is explicated by Emecheta throughout the novel. She describes the situation of girl children. The missionaries provided education to the slaves who eventually become doctors, lawyers, and teachers in the community which irritates the traditional villagers. Though they were economically empowered, they were treated as downtrodden in the village. It is not only the family but the whole of Ibuza is against Akunna marrying Chike. This hatred is well exhibited towards the end of the novel, the villagers jointly destroy and cut down the large plantation of cocoa beans and coconut trees of Chike's father to show their disgust rendering their support to Okonkwo. Eventually Chike's father sues them in the court. The villagers on the whole came forward as witnesses against Chike's father. After the thorough investigation European law finally decides against the villagers and the court ordered that the free men had to plant new cocoa for the slave.

Women are treated as slaves to men from the beginning till the end of the novel. A woman is looked as a product bought and sold by bargaining bride price. The suitors looked at the prospective bride, like slave traders. Women were expected to bring prosperity to their family by giving birth to sons. Okoboshi's father "poured chalk, the symbol of fertility, on her breasts and prayed to his ancestors that Akunna would use it to feed the many children she was going to have for his son" (TBP 133). Igbo women are expected from an early age to readily accept a subordinate role to male domination. The male members are favoured by tradition and are treated with reverence and authority.

Such customs and mores, in fact, are actually institutionalized forms of male oppression: inheritance of widows by their brothers in law, the custom that a man could make an unwilling woman his wife by kidnapping her and cutting off a lock of her hair, the prohibition against women marrying descendants of slaves, and numerous other inhibiting manifestations of traditional culture in *The Bride Price* are all determined and enforced by men. (Frank 483)

The purpose of a woman in the Igbo society is dual, the first one is the bride price she will fetch during her marriage to her father and the second one is her ability to bear children, preferably sons to her husband. The most demoralizing aspect is the gender disparity that exists in the traditional society. Right from her childhood Akunna was aware that that she was not considered significant by her people as she was a girl child. A woman's worth is determined by the money she brings to her father as bride price. In Ibo custom, if the bride price offered by the bridegroom's family is accepted by the bride's father, then it is the duty of the girl is to marry the suitor even if she disliked him.

A man who could not afford a bride price can “sneak out of the bush to cut a curl from a girl's head so that she would belong to him for life," and he would be able to "treat her as he liked, and no other man would ever touch her” (TBP 103).

Akunna is greatly affected by her mother's reluctance towards her needs. Her mother was engulfed in the household of Okonkwo was not in position to take care of her children. Akunna and her brother felt like, “helpless fishes caught in a net: they could not ... go back into the sea, for they were trapped ... yet they were still alive because the fisherman was busy debating within himself whether it was worth killing them” (TBP 82). Nnanndo love for his sister is consistent throughout the novel. He plays a brief mediator role between Chike and Akunna when she was kidnapped by Okoboshi's family. A good sister is another mother to her brother, Akunna takes care of her little brother Nnanndo by providing him good nourishment and education with the help of Chike. He remained with his sister till her end and cries for her along with Chike.

The novel represents two types of people, educated people who are against the superstitious practices like Chike's family members, on the other side the illiterate crowd like Akunna's family who hate education and are afraid of modernity. Okonkwo kept everyone in his control. Though Akunna's education was taken care by Ma Blackie, it was Okonkwo who takes decision on her higher education. He makes sure that everything in his household should be under his rule. So, when he gets to know about the elopement of Akunna, he is infuriated by the dishonour that Akunna has caused, he even forgets his desire of attaining the title of Obi and decides to take revenge on Akunna. He visits the witch doctor to punish her through a slow and painful death. It is the power of her people's conventional beliefs that Akunna finally lost courage and hope that she would survive.

In a larger perspective, “one could see Aku-Nna’s death as one of redemption — redeeming the woman’s lot” (Solberg 255). It is a keyword that is found at the end “joy” (TBP 167). Before Aku-nna’s death Chike promises her that their baby girl will be called Joy. Joy is a symbolic representation of the new generation which will remain safe from the effects of the cultural conspiracy that oppressed women.