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Mapping Masculinity and Gender Disparity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract:

*Patriarchy, a male dominated institution, is a system of gender based social stratification and discrepancy, whereby men are licensed to hold mastery over women. Patriarchy normalises the dominant position for men and subordination of women thus emphasising the superiority of masculinity over femininity. The term 'masculinity' refers to men's traditional manners, habits, attitudes and ideologies, which constitute the patriarchal system of social order where men in general dominate women. Like most African societies, Nigerian society is marked by patriarchal construction where female is subjugated to male supremacy. Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), one of the leading novelists of African literature, represents in his maiden novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) this masculine social fabric of Nigeria which forces women, 'the second sex' to lead a conventional life of marginality and subjugation. Through the patriarchal consciousness of Okonkwo and his clansmen who emphasize masculinity and virility over women and femininity, Achebe depicts this gendered oriented Nigerian Igbo society toward the end of the nineteenth century immediately before the arrival of the white culture. The present paper is an attempt from the feminist perspective to peruse Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with a view to explore the peripheral subaltern position and predicament of women in the contemporary Nigerian Igbo society dominated by patriarchy.*

Key words: *Patriarchy, masculinity, gender disparity, inequality, women, Igbo community.*

Introduction: Patriarchy, a male-centered hegemonic institution is a system of gender based social stratification and discrimination. Patriarchy exists as a system of social relations where authority is exercised by the male over female, thus fostering the gender disparities between men and women. Patriarchy "in which female is everywhere subsumed under the male" (Rich 58) promotes masculine hegemony and gender discrepancy and inequality in its negotiation with women. S. Walby defines patriarchy "as a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (214). Patriarchy defines the concepts of masculinity and femininity, thus structuring gender

relation between men and women. This is what Kate Millet calls ‘sexual politics’ as she argues that sex is ‘biological’ whereas gender is a ‘cultural construct’ (62). The term ‘masculinity’, a cultural construct, in feminist theory refers to men’s traditional manners, habits, ideologies and attitudes, which constitute the patriarchal system of social order which ‘governs the relationship between men and women in society, where women in general are subordinated to men’ (Kegan, 147-157). The term ‘femininity’ means culturally constructed image of traditional female submissive attitude and their marginalized condition.

Patriarchy and its masculine practices intrude almost every society of the world. African societies are no exception. Africa’s tradition is ‘strongly in favour of male dominance ... African women are subjugated mercilessly to men’s authorities in their communities’ (Gbaguidi, 41). Like most African societies, Nigerian society is marked by patriarchal dimension where importance is given to male more than the female counterpart. “Most Nigerian societies are typically patriarchal, with persistent beliefs that perpetrate unequal treatment of women” (Ntoimo, 1987) in the process of gender socialization. The affirmative answer to the question, “were Nigeria and Africa oppressively masculinist?” asserts that the traditional culture of Nigeria as well as Africa has been masculine based much before the advent of European settlers. The nature and extent of female subordination and oppression is indicative of the image of helpless, silent, dependent African women who “have continually endured exclusion and restriction” (Ohale, *n.p.*). Writers like Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana and Flora Nawapa, and Buchi Emcheta of Nigeria approve that African women were traditionally subordinated to sexist cultural mores. According to this system, African men received the best skills and things including education, while “women received only utilitarian cosmetic skills in domestic centres– the kinds of skills that only could prepare them for marriage and to be useful male helpmates” (qtd. in Annan, 17).

The masculine social fabric of Nigeria judges everything in traditional terms of gender construction and identity, troubling the life of the female sex, so-called “the second sex”. They are forced to lead a conventional life of marginality and subjugation in the patriarchal paradigm of Nigerian society where male values and ideology always determine the predicament of women and girls resulting in gender inequity. They are sexually and psychologically reduced to objects to be continuously exploited and oppressed. The marginalized plight is vividly exposed in J. O. Debo Akande’s book *Law and the Status of Women in Nigeria*:

In Nigeria women spend their whole lives under male dominance, submitting first to the authority of their father or their mother’s brother (according to the prevailing kinship system) and later to that of her husband. Moreover, women never attain legal independence a woman can sue or be sued in her own name Her labour belongs to her husband if they earn any money (for instance from petty trading); only with his consent can she enjoy the profit. Apart from her jewellery everything she has belongs to her husband and can be claimed by his heir. A man may have several legal wives

and will be allowed a mistress, but a woman must be faithful to her husband. (Akande, 1)

In the traditional Nigerian Igbo society male holds the centre and women is in the periphery and male is credited with power while female are underestimated as inferior and fragile. Odimegwu and Okemgbo in “Men’s Perceptions of Masculinities and Sexual Health Risks in Igboland, Nigeria” (2008) discover that in Igboland, men are seen as the “head of the women”, the king and defender of women from trouble” (30).

Objective: The present paper is an attempt from the feminist perspective to study Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* with a view to explore the peripheral position and predicament of women in the contemporary patriarchal Nigerian Igbo society.

Masculinity and Gender Disparity in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*: Achebe, a native writer represents the masculine social fabric of Nigeria in his maiden novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Achebe delineates the traditional Nigerian Igbo androcentric world toward the end of the nineteenth century immediately before the arrival of the white culture. He presents the Igbo masculine society which values man and manliness much more than women denoting fragility and femininity. Here, Achebe exposes the traditional women as submissive, voiceless and virtually inconsequential. Though Achebe is criticised for misrepresentation/ superficial and male oriented representation of African-Nigerian women who are shown happy, harmonious members of the community, even when they are repeatedly beaten and debarred from any communal decision-making process, the novel reflects amply on the social condition of Nigerian women during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Whatever picture is painted in this novel is sufficient enough to understand the sexually peripheral location of women in the patriarchal domain of Nigerian Igbo society.

In the novel “*Things Fall Apart*” based on the narrative of Okonkwo, a greatest wrestler and warrior, Achebe gives a vivid account of the role and predicament of women who are enchained in the traditional patriarchal social mores and cannons. The close perusal of the novel brings out the truth about the pathetic predicament of Igbo women under patriarchy which enters oppressively in every rungs of social life. He depicts a male dominated world where the power is centred on male, and woman is the man’s property. Male possession of women is ensured in their objectification as wives and daughters. Man possesses women in order to get respect and title in the clan. In the novel, we see the male prestige and honour largely depend on the number of women they marry and possess in the community: “There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo’s village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan.” (15) It is clear that the Ibo society is based on gendered structure which defines and locates women in the periphery. It is because of this tendency women become victims of masculine society which discriminates and considers women as possession and mere sexual body.

The identity of women in the Igbo community is designed as sexual body to be possessed just to maintain the patriarchal norms and interest. In third chapter of the novel there is clear description of the fateful predicament of women with reference to the exchange of girl, a 'virgin' with the abused and slain wife of Udo. It is reported by Ugbuefi Ozuego, the orator that people of Mbaino should hand over a virgin girl for Udo's wife: "a virgin to atone for the murder of Udo's wife" (21). Finally, as decided, Okonkwo brings "a virgin who was given to Udo as wife" (21). It is interesting to note that in both cases women become victims to the patriarchal decision and patriarchal notion of honour and prestige. Udo's wife, an innocent woman is killed by the men of Mbaino. This killing is taken as an assault to the patriarchal sentiment of virility and honour of the people of Umuofia who determine to take revenge. The angry way Ezuego narrates the incident of killing and the villagers' reaction following the death of Udo's wife is indicative enough of the fact that the villagers are more concerned about the community honour than the respect, life, and security of the individual woman. On the other hand, her death is compensated with the exchange of another girl. Here both the women succumb to the whimsicality exposed and imposed by patriarchy which treats women as possession to be killed, and exchanged without listening to their words. The virgin girl is not given any scope to express her feelings. In the context of virginity and women one can remember here how the new bride of Amikwu is forced to answer the embarrassing questions during confession episode: "How many men have lain with you since my brother first expressed the desire to marry you?"(97) Ultimately she has to "swear" on the familial ancestral staff Uchendu, her father-in-law holds to her to prove her virginity before Amikwu accepts her as 'his wife' (97). But this crude taste of virginity and chastity during the confession is not applicable in case of grooms. The parameter of marriage based on female purity and chastity only is never questioned in case of the groom, Amikwu here. It exemplifies the typical patriarchal practice to question over female sexuality and moral character. This is the double standards of patriarchy.

Women in the phallogocentric Igbo society are submissive lacking in freedom of choice and voice. The space women are given and roles they perform are specified within the male vision and ideology. Absolutely dependent on the male, they can hardly do anything according to their choice and decision. When Ezinma, Okonkwo's ten years old daughter is sitting with Obiageli during the eating time, Okonkwo is angry to see the sitting position of his daughter. He rebukes her: "Sit like a woman!" (33). According to his order, she brings "her two legs together and stretched them in front of her" (33). Even the works and casual works are gender specific. When Ezinma wants to bring a chair for Okonkwo, he specifies the nature of job on the basis of gender: "No, that is a boy's job" (33).

This gender biasness is displayed more in the division of work force related to agricultural activities. While trying to establish himself taking yam seeds from Nwakibie, as the narrator informs, Okonkwo's mother and sisters work hard enough, but "they grew women's crops, like coco-yams, beans and cassava. Yam, the king of crops, was a man's

crop.” (18) The Igbo social system nurtures gender prejudice and difference even in selecting the professions and works. The Igbo villages represented by Umuofia and Mbanta consist of heavily androcentric society with specific roles strictly fixed for men and women. Regarding the sexual bifurcation of labour along commodity lines, Niara Sudarkasa writes:

Among the Ibo, females and males grew different crops Within the conjugal family unit, women and men had different responsibilities which were met from the proceeds of their separate economic pursuits. A husband might be primarily responsible for the construction and upkeep of the home and the provision of staple foods, and the wife (or more probably the wives) assumed responsibility for nonstaple foods and the daily needs of her/their children. (Sudarkasa, 100-101)

The Umuofians, like the typical Igbo people with such gender biasness value the financially profitable ‘yam’ most as ‘the king of the crops’. But women’s crops such as coco-yams, beans of lesser value and income stand for womanly softness and tenderness. Like the yam which is an ‘index of masculinity’ and virility, Okonkwo ‘represents the epitome of masculinity in the Umuofia society’ (Annan, 21). The seed of patriarchy lies in the typical assumption that women being weaker are suitable for producing the crops which need the least labour and competence while male is supposed to be engaged with the crops that need more power and productive skills. Patriarchy thus controls the working habit of women. In this society women are not allowed to do what she likes. Women are given household tasks like producing and rearing children and cooking which are considered to be less difficult and feminine. Strong-Leek (2001) points out that: “In *Things Fall Apart* [...], women are viewed mainly as child bearers and help mates for their husbands” (30). Men’s works in the home ‘like splitting wood or pounding food’ (38) are supposed to be “difficult and masculine tasks” (38). Though women are engaged in collecting firewood (“The women had gone to the bush to collect firewood” (40)) and cooking food and preparing edible things, they have no access to eat and taste it before their husband. The narrative goes on: “She could not be expected to cook and eat while her husband starved”. (17) We see how Okonkwo enjoys first the food cooked and sent by his wives. Neither they nor their works are valued and paid in the family. Thus they become “life-contracted unpaid workers” (Greer, 329). At the same time, their domestic works which are low in status are viewed as feminine on account of gender division of labour. This occupational differentiation and gender segregation are a patriarchal practice to exploit women. Lorretta F. C. Ntoimo and Uche Isiugo-Abanihe highlight this patriarchal strategy in the context of Nigeria:

In this patriarchal structure, women’s labor is expropriated by their husbands and in some cases, by their fathers, within marriage and household relationships. Women usually perform domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning, and child care. In these relations of production, housewives, as part of marriage relations engage in unpaid labor for their husbands who exploit it. The husband is able to exploit the wife’s labor because he has control over her labor power. (1984)

Patriarchy nurtures masculine virility which is exposed in the socio-cultural construction and sensibilities of Umuofia. The villagers value men and manliness most. Patriarchal manliness or masculinity connotes bravery, strong will power and bodily strength and success. Okonkwo, a patriarch wants to see these masculine forces in his sons. Hence he prefers male child. He wishes: "If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit." (46) He wants to see it in his lazy son Nwoye. Any man without the 'spirit' of virility, 'manly' courage and titles is denounced seriously and are stigmatized as effeminate and womanish. It is a characteristic flaw in a man. Unoka, Okonkwo's father, a poverty stricken man having no title, burn and fame is considered socially weak and least important person connoting femininity. In a public meeting Okonkwo who detests weakness calls Osugo "a woman" (20). He insinuates at him: "This meeting is for men" (20). An unbeaten wrestler, Okonkwo known as "Roaring Flame" (112) always values male virility, valour and energy. Okonkwo builds his life on the principles of patriarchal masculinity and is afraid of being called womanish or 'Agbala'. Agbala stands for a name for a woman but the term also refers to a man with no title. From his childhood, Okonkwo is obsessed in proving his masculine virility to avoid being called an agbala, like his father. His whole life is dominated "by fear of failure and of weakness" (10). Even he considers showing of love and affection as weakness and womanliness. Generally, "an Igbo man is not required to betray his emotions." (Odimegwu 30) Hence, in spite of his inward love for Ikemefuna and Ezinma, he "never showed any emotion, unless it be the emotion of anger" (21). He believes that "to show affection was a sign of weakness" (21). Hence he treated them with his heavy hand. The villagers in Umuofia who refuse to assist in killing Ikemefuna as per the decision of the oracle are called "effeminate men" (42). In order to attest his manliness Okonkwo participates in the clan-plan to kill Ikemefuna, his adopted son, because he "was afraid of being weak" (44). But this fear haunts him when he suffers inwardly immediately after the murder of Ikemefuna. Guilt-ridden Okonkwo broods over the loss of his courage: "When did you become a shivering old woman" (47). He reprimands himself not to "become a woman indeed" (47). For a masculine oriented man like Okonkwo it is a sign of weakness and lacking in virility. Seeing Nwoye's idle and inactive mind-set, he rebukes often him as womanly and effeminate. Soon after learning about his conversion to Christianity, Okonkwo broods over how he, "a flaming fire Could have begotten a son like Nwoye, denigrate and effeminate?" (112) Shocked and grief-stricken, he sighs heavily as if "living fire begets cold, impotent ash" (113). The narrative description of his tribe, his children and his mental condition highlight that in Ibo society men without potentiality and courage are marked with impotency. So towards the end of the novel we see Okonkwo laments at the disappearance of the ancestral community valour and courage which once characterised the people of Umuofia before the arrival of the white men there: "Worthy men are no more ... Those were days when men were men" (145). Okonkwo is deeply grieved. He "mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women". (133) He rebukes Egonwanne, a villager for his soft and sweet tongue and cowardice, and hence

his wisdom is described as 'womanish': "When he speaks he moves our men to impotence" (145). These binary attitudes of 'potent' and 'impotent' in terms of stronger men and feeble women validate the traditional concept and the construction of masculinity in the Igbo community. Okonkwo, a traditional masculine man, not fitting into the new 'effeminate' way of life, finally commits suicide.

In such a society with heavily patriarchal consciousness male is always fond of controlling and subjugating women. This echoes the patriarchal ego satisfaction. Okonkwo, an authoritarian man cherishes the hope that his son Nwoye would be prosperous man having control over barns and wives in future. He is troubled with his father's weakness and failure which he never expects to transmit into his sons, especially Nwoye. As a father he is worried about Nwoye for lacking in his own 'manliness'. He wishes "Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household" (38). He is pleased to see the grumbling attitude of his son to women and their works. This shows that in future he would be "able to control his women folk". (38) Okonkwo is of the view that familial authority of man comes through his dominating attitude towards women. The virility and quality of man is judged on his capacity of controlling women in the family. This shapes largely the pattern of patriarchal domination of women which is echoed in the narrator's voice: "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (especially his women) he was not really a man" (38). Okonkwo proves to be a 'real man' in his capacity of complete authority over men and women of his family. An aggressive man, he rules "his household with heavy hand" (10). His wives and children live in "perpetual fear of his fiery temper" (10). The patriarchal society is conscious enough to generate and enhance this authoritative capability in a male child by culturally narrating the war account and stories of heroic deeds and achievement of men. Okonkwo never likes his sons, especially Nwoye listen to 'the mother's stories' that he loves. Okonkwo considers these stories of 'tortoise and birds' to be "as silly as women stories" (55) meant for 'foolish women and children" (39). That's why Nwoye never expresses his love for the stories told by his mother in fear of his father who always "wanted him to be a man" (39). Hence Okonkwo while sitting in his obi "encouraged the boys to sit and told them the stories of the land- masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (39). Unlike the 'women/mother's stories' illustrating female values, Okonkwo's stories (to boys only) exemplify male values of warfare and violence thus inculcating patriarchal notion of courage in the boys. He eventually impresses his son and indoctrinates the basic patriarchal consciousness in Nwoye who begins to nurture the typical male ideology that "it was right to be masculine and to be violent" (39). This is how the seed of patriarchy is implanted in the young mind of the boys thus perpetuating the phallus-centric authority in the society in general and Igbo society in particular.

The masculine temperament finds expression in Okonkwo's domination of his wives who represent the female victims of Igbo gendered prejudice. An angry man, Okonkwo, as already said, always controls his wives who are in 'perpetual fear' of him. Even he thinks

his wife's mere inquiring as disrespect. When Nwoye's mother asks if Ikemefuna will be staying long with them, Okonkwo rebukes her: "Do what you are told woman. When did you become one of the *ndiche* (clan elders) of Umuofia?" (18) This dominating tendency gets finer expression in his practice of wife beating, a form of male violence and authority over women. He beats his youngest wife, Ojiugo who went to her friend's house to plait her hair without cooking the afternoon meal. When she comes back later, "he beat her very bitterly" (22) even in the week of peace, the sacred week. There is huge dissatisfaction among the villagers who utterly disapprove Okonkwo's grave act of violation "not because of the physical battering, but, rather the timing of the occurrence" (Strong-Leek 31) i.e. during the Peace-Week. Here the clan is more concerned not with the safety and justice of woman beaten. Hence no body from the clan comes in favour of the wounded wife. On the contrary, Ezeani, the priest who initially gets angry at Okonkwo's behaviour blames the 'wretched' girl: "your wife was at fault" (23). Thus it is clear that wife battering is not the matter of serious concern. S. Iyasere (1969) points that "the peace of the tribe as a whole takes precedence over personal considerations" (94). There is hardly any sympathy or compassion for the atrocity women face in the patriarchal Igbo culture that devalues women so much that their feelings, security and safety are not significant at all thus erasing their identity. That woman is less important than the creed is clear from the reaction of the people when Okonkwo beats his second wife Ekwefi for cutting a banana tree after this peace week: "without further argument Okonkwo gave a sound beating and left her and her daughter weeping." (28) He never considers her ill-fated condition. Even no neighbours come in support of Ekwefi except her two co-wives who dare to restrain Okonkwo with pleading words: "it is enough". He again "swore to beat Ekwefi" (56) for giving Ezinma eggs. They helplessly face patriarchal dominance.

This situation shows that it is easy for men to control woman through beating and torturing over women's body. Men exercise his power over women in various forms including beating. Beating is one kind of physical torture that powerful men always use upon the powerless women in order to exhibit the androcentric hegemony thus proclaiming that men as superior are the protectors of women. Thus wife beating colonizing the body renders much pleasure to male ego, as found in Okonkwo. The Nigerian patriarchal society allows and promotes physical abuse of women and wives. It is normal incident in this Igbo community people. Except Ndulue almost everybody badly treats women. Equality and independence are matter of imagination to women. Apart from Okonkwo's case, the practice of wife beating happens in the life of Mgbafe: "Uzowulu is a beast. My sister lived with him for nine years. During those years no single day passed in the sky without his beating the woman ... when she was pregnant, he beat her until she miscarried" (67). Hearing the case from both sides for judgment, the leader of Egwugwu, the man called 'Evil Forest' gives sympathetic view to the woman. But one of the elder men says, "I don't know why such a trifle should come before the egwugwu." (68) This exposes that female subordination takes so grounded in the traditional Igbo culture, that people of Umuofia find

no wrong in the serious matter of wife beating and tortures-- mere 'trifling' matter in the eyes of men. So women are absolutely helpless victims in this male society of Umuofia. Their hapless condition here reminds one of what Virginia Woolf says of woman: "Imaginatively she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant." (45)

In the Nigerian Igbo society being sexist, women become "insignificant" even in the case of marriage. Marriage, an important event in the Igbo society, takes place with serious discussion among the elders of the two families. But women has little role to play. The marriage system is so gendered that women always silently suffer and adjust because of the patriarchal gender consciousness. Men practice polygamy marrying a number of wives while women generally practice monogamy. Thus marriage, a male centred institution, with few exceptions, causes gender humiliation and discrimination for women in the process of their commodification in accordance to how much "ripe", "fresh" (51) they are for marriage implying their productive ability and fertility. Women and girls suitable for marriage are placed before the suitors and his relatives for match fixing. The relatives observe the physical and other qualities of the bride. If they are satisfied they offer the bride-price for marriage in consultation with the senior male members of her house. Generally young girls and women are decorated in order to look her beautiful in the eyes of the groom and his relatives. A few men come to fix the bride price for the marriage of Oberika's sixteen year old daughter Akueke who is considered "ripe for marriage" (51). The suitor and his relatives observe, just like surveyor, "her young body with expert eyes" and assure that she is "beautiful and ripe" (51) enough. Her young body with "full, succulent breasts" (51) here becomes sexual object to be surveyed with male gaze. Hence she is decorated with uri, black necklace, waist-beads and also her skins rubbed lightly with cam wood in order to impress the suitor's relatives as well as to satisfy the patriarchal notion of marriage and sexuality. Marriage in Umuofia is like a play and deal: "Marriage should be a play" (53). In this deal women are sold as brides with bride price. Akueke's marriage is finalized when the deal is fixed: "In this way Akueke's bride-price was finally settled at twenty bags of cowries... when the two parties came to this agreement" (53). But in this decision making deal the bride and women have no important role to play. The same happens in the marriage occasion of Amikwu, the youngest son of Uchendu in Mbanta.

In the gender bias society of Igbo community men occupies the central power and position offering the secondary position for submissive women in social transactions and organizations. Hence women are considered as outsiders. The narrator describes this neglected predicament of women in the context of community meeting for trial: "It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders." (64) Women are excluded from social life. This gender exclusion and silence characterise their life. They are born to obey and never to question their male authority. Women have hardly any right to ask question

neither in the family nor in the society. The narrator gives description of the gender polarity with reference to the egwugwu house:

The egwugwu house ... with many coloured patterns and drawings done by the especially chosen women at regular intervals. These women never saw the inside of the hut. No women ever did. They scrubbed and painted the outside walls under the supervision of men. If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No women ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan. (65)

This non-inclusion of women is evident in their non-participation in any socio-political discussion and decision making body equally with their male counterpart. Neither they are invited to stay in social body nor included in councils of war: “they did not form part of the masquerades representing the judiciary and ancestral spirits.”(57) This gender discrimination, maltreatment and marginal predicament of women is evident even in Mbanta in family gatherings in Uchendu’s house in the different types of sitting arrangement for men and women: “The men brought their goatskin mats, with which they sat on the floor, and the women sat on a sisal mat spread on a raised bank of earth.” (97). Born victims of patriarchal prejudice and injustice, woman has secondary position and status in comparison to the male members, ‘the first sex’. Simone De Beauvoir argues in this context, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (293).

This masculine dimension of the Igbo society is evident in the gender duality as exposed in the words of Uchendu, maternal uncle of Okonkwo. Though it is called “mother is supreme” (98), the Igbo society does not give much importance to woman. Uchendu explains: “We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wife do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland.” (98) Even after spending lifelong with family members and children she cannot find a space, a room and home to be buried. Uchendu continues “when a woman dies she is taken home to be buried with her own kinsmen. She is not buried with her husband’s kinsmen” (98) Okonkwo’s mother lived with Unoka for long time. But after her death she is buried by her brothers and kinsmen in Mbanta. Women are for sorrows and suffering. Male is for good and sweet moment. Uchendu’s words bring out the patriarchal duplicity again: “a man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrows and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland.” (98) This gender consciousness is also associated with the laws and customs of the Igbo society. The crime of killing is judged from the perspective of gender. As per the customs and rules, Okonkwo has to flee his village Umuofia immediately after his accidental firing at Uzoudu’ sixteen year old son: “The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return after seven years.” (91) This implies the patriarchal idiosyncrasies of dominating and valiant manliness and weaker womanliness; thus proclaiming the superiority of masculinity over femininity.

Conclusion: From the perusal of this novel, it is obvious that Achebe depicts a patriarchal structure of Nigerian Igbo society which values masculinity over femininity. In fact, patriarchal masculine consciousness intrudes almost every section of life— social structure, customs, interaction, marriage, law, profession and works. It is exposed in the dominant and reproachful attitude of ‘potent’ men towards women, resulting in gender discrimination. Achebe sympathetically presents the social predicament and role of marginalized woman who, in spite of being very hardworking, dutiful and obedient, are positioned as ‘second sex’, an appendage and a mere possession of men in the patriarchal Igbo society. In this androcentric society represented by Umuofia and Mbanta there is clearly defined traditional roles for men and women; the men have leadership and authoritarian roles while the women have submissive domestic roles. In this masculine society a man is to be violent, strong, and courageous, and any sign of weakness is considered to be an effeminate or female feature. Okonkwo who represents a traditional masculine man, strictly adheres to this patriarchal consciousness and values defined by the Umuofian society and also has intrinsically biased and domineering attitudes of women which are reflected in the way he treats them. Like Okonkwo, the protagonist, all the male characters in the novel have both cultural and individual patriarchal idiosyncrasies and ideologies that validate the scope and nature of masculinity and gender inequality. In the novel Achebe has made an artistic use of women’s gendered marginality to map the pattern of patriarchal construction of Igbo society.

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