

## WOMEN EMERGING FROM SHADOWS: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE NOVELS OF MARIAMA BÂ

**DR. J. S. CHEREKAR**

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Arts, Commerce & Science College,

Shankarnagar, Tq. Biloli, Dist. Nanded.MH (INDIA)

### ABSTRACT

*This present research paper analyzes female condition in two novels written by Mariama Bâ and examines the impact of race, class and gender on women's relationships. The novels emphasize how women face the challenges of patriarchal institutions and other attempts to subjugate them through polygamy, neo-colonialism, and constraints of tradition, caste prejudice, abuse of Islam and political instability. This research paper uses characterization and plot analysis to explore the different stories and messages the novels portray. As findings this study foregrounds the healing powers of female bonding, which allows women to overcome prejudice and survive, to enjoy female empowerment, and to extend female friendship into female solidarity that participates in nation building. However, Bâ appeals to women of the world to be a good mother to mould the characters of their daughters to struggle against the injustice inflicted on women by the patriarchal society.*

**Index Words:** *Women's relationships, Polygamy, Constraints of tradition, abuse of Islam, Political instability, Female bonding, Motherhood, Female Empowerment*

#### Introduction

*The woman writer has a special task. She has to present the condition of women in Africa in all its aspects. There is still so much injustice....In the family, in the street, in the institutions, in society, in political organizations discrimination reigns supreme....As women, we must overthrow status quo which harms us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon. We should no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother, who in his anxiety, man confuses with mother Africa. Within African literature, room must be made for women...room we will fight with all our might.*

*(Bond, 2003: 214)*



Mariama Ba, a prestigious Noma award winner Senegalese women writer makes her stance clear regarding the various issues prevailing in the African context. Ba's words aptly sum up her approach towards writing as a weapon to assert the true self of a woman. She urges the women writers to write on the contemporary socio-political issues such as the tyranny of male gender and the marginalization of women. She believes that the only weapon which is true and infallible for a redress of their grievances is literature. Writing will engrave indelible reprints on the public mind. It is through her novels Ba appeals not only to the African women but the women of the world that the ultimate solution depends upon women themselves. She urges the women to develop capacity for suffering and sacrifice. In this regard Mariama Ba's novels mark the beginning of an awakening among all the women of the world, the beginning of their true all round development. She firmly believes that education will automatically inculcate in them the hidden potentials and strength.

The novels of Mariama Ba reveal her deeper concern for journey from 'traditional heritage' and to "modernity". In both of her novels, Mariama Ba narrates African women's journey from tradition to modernity. It is a long journey which lays emphasis on thinking, planning, arranging, organizing, making choices and creating something novel and innovative. Her novels, thus, reveal her sincere commitment to the glaring reality that at all levels woman has been thrown at the mercy of waves and winds by the selfish ends of men. She has always been considered as an object of mere use and that at no level she is assigned equal position with men in all the areas of life. These include familial, socio-cultural, political and even academic. However, in both of her novels Ba examines the issue of inter caste, intercultural and interracial marriage and relationships, and she raises the questions over the whim or fancy of the male, the calculated machinations of the female elder resulting in the marginalization of women. She also expresses her deeper concern for the African Muslim society by pointing out the use and abuse of Islam by some selfish and narrow minded persons. Ba firmly believes that the ultimate solution for these issues depends on the stability and viability of political, economic and cultural fabric of her society.

Ba's novels present various dimensions of women's personality, through the depiction of women belonging to the younger generation. These young women characters communicate a positive message, anticipating an affirmative journey in the vision of socio-cultural changes in Africa. Thus, she sharply veers from the contemporary women novelists. Without presenting the same picture of African womanhood, Ba insists that the literary genres should emphasize harmony and balance at the individual, family and societal levels. Ba's canvas covers the different women and their locations in the society. As a female writer, Ba anticipates a world where women will have choices and where monogamy would be the order of the day. This world can only become a reality when women re-examine their relationships with each other and with that of their men. Mariama Ba's novels, thus, present women to be the active agents of change in the society. Her novels display a certain formal and thematic coherence. These include Marriage, motherhood, emotional and economic independence,

women's education, their political and economic marginalization, their resistance to oppression and role in the nation are the recurrent themes in the novels of Mariama Ba. The present thesis intends to explore all these themes in Ba's writing.

The more reading of her novels reveal Mariama Ba's pioneering efforts to reconstruct Senegalese womanhood, her broad vision of holding relevance not only for women in Africa but also for the women of the world, her sincere commitment to and positive as well as transcendent outlook of African life, her faithful depiction of the postcolonial mentality, her concern for the female self-hood, her presentation of the balanced picture of the Senegalese society, her insistence on the complementary bonding between men and women, her sincere belief in the youth of the country to change the status quo are the chief reasons which fascinate any sensitive mind. It has also made a deeper kind of impact on the researcher's mind. The present, thesis is, undoubtedly, the first ever contribution to the studies of Mariama Ba in the Indian context. The researcher firmly believes that the thesis has done full justice to the works of Ba. The credit, of course, should be given to Ba for having presented the balanced picture of the society. The researcher firmly believes that such humble contribution would ultimately be acknowledged.

Mariama Ba, a Senegalese woman writer used writing as a weapon to fight against the male literary tradition. She wishes that women writers must make the use of their literary works as a weapon to eradicate social evils of any type. She also asserts that this literary weapon would enable them to eradicate the male tyranny by presenting the sensitivity of feminine gender. As she says:

*We cannot go forward without culture,  
Without saying what we believe,  
Without communicating with others,  
Without making people aware about things.  
Books are weapon perhaps, but they are a weapon.*

Ba's words aptly sum up her approach towards writing as a weapon to assert the true self of a woman. A self which while asserting itself never loses its touch with the African culture.

The work has, thus attempted to show as to how, through the use of writing as a weapon, a woman writer like Mariama Bâ pose and discuss some of the issues in African culture that result in the subjugation of women. The task of exploring her works in the cultures suppressed, in the African case, has had to be approached in this thesis from an interdisciplinary perspective including an examination of the literature's historicity and social significance. The thesis has further attempted to understand the writer's commitment to reflect and often to reform the culture that literature represents. This study has used alternative critical methodology taking into consideration the accepted approaches to

postcolonial women writers like education, caste and class prejudices, racism and patriarchy, within the innovative context of writing as a weapon of self assertion.

The novels of Ba, on the other hand also deal with the particularity of Senegalese, particularly Wolof experience. As Ba explains, “....there is a cry everywhere in the world, a woman’s cry is being unheard. The cry may be different, but there is still certain unity”. The statement by Ba is the outcome of her first hand experience of the impact of Islamic Wolof society on womankind.

Thus, the novels of Ba are written in the context of Islamic Wolof society having an Islamic/Wolof world view. Ba is a daughter born into high caste family in a society where caste impacts on one’s life. Ba’s status as a guer distinguishes her and places her in position that is different from that of other women who belong to the lower caste. It is by virtue of circumstances of her birth, some superiority is assumed. The fact that she is western educated complicates the matter further and puts her into a whole new category. Therefore, Ba’s positioning as female, Muslim, guer, western-educated, orphaned, mother and a divorcee inform her experiences and the different tensions in these multiple positioning. In fact she had much to say on the subject of women and the reality of life in West Africa after independence. She, therefore, used the pen to speak about the injustices that surrounded women, and to advance women’s issues, and although she wrote only two novels *So Long a Letter* (1979) and *Scarlet Song* (1981), she remains a central figure in African literature.

Mariama Ba’s Noma award winner novel *So Long a Letter* is a cry from the heart of a Senegalese woman, because it articulates astutely the problems of Senegalese women, in general and of Muslim woman in particular. The use of Western literary letter in this novel enables the marginal women like Mariama Bâ and the protagonist, Ramatoulaye to make themselves succinctly heard to the people in the central power. The writing of a letter thus implies a spiritual journey of the doubly oppressed protagonist, Ramatoulaye to reach an emotional breakthrough. It is this journey which reveals all the aspects of African life that result in the oppression of women. These include polygamy, caste, race and culture prejudices, motherhood and various other issues. It is through the conflict in protagonist’s mind between tradition and modernity that Bâ presents the African life.

The novel *So Long a Letter* is written in twenty four letter installments to Aissatou. The narrative structure of the novel is a woman-to-woman talk, revealing the story of thirty years of married life of Ramatoulaye. It is while lamenting the crude reality that resulted in the breakdown of the blissful married life that Ramatoulaye shares her response with Aissatou. She tries to relate Aissatou in the form of a long letter, however unsent, to the situation that converted her life into desert due to the sudden onslaught of abandonment. It is while telling about her experience Ramatoulaye also reveals the story of Aissatou, who also experiences similar sort of situation but reacts to it in an entirely different way compared to Ramatoulaye.

In addition to these main stories, the letter also reveals the story of Jacqueline, an Ivorian married to a Senegalese boy.

The novel falls in three sections. Section one consists of first four letter installments in which Ramatoulaye reconstructs the events immediately preceding and following Modou's death. It is through "Mirasse", the forty day mourning period that the narrator Ramatoulaye provides in details the description and analysis of the happenings which provide nothing but pains and sufferings to the noble soul of Ramatoulaye. She expresses her disgust in a vehement manner over the hypocrisy of the people. She laments over the fact that the original intent of such ceremonies are debased due to the commercial attitude of the people and their undue importance to the issue of prestige. The tone becomes bitterer when she comes across the total callous behaviour of Tasmir, Modou's elder brother. His utter disregard for religion torments her noble soul. As in the middle of Ramatoulaye's period of mourning, Tasmir has the audacity to invoke the traditional practice of spouse inheritance to ask Ramatoulaye's hand after she comes out of mourning. Ramatoulaye becomes angry and she reacts indignantly to Tasmir's proposal: My house shall never be for you the coveted oasis: no extra burden: my "turn" every day: cleanliness and luxury, abundance and calm! No, Tasmir! (58).

The second section of the novel is made up of the installments of 11 letters. The section reveals the past glory that Ramatoulaye experienced during her school and college days along with Aissatou, Modou, Mawdo and Dauoda Dieng. It is in this section that the narrator explains in details the days of her courtship with Modou. It reveals the circumstances that led to the entrance of Modou's personality into Ramatoulaye's life. The section also details Mawdo's courtship with Aissatou and its culmination into marriage. It simultaneously narrates the academic history of Modou and Mawdo and their rise to positions of power in society. It is in this section that Aissatou also faces similar situation like Ramatoulaye. Her blissful married life comes to an end when Mawdo takes the second wife. In fact it is the outcome of Tante Nabou's machinations that led Mawdo to marry young Nabou. But unlike Ramatoulaye, Aissatou refuses to remain in married life. She, therefore, divorces Mawdo and settles into professional life along with her four children. On the other hand, Jacqueline suffers the same fate due to her marriage with Senegalese husband. The section details Jacqueline's hospitalization and recovery. It is in this section that the narrator explains in details Modou's courtship with Binetou and its resultant the marriage. The section also details Binetou's mother and her greediness. It is in this section that Modou abandons Ramatoulaye and her twelve children.

The third and last section of 12 letter installments reveals the reflection of Ramatoulaye over immediate past and the present. It is in this section that Ramatoulaye calls back the events she witnessed in the days of mourning period. She broods over the daily routine that she followed during this period. The section also reveals Ramatoulaye's newly changed role as both mother and father of her children. She comes to realize that the rapid developments in the

outside world have certain kind of impact on her children. She, therefore, keeps her own frustrations and disappointment aside and prepares herself to face the challenges of the newly changed world. It is in the case of her daughter Aissatou that Ramatoulaye neglects the traditional way of thinking and takes on a new role to help her daughter overcome the calamity that is descended on her. She, therefore, encourages her daughter to settle into a new life. The decision of course proves the maturity of mind. It places her to the role of an Ideal mother and an Ideal woman who understands the inexplicable and acts accordingly. Ibrahima Sall, who, for Ramatoulaye represent a ray of hope, the potential new type of man capable of ushering in a new type of relationship of equality, respect and mutual consideration between men and women.

The novel ends in the future tense with Ramatoulaye anxiously awaiting the arrival of Aissatou, who is coming back for a holiday from her diplomatic post in Washington, and affirming her intention to be free and happy in spite of all the sufferings she went through:

*I warn you already, I've not given up wanting to refashion my life.  
Despite everything-disappointments and humiliations-hope still lives  
on within me. It is from the dirty nauseating humus that the green plant  
sprouts into life and I can feel new buds springing up in me. (SL 89).*

Thus the novel opens with funeral and closes with an affirmation of life, neatly captured in Ramatoulaye's statement that—

*I shall go in search of happiness (SL 89).*

The same human and social issues that Ba dramatizes in *So Long a Letter* are also evident in *Scarlet Song*. In the novel *Scarlet Song*, Mariama Ba enlarges the sphere of scrutiny to introduce and develop the elements of race, class, caste and religion and their use and misuse in human and social relationships. *Scarlet Song* is a tragic story of Ousmane Gueye, a young Senegalese from the Dakar ghetto of Usine Niari Talli, and Mireille de la Vallee, daughter of a distinguished French diplomat stationed in Senegal. Ousmane and Mireille meet at the University of Dakar, fall in love, secretly get married in France and return to Dakar. It is in the later course of events that their relationship gets deteriorated. It is in fact the outcome of various social and cultural pressures exerted mainly by Ousmane's mother with the aid of others related to Ousmane for one or the other reason. The climax of the events is the sacrificial murder of their son and the stabbing of Ousmane by Mireille.

Like *So Long a Letter* the novel, *Scarlet Song* is also divided into three parts. Part one concentrates Ousmane's childhood and adolescence in Ursine Niari Tiali, his rejection by Ouleymatou, his childhood friend. The section also details Ousmane's sense of hard work and devotion to his mother Yaye Khady, and his father Djibril Gueye, a devout Muslim.

Ousmane's excellent performance in school leads him into the University of Dakar, where he meets and falls in love with a white French girl Mireille de la Vallee, whose father is a part of the French diplomatic mission in Senegal. Mireille's father discovers the love affair when he finds one of Ousmane's photographs in Mireille's possession. He, therefore, sends her back to Dakar to keep her away from 'ca', his word for Ousmane and black people, is general. But the love affair is continued through letters against the background of the socio-political unrest in both Paris and Dakar in 1968. Ousmane graduates from the university, and gets job as a school teacher, moves his parents from ghetto to a new villa, Gibraltar, and pays his father's way to Mecca, for the pilgrimage, to the grand admiration, gratitude and praise of all. Having done all these things for family, Ousmane decides to go to France for a short visit.

In part two, Ousmane and Mireille, who agrees to convert herself into Muslim, get married in France. The parents on both the sides, however, get the news only through letters. The decision of the two, results in shock and disappointment to their respective parents. The couple returns to Dakar, stays for a while with Ousmane's family at Gibraltar and then decides to move into its own apartment which soon becomes the gathering place for Ousmane's friends whose lack of consideration becomes a source of constant argument between Mireille and Ousmane. The section also details Yaye Khady's machinations and her constant visits to their household, only to disturb the married life of Ousmane and Mireille.

Part three details the continual weakening of the bond between Ousmane and Mireille. Mireille gives birth to a baby. But Yaye Khady's traditional way of thinking hinders her from accepting Mireille's child to be a part of Gueye family. On the contrary the birth of the baby makes her more resolute to get rid of Mireille. In the meanwhile she receives unexpected help from Ouleymatou who now begins to take interest in Ousmane because of his position and material wealth. She, therefore, embarks on her plan to wrest him away from Mireille by employing the best and the most irresistible of feminine charm and will that Wolof culture possesses. Ousmane, by now a victim of cultural nostalgia, becomes an easy prey to Ouleymatou's trap. He pays continuous visits to Ouleymatou which result in her pregnancy. Ousmane, however, is criticized for this kind of double dealing by his friends. But Yaye Khady's approval and encouragement leads Ousmane to marry Ouleymatou without the knowledge of Mireille. He, therefore, begins to live a double life. Soukeyna, Ousmane's younger sister, who is enraged by Ousmane's lies and deception, slips an anonymous letter in Mireille's mail box saying: 'You have got a Senegalese co-wife. If you want to know more about her follow your husband.' (SS 155) Mireille puts a tail on Ousmane and when she verifies the existence of a secret co-wife, she goes brisker. In a fit of rage she kills her own baby and stabs Ousmane over and again. Ousmane is rushed to the hospital. The news of Mireille's stabbing Ousmane results in the bewilderment of the Gueye family. Djibril Gueye utters a Wolof proverb which connotes- "when one abandons one's own hill, the next hill which one climbs will crumble (168) to sum up the tragedy of his son and daughter-in-law. While Yaye Khady keeps asking "lan la? "What is it?"

The novels *so Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song* reveal the reality in the African society that the women characters witness, that is polygamy. However, the novels also present the need and resolve to transcend and overcome this social disease. It is by way of educating the masses and improving the mentality of male partners in broadening their outlook regarding polygamy that Ba points out that African society will overcome the problem of polygamy.

The novels of Ba present the fact that polygamy in Senegalese society is the direct outcome of the impact of Islam and the practice that the traditional societies followed. Ba offers some clarification regarding what Islam has to say about polygamy, “A man must be like an evenly balanced scale. He must weigh out in equal measures his compliments and his reproaches. He must give equally of himself. He must study his gestures and behaviour and apportion everything fairly.” These lines clearly indicate that no man is qualified to have more than one wife. In fact, polygamy according to Islam was initially introduced as a means of rehabilitating widows and orphans.

*And if you fear that ye will not deal fairly with orphans, marry of women, who seem to you, two two, three three, four four and if you fear that you cannot justice then one only.*

The statement clearly shows that Islam allows polygamy with certain restrictions and conditions. A man should marry only when he can afford it. Thus, according to Islam, husband is responsible for all marriage expenses. The custom of dowry especially practiced in India and Pakistan is foreign to Islam. Islam considers love as an essential ingredient in marriage. Consequently, a man cannot compel a woman who does not like to marry him. Islamic laws grant equal rights of separation to both the spouses, but in reality these rights are enjoyed only by men.

The Islamic principles make it clear that religion has not sanctioned polygamy for the purpose of fulfilling man’s notorious desires. It is mainly sanctioned for checking social evils like prostitution and kidnapping. Polygamy is mainly recommended for extending support, safety and livelihood for widows, whose husbands have lost their lives in wars. But it is misused by some selfish and narrow minded males in the African context. This aspect of reality has been depicted in the novels of Ba.

Thus, in both her novels Ba presents the fact that female characters like Ramatoulaye, Aissatou and Mireille are in fact the victims of their husband’s duplicity. These women are totally kept in dark regarding their second marriage by their husbands. It is in *So Long a Letter* that Ramatoulaye pinpoints the issues at stake that result in polygamy. As she says; ‘Thus to satisfy himself he reduced Young Nabou to a plate of food’. In reality much of the argument about polygamy in Ba’s novels rests on this statement by Ramatoulaye. The main



issue is not polygamy as an institution but men's polygamous instincts that result in philandering, betrayal, infidelity, lack of trust and abandonment. The issue in her novels is less about Islamic or African culture but more about men's inability to control their lust. Thus the male protagonists Modou, Mawdo and Ousmane are irresponsible philanders who manipulate the system to their own advantage. According to Obioma Nnaemeka Ojo-Ade's justification and praise of polygamy as "a function of Africinity" mimics the all too familiar excuse given by Mawdo Ba, in *So Long a Letter* and Ousmane in *Scarlet Song* to justify their infidelity and philandering.

The another dominant reason is the role of men and women who claim to be the cultural bearers and therefore, any excess on the part of women provokes their cultural nostalgia which leads them to wreck their vengeance against the women who disregard cultural pattern. Therefore, Aissatou and Mireille experience the problematic abandonment due to the dominant role played by their mother-in-laws in wrecking their happy married life. The antagonistic attitude of these mother-in-laws, their cultural nostalgia, and social profit leads them in turning around and confusing the heads of their sons. Both the novels *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song* present the typical role played by mother-in-laws in disturbing the happy married life of their sons. Tante Nabou and Yaye Khady represent the feminine reincarnations of the spirit of Iago machinations that led them just to disturb happy life of Aissatou and Mireille. Their actions and machinations are juxtaposed to the thoughts and actions of Mawdo and Ousmane. On the other hand, Modou Fall acts alone under the influence of lust and vanity. His action results in the disturbance of the twenty five year of married life to Ramatoulaye. All the three characters present the comprehensive picture of the dynamics of abandonment. It is by presenting such characters, Mariama Ba is able to bring into sharp focus the part played by both male and female segments of society in this process of abandonment.

The role of Imam in polygamous relationship is briefly discussed in *So Long a Letter*. He is the one who breaks the news of Modou and Binetou to Ramatoulaye. As she says, "All he has done is to marry a second wife today." Here he appears to be an insensitive individual; he is completely ignorant to the fact that he has just delivered a heavy blow to Ramatoulaye. But it is hard to blame him. As a man versed in Islamic laws, all that mattered to him was whether the laws had been adhered to or not. Whether Modou treated his wives equally staying three days with Ramatoulaye and three days with Binetou on a rotating basis was not within the Imam's immediate preview. Again, the Imam will be on hand to accompany Modou's brother Tasmir as his witness to ask for the widowed Ramatoulaye's hand for marriage. In bringing in her treatment Imam and his role in polygamy, Ba criticizes the selfish desire that leads men towards polygamy. She also condemns the religious laws that sanction it because she considers polygamy as a basic human flaw.

The novel *Scarlet Song* on the other hand also presents a role played by religious man like Djibril Gueye in polygamy. Djibril, a deeply religious man with strong religious beliefs embraces Mireille as a new member of the family in the beginning. But in the end, however, Djibril is not so sure anymore that Mireille and Ousmane's marriage in Paris was also made in Senegalese heaven. It is this realization from the facts surrounding Ousmane and Mireille's married life in Senegal that prompts Djibril to allow Ousmane to marry a local girl, Ouleymatou. In the cultural view of Djibril the secret local marriage is made both on earth-the Senegalese cultural reality-and in Heaven as Moslem. The only man Ali though a Moslem rejects Djibril's views and in a sincere fashion advises Ousmane to divorce Ouleymatou. However, the text does not comment on Djibril's advice to his son.

However, the novels of Ba also show that it is not only an avowed polygamist that makes women's lives a living hell. It has been argued in this study that polygamy exists under different guises in societies where the practice is unacceptable. Even though women's issues seem universal, they should be addressed on individual basis taking the culture of the women in question into consideration. Not all the women in this study fall under bigamous or polygamous marriages, some women, though in monogamous marriages, have been rendered voiceless by their husbands. Madame de la Valée in *Scarlet Song* is an example. Her silence in the text illustrates her powerlessness in her marriage. As a mother, she could only look on helplessly when Monsieur de la Valée opposes the marriage between Ousmane and Mireille.

Bâ's major concern in her writing is about mothers being role models to their children by making the right choices. Ramatoulaye and her friend Aïssatou's decisions in the face of their failing marriages are going to affect their children. By walking out on Mawdo and taking her sons with her despite society's condemnation of her action, Aïssatou has decided to prevent her husband from negatively influencing his sons. She has taken over raising them single-handedly but she is surely preventing them from feeling treated as undesirables since their father's family will not accept them completely due to their link with their mother's lower caste. By deciding to stay in her failed marriage, Ramatoulaye has decided to concentrate her soul attention on the welfare of her children. She, therefore, becomes a positive role model for her children. This grand gesture on the part of Ramatoulaye shows good instincts of a good woman. It also shows cultural greatness in which Ramatoulaye has been born and brought up. But this cannot be applied to all women invariably who have suffered similar pains in life.

Thus, Mariama Bâ's novel *So Long a Letter* shows that women's progressive access to education can help them redefine the existing patriarchal constructions of gender and female consciousness in modern Senegal. Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou show the courage to embrace modernity. Therefore, both women are the witnesses of transitional times in the history of Senegal:

Ramatoulaye's daughters have the potential to alter their existing situation by acknowledging the values of education, economic independence and equality in marriage. She also witnesses a change in gender roles in her daughter's marriage and realizes that Daba's husband plays a more active role in domestic activities. Ramatoulaye contrasts her failed marriage characterized by the absence of communication between husband and wife to the progressive way Daba and her husband handle their relationship.

Overall, the study of Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) reveals that the traditional women of the past carried with them ancestral values that have been transmitted to their daughters and granddaughters. Today's Senegalese women face the challenge of living in a modern world still influenced by their past traditions. In order to improve their present condition, they have to go through a transformational process that involves a level of awareness of the possibilities offered to them.

Mireille, in *Scarlet Song*, in the throes of her woes, maintains a positive combative attitude towards life. She rails against the capitulationist tendencies of some women who, in similar circumstances hide behind their children to mask their apathy. It is by killing her own son and stabbing Ousmane, Mireille asserts the true self of a woman, who is determined to put an end to her own passivity that makes her suffer throughout her life due to no fault of hers.

In *Scarlet Song*, Mireille's mother finally realizes that her daughter, who belongs to a younger generation, sees life as full of opportunities and of freedom of choice, therefore her decision to marry a black is an act of the freedom to choose. Bâ however draws the reader's attention to the fact that racism and cultural intolerance is prevalent not only among the older and more conservative generation but also among the younger and liberal ones. In *Scarlet Song*, Ousmane has proved to be no less racist than his mother. On the question of marriage, Ramatoulaye has finally realized that her friend Aïssatou's decision to divorce Mawdo was right even though in a subtle way, she wished Aïssatou had remarried since in her opinion, men and women are meant to complement each other.

Thus, the heroines of both the novels have affirmative tone towards life. The patriarchal situation enables these women characters to suffer throughout their life; however, it is towards the end of the novel that these women overcome their own sufferings. Ba's intellectual project leaves the battle to the young women to change the status quo. Her hopes are through the younger generation, the archaic and negative attachment to tradition will make a way for a different way of constructing knowledge within tradition but in a positive manner. This transformation she firmly believes can and will take place within Senegalese society.

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