

Book report

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Book Report Fasting and Feasting The book “ Fasting and Feasting” revolves around two families, one that lives in India the other in America. The author Anita Desai contrasts the two families. The book focuses on the social role of the woman in the household and the Indian traditions that keep them there. The main character of the book is an Indian woman that is not pretty, smart, or confident. The story follows her throughout her life and chronicles the struggles she has, her failures and lost opportunities. One of the more disturbing aspects of the book is the fact that woman were meant only for marriage, and this is taken advantage of by many people throughout the story. The author shows the reader a glimpse into the arranged marriages of the middle class in India through the eyes of Uma. She is married off twice and is twice scammed into giving up her families’ dowry. They lost the dowry both times and never get the money back. “ Women were bred for marriage” (pg) Uma states this towards the end of the of her story. It sums up a how the culture sees her and what a woman’s job in life is. Uma’s life was constantly planned by Papa. Papa limited her freedom and confined her to the house. Uma’s days were spent looking after baby Arun and making sure that the household was running well. Papa imprisoned Uma at home. When Uma wanted to go for outings or for tea at the neighbour’s house, Papa would stop her from doing so saying it was a waste of time. Uma could not resist her father’s oppressive patriarchal ideology, because she was afraid of the consequences that would befall her if she angered her father. Uma had two paths to follow in her life, she could either get married or stay with the family and become close to a slave for her parents. Uma’s family does try to marry her off. They go to great lengths to find a man that would take her.

They send pictures to all the relatives and Uma's mother talks to all her friends about finding her a husband. (Mama)' worked hard at trying to dispose of Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised... but it was always returned with the comment ' We are looking for someone taller/fairer/more educated, for Sanju/Pinku/Dimpu.' They were not that concerned with how honest or trustworthy the eligible men were, they were only concerned with his family statues, and if it would benefit them.

However, Uma proves rather difficult to pair off due to her limited education and her looks. When Mamma is finally able to find a suitor for Uma, Papa is scammed into paying a hefty amount in dowry only to be left dangling midway with the cancellation of the marriage. The man Uma was supposed to marry decided he did not want to marry anymore. Papa sees this as a terrible shame and inevitably blames Uma for bringing shame to the family. This is a problem with the Indian system. All someone needs to do is find a desperate family that wants to marry their daughter off and then take advantage of that opportunity. That is exactly what this family did; they found Uma's family and then offered to marry her. There seemed to be no law about getting the dowry back, the father of Uma's uncertain husband claimed they had already spent the money. Papa could no longer get any money back. They did not even try, Papa just excepted that he had lost his dowry. After a long search for more eligible suitors, Papa encounters the family of a merchant who asks for Uma's hand in marriage. Papa gets her married only to be conned once again when she finds out that she is actually the second wife of the merchant. This was the second time that Uma's family was scammed into giving up money. Papa becomes furious not because his

daughter's life is ruined but because he has once again wasted a large sum of money on Uma's dowry. He did get some of the money back by threatening legal force. ' The marriage was somehow cancelled, annulled. Uma was never told of the legal proceedings involved. It was assumed she would not understand.' (Desai: 1998: 95) Papas only way to cope with the loss of another dowry is to blame Uma. ' he beat his head with his fists, and moaned aloud about the dowry and the wedding expenses while everyone, all of them strangers-women with babies and baskets of food, men reading newspapers or playing cards or discussing business-turned to listen with the keenest of interest, throwing significant looks at Uma who kept her head wrapped up in her sari in an effort to screen her shame'. (Desai: 1998: 94) This whole situation may have been avoided if the tradition of prearranged marriage was set aside. The Indian tradition was to have the older daughter married off before the younger one. " There were so many marriage proposals for Aruna that Uma's unmarried state was not only an embarrassment but an obstruction.' (Desai: 1998: 85) So in order to get the younger daughter married off they sped up marrying Uma off. If they had not been in so much of a hurry they might have looked into the family and been tipped off that something was amiss. In the book the author seems to disagree with arranged marriages, showing them in a bad light through Uma's experiences. Even when her younger sister Aruna gets married she still has problems even though she had so many suitors. There is one family, the lady that lives next door to Uma's parents that has a loving relationship with her husband. The author shows us three examples of how the arranged marriages did not work and one that does. Arranging a woman's marriage is

really just another way to keep them in a world ruled by men. Sometimes these marriages work out but they still are dominated by males. The dowry paid to the husbands family was just another way to oppress woman. When the family marries off their daughter they must pay a substantial amount of money and other various items. Failure to do so could result in the bride being abused and alienated by her in-laws. In the novel, Uma was lucky to have been spared the tortures of her in-laws. Her parents were grateful that 'Uma was not married into a family that could have burnt her to death in order to procure another dowry!' (Desai: 1998: 83). After the dowry is paid to keep their daughter relatively safe she is then taken away to live in a new home and be oppressed by the people that live there. It seems to be no win in this situation. Why was there no law or legal grounds to gain back the lost money. It seems strange and unfair that the woman in the story have no say in who they will marry. It is all decided on the status of their family and the size of the dowry they can offer. In the book arranged marriages do not work well. They either learn to cope with each other like mama and papa or the struggle through it like Aruna. Uma is taken advantage of twice during her life because of this tradition and is disgraced and shamed. Also a large amount of money is "stolen" from the family in the form of a dowry. There is no legal means to gain the money back. All it takes is a family that is willing to play along to get a dowry and in the case of Uma's second marriage another person to cook. In my experience there needs to be love in a marriage to make it work. There is a difference between just living with someone because your family gave you to another family and actually being married. I would argue that arranged marriages can never be as fulfilling as

a marriage that is based on love and the other person have the right qualities to work with you.