



GENDER AND PERFORMATIVE IN EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVEL *A TERRIBLE MATRIARCHY*

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Abstract

Gender as a social construct is a notion in feminism, sociology and Gender studies. Gender studies show that identity is a social construct through speech acts and nonverbal communication called *Performative*. Gender as performative shows the reversal of the idea that a person's identity is the source of their secondary actions of behavior and gestures. It shows that identity is continuously being redefined through speech acts and symbolic communication. This happens when society and culture act as an agent in creating gender roles. Such gender roles are results influenced by universal biological factors and social convention. EasterineKire's novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) reveals women's lives in the Naga society. The novel analyzes the actual situation and presents quite a different picture from a common understanding of how patriarchy operates in the community. Hence, the paper attempts to show how gender, as social and cultural, performs, acts, and aids gender biases and differences in society.

Keywords: Ideology, Gender Roles, Matriarchy, and Feminism

Introduction

Easterine Kire is an English poet and author from North-East India. She writes novels, poetry, and short stories. The central theme in most of her novels includes the rich heritage of Naga's history, cultures, traditions, rituals, and beliefs. From oral histories to that of war and conflicts, Kire tries to capture the true essence of Naga life and its society. As a writer, she writes about Naga people. Her novels also voice Naga women's marginalization, pain, and suffering under the traditional male-dominated patriarchal society. The paper attempted to explore and analyze 'Gender' as performative through the female characters in the novel. It aims to examine how Kire demonstrates these gender performances through her writing. The

paper also focuses on how patriarchy manipulates the female body and mind in creating gender.

Discussion

What is Gender? Ordinary people seem to think that both sex and gender mean the same. Their understanding is that women are human females and men are human males. In *Evolution of Sex* (1889), Geddes and Thompson conceptualize sex in terms of biological means. They held that the human metabolic state causes social, psychological, and behavioral traits. They proposed that women supposedly conserve energy '*anabolic*', which makes them passive, conservative, sluggish, stable, and less interested in areas like politics. Men expend their surplus energy '*katabolic*,' making them eager,

energetic, passionate, variable, and, thereby, interested in political and social matters. This biological understanding of sex explains behavioral differences between men and women and justifies women's position in different social and political arrangements. However, Feminists objected to this definition and understanding of the term woman and held that woman's behavioral and psychological differences have social rather than biological causes.

In her book *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir argues that society influences feminine traits. She believes there is a certain distinction between the two where sex is based on biological features. Sex refers to biological differences in humans' reproductive organs and genes, (which categorize them into male and female). Gender is socially and culturally constructed, (referring to psychological, emotional, and behavioral traits that differentiate and categorize females from males). Similarly, Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) proposes that gender is socially constructed through the act of performing, and is not natural. She argues that society assumes specific gender roles meant to be performed by males and females due to biology. In society, the definition of man and woman depends on how the person will behave in masculine and feminine behaviors.

Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) revolves around the lives of three generations of Naga Angami women- Dielieno, her mother Nino, and her grandmother Vilano. Angami Naga's society is patriarchal, where the descent and inheritance are passed along the male line. Like any tribal social system, Naga man exercises authority and power over the household and property. The birth of a male child is an occasion of celebration while a girl child is never considered "a real family member" (Kire 26). A girl child is generally believed as a member of another household- through marriage. The novel presents a picture of how patriarchy and gender operate in society. The novel begins with Dielieno, a girl child of four and a half. She suffers greatly at the hand of her grandmother. As a child she does not understand why her grandmother acts coldly towards her.

In many cultural gender studies, gender hierarchy is expressed through food. A woman has less access to food than man. A practice supported by their economic dependence on men and the belief that women eat less. The process of gender training began with the food used as a power to subordinate women. In the novel, Dielieno remembers how her grandmother treats her by serving only one piece of chicken, more pieces, and a chicken leg to her brother when they were in her grandmother's house. Little did she know that being denied one more chicken piece by her grandmother showed how society prefers a boy over a girl. Dielieno is young to understand grandmother discriminating treatment between her and her brothers. She innocently thought that maybe it was because at grandmother's house, as the food was cooked and served by her so it was 'her' food and she had every right to do with it as she wished (Kire 1). She even notices her mother giving a portion of meat from her mother plate to her brothers.

Gender is hierarchical, and this hierarchy is fundamentally tied to power. In the novel grandmother Vibano became the authoritative figure. She is the eldest, and exerts control over the young ones just like patriarchy does. She controls all the other women characters: Dielieno, her mother Nino and Bano, who feared and suffered inevitable abuse and discrimination in the hands of the grandmother. Kire twists the theme of gender discrimination and shows a woman exploiting her own granddaughter and other women members of the family. Dielieno's childhood is sacrifice to appease the grandmother. Whenever she tried to confront the injustice she is silenced by her father, who reprimands her by saying that: "it is for your own good, your Grandmother would never do anything to you that is not for your welfare" or "she only wants to raise you to be a good woman" (7).

Dielieno remembers her grandmother never addressing her by calling by her name; she is referred to as "the girl" denying her any individual identity. As she stays, she learns that being a girl gives her less privilege in the system. Dielieno learned discrimination based on sex and gender. In her grandmother's house, she felt inferior and unwanted. She wished to be loved and cared for like

her four brothers. Grandmother's treatment was so much for her young minds that she even wishes she would die instead staying at her house and in her presence. She is so afraid of her scolding that she suffers a nightmare.

Dielieno is tame under the gaze of her grandmother. From having being denied of warm bath in chilling weather to that of play time or rest Dielieno even to the extent of denial for her education she suffer humiliation being a girl at the hands of her grandmother(who is reveal to practiced and promotes patriarchal tradition under the guise of matriarchy system). The novel shows the unhealthy relationship between a grandmother and a child under patriarchy tribal society.

Gender discrimination is performs through inequality. Upon reaching her grandmother's home, Dielieno is treat as unclean, and she is asked to take a bath before entering her grandmother house. She is even assigned duty: to rise early in the morning, fetch water from the well, sweep and clean the house, wash clothes, feed the chickens, dry and store vegetables, and run an errand at every command from early morning till evening. Her grandmother even punished her for not working or finishing the assigned task on time. Dielieno had to act the way her grandmother wanted her to be.

Patriarchal society expects and put much restriction on girls, but these social rules and restriction were not meant for the boys. In the novel men are seen more privileges than women. They are allowed to enjoy, get drunk, get into street fights and even beat their wives. Patriarchal Society does not impose any responsibilities on them, whether to take care of the family or the child or towards society. They can do whatever they want, with the excuse being 'they are boy'.

Gender discrimination is revealed in grandmother's treatment for Vini, Dielieno's younger brother. He is an alcoholic, has a violent temper, and a headache for the family. However, grandmother Vilano has total praise of Vini. She pampered him and even bribed him by giving him money to gain his love and attention and even went to the extent of giving him her field portion. Deilieno had to take responsibility for her parent's

household. Unlike her brothers, she is questioned, bullied, and humiliated by her own grandmother, judging her in every aspect of her life: her behavior, her friends, her study, her career and even her choice of lifestyle.

The novel shows the complex layer of gender oppression found in patriarchal-dominated society on three levels –social, economic and political. All three generations of women bear the brunt gender inequality -Grandmother, Mother and Dielieno. Grandmother Vilano, demonstrates her as a subscriber to patriarchal ideology, and in other words she plays, as the child of patriarchy.

In social learning theorists understanding of child psychology, children are often influenced by what they observe around their world. Grandmother patriarchal attitude is the result of her childhood experience. Grandmother saw her mother suffer hardship, extreme poverty, helplessness, and exclusion from many social benefits and aspects because she has no male child. Grandmother looks at her grandsons as a kind of security. Her attitudes define how patriarchy ideology is embedded and culturally constructed. She becomes the means to advocate for the male-centric society. She believes that it is the male heir who can give her security, free from fears, and can earn respect for her in the male-dominated society.

Patriarchy operates a power to subjugate women. The novel looks into the various aspect of how patriarchal assertion manifold in ways and challenge the commonly held feminist point of view. Patriarchal practice ensures that women subordinate's position, which entails the performance of most of the domestic work falling on women making her look less appealing. Dielieno observes unequal work distribution between the two sexes, whether between her and her brothers in grandmother's household, or in her house between her parents. Grandmother was herself the victim of sexual or Gender politics.

Conclusion

Gender make performative through language. The language that grandmother used for her household was that of patriarchy. Language

gives grandmother her command over her household. She uses it according to her wish and as a threat to blackmail to her family members. Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) stressed that it is only through education and financial stability one can break away and become a woman equal to male. Gender is not natural and will cease to exist if stop performing it. Kire shows it is through education that one can break away from these ties of gender dominance legalizes under patriarchy and liberate her. Dielieno did not succumb to the demand of her grandmother. Even after so much suffering and humiliating treatment. She strives and with the help of her mother's support and her elder brother's financial help, she can graduate and become a teacher. The novel as cultural text reflects subordinated social position of women, especially of a girl child in tribal society.

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