

Manifestations of Double Layered Subjugations of Women in the Select Works of Jamaica Kincaid

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Abstract

The women of the Caribbean society were silenced and trained to become an echo of the male ethos. Unlike the women of the island Kincaid's protagonists refused subordination. They revolted against authority and adopted various means to resist oppression. Xuela abnegated motherhood to resist her recurrent fate, Annie John underwent a painful rebirth to attain selfhood. All the protagonists of Kincaid were blessed with indomitable courage and unflinching intelligence and they used it to emancipate from their oppressed state. This study brings out the peculiarity in the oppression undergone by the protagonists of Kincaid – they are oppressed by contrapuntal powers – the patriarchy and the colonial powers. The forced subjugation they encountered left them physically, linguistically and culturally oppressed.

Key words: Subjugation, double colonisation, oppression, selfhood, and resistance.

Introduction

Kincaid's works bring to surface the irredeemable effects of oppression endured by the women from the male-masters and the colonial masters. Women entangled with norms of the phallogocentric and the imperial powers under went a long painful struggle throughout their life. They are silenced, made voiceless and at times removed from the mainstream society. More than the contrapuntal oppression, women face oppression from other women who act as agents of the patriarchy and the colonial powers. They take the role of controlling and shaping the younger generation women, like the mother who gives an iteration of instructions to imprison the girl, the daughter, into the domestic frame and the child to a mere domestic servant. The fictional mother in 'Girl' wards off future suffering with warnings about bullying males and dismissive lovers and with a recipe for an abortifacient to end unplanned pregnancy. The concluding phase envisions a competent shopper who, like her indomitable mother, squeezes

bread for freshness while facing down a disapproving male Baker. The image portrays a circumscribed life of women where they lay claim to limited powers, such as the freshness of baked goods and carrying of their own embryos to term.

Double colonization is a term coined in the mid-1980 and usually identified with Hoist Peterson and Rutherford's *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's* writing published in 1985. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Bill Ashcroft says:

The term refers to the observation that women are subjected to both the colonial domination of empire and male domination of patriarchy. In this respect, empire and patriarchy act analogous to each other and both exert control over female colonial subjects, who are, thus, doubly colonized by the imperial and the patriarchal powers. Feminist theory has propounded that "women have been marginalized by patriarchal society and consequently the history and concerns of feminist theory have paralleled developments in post-colonial theory which foregrounds the marginalization of the colonial subject. (Bill Ashcroft, 66)

Women are imposed with a subservient role like the roles Annie John is given by Mineu in their play - a servant, a dragon, a person who runs errands. Man takes multiple prominent roles which have the privilege to exercise powers on the female gender. Women's bodies are colonized by the men in the name of sex, marriage and motherhood. For many women in the Caribbean society, pregnancy is a result of sexual vulnerability and it is not a result of their aspiration for motherhood. Xuela is sexually exploited by LaBette and given an unwanted child when Xuela herself was no more than a child. Throughout her life, Xuela struggled with oppression through various sources. Xuela's step-sister is another victim whose life was equally pained by neglect and dominance. Her sexual experience with her lover is not out of emotional bondage which she believed to be. Xuela reduces sexual relationships to mere source of pleasure. She says,

... My sister... thought this sensation was unique to her being with him; She did not know she could have this sensation with anyone else,, including her own self. She was in love with him, what did that mean? It was something I hoped never to know, for she made it look like the definition of foolishness itself. (AMM, 121)

The accident Xuela's step-sister meets with leaves her "a semi – invalid for the rest of her life." (AMM, 125) This is what she got through her relationship with the person whom she believed to love. Xuela explains the condition of her step-sister as,

Completely disfigured ... her eyes were unable to focus properly, one leg was longer than the other, and she walked with a limp. It was not these things that made her not beautiful, for the internal chaos her unfocused

sight caused her could have led to an expression of vulnerability on her face; the limp, too, might have caused anyone to feel sympathetic towards her. (AMM, 128)

Elizabeth is “a woman disappointed with love when it comes through man.” (AMM, 128) She conveys a kind of relationship a woman can always have with a man – disappointed, invalid, and a mere object of pleasure.

Though the physical existence of the colonists and their direct exploitation over the colonial subjects are not shown directly in the novels of Kincaid, the protagonists and the other characters suffer under the colonial oppression through their own people, whose psyche is set with the colonial thoughts and the colonial standards of life. In *Annie John*, Annie is instructed to dress like their already left colonial masters: still living in their psyche. Unknowingly, Annie’s mother behaves as an agent of the left-colonizers and she tries to colonize the thought and the lifestyle of her daughter. By doing so, she unconsciously crushes the individuality and the ethnicity of her own daughter. It is very pathetic to see the psyche of the people is being colonized and the same was forcibly inflicted on to the forthcoming generations.

The psychological trauma which Lucy the titular character of *Lucy* undergoes over the thought of daffodils clearly shows that the psyche of the colonized are still haunted over the thought of the colonial powers. Unfortunately, these nightmarish dreams torment the female colonized subjects rather than the male. Jamaica Kincaid would have deliberately chosen Lucy, a female protagonist to suffer with the terrific dreams of daffodils, the symbol of the colonist; perhaps to say the world that the sufferings under the colonial powers and the wound which created is far intense in the case of a woman – the doubly oppressed.

In the case of Xuela, Xuela is a child who never utters a single word until she is of the age of four. But when she starts talking, the very first sentence she utters is in English. She asks “Where is my father” in flawless English. The step-mother and the other children are surprised not because she has started speaking and asked a question but because she has used English, the language which Xuela has not at all exposed to. From this it is evident that the colonizers were able to colonize even the children yet to be born.

Conclusion

The Caribbean women portrayed in the novels of Jamaica Kincaid suffer under the thoughts of colonial representatives; language English in the novel *AMM*, *Daffodils* in *Lucy* and, culture and lifestyle in *Annie John*. Though the colonial masters have left the Caribbean Island free, they still have left their representatives like, their language, culture, lifestyle and even the favourites of their land (like daffodils) which the natives cannot even figure out is only to confuse the psyche and to erase the ethnicity of the native land. The protagonists of Jamaica Kincaid’s novels suffer this psychological colonial trauma and also, they have to struggle with the patriarchal oppression in every walk of their life thus encountering double

colonization. Kincaid breaks the traditional portrayal of women: they suffer and undergo contours of pains in their life and they endure physical and psychological pains inflicted on them. But at the end, they realize their self-worth and that they do not deserve what they undergo and they start acting and reacting.

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