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GENDER INEQUITY AND PATRIARCHAL DOMINANCE IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

Abstract

This paper aims at study gender inequity and patriarchal dominance in African literature. The paper tries to explore the views of some writers on gender discrimination and stereotype roles. Revisiting the African literature throws light that traditions and customs supported dominating role of male and submissive role of women. As a result the males enjoyed more rights than the female gender.

INTRODUCTION

Literature encompass the culture, social norms, values , religion and life style of the people specific to that particular location. An upsurge in literature triggered by the feminist movement has been witnessed. A common feature in African literature happens to be portrayal of patriarchal society. Gilian Gorle reiterates:“Since many postcolonial texts are set in traditionally patriarchal societies, in which boys are thought more worthy than girls of formal education, any discussion of language and power must include gender politics...(Gorle)”

Kolawole (1997) notes, most of the male writers by omission or commission, in the early phase of African literature encouraged the marginalisation of women. In this context, female characters are made marginal to the plot of the fiction, while only a few emerge as powerful and credible protagonists. Chukukere (1995) affirms that male writers often created ideal female characters within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. Social values are so

strong that the respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaptations to these roles.

Gender Inequality

Gender refer to social, cultural and psychological aspects of masculinity and femininity and is also known as the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person. Gender inequality is linked to the relationship of power between the sexes. McKinnon (quoted in Kramarae & Treichler, 1986:174), further emphasises the statement that, gender is a division of women and men caused by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. In Mothlabane's drama, *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*, male character Sibonda is telling Gcisa, his neighbour, about Nolasti, his wife, who answered him back at home. His attitude towards women shows that he wants to patronize them, he doesn't talk them as an equal, but as superior and wiser. He expects his wife not to object to his ideas or observations.

The acceptance of inequality and identification of gender roles by both females and males is portrayed in "The slave girl" by Emecheta (1995). In this well known women trader Ma Palagada pays for the slaves from outside to help her with domestic work and with her trade. However as she is a women, she is powerless, does not own the slaves for whom she pays, but Pa Palagada does, because he is a man. Here it is clear cut reflection of gender discrimination, as Ma Palagada is excluded from the power she deserves because the only reason of her being women. Pa Palagada is not involved in trading. He stays at home abusing female slaves and waits for his wife to come back from work. The credit is not attributed to the one who works hard for it, but to the person who did not do anything. Pa Palagada the male character views women in a way that shows gender stereotypes: He was one of those big, manly males who would not hesitate to tell you that women were created as play things for men, that they were brainless, mindless and easily pliable. (Emecheta, 1995:178.) In "The trials of brother Jero" play where all Chume needs to beat his wife is the consent of a fraud prophet, who is also a male. In

patriarchal society, inherently it is believed by men that it was their right to silence their women as they wished. The men thought that any woman to silently endure to be the “good” woman.

PATRIARCHAL DOMINANCE

Patriarchal society heads of families are the men and want things to go their way. Patriarchal society commands women to go with accordance of men. A typical example of the patriarchal society can be seen in *Buzani kubawo* by Tamsanqa (1987) MaGaba, ZwiLakhe's wife, is bound by patriarchal rules. She is not allowed to get involved in the family discussion of her son, Gugulethu's, arranged marriage.

Repression means limitations put upon one group's or individual's freedom of expression and action by a dominant group or individual. According to Reber (1985:640), Masukude's feelings are being repressed by her in-laws. Masukude, , has been limited by the man in her family of a freedom to express her feelings in the meeting that concerns her home as she is a woman, she is not allowed to take part. She has to accept whatever decision is made, even if she does not agree with it. In *Inene nasi isibhozo Mfolo*, Masukude's presence in the family meeting, dissatisfies her late husband's brother, although they are discussing issues that concern Masukude's home

The traditional culture and patriarchy demands and expectations is accepted by women.

Submissiveness is part of repression, and the patriarchal society demands that women should be submissive to their husbands' actions towards them

In “The slave girl”, Ojebeta, accepts what is happening in her life as the way things should be. Ojebeta was content and did not want more of life. The character shows that she was happy to be submissive to husband, even to accept an occasional beating, because she had been brought up to believe a wife should accept it. (Emecheta, 1995:178.) The reason Ojebeta accepts the situation is that she was socialised in such a way that, as a woman, she had to accept what was being done to her by men. Women's submissiveness to their husbands is also reflected in “The joys of motherhood” when NnuEgo witnesses in the court of law that though she is the one who provides for the family, because she is a woman, she bestows her hard work for the family on her

husband. In her words, “Nnaife is the head of our family. He owns me, just like God in the sky owns us. So even though I pay the fees, yet he owns me”. (Emecheta, 1988:217.)

Conclusion

The African literature depicts gender bias was a prevalent part of the African culture. Women and men were not equals and their roles in literature and theatre screamed that theme. However the female role was rectified and redefined through collective efforts after feminist movement.

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