



## Patriarchal structure and place of Women in Angami Society: In the Select Novel

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**Abstract**— Gender discrimination against women within the matriarchy and patriarchy plays a pivotal role in the protagonist's life in the select novel. This paper examines the protagonist's journey as seen in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, and also aims to expose patriarchy for what it is. Kire gives a critical insight into how girls are raised and groomed to be submissive wives. Women's subordination in tribal communities is one of the key themes explored in this novel. As the Angami society is a dominant patriarchal society, this work shows how unfair the matriarchy is to women. This paper focuses on how a matriarch becomes an ardent defender of patriarchy.

**Keywords**— Patriarchy, Androcentric, Matriarchy, Matrilineal, empowerment.

### I. INTRODUCTION

*The Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire was published in 2007, Kire is the first Naga writer to write and publish in English. The complexity of colonial crimes and discrimination are shown in Easterine Kire's works, which also depict the harsh reality of living in Nagaland.

In the twentieth century, women's writing is viewed as a powerful platform for modernist and feminist statements. In the last twenty years, feminist works written in English by Indian women have become wildly popular. In describing their writing, many female authors have adopted the term 'feminist,' which represents that, in the modern era, women have realised that they are not helpless or dependent. These facts, portrayed in the works of contemporary Indian women authors, reflect the changed mentality of today's modern women.

India has one of the world's most significant concentrations of native peoples. North-East India is home to a sizable indigenous population and holds a high profile in the community, one of the world's most culturally varied regions. Tribal customs and regulations heavily impact the

native people of the area. Therefore, the community's social, cultural, and political components are influenced and decided by tribal law and order. In Nagaland, women face numerous obstacles that prohibit them from fully participating in the political-social life of their community.

The paper focuses on gender discrimination issues in India, especially in the Northeast, as seen in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*. This study provides a gendered examination of the systems and practices of violence that define both public politics and private family space in Northeast India. The study analyses vital gender challenges faced by Northeast Indian women, as seen in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. This paper refers to the work of Kire because her narration accurately portrays women's life in North India. The story is autobiographical and draws from her life events; the representation of powerful women in positions perhaps be read as a reflection of the authors' lives. Kire is an influential woman writer who has made a mark in the academy by bringing the forgotten histories of marginalised groups to a worldwide audience in innovative ways. Kire is the first one to write in English from Nagaland. Kire's work portrays the painful reality of life in

Nagaland and the intricacies of colonialism and oppression. It also reflects upon the lifestyle and culture of Angami. *Mari* is one of her bestselling novels *When the River Sleeps* (2015); she received 'The Hindu Prize.'

## II. ANDROCENTRIC ANGAMI SOCIETY

*A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) by Easterine Kire represents the status of women in Angami society, which has a patriarchal setup and the work is fictitious, and real-world events coexist. There is no doubt that women's position in society has advanced significantly. We have not yet achieved parity in all social and political engagement areas. Modern women in India's academic and administrative sectors are challenging the status quo even as their patriarchal culture struggles to acknowledge their achievements.

Angami society is patriarchal, and its treatment of women regarding their rights to get primary education, property inheritance, freedom of choice with their marriage, divorce, and their very existence is patrilineal. However, we can see that women are the primary source of the family's income through various forms such as agricultural activity, weaving clothes and sweaters, and being good with handicrafts. Naga society is patriarchal, but some women have freedom, and their role is essential for the community's growth. Kire has analyzed the Angami society's culture deeply and dealt with the present situation by bringing her own life experiences based on real people. Kire has given a different perspective on how patriarchy operates in Angami society.

Modern women in India's academic and administrative spheres are challenging the dominant narrative despite the country's persistent patriarchy, which makes it difficult for the government to acknowledge the achievements and skills of women. Writers like Kire have defined the literary identity of the indigenous community by acting as representatives of civilizations that have had to overcome historical marginalization. In the novel, the grandmother represents the docile grandparents whose values contrast with the 'new Naga woman.' Matriarchal dominance is described in the narrative by Dielieno's grandmother. Nonetheless, let us analyze the grandmother's story carefully. Her influence over the young female protagonist is primarily due to fear of society rather than contributing to the community's cultural norms.

## III. MATRIARCHAL CULTURE

The novel's title alludes to the grandmother's matriarchal hegemony, which she uses to bury the pain of raising a daughter in a culture where men have all the power. The novel revolves around female characters belonging to three

different generations, and the primary women characters are Grandmother, Mother, and the protagonist Dielieno. This novel is one of the few books about Naga women and how their values and beliefs determine their social roles. Kire's understated emphasis on patriarchal authority is one of the work's distinctive features. Kire skillfully makes maternal authority and the harm it causes to female offspring, as seen through the protagonist Dielieno.

The matriarch is the last stage a woman attains in her lifetime; she becomes a matriarch after living as a mother. Traditional Naga patriarchal values are the root cause of the grandmother's conformist role and the values she upholds. Despite the absence of overt male characters, the work permeates every aspect of the workplace through the subtle yet potent influence of the patriarchal societal order. While trying to mold Dielieno into a 'decent' girl, her grandmother ignores that by exercising her authority, she reinforces the norms of a patriarchal culture that limit women's agency. It is clear early in the book when Dielieno's grandma scolds Dielieno's mother for not including Dielieno in household tasks. Grandma expects Dielieno's parents must make the girl do housework and should stop letting her play around with her brothers. Grandma says, 'No responsible parent would raise their daughter that way' (Kire, 2007). In addition to her worryingly conventional outlook, grandmother's refusal to call Dielieno by her name, preferring to refer to her as 'the girl,' is disturbing to Dielieno, and she asks grandma to call her by her name. Yet, Grandma still wonders where her current identity came from.; Dielieno means 'errand girl' in the Angami language, which is both exciting and relevant.

A matriarch is a woman who influences her community, family, and society. The Grandmother, Vibano, has earned the status of a matriarch. Grandmother takes control of five-year-old Dielieno and prunes her into a docile, dutiful woman to become a good wife in the future and bring honor to her family and society. The grandmother also takes control of the lives of two other women in the novel, Bano and Dielieno's mother. Dielieno has a hard life because of her grandmother's attitude against girl children. In this novel, patriarchy is dominant; the male child's value is more than the girl child in the family. Towards the end, we know that this partial treatment of the male heir is because of socially and culturally constructed beliefs. Dielieno constantly conflicts with Angami's tradition that keeps women under suppression.

The protagonist Dielieno has a loving mother, father, and brothers who support her in the novel. Still, she faces matriarchal oppression from her grandmother, the matriarch of the family who has no consideration for a girl child. Lieno is just a five-year-old child while being sent to

care for her grandmother Vibano. Grandmother has no sympathy for any girl child, so Lieno goes through tremendous household work, which is impossible for a child her age. As a result of her grandmother's lack of sympathy for female children, Lieno exerted compulsion to perform household chores beyond the capabilities of a child her age. It compelled Lieno to follow impossible rules dictated by her grandmother, who believes that a girl child does not require care, education, love, or even an adequate diet of meat and jaggery. Because of her gender, a girl is not even entitled to a slice of beef or jaggery.

What meat do you want?" she simpered sweetly... "I was not the leg, Grandmother; give me the leg." "I was not asking for you, silly girl," she said as she swiftly put the chicken leg into my brother's plate. "that portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other parts. (Kire, 1)

Lieno's brothers enjoy every privilege imaginable, from the smallest such as having jaggery to eat, extra food, or meat, to the most significant such as inheriting the family property even if the man cannot care for it.

The framework According to Kire's introduction, *A Terrible Matriarchy* has an overarching patriarchal framework and seems to be focused on exposing abuses of the patriarchal system. However, the novel's less obvious understructure is a matriarchy, which abuses the patriarchal framework to justify violence against women by members of the same gender. Kire presents an entirely new perspective on women's oppression in *A Terrible Matriarchy* by depicting the patriarchy as abused by the matriarchal structure, which results in gender suppression within the same gender. In India, gender discrimination is overwhelmingly patriarchal, but Kire addresses the other women in the family who impose women's suppression and oppression in the name of tradition. Extremely oppressive matriarchal pressure is the root cause of women's subjugation.

The novel delineates Angami's tradition, and the book is developing modernity. Modern concepts and ideas are still in their infancy, evidenced by their evocation in the developing Angami society. For instance, menstruation, a natural process, is called 'the curse,' and young girls are unaware of their body mechanisms. Lieno is terrified of such 'adult matters.' Lieno and her friend are apprehensive about purchasing sanitary napkins from a shop run by a man. It demonstrates that the Angami society persists without any development in such matters.

Kire demonstrates how Angami society functions patrilineal through the matriarch. We can see this through the grandmother Vibano's character, where she reserves the property rights of her grandson Vini, who is an

alcoholic and has no job. When Vini is dead, Vibano shares her love for Vini's son and even gives him the right to own the property. Though Lieno stays with her grandmother and does all the work, she does not inherit any property or money from the matriarch. Even Bano, who has lived in her grandmother's house her entire life, performs all housework, although she receives no property rights or money from the matriarch. Nino, Lieno's mother, explains that this patriarchal system believes only the male heir can inherit the family's property or money.

As Nino says, 'widows without sons lost all their husband's property to their male relatives (Kire 250). Kire illustrates this point through Neiko, grandmother Vibano's younger sister, who has remained unmarried and thus spent her entire life at her father's house. However, as far as anyone knows, the home and property belong to Neiko's brother, Sizo. They claimed that Sizo was the legal owner of the property even though he does not currently reside there. As soon as Neiko passes away, they will give it to Sizo.

The grandmother, the matriarch, provides additional food and meat for the male heir and family members because, in her opinion, the man cares for the family. In contrast, a woman is of no use to the family. According to Vibano,

There was no male heir in the family. There was no male heir in the family. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would have only one man to protect them. We love our male children and give them the best food. And we should." (Kire, Pg 35-36)

The common law of society provides only minor attention to the desires and rights of a married woman. Kire gives us a picture of three-generation women, allowing us to observe the lives and positions of women in three consecutive generations of society. Vibano's personal experiences shape how she views men and women. According to Lieno's mother, the grandmother Vibano's gender discrimination against girls stems from how society treats her mother. Vibano's behavior has taken the form of her mother's struggles with being a woman, demonstrating the community in which Vibano developed.

Similarly, when Lieno's mother describes the type of woman a man prefers, we can understand the society in which she lived. Men like quiet and timid women; they do not want an outspoken woman. According to Lieno's mother, Strong-willed and opinionated women are generally not well-received by men. As a result, they value hardworking wives. You are an effective worker, Lieno, but you could stand to be more submissive (Kire 249).

#### IV. FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS

The views of Lieno's mother and grandmother illustrate the treatment of women in society, which has remained essentially constant throughout two generations. Women still face many obstacles in today's culture, which is skewed heavily toward men. Women in Naga society experienced significant repercussions at this time of transition since their voices and story excluded from mainstream society and devalued. It is clear that selective participation' is a persistent trend since women's access to decision-making opportunities remains limited. Conventional gender roles that previous generations of Naga women adhered to are stifling and no longer fit the needs of modern society. As much as bestowing personal freedom, an individual should encompass space of all types in all areas, private and public.

For many Naga women in the modern day, Dielieno's unyielding attitude against the pressures of society hurled at her by her grandmother is a good symbol of the struggle to find one's voice and identity in the face of the domineering force of patriarchy. Kire connects Angami's education system's traditional and contemporary modern views toward girl children. Grandmother Vibano denies primary education even for a five-year-old child if it is a girl. According to her, education does not help the girl child become a good future wife or mother, which she considers the only important goal for any girl in Naga society. Vibano believes that educating a girl will make her adamant and will get her into trouble; as she says,

In our days... girls did not attend school. we learned fieldwork and everything we needed to know while holed up at home.... They will always have something to do, so they will be too occupied to cause any trouble (Kire 22)

Compared to Grandmother, Lieno's parents support her attending school. Though they persuade the grandmother to enroll Lieno in school, the grandmother is unhappy with the arrangement and ensures it is only temporary. Lieno's primary goal is to attend school. However, she may attend school if she agrees to complete all house chores on time. Lieno works diligently and excels in her education once she enrolls in school. We see Lieno grow up in an Angami society that places little emphasis on female education. Dielieno gets criticised for her ambition to join college for higher education. Her grandma tells her the harsh reality that men do not choose to marry women with advanced degrees since they see it as a barrier to having children (Kire, 2007). The grandmother internalizes patriarchy since she defends and values the community's cultural standards. She conforms unthinkingly to her gendered role and makes the other women in her home into virtual prisoners, making herself a

submissive victim. (Kire, 2007). Gender equality among Naga women requires them to confront the cultural norm of male superiority while working through the emotional scars of centuries of subjugation. Because of this, tensions are rising between the old and new ways.

Women have been assigned the role of subordinate figures, and their social identity and status have, time and again, not been allowed to rise above that of second-class citizens. This is not new for Naga women deprived of dignity and rights on the pretext of valuing social customs. As Dielieno grows up, she questions her village's harsh and rigid traditions. She learns the hard truths of being a girl while also knowing the wrongs done to her by her grandmother. This is made clear by a pivotal event in the story, after which Dielieno gradually seeks new means of becoming self-sufficient and valuable to the society to which she belongs, calling into question the traditional role of women in Naga culture. She is consistently subversive in her efforts to redefine what is expected in woman's expectations and consciously celebrates female protagonists who are strong enough to make their own choices and take charge of their destinies.

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