

Permeation of Pain in the works of Jamaica Kincaid: A Study

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Abstract

Kincaid, the vindicator of the voiceless in the colonial and patriarchal society has penned the contours of pain encountered by women in such a society. The previous chapter discussed the double colonization which women underwent by the oppression of the masculine as well as the imperial powers. Subordination always brings out pain. Subservience is a result of continuous suppression from all possible angles. Kincaid's protagonists are intelligent to understand the undue suppression women underwent. The realization adds to the existing pains. They had painful personal lives and the personal pain was intensified by the oppression they received from the people around them. This paper attempts to bring out the recurrence of pain in the lives of Xuela, Annie John, the daughter in Girl and Lucy, and also the ways in which they dealt with their pains.

Keywords: Voiceless; double colonization; pain, subservient; patriarchy and recurrence

Introduction

"...everything in my life, good or bad, to which I am inextricably bound, is a source of pain." (AMM, 7)

The ruthless dominance over these

defenseless women left them –abandoned, betrayed, separated from their own self, annihilated. The loss of the mother is the central focus of *The Autobiography of My Mother*. It permeates throughout the work and the consequence of the loss of a mother is presented in all possible angles. When in all other works of Jamaica Kincaid the central focus was the presence of the mother, *The Autobiography of My Mother* the central motive is the absence of the mother. The absent mother haunts Xuela throughout her life. The loneliness and pain, caused by the loss of the mother is the pulling forces which designs the protagonist's character. Xuela's life starts with the loss of her mother. She says, "My mother died at the moment I was born." (*The Autobiography of My Mother*, 3) The pain and struggle starts in the life of Xuela, the moment she was born. "... and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between me and eternity, at my back was always a bleak, black wind." (*The Autobiography of My Mother*, 3) Handed over to her foster mother, her father's laundress Ma Eunice Paul, Xuela is raised along with her six children. As a child Xuela did not receive any tenderness in nurturing from her foster mother. Eunice Paul a woman who has seen cruelty and penury extended the same to Xuela. Xuela had to undergo poverty in love and cruelty

in everything. “The lovelessness of the relationship presses Xuela in to verbal silence and a mental repetition of “not”. (152) (M.E.E)Xuela says, Xuela’s life started with denial – of a past, of mother’s love, father’s love, and a family. This denial made her to deny many things later in her life. the loss of her mother caused pain in her life, also left her vulnerable to others like Eunice Paul, her step mother, her step sister Elizabeth. They inflicted both physical and mental pain to Xuela. At school, her African teacher felt herself a symbol of shame because of her race and she found Xuela an even bigger shame because she was partly Carib and half African. My teacher ...a woman ...was of the African people, that I could see, and she found in this a source of humiliation and self-loathing, and she wore despair like an article of clothing, like a mantle, or a staff on which she leaned constantly, a birth right which she would pass on to us” (The Autobiography of My Mother,15).

The oppressed people did not find an oneness in their suffering and to love and trust each other. Instead, there was mistrust and odium among them. “She did not love us; we did not love her; we did not love one another, not then not ever” (The Autobiography of My Mother, 15) Xuela’s pain was doubled by the fact that, she is a girl and a member of a defeated and, erased race. “When the male students see Xuela’s face, they see more than racial difference; they see defeat, historical erasure, a trace of people who did not survive” (17, Caribbean Genesis) At the age of seven, Xuela was all alone struggling in the hostile world where she had nothing but “beatings and harsh

words” (The Autobiography of My Mother, 19) She was a lonely wolf searching for the face which would provide her a connection to her past – her mother. “I was lonely and wished to see people in whose faces I could recognize something of myself. Because who was I? My mother was dead; I had not seen my father for a long time.” (The Autobiography of My Mother,16). Her emotional impoverishment made her to write letters to her father describing her tormented life which she says “nothing but the plaintive cry of a small wounded animal.” (The Autobiography of My Mother, 19) When she was taken by her father to his house where he lived with his new wife, Xuela understands that her life is going to be life a fish from the fry pan to fire. She sensed the danger awaiting her at her father’s house. Her constant refusal to accept her overwhelming emotions betrays her pain and vulnerability. She undergoes ill treatment at the hand of Eunice Paul and her African teacher. The same continues in her father’s place where she had to undergo the same humiliation and ill-treatment. Her step mother was a great source of danger. She always wanted Xuela to be dead. She tries to poison her with old and moldy food. The seven year old child had to cook her own food to save her life from being poisoned and killed. As a child, she should have enjoyed shower affection like what Annie John had before the separation from her mother. Annie John enjoyed abundant love from her mother. She was always showered with kisses and hugs and embraced with smiles. Even her smallest deeds in life were celebrated by her mother. As she told me the stories, I sometimes sat

at her side, leaning against her, or I would crouch on my knees behind her back and lean over her shoulders. As I did this, I would occasionally sniff at her neck, or behind her ears, or at her hair. She smelled sometimes of lemons, sometimes of sage, sometimes of roses, sometimes of bay leaf...It was in such a paradise that I lived. (The Autobiography of My Mother, 22-25) Annie John lived in a paradise and her fall from the paradise caused her pain. Xuela lived in a 'false paradise.' "I awoke in the false paradise in which I will die." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 32) She never experienced the real paradise- love. The personal loss she had endured right from the moment of her birth haunted her throughout her life. The loss became a burden in her mind. She carried it throughout the day, throughout the night and throughout her life.

For Xuela, it is not just the absence of love and security Annie John had in her life makes her life miserable but the presence of brutality and enmity and hatred in her life made her soul roil. She did not have children of her age group to love her or to establish friendship with her. Though they "shared a common history of suffering and humiliation and enslavement" (The Autobiography of My Mother, 48) they did not trust each other. Nobody bothered her existence, but her stepmother wanted her demise. She did not have a fairy Godmother to protect her from a cruel step mother. She says, "God did not seem to care one way or the other, whether I lived or died." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 34) For Xuela, the pain does not hurt only the physic but the soul, "Soul roiled at the

harshness of life." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 31) Humiliation became a permanent part of her life. She experienced this humiliation from Eunice Paul her foster mother, her African teacher, her step mother, her step sister, from Moira her husband's first wife. She also experienced a kind of humiliation from men who tried to devalue her from a human to a mere object. She was raped by her employer Monsieur La Batte. Xuela wanted to take the pleasurable part of it. It was not an act of love but then Xuela took the carnal pleasure alone. "... the force of him inside me, inevitable as it was, again came as a shock, a long sharp line of pain that then washed over me with the broadness of a wave, a long sharp line of pleasure: and to each piercing that he made inside me, I made a cry that was the same cry, a cry of sadness, for without making of it something it really was not I was not the same person I had been before." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 71).

When she was impregnated by Monsieur LaBatte, Xuela never wanted motherhood. Xuela was a child with the pain of being motherless, without a history and a past was determined to never give birth to a child who may have the same fate as her. She says, "Perhaps I knew then that the child in me would never be stilled enough to allow me to have a child of my own" (The Autobiography of My Mother, 73) When Xuela was carrying the illegitimate child of Monsieur La Batte, Lise said that Xuela is "with a child" in English, the language of the captor. Xuela, the captive is left with the child, vulnerable to the oppressive world. She could not even

bear the thought of having a child within her. She met a lady named 'Sange-Sange' to abort the unwanted fetus. The mental agony of carrying the colonizers child resulted in intense physical pain that is abortification. She underwent an extremely painful abortion. She says, "The pain was nothing like had ever imagined before, it was as if it defined pain itself; all other pain was only a reference to it, an imitation of it, an aspiration to it." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 82)

Her physical pain was no lesser than her mental pain. She was exploited physically by La Batte and Lise tried to exploit her emotionally. Her mourning for the lost child was a painful sight for Xuela. Had Xuela had a weak heart she would have succumbed to the emotional drama of Lise. It was not just on Lise's part to expect a child from Xuela who herself was not more than a child. "I could hear her (Lise) say, "save me save me"; but even if she did not know, I knew it was not herself she wanted to save; it was me she wanted to consume" (The Autobiography of My Mother, 94) Xuela married Philip an English doctor whom she says she did not love. She had her marital life with a person who constantly reminded her of her defeat. "I did not love him ...my marriage represented a kind of tragedy, a kind of defeat, nothing, though, that would make the world hesitate to spin." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 211-212) Her only love with men was in her relationship with Roland. She loved him because they had a shared history – both slaves, and servants. But when he tried to possess her, she ended the relationship. "At

that time I loved him beyond words; I loved him when he was standing in front of me and I loved him when he was out of my sight." (The Autobiography of My Mother, 176). She lost her only love of her life. Like Xuela, Annie John loses her only love of her life that is her mother Annie. Xuela did not have a mother and she did not know what a mother's love is. But Annie John was blessed to have a mother and also to experience the bounty of her love. But at the moment of her life when she was completely immersed in the love of her mother, her mother started withdrawing herself from her life. This pain of being robbed of her most treasured bounty is what Annie John experienced in her life. She was expelled from the paradise in she lived for no reason but maturing in age. Her tender heart longed for the original state of harmony. She did not want to grow which was the reason she was separated from her mother. "I thought of begging my mother to ask my father if he could build for me a set of clamps into which I could screw myself at night before I went to sleep and which would surely cut back on my growing." (Annie John, 27). The same child, who wanted to curb her physical growth to avoid being separated from her mother, wanted her father to make a separate trunk for her. Annie was not just hurt by the fact that she is separate from her mother, but in the ruthless way her mother communicated it. Xuela was motherless and was under father who could not, did not love her. He failed to protect his daughter and left her vulnerable to the powerful. Throughout her life Xuela was constantly enduring various pains. Being a motherless child became the

central theme of her life. Xuela's fathers a Scott African, who had both the victor and vanquished choose the victor part of him. He ruthlessly dealt with the vanquished to hide the vanquished part of him. When he turned Lazarus, empty handed who came asking for his nail, Xuela innocently mention the barrel full of nails at home, her father become furious with Xuela. Ten year old daughter was brutally attacked by her father who sensed that Xuela being a part of the vanquished took the side of Lazarus who was also a part of the enslaved. Unable to tolerate this and out of the fear of expressing his ancestry of the vanquished, he took the role of the victor and assaulted his daughter Xuela was physically tormented by Alfred which made it evident that he did not have an iota of love towards his motherless daughter.

Xuela refuses to bear any children because she says that she wants to stop the recurrent fate of abandonment. Her mother was orphaned at the moment she was born. She was unfortunate as Xuela, for she did not have the luxury of having a mother. Her renunciation of motherhood is the result of the pain of the loss of a mother, being orphaned at the moment of birth. Annie John had troubles in her transformation from childhood to adolescence. She did not have a compassionate mother to ease her through the transformation. Her mother's sudden severing of the intimacy she was so far enjoying, further complicated her transformation. When Annie John asked her mother for a look of the trunk: one of her favorite past times, her mother replied in a tone which was brimming with treachery and hatred. "Absolutely not! You and I

don't have time for that anymore." Again, did the ground wash out under me? Again the answer would have to be yes, and I wouldn't be going too far." (AJ, 27) When her mother talked about the day when they would live separately in their own houses it was almost a death blow to Annie John. "That the day might actually come when we would live apart I had never believed. My throat hurt from the tears I held bottled up tight inside." (AJ, 29). "She developed insecurity and shame about her developing sexuality. When she saw her own image on the glass door of a shop she saw a person whom she could not even recognize." "She felt lonely and miserable at the absence of her mother's love during the change in her transformation. The newly developed enmity with her mother made her feel lonely. She compares herself with Satan for, both are rebellious against authority. She is able to see the unspoken anguish of Satan as she undergoes the same kind of anguish. It was Annie John who felt miserable at the changes in her life. She felt very weak and spent when she was almost brimming with tears. The boys on the road started teasing her. Her agony was intensified when she felt that she does not deserve such a treatment from them. Her mother without asking for details accused Annie John 'a slut' for talking with the boys in the road. Her anguish reached the pinnacle when she heard her mother called her a slut. Annie John already hurt by the unruly behavior of the boys, searched solace in her mother's arms. "What a new thing this was for me: my mother's back turned on me in disgust." (AJ, 28) When she received a completely unexpected reaction

from her mother Annie John's heart broke and it widened the breach between the both. When her mother called her a slut Annie John to her surprise retaliated in an unusual way by saying "well, like father like son, like mother like daughter." (AJ, 102) This further worsened the situation. This was an unexpected blow to her mother. Annie John was pained to see her mother hurt. She realized that her rift has become permanent and the words that she has just said are irrevocable. This made her sick to bed. She was grossly ill that she went to a symbolic pre-oedipal stage and had a painful rebirth. Her transformation, her symbolic rebirth was not pleasant like what Xuela says of the birth of a child.

This kind of natural blossoming did not occur to Annie John. The patriarchy has designed the blossoming in a particular way and her mother who acted as an agent stimulated her in a way to fit into the patriarchal pattern. She was forced to grow in a way accepted and approved by the double powers. This forceful conditioning and taming caused pain to her which in turn resulted in deep confrontation with her mother, colonial education, the gender biased society. She wanted to leave everything familiar and everything oppressive for a far off place where she can start her life fresh, free of all her past agony. Women are not allowed to develop an identity of their own. They were placed within cramped clamps framed by both the colonized and the patriarchy. They are expected to just become an extended self of the already termed elder generation women. The pain the protagonists experienced where not just pain in the surface level, they

are all deeply inflicted wounds which become a permanent part of their lives also their histories. But the protagonists of Kincaid are not the kind of women who are unaware of their situations, who passively accept everything they suffer in the name of fate or power. Though they undergo pain they question their fate. They resist the powerful who are insensitive to the sufferings of these women. They refuse to be silent and try to voice: voice against authority, injustice and power. The next chapter discusses the multiple dimensions in which the protagonists expressed their resistance against the top sided established norms of the society, the injustice caused in their personal lives and the colonial dominance in the islands.

Conclusion

This study brings out the facets of pains underwent 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. They 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 and Lucy pursued hedonism to break

norms. All the protagonists were blessed with indomitable courage and unflinching intelligence and they used it to emancipate from their oppressed state. With providence

they achieved validation from their devalued state. The stages of oppression and the resultant pain, their resistance towards oppression and their struggles to emancipate; is analyzed in this research. Kincaid's protagonists are like the mythical phoenix they rose from ashes with all the vigour to face the future.

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