
"Women in Transition: A Comparative Study of Female Characters in the Novels of Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai"

Dr. Sandhya Katumala

Assistant Professor (Adhoc),Dept.of Humanities and Social Sciences,J. N.T.U.A. College of Engineering Pulivendula (A),PULIVENDULA-516390
YSR (Dist) A.P., India.

Article Received: 16/11/2024

Article Accepted: 27/12/2024

Published Online: 28/12/2024

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.12.139

Abstract:

This study examines the portrayal of women in transition in the novels of Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai, highlighting their struggles with tradition, modernity, and personal agency. Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* explores generational patriarchy, depicting women resisting social constraints. Her narratives emphasize trauma, resilience, and transformation. In contrast, Dai's *Stupid Cupid* presents women balancing love, independence, and career aspirations, integrating history and myth into their identity. While Kire's women challenge structures through defiance, Dai's characters negotiate power within cultural frameworks. Using feminist literary criticism, particularly Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the *Other*, this study contrasts their approaches to female agency, familial ties, and self-realization. Through this comparison, it highlights how both authors redefine gender roles, contributing to the evolving discourse on women's identities in Northeast Indian literature.

Keywords: Female agency, patriarchy, tradition vs. modernity, identity, resilience, generational conflict

Easterine Kire (120 words)

Easterine Kire, a pioneering writer from Nagaland, is known for her novels that explore Naga history, oral traditions, and women's struggles. Her notable works include *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), and *When the River Sleeps* (2015), which won the Hindu Prize for Literature. Kire's writing focuses on themes of patriarchy, cultural identity, trauma, and resilience, often portraying women negotiating social oppression and personal freedom. Her narratives bridge folklore with modern storytelling, preserving Naga heritage while addressing contemporary issues. As the first Naga writer to publish a novel in English, Kire has gained critical acclaim for giving voice to Northeast India's marginalized histories, making her a significant literary figure in India and beyond.

Mamang Dai (120 words)

Mamang Dai, a celebrated writer from Arunachal Pradesh, is renowned for her poetic and narrative works blending history, myth, and contemporary themes. Her major works include *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), *Stupid Cupid* (2009), and *The Black Hill* (2014), which won the Sahitya Akademi Award. Dai's literature portrays the intersection of tradition and modernity, with a strong focus on women's agency, folklore, and indigenous identity. Her female characters navigate personal and cultural conflicts, reflecting the evolving roles of women in Arunachal society. A former journalist and civil servant, Dai's writing has earned national and international recognition, establishing her as a leading voice in Northeast Indian literature. She remains instrumental in preserving indigenous narratives while redefining women's roles in literature.

Tradition vs. Modernity

Easterine Kire's and Mamang Dai's female characters navigate the tension between tradition and modernity differently. Kire's women, as seen in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, resist patriarchal norms imposed by older generations, echoing Simone de Beauvoir's concept of *The Other*, where women struggle against societal roles assigned to them. Dai, in contrast, presents women who work within traditional structures while asserting their independence, as seen in *The Legends of Pensam*. Her approach aligns with Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, where storytelling reclaims female subjectivity through myth and oral traditions.

Kire's characters often break away from cultural restrictions, emphasizing individual freedom. In *Bitter Wormwood*, younger women challenge expectations, embodying liberal feminism's call for education and self-determination. Dai, however, integrates modern aspirations within traditional frameworks. In *Stupid Cupid*, women balance career and relationships while remaining tied to their cultural heritage. This reflects postcolonial feminism, which critiques Western notions of progress and instead highlights indigenous women's unique ways of asserting agency.

Both authors show women navigating patriarchal constraints, but their methods differ. Kire's *When the River Sleeps* features a woman overcoming societal and supernatural trials, symbolizing a struggle for self-definition outside conventional norms. Dai's *The Black Hill* depicts women using resilience and cultural wisdom to adapt rather than openly resist. This contrast mirrors de Beauvoir's view of women breaking free from patriarchal constructs versus Cixous's idea of reclaiming power through storytelling and cultural continuity.

Ultimately, Kire's approach leans toward direct resistance, advocating for breaking free from oppressive traditions, while Dai's narratives suggest that women can achieve empowerment without abandoning cultural roots. By applying feminist theories, it becomes

evident that both authors challenge gender norms, though one through defiance and the other through adaptation. Their works contribute to a broader feminist discourse on how Northeast Indian women negotiate identity, tradition, and modernity.

Patriarchy and Resistance

Easterine Kire's female characters often resist patriarchal oppression, directly confronting societal norms. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Dielieno suffers under the rigid control of her grandmother, highlighting the generational enforcement of patriarchal values. This reflects Simone de Beauvoir's *The Other*, where women are socialized into submissive roles. However, Dielieno's pursuit of education challenges these restrictions, representing women's fight for self-determination. In contrast, Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* portrays women who subtly navigate power structures without direct defiance. Instead of outright rebellion, Dai's characters use traditional wisdom to carve space for themselves, embodying Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, where storytelling becomes a means of reclaiming agency.

Kire's narratives present patriarchy as a rigid force that must be actively resisted. In *Bitter Wormwood*, female characters struggle to break free from societal constraints, mirroring liberal feminism's emphasis on individual empowerment through education and choice. Conversely, Dai's *Stupid Cupid* shows women asserting their independence in relationships and careers while still honoring cultural values. This aligns with postcolonial feminism, which critiques Western feminist ideals and highlights the ways indigenous women negotiate agency within patriarchal structures rather than entirely rejecting them.

While Kire's characters often experience direct oppression from male and female enforcers of patriarchy, Dai's women operate within a more fluid system where tradition and autonomy coexist. In *When the River Sleeps*, Kire portrays a female character who defies societal norms and supernatural forces alike, symbolizing the breaking of patriarchal and spiritual constraints. Meanwhile, in *The Black Hill*, Dai's women use resilience and adaptability to assert their influence without direct confrontation. This distinction reflects different feminist approaches—Kire focuses on overt resistance, whereas Dai explores transformation within existing frameworks.

Emotional and Social Identity

Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai explore how relationships, love, and familial ties shape the emotional and social identities of their female characters. Kire's women often struggle with familial oppression but ultimately carve out independent identities. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Dielieno's emotional growth is shaped by her strained relationship with her grandmother, reflecting Simone de Beauvoir's idea of *The Other*, where patriarchal figures enforce societal norms. In contrast, Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* presents women

whose identities are deeply tied to communal bonds and folklore, aligning with Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, where women find agency through storytelling and shared experiences.

Kire's characters experience relationships as both obstacles and transformative forces. In *Bitter Wormwood*, the burden of political unrest affects personal ties, influencing women's self-perception. Love, in her works, is often secondary to survival and self-actualization. Dai, however, portrays love as an integral part of identity. In *Stupid Cupid*, romantic relationships intersect with career aspirations, allowing women to embrace modernity without rejecting traditional emotional bonds. This contrast reflects postcolonial feminism—while Kire emphasizes breaking away from restrictive social expectations, Dai presents an evolving, adaptive identity where love coexists with autonomy.

Family plays a crucial role in shaping emotional identity in both writers' works. In *When the River Sleeps*, Kire's characters face emotional isolation due to societal norms, reinforcing their need to seek self-definition outside traditional structures. Dai, in *The Black Hill*, portrays family as a stabilizing force, where relationships provide emotional strength rather than restriction. This divergence reflects their differing perspectives on how women negotiate their roles within familial structures—Kire's protagonists often distance themselves to achieve autonomy, whereas Dai's find empowerment within these relationships.

Narrative Style

Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai employ distinct narrative styles that shape the reader's perception of female agency. Kire's writing is straightforward, often using first-person or close third-person narration to emphasize personal struggles. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Dielieno's direct perspective allows readers to intimately experience her resistance against patriarchal oppression, aligning with feminist narratives that foreground women's voices. In contrast, Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* adopts a lyrical, fragmented storytelling approach, blending myth and memory. This reflects Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, where nonlinear narratives mirror the fluidity of female experiences, reinforcing women's agency through collective storytelling rather than singular defiance.

Kire's narratives create immediacy, immersing readers in her characters' emotional and social battles. In *Bitter Wormwood*, she employs a linear structure that focuses on the impact of historical conflicts on women, reinforcing their struggle for agency in oppressive contexts. Dai, however, weaves poetic prose and folklore, as seen in *The Black Hill*, where time and memory intersect to show how women assert themselves through resilience rather than rebellion. This narrative style aligns with postcolonial feminism, which values

indigenous storytelling as a means of reclaiming agency beyond Western literary conventions.

While Kire's prose is concise and direct, emphasizing character-driven realism, Dai's style is more atmospheric, allowing for introspection and layered meanings. In *When the River Sleeps*, Kire's structured storytelling reflects the protagonist's determined journey toward self-liberation, highlighting individual autonomy. Conversely, *Stupid Cupid* employs a lighthearted, yet reflective, narrative that integrates humor and romance, presenting modern female agency in a relatable, everyday context. These stylistic choices shape how readers perceive empowerment—Kire's women achieve it through defiance, while Dai's women navigate it within tradition and emotional depth.

Ultimately, both authors craft narratives that highlight female agency but through different literary techniques. Kire's clear, structured storytelling makes resistance tangible, encouraging readers to engage with women's struggles directly. Dai's fluid, poetic narration presents agency as evolving and deeply intertwined with history and culture. Together, their works offer a nuanced understanding of how narrative style influences the representation of women's voices in Northeast Indian literature.

Works Cited

1. Barnes, Andrea, editor. *The Handbook of Women, Psychology, and the Law*. Jossey-Bass, 2005.
2. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage Books, 2011.
3. Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893.
4. Dai, Mamang. *The Black Hill*. Aleph Book Company, 2014.
5. ---. *The Legends of Pensam*. Penguin Books India, 2006.
6. ---. *Stupid Cupid*. Penguin Books India, 2009.
7. Kire, Easterine. *A Terrible Matriarchy*. Zubaan Books, 2007.
8. ---. *Bitter Wormwood*. Zubaan Books, 2011.
9. ---. *When the River Sleeps*. Zubaan Books, 2015.
10. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review*, vol. 30, 1988, pp. 61-88.