

Ambivalent Sexism and Misogyny: A Reading of Alain Mabanckou's novel *Black Moses* in Feministic Perspectives

Vijayan R*, Dr. D. Jockim**

*Ph. D. Research Scholar (Reg. No. 19111284011002), Research Department of English St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai – 2, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

** Assistant Professor, Research Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai – 2, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract- Feminism is a wide thrust area in the research platform and it aims at studying the status of the women in the society. This realm is accommodated to study the state of women in Alain Mabanckou's *Black Moses*. Mabanckou is an author of African diaspora and his contribution to postcolonial literature is immeasurable. He has taken African literature to the next phase academically. Though he resides in USA, his literary contributions spotlight the issues of Africa. This research focuses on the novel *Black Moses* to enlighten the condition of African women. Two feminist theories namely ambivalent sexism and misogyny are focused to enlighten the status of African women. Ambivalent sexism has two sub- divisions: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism replicates the pessimistic and stereotypical evaluation of gender and benevolent sexism refers to optimistic side of females subjectively but it deeply focuses on pessimistic face of gender. The social psychologists have defined that the place where hostile sexism and benevolent sexism meet, it is called ambivalent sexism. Misogyny is another feministic theory, adopted in this platform to study the injustice act against African women. The study reveals that the social norms of the society have been formed according to the convenience of men and the women are enforced to follow the perceived rules of society without minding their comfort. The finding is that men in Africa still dominate the women and it attempts to prove that the gender inequity is still existed in African society.

Index Terms- *Feminism, Ambivalent Sexism, Hostile Sexism, Benevolent Sexism and Misogyny*

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a social, political, economic or cultural movement and it aims at establishing equality between the genders. It has the close associations with political and sociological theories. The philosophies related to feminism advocate the gender disparity in order to claim for the gender equality. The term feminism was derived from French to English in 1980. In earlier, similar word in Oxford English Dictionary referred to negative meanings. Feminism in Germany is a socialistic term and in those years, there was an alternative term „womanism“ which reflected the same hostility. Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker marked the three phases of feminism. The first wave commenced from 19th to early 20th century, the second wave was from 1960s to 1970s and the third has been extended from 1990s to the present. All the three phases reveal the different profile status of the women in the society.

The role of feminism in Africa is highly prominent paradigm because the struggles of African women diverse from the other women in the world. Feminism in Africa is defined in *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* as, “Feminism in Africa is heterosexual, prenatal, and concerned with „bread, butter and power“ issue. Genital mutilation, as a way of suppressing unruly female sexuality, is still carried out in some African countries. It is not an inherently Muslim practice, but has become part of the anti-woman stance adopted by certain fundamentals” (125). This elucidation details the grade of the African women. Their society has been formed against to the women.

The reference of Margaret Walters on African women replicates the close association to the study of this research. She denotes the life of Amina Lawal, 30 year old Muslim girl in Nigeria and she was stoned to death after she had a baby outside marriage despite she was apparently raped. It got the spotlight worldwide coverage and there was a plan in the country to conduct the contest of Miss World beauty. So many participants protested against to participate in the event because the harmful event against to women in Nigeria. African women are in the position to accept the blames though they do not have any connection with that.

Ambivalent sexism is a theoretical frame work and it was invented and developed by Glick and Fiske in 1996. It encloses two sets of sexist attitudes namely hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism replicates the clear antipathy toward women whereas benevolent sexism seems to be positive vibration towards women but actual intention of patronizing women. Glick and Fiske defines that benevolent is a group of attitude which aims to view the women stereotypically and confining their role.

Hostile and benevolent sexism are the part and parcel of ambivalent sexism. The definition elucidates that where the definition of benevolent and hostile sexism meet, the actual definition of ambivalent sexism gets fulfilled. Chen, Zhixia et al define ambivalent sexism is given below as:

Presented a theory that sexism toward women is usually ambivalent, involving not only hostile sexism but also benevolent sexism. The theory posits that the relations between the genders are characterized by the coexistence of male dominance in society and intimate interdependence, hence eliciting ambivalent sexism. On the one hand, male predominance in economic, political, and social institutions supports hostile sexism, which characterizes women as inferior and incompetent. On the other hand, sexual reproduction makes men and women intimate and highly interdependent with each other, this relationship creating benevolent sexism, which characterizes women as needing to be protected. The relevant research supports both positive and negative

attitudes that serve to justify unequal gender relations. (765)

The given quotation delineates the characteristics of benevolent and hostile sexism and how they play role in the life of women in pessimistic and optimistic perspectives. Men attempt to take advantage in economic, political and social institutions by denoting the inability of women. This theoretical approach is applied in Mabanckou's novel to find out the condition of African women under the male society. Through this theory, the study endeavors to spotlight the male domination by giving lots of flimsy causes.

Misogyny is a prejudice against women and it encourages the people who appreciate the inferior status and injustice act against women. This practice has been existed throughout the history. It is derived from Ancient Greek word "mīsoguniā" which means hatred towards women. The misogynistic concept was invented in Greek literature but it was considered as Classical Greece disease. It entered as a common term in English in 2012 and it not only exists in literature but also sacred texts of religions, mythologies and philosophies contain the misogynistic impacts. It has been called male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, belittling of women, violence against women and sexual objectification.

Misogyny refers to both physical and psychological violence. This concept entered into English through the proto-feminist play, *Swetnam the Woman – Hater*, published in 1620. The character named Misogynos from *Swetnam the Woman* is the origin of the term misogynist in English. Michael G. Food is an Australian sociologist and his research mostly depicts the atrocity against women. He has defined this term as:

Misogyny functions as an ideology or belief system that has accompanied patriarchal or male-dominated societies for thousands of years and continues to place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making... Ever since, women in Western cultures have internalised their role as societal scapegoats, influenced in the twenty-first century by multimedia objectification of women with its culturally

sanctioned self-loathing and fixations on plastic surgery, anorexia and bulimia. (443)

The above quotation glosses the actual condition of women in the male formed society. According to Food, the male domination started from Western culture. They have made their women as scapegoats. This term has gradually entered in the other countries and Europeans spread their culture wherever they colonized. Similarly, Africans are not exceptional in this platform because the men in Africa follow their learned custom in their life. Mabanckou has depicted this custom through his literary contributions.

II. IDENTIFICATION AND RESEARCH

Mabanckou was born in Democratic Republic of Congo and he went to France for his further studies. He became a citizen of France and started his literary career. He has authored twelve novels in French and nine novels have been translated to English. The chosen novel for this research is *Black Moses*, translated in 2017. The French version is named as *Petit Piment*, written in 2015. Mabanckou is one of the African diaspora writers and his contribution aims at discussing the issue of native Africans and African diasporas. He has become the voice of African diasporas, the same is replicated through his write-ups.

Orphanages in African are not exceptional in the view of ambivalent sexism because there is a gender disparity, located among the boys and girls. There is a priest named Papa Moupelo and He visits everyday to the orphanage to entertain the children with regards to religious perspectives. The gender discrimination starts from his car play. The girls are not allowed to play certain games because they have been instructed that the games are meant for boys. The infliction of the gender disparity starts from the games in orphanages. Boys feel proud and they never persuade their female companions to take part in the certain games. Girls are not permitted to leave the premises of the orphanages and the management of orphanage has perceived the roles of girls and they are not anticipated break the perceived rules. In case the girls break the rules, they have made the custom that there would be drastic change in their physic.

Two categories of taboos are prescribed for orphanage girls: car game and boa meat eating. These are the antipathy to the girls, experienced by them. The girls are inflicted the psychological fear so that they may not exceed their role. They follow the rules without having any second thought. The girls are brought up from their childhood to accept their underestimation. They do not fight for their rights. Mabanckou has depicted the gender disparity clearly. The narration of *Black Moses* replicates has the involvement of the hostile sexism as:

For example, they were forbidden to eat boa meat, even though it was considered a delicacy in our country. If they ate it anyway, their breasts would drop to their ankles. Perhaps that was why the girls among us believed that if they sat behind the wheel of a car like Papa Moupelo's, they would sprout a little beard and their sexual organ would suddenly put on a growth spurt and turn into one like ours? At any rate, they distanced themselves from the boys playing at cars and discreetly held their fingers to their chest, as if the very act of looking for few seconds at a boy pretending to drive a vehicle might bring them bad luck. (13)

The given quotation deciphers the role of taboos, created for the girls who reside in orphanage. The dominative psyche is sowed through the mindset of boys and they are asked to monitor the girls whether they go against to their roles. The orphanage management strongly emphasizes that the men are always higher than women and if women do anything against men they would lose their originality. The physical transformation fear is generated among the girl so that they do not attempt to go against their boundary.

Black Moses says that boys are very keen to notice whether girls observe their taboos properly. If the girls eat boa meat, their breast would come down and it may touch their angles. The breast transformed physic is the ugliest appearance in Africa and those girls would be denied by the society. They cannot get the dream of marrying someone in their life. This fear is made only to make the girls to follow their taboos without any opposition. The hostile sexism is generated in this place because it is where the gender

disparity takes place. Boys used to play around the car of Papa Moupelo, the priest. But the girls are not supposed to play near the car because the place is meant for the boys. In case, they occupy the place of back seat of the car, there is a belief that they may get the beard. The girls used to keep their fingers on their chest because the boys who drive the car would bring the unfortunate to their life. This episode clearly paves the way for gender discrimination and the girls are not at all given importance in the orphanage. It becomes the evidence of the existence of hostile sexism in the novel.

Sabine Nianguï is accounted in this research to depict the role of hostile sexism. She is a caretaker in an orphanage and Black Moses is heeded to the core. She feels comfortable to converse with him. This attitude makes her to share her past experience to him. She elucidates the nature of Africans in terms of female children. Female children are simply left out in the orphanages because. Though there are thirty children in the orphanage, most of them are females. They are brought up without parents and it does not happen in their life naturally rather the parents abandon them since they are females. They feel that they may have much responsibility to bring up the female children in the society.

Sabine Nianguï recollects her past experience while she narrates the past life to Black Moses. She opens as:

Back then, dear Moses, the children called me "Mama Organizer", and there were only thirty or so orphans, mostly girls, a good dozen of them abandoned by their parents because in their families, it was considered a failure to have a first child who was a girl. My job was to keep them amused, help them with their homework, or teach them songs in the main courtyard. (63)

The given quotation illustrates the psyche of Africans against the female children. They simply give significance to male children. Their prayer is always to have first male child. Their anticipation gets fragiled when their wives deliver female babies. It makes them to abandon their children in the orphanages. Sabine Nianguï experiences this hostile sexism in her life by seeing the lifestyle of female orphans. If the female children are born unexpectedly, it is considered as

failure delivery by the people. The gender disparity is seen in this episode.

Sabine Nianguï not only witnesses the gender disparity but also she experiences in her own life. She was born for the African mother and Cuban soldier so she is blessed with the colour neither African nor Cubans. She does not look like Congolese girls because her colour is different. Her mother does not wish to have child in black colour because she has experienced that white colour people are highly respected and blacks are not. She voluntarily roams near the Cuban military camps to admire the soldiers and she magnetizes Cuban soldier to get impregnated. The mixture of two races leads Sabine Nianguï a different colour. The mother comprehends the superiority of whites and this feel alone tempts her to have a sexual intercourse with the whites. The African society has completely exploited her in the form of inferiority and superiority complexes.

The society corrupts the psyche of mother in terms of thinking high about the whites and she does the act against to the perceived norms. Though she goes against to the norms, the temptation is gained from the society. Sabine Nianguï explains her condition and mother's suffocation as:

I get my light skin from him; when I was young I was both teased and envied for it. People made fun of it because you could see straight away I wasn't as black as the Congolese girls, so I had to be bastard, "a Cuban"... she was secretly working as a prostitute near the military camps on the border, but I favour the first possibility. Yes, she did want to have a child with lighter skin, because at the time that represented a kind of superiority, it was silly, but it was all part of the complex we had about white people, anything white was superior, everything black was doomed, with no future, no tomorrow, are you still with me... (64 -65)

The given quotation glosses the suppressed psyche of Sabine Nianguï's mother. She is very strong in making her child to be respected. So she is ready to sleep with the whites to have a white child. Sabine Nianguï is the result of her aim. The hostile sexism is found in the novel by the imposed act of society on her.

Misogynistic act is exposed through the character Sabine Niangui because she does not commit any mistake but she becomes the hostage of orphanages due to the mistake, committed by her mother. The injustice act does not happen only in the life of Niangui rather it happens for the children who were born at the time of her birth. She narrates the misogynistic happening as:

I was born my mother put me in the National Orphanage for Girls in Loandjili. A bit later I realized half the girls in there had a Cuban soldier for a father, as though the institution had actually been created especially for them, or as though the institution had actually been created especially for them, or as though the orphanage practised a kind of positive discrimination, accepting only girls of Congo- Cuban origin. Sure enough I discovered a bit later that the place was entirely funded by the Cuban president, Fidel Castro. My mother intended to take me back when she'd managed to sort herself out. (66)

The above quotation illustrates the injustice act towards the women especially it correlates the two countries namely Congo and Cuba. The Cuban soldiers utilize the African girls for their sexual pleasures. The whites do not leave them simply with the sexual pleasures rather they pregnant the African women. When they deliver a baby, the Cuban government comes forth to accept the baby in the orphanage, constructed by the Cuban government only for the Cuban and African mixed racial girls. The orphanage is only meant for girls because they have an intension of making use of them in future. The pitiable condition is that the orphanage for girls is funded by Cuban government and no other opposition from the native government is raised against for this system. The injustice act against women is encouraged by Africa.

The adoption of Sabine Niangui by white family leads the way to identity crisis of African women. The white family used to kill first their unique identity of the names. African names are entirely different from other continent people because they name their children after their ancestors. They have the belief that their ancestors' blessing would follow them throughout

their life. Killing this name identity is equal to breaking their spinal bone. The name of Sabine Niangui is changed by the white family despite the importance of African ancestors. The identity loss of African women is disclosed through the life of Sabine Niangui as:

The day a couple turned up to adopt me. The woman who was to become my adoptive mother was crazy about my putty-coloured skin, my big eyes and afro hair. In fact until I reached adolescence she refused to let me have braids and nicknamed me "Angele Davis", after a black American activist you may have heard of. I liked her calling me this, especially when I learned that this woman had fought for the freedom of black people in America and that she belonged to that brave organization known as the Black Panthers. My new parents decided to call me simply by the pretty name of Angele. (66)

The given quotation untangles name changing process through the way of adopting an African child. Sabine Niangui has been baptized by her mother with an African name. When she is adopted by the white family, they change her name as Angele Davis, which is white name. It is a black American activist name. Though the name belongs to black American freedom fighter, the name replicates the influence of whites. The adoptive family calls her Angele and she is also attracted towards the new name. It is the identity loss of African women, portrayed by Mabackou. The women become the victim of the society by the act of Cuban soldiers too.

The injustice act against Sabine Niangui happens to her at her adulthood age. African women are in the position not to believe the family friends because they never mind the relationship rather they take advantage of the loneliness of the young girl. The postman who becomes accustomed with the family of Sabine Niangui betrays the belief of his friend. She narrates this misogynistic feel as follows:

But there you are, at seventeen I let a man touch me for the first time, then take away the innocence which till then had distinguished me from the young girls of Pointe – Noire whose future was prematurely ruined by thoughtless –

I might say irresponsible – lovers. The man was forty, married and worked as a postman in the National Office of Post and Telecommunications. I'd known him since I was three, and felt completely safe with him, perhaps because he'd watched me growing up, calling in on weekdays to drop off the post at my parent's house, chat for a few minutes with my father, accept a glass of palm wine from my mother. (66)

The quotation attempts to show the minor rape by the family friend called postman. He is forty years old but he never thinks about the life of seventeen years old

III. STUDIES AND FINDINGS

The study finds out the existence of ambivalent sexism and misogynistic elements in Mabanckou's *Black Moses*. The application of these two theories depicts the originality of African society towards women. Though there are many female contestants in all the fields, raised up to contest against men, Africa still has the gender disparity and women are highly subjugated by giving the name of obedience. The social rules still instructs the women to follow the words of men and they are not encouraged to study. Mabanckou portrays that women in African are not

girl. It is totally injustice against her. Though she knows him at the age of three, he never considers her as a daughter. The whole family trusts him to the core but he breaks the trust by crossing the limit to the seventeen years old girl who is alone in the house. The family starts allowed him inside the house since he becomes regular to bring the letter every week end. She becomes the victim to the society afterwards. Her parents anticipate her to abort the child but she refuses. The parents deny accepting her in their family afterwards. Though it is not the mistake of her, the family abandons her. This episode strongly illustrates the impacts of misogyny in the novel *Black Moses*.

only underestimated by blacks but also whites. They are utilized maximum for the physical pleasure and the convenient of male society. In order to control this female subjugation, there are good number of feminists, emerged out to make voice their rights. Their literary contribution becomes the awareness write-ups for the female genders. So, African feminism is still to be strengthened to take gender equality in their society and it will find a good way to women to achieve in all the fields. The finding of this study emphasizes that African women is still under the control of men and they are asked to find a comfort zone within the given limited zone.

REFERENCES

Chen, Zhixia et al., "Ambivalent Sexism and Power-Related Gender-role Ideology in Marriage." *Sex roles* vol. 60, no. 11, 2009, pp. 765-778. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9585-9.

Flood, Michael et al. editors. *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, Routledge, 2007.

Stevenson, Helen, translator. *Black Moses*. By Alain Mabanckou, Serpent's Tail, 2017.

Walters, Margaret. *Feminism: A Very Short A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford UP, 2005.