**Girl- Excessive Involvement Harms Loving Bonds**

Jamaica Kincaid's story "Girl" conveys the theme of feminism and social constraints. The story highlights the restrictions faced by girls due to social norms and practices. The society expects girls to take traditional roles as housewives and mothers. The cultural patterns are instrumental in engendering gender-imbalance in society they distribute power unequally between males and females. Due to this reason, women lack independence and freedom throughout their lives. The story “Girl” uncovers the role of social norms as a girl transforms from a child to an adult. Upon reaching adolescence, the mother tries to teach her daughter about taking an approved feminine role which becomes a source of confusion for the naïve girl. To make it more real, the author incorporated the theme of culture and customs in a conversation-form between the mother and daughter. This short story “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid displays the transformation of a girl to woman while undergoing conflicting experiences. The innocent girl has a difficult time in accepting the fact that women have roles only in the kitchens, houses and indoors. She faces society which restricts women from taking part in social activities and the most important role in the process is played by her own mother who prefers to train her daughter for all domestic purposes such as future wives and mothers. The mother in the story also emphasize that there is no scope for mistakes, and the women cannot deviate from their constructed gendered roles. In short, the author criticizes the conservative and traditional outlook of society towards girls and especially of mothers that attempt to train their daughters with wrong ideas and methods. The author Jamaica Kincaid adequately portrays in her short story “Girl” the importance of of feminist literacy, excessive involvement of the mothers in their daughters’ lives, widespread gender stereotypes, the dominant role of social norms, the associated stress and fatigue in the lives of girls.

To begin with, the story reveals the conservative role played by the mother and the social constraints with feminist literary theory. Kincaid has challenged the traditional mores of society by creating female characters who are entrapped in an unfair world. The criticism of the author states that girls face the repercussions of the gendered society because they are forced to follow the old patterns of living. The purpose of criticizing traditional assumptions is to focus on creating a free and equal world for the females. The attempts of the author reflect her efforts to resist the traditional assumptions that portray females as dependent and less weak characters. The typical role played by the mother is used for criticizing the conservative culture. Social constraints becomes visible as the mother mentions, “this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch” (Kincaid,1). Henceforth, this reflects that the mother is trying to teach her daughter to take the same traditional role as taken by other females and the worth of literacy is diminished in that context.

The story embodies stereotypes that portray females as oppressed characters and displays the excessive involvement of mothers in their daughters’ lives. The author uses the motifs of food and clothing to convey the domestic roles of the women. The theme of prohibitions and directions are visible in the discussion between the mother and the daughter. Mother tries to impose the female domestic roles on her daughter and tries to convince her about the customs. Inevitable tensions appear between mother-daughter relationships due to the contradictory social behavior of a young girl. Upon reaching adolescence, the mother tries to teach daughter several ideas of the past. Kincaid tries to illustrate the complications faced by young girls. The discussion of the food and clothing symbolizes social taboos limiting her role. Educational transformation makes it difficult for the daughter to accept reality. The voice of the mother expresses restrictions as she mentions, "in the presence of men who don't know you very well and this way they don't recognize immediately the slut” (Kincaid,4). The mother though her own experiences tries to warn the girl about the threats that she will face in the world. Language in the story highlights betrayal and loss as it divides the mother from daughter. The inclusion of the terms like clothes uncovers the girl’s voice (Marie, 01/01/95). Hence, the suppression of girl with excessive involvement of mothers is evident in the story.

The character of the mother discourages bold behaviors in girls and convinces them to act within the social norms. Kincaid constructs the role of mother to express her acceptance of social stigmas. The views of the daughter are different from the mother because she is unaware of the social constructs that control the lives of females. The words of the mother echo in mind of the girl, teaching her not to take roles that contradict from social constructs. The mother discourages freedom and independence leaving a long-lasting scar on the life and personality of the girl. She instructs her to remain decent, “walk like a lady not like a slut” (Kincaid, 3). The alarming tone of the mother depicts her belief in social customs and traditional values. The interaction between the two fictional characters is used by Kincaid to show the ramifications of the gendered stereotypes. Hence, the author employs feminist theory for expressing the adversarial implications of the old social system that place women second to males and the role of gender stereotypes in promoting gender-imbalance in society.

Kincaid in her story highlights numerous social tensions affecting the lives of young girls. The stress of mother on abortion reflects her fear, “this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child” (Kincaid, 5). The author highlights daughter rebellion that is the result of her desires to break social sanctions. The daughter failed to follow the sexual and social rules displaying her reactions to the restrictions that society imposes on her. Contradictions appear as the girl fails to accept the thoughts of her mother and rejects the social codes. Her sexual role reflects her rebellion and protests against social stigmas (Edwards, 234). Kincaid has focused on highlighting common issues faced by growing girls due to the gendered system and female oppression. Feminist theory is incorporated for capturing how such system has shattered the hopes of young girls who fail to achieve their desires. Thus, various social pressures are faced by girls in their lives.

Through feminist criticism, Kincaid tries to uncover the unrealistic implications of socially sanctioned society. The limitations provoke the rebellious nature of the girl as she finds difficulties in accepting feminine oppression. Her discussions with her mother convey the theme of freedom. The desires of the young girls reflect her rejection of the socially constrained world. The rebellion of the girls reflects her failure to accept social customs. The mother orders in one scene, “I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don’t squat down to play marbles you are not a boy, you know; don’t pick people’s flowers” (Kincaid,1). The instructions of the mother and her over concerned nature is the result of society’s influence. Feminist criticism is thus used for teaching the audience about the negative impacts of gender discrimination on girls. The purpose of alarming the young girl is to show her the reality of the gendered world. The mother is continually setting limitations for her daughter and explaining her to behave differently from boys. She mentions that girls can't do the same things as boys because this is disliked by the people. Thus, irrational and unpractical social expectations in male-dominant systems ruin the future of girls in society.

Feminist literary criticism is used for valuing female experience. Kincaid has focused on providing a different view on the feminine role by rejecting the traditional approach of repressing females. Throughout the story, she portrays a broken relationship because the daughter desires to take a different role compared to traditional females. She has continually criticized the typical roles played by mothers by adopting feminist theory. The mother mentions, “this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn’t work there are other ways” (Kincaid). The conversation reveals that the mother has accepted the patriarchal and typical role of women. She is aiming to convince her daughter to accept the same role who has just entered her adolescence. Feminist theory has criticized that the mother assumes that the girl

will ruin her life if she fails to take the same traditional female role as taken by her. The discussion of the mother reveals that she witnesses women through the eyes of males who either view females as respectable or sluts. She thus attempts to convince her daughter to stay away from the boys and live a respectable life. Respect according to cannot be attained without an accepting patriarchal status in which females have to perform an inferior role. Kincaid has criticized the male patriarchy by mentioning that the only role of females accepted in the society is to serve males. The mother is continually suggesting her daughter follow that same tradition by learning to become women desired by males. Henceforth, the mother gives more precedence to her opinion.

Kincaid has attempted to construct the way in which women are traditionally portrayed by male-dominant society. Deconstruction has shown how gender influence one's role and place in the world. The young girl is entrapped in the same patriarchal system in which she is unable to escape the conservative settings. The feminist theory is thus used by Kincaid for explaining how the same world impacts the thoughts and choices of two women. The mother herself is convinced to treat girls as inferior or of secondary importance to the males. The relationship between literacy texts has also confirmed the oppressed roles taken by females. The ideas of power and gender are essentially working to undermine female independence and desires of attaining something great. The author has transmitted the themes of gender stereotypes by sharing concerns of a mother who is part of the conservative norms. Kincaid has managed to use feminist literary theory in her story by showing how females are lacking real goals of life and how they are portrayed in the patriarchal society.

Feminist literary theory is adopted by Kincaid for demonstrating the implicating's of social constraints on the lives of young girls. The mother informs the girl about the life and relationships of her own experiences and ignores the innocence of the girl. The role of the

mother displays the stereotypical society that pressurizes women to act according to the social norms. The mother provides instructions to the daughter about what she has to do and what she has to avoid that leads to her confusion. Restricting the girl to play or talk with boys reflects the social taboos that put restrictions over young girls. The role of the mother displays her fear of preparing her girl as the perfect women that do not fail her. The society imposes stereotypes on children that are more negative in the case of girls. The story displays the elements of inequalities, gender discrimination, and conservation of society. The only life that social norms allow women is restricted to domestic lives. The mother plays a derogative role in the life of her daughter. Kincaid constructs the characters of the mother and the girl to portray the social ills. The social evils and stereotypical attitudes exert negative impacts over a young girl that takes away their freedom and liberty. The same propagation and gender inequalities prevailed in the societies throughout histories. In short, several constraints impede the progress of girls in society.

To summarize, it can be concluded from the above discussion that the author highlights several pressings issues of the time that are faced by women in society. Female literacy is compromised and they are made to choose the set patterns of the culture. Girls face enormous social pressure throughout their lives which comes in many forms. So, this story is a good step to illuminate that struggle of girl in a patriarchal setup where they face difficult life even in their homes and from their close relationships.

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