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The New Woman in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *A Respectable Woman*

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Abstract:

Critical perspectives on women's literature have gone through several ramifications in accordance with the changing image of a woman down the ages. From Elaine Showalter's tripartite classification of 'Feminine', 'Feminist' and 'Female' to Alice Walker's 'Womanism' the movement has endeavoured to include different voices and address myriad discriminations across the globe that transcends the blatant gender binaries. Easterine Kire's works invite such an approach. Her fiction provides fresh insights into her birthplace Nagaland, the struggles of the local tribes and especially the arduous journey of Naga women that this paper looks at. Examining her two novels *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *A Respectable Woman*, this paper finds Kire essaying out a remarkably balanced, nuanced approach as she upholds the new-age woman who is sensible, mature and complete in herself.

Keywords: Womanism, gender binary, Naga tribes, matriarchy, maturity, new-age woman.

Introduction:

One of the foremost voices from the North East India, Easterine Kire stands in a class of her own. Her works present an insider's view of the different phases of evolution of her birthplace Nagaland, foregrounding the trials and tribulations of the local tribes, their culture, customs and values. In the process the voice of the Naga people battling different forms of oppression becomes audible like never before. Strongly dismissing any gender bias in her portrayal, Kire declares: "I don't like certain books of mine being labelled feminist literature. They are not. I am concerned about human rights of both genders, not just women, but any human being discriminated against and being badly treated." (Pou) At the same time, her writings are imbued with her natural, intuitive understanding and sensitive appraisal of women's

issues that this paper seeks to focus on. Her two novels *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *A Respectable Woman* provide the scope for this analysis. The basic objective is to trace the image of woman from Kire's depiction of social upheavals in Nagaland.

A Terrible Matriarchy:

A Terrible Matriarchy, as is evident from its title leads us into a household headed by an aged widow Vibano, referred to as Grandmother, as per her relation with the first-person narrator Dielieno, whose name Vibano in turn, never takes, only refers to her generically as 'the girl' (4). A Grandmother-girl binary comes to fore bringing in its train the generation gap that keep two minds poles apart. As the senior most member of the family Grandmother has the final say on all domestic matters: be it the things to be bought, the food to be shared, the education, upbringing and the marriage of the children. However, the biased views of the domineering matriarch make the youngest member and the only girl child of her family feel unloved quite early in life. "My grandmother didn't like me. I knew this when I was about four and a half" (1) says Dielieno. She finds her paternal grandmother reserving the chicken leg piece for her brothers, taking them on her lap even when they have arrived at their teens, while beating her cruelly with a stick for climbing the shoulders of her uncle Atu. "The girl must start working at home. Don't let her run about with her brothers anymore. That is not the way to bring up girl-children" (4), she instructs Dielieno's mother. With her quaint mindset she has a rigid notion of gendered upbringing. As per her orders Dielieno comes to stay in her house for a rigorous training of domestic activities and manners in conformity with the traditional parameters of a 'good woman' (5). Thus she has to fetch water, wash clothes, clean the house, store the grocery, feed the chickens and the like. She has to bathe early in cold water despite the inclement weather, walk slowly, speak in a hushed voice and remain under constant surveillance of the aged matriarch whose strictness is her means to ensure Dielieno does not fall prey to unwed motherhood, a social taboo of the times. Dielieno's maternal aunt Pfunuo has to be married off hastily outside church to hush up her scandalous affair while Grandmother's younger brother Sizo has to break up with the woman he was intimate with before marriage and forgo his claims on his illegitimate child Bano who lives with Grandmother as her primary aid. The matriarchy only reasserts the patriarchal bias imbibed over the years. Grandmother constantly refers to her growing up years during her father's time which has shaped and cemented her mindset. She represents an orthodox Naga society bound by archetypal customs and values. Here women are the keepers of tradition, it is their bounden duty to imbibe, uphold and thereby perpetuate the same.

It is here that Kire critiques the gender stereotypes subtly foregrounding Dielieno's natural urges as an individual who is not just another girl. In the process, the traditional concept of 'good woman' comes under scanner. "I don't care to be a good woman. I shan't ever be a good woman, whatever that is" (37) says little Dielieno strongly resisting the pressure to fit in as per societal norms. She feels more comfortable wearing her brothers' trousers and T-shirts than the girls' clothing bought for her by her parents. She finds it more fun playing outdoors, moulding the wet clay into a car than playing with doll inside the house. She runs around in gay abandon but slows her natural pace while entering her grandmother's house. Thus, when Dielieno is summoned by her grandmother, her mother voices her concern to her husband: "I worry that Lieno is not going to turn out to be the ideal girl your mother so wants her to be. She is too full of life for that. And only I know what a sweet little girl she is. I don't want her to be with people who might misunderstand her and mistreat her." (9) Here the stereotypical concept of an 'ideal girl' is posited as an antithesis to liveliness and sweetness. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, an inspirational treatise for the later feminists, has exposed the fallacy involved in the gendered demarcation of human character and virtue: "To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character: or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet, it should seem, allowing them to have souls, that there is but one way appointed by Providence to lead mankind to either virtue or happiness." (28) Placing her novel in the context of Kohima in the 1960s and 1970s that Easterine Kire has grown up in, she depicts a Naga society yet to acknowledge a girl's selfhood and natural proclivities that ought not to be curbed at the altar of gendered grooming. Dielieno's father therefore dismisses his wife's argument saying: "Mother was right then. You are not raising her properly. She will leave tomorrow for Mother's house and I don't want to hear anymore arguments about this." (10)

The education of a girl child was not a commonly accepted fact in twentieth-century Nagaland that Kire depicts in her novel. Grandmother's disapproval of girls' education on the ground that – "It only makes them get fancy notions about themselves and they forget their place in the family" (22) – alludes conversely to the role of education as a potential awakener of human consciousness to resist all forms of discriminations in society. Bano is a school dropout while Dielieno's schooling continues on the condition that she finds time to complete her domestic chores. However, such difficulties only increase Dielieno's determination to study and surge ahead. In a short while she impresses her teachers with her progress. Her own efforts enable her to read,

even before she has been taught to do so at school, and get her promoted before time to a higher class. Grandmother's fears notwithstanding, the education at school does provide domestic training to girls especially in the higher classes. Dielieno says: "From the ninth standard, Mathematics was no longer compulsory for us girls. So we went to another class called Domestic Science where we were cooking, knitting and sewing. We also did some Arithmetic but it was usually easy sums twice or thrice a week." Diverted from the higher terrains of advanced intellectual exercise, the meritorious Dielieno has to sit for her cookery test with her female classmates by preparing a meal on the occasion of Teachers' Day. At the same time, refraining from any bitter indictment of gender oppression, Kire's protagonist views this new subject as offering a scope to take a "break from classes and sit in the sunshine and knit or sew." (185) Dielieno balances well her studies and domestic chores, takes over the household when her brother Pete dies and mother falls ill while her brothers grow increasingly lazy that Grandmother excuses saying: "In my father's day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered as barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best food. And we should." (35-36) Her justification for her male bias highlights the war-torn history of the Naga tribes.

Easterine Kire in her writings has dealt at length on the historical background of the different tribes inhabiting Nagaland. War in the process has surfaced as an indispensable factor, challenging and shaping their lifestyle. To quote Kire: "The big events in Naga history have been the Battle of Khonoma (1879) and the warrior culture that gave the foundation to the Naga underground, Naga participation in World War I (1917-1918) and the battle of Kohima (1944)." (*Walking the Roadless Road* 217) The sturdy people of Nagaland have experienced and resisted all forms of oppression and encroachment of their land – be it from the Japanese invaders, the British administrators or from the imposed rule of the Indian army post Independence for that matter. Dielieno learns from her mother her memories of migrating during the Kohima war in an army convoy, living as refugees in a makeshift dwelling and getting molested by a British officer eventually exposed as a German spy in disguise. Post-Independence Nagaland reels under the repercussions of the Naga fight with the Indian army. The boys in her class talk about enrolment in the Naga army and also the horrors that await those arrested by the Indian army. Her brother Vini attributes his drinking habits to his frustration with the political situation in Kohima. He is irked by the fact that people have given up on what he calls 'the Naga cause' of fighting for independence in this case from the atrocities of the

Indian army. He refers to his friend Lato being badly beaten while trying to avenge his mother's tortuous death and vents out his anger at an apathetic Government, indifferent to the cause of citizens. Living an insecure life amidst the political disruptions, the Naga society holds tightly the women who as the non-warring and dependent population are expected to work at home and in the fields, in gratitude to their male protectors who are risking their lives for a greater cause.

Accordingly, economic independence of girls was not favourably looked upon. When Uncle Atu gives Dielieno money to buy sweets Grandmother expresses her displeasure: "I wouldn't have served you food if I knew you were going to spoil the girl with money. (27) However, it is ironically she who sponsors the alcoholism of her grandson Vini saying: "In this day and age, one cannot expect a young man to keep from tasting a little wine now and then. People make too much of it." (207) Spoiled by Grandmother, Vini a school dropout neglects his job, falls in bad company, and eventually succumbs to cirrhosis of the liver. Dielieno on the other hand, proceeds to college after matriculating, dreaming of economic self-reliance and buying a nice house someday for her parents. Grandmother warns her of the dire consequences of being an educated, independent woman: "a woman's role is to marry and bear children, remember that. That is her most important role. Men don't like to marry educated wives. And if you find no one to marry you, you will be alone in your old age and have no one to bury you." (190) Though not averse to Dielieno's education, Grandmother's younger sister Neikuo who embraced spinsterhood at the death of her beloved, too admits the importance of marriage: "it is good to marry because marriage gives you children and when you are old, it is your children who will look after you." (107) Critiquing the gendered bias in a marital relation, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* declares: "The situation has to be changed in their common interest by prohibiting marriage as a 'career' for the woman." (592) Kire on her part puts forward a staid approach as she underlines a woman's need for self-reliance that is not necessarily at loggerheads with marriage as a social institution. The novel thus ends with Dielieno happily settled in her married life.

Interestingly, contrary to her emphasis on marriage and motherhood as the ultimate destination of women, Dielieno's grandmother makes no efforts to get Bano married. When her biological father brings a reasonably good marriage offer for her, Grandmother adamantly refuses it on a flimsy ground which incites the accusation from Grandfather Sizo that: "I suspect you are being selfish here, Vibau, the truth is, you want to keep Bano for as long as you can because she is such a big help now." (97) This apparent selfishness of Grandmother actually masks her loneliness and insecurity that Dielieno realizes later as her mother briefs her about Grandmother's past life. Grandmother grew up in an oppressively patriarchal society where a woman was not entitled to

property rights. Grandmother's mother in the absence of a brother lost all her lands and fields when her father died. The eldest of three sisters and a witness to her mother's difficult, poverty-stricken life, Grandmother determined to avert a similar fate in her life. She, as Dielieno's mother tells her: "looks at her sons and grandsons as a kind of insurance and she is inclined to take a very conservative attitude toward your brothers by pampering them as she saw other boys being pampered in her childhood." (250) However, with advancing years she becomes increasingly dependent on the girls she strives to discipline and teach the domestic chores in her house. A believer in male supremacy she pampers her grandsons but it is the likes of Bano and Dielieno who actually become her support system in old age. Thus, she becomes the prime cause of Bano's spinsterhood and calls back a reluctant Dielieno whenever she goes to stay with her parents. Grandmother eventually succumbs to a stroke but not before shedding tears of remorse as Dielieno holds her hand and tells: "I want to say that I forgive you for being harsh with me." (256) She may have arrived at the same realization as Dielieno's mother: "You know that our people say we should love our sons because they are the ones who look after us in our old age. That may be true but for your father and I, it is you, our daughter, who has brought us the greatest comfort." (250) After Grandmother's death Bano is compelled to leave the house by Dielieno's uncles who give the house on rent for extra income. However, the spirit of grandmother drives the tenants away repeatedly until Bano is brought back to the house. Thus, Grandmother, though in spirit, ultimately outgrows her gender bias, disciplines her greedy sons and acknowledges the right to stay in her house of the girl who has not only addressed her as her mother but also cared for her likewise.

This is where the novel goes deeper than being a blatant critique of oppressive patriarchy. In her introduction to the novel Easterine Kire states: "While the visible structure of the novel is patriarchal and seems focused on bringing out the misuse of the patriarchal system, the less visible under-structure is matriarchy and how it abuses the patriarchal structure resulting in gender abuse within the same gender." The characters who oppress and abuse women in the novel are mostly women rather than men. While Grandmother is strongly averse to education for girls, Grandfather (her husband) as well Grandfather Sizo (her brother) are shown as supporting the education of Bano and Dielieno respectively. Dielieno gets equal share of her parent's love as does her brothers who, especially the eldest Leto makes up for unequal distribution of food by Grandmother by sharing his portion with his little sister. While little Dielieno finds Uncle Atu affectionate and fun to be with, her lively, vibrant nature as a young woman causes her to be judged as "too outspoken a girl to be considered as good wife material" (287) by Aunt Bino. Moreover, all is not bad in a patriarchal set up as Kire speaks of in an interview: "I do feel it's important to see the positive attributes about the

patriarchal system: the responsibility for looking after mothers, daughters and sisters is given to the brothers and fathers. They are to provide for them if they become divorcees or widows. If they are unfortunate in life, and their husbands abuse them, then their male relatives have every right to take them away and provide for them under the ancestral roof. All these are good things.”(Pou) In the novel when Grandmother brings Vini’s widow Nisano and her son Salhou to stay with her people start critiquing this arrangement as it departs from the custom of the society that does not consider it proper for a widow to stay with her in-laws beyond one year of her husband’s death. The village gossip reflects a society that in its way absolves a young widow of her commitments to her in-laws, making her free to start her life anew as she returns to her original, paternal home. After Grandmother’s death Nisano gets a fresh lease of life as she eventually marries and settles down with Vini’s brother Bulie. Besides, the novel traces the growth of the first-person narrator Dielieno from a little girl four and a half years of age to a young woman of twenty-three within whose narrative again is included past memories of her mother and grandmother. Thus, through the lived experiences of three generations of women the novel highlights the salient features of Naga society and the changes brought therein with time. While Grandmother, the aged matriarch of the novel is “too old to change” (76), to quote Bano, Dielieno’s mother has outgrown her childhood indoctrination in male supremacy to realize: “women are not weaker. They simply have strength different from men.” (251) Dielieno understands and cares for her mother in a way her brothers with all their love for their mother can’t. “I had often seen her scraping the pot and giving it to Leto, my eldest brother, or taking out meat pieces from her own plate to slip into Vini’s plate saying she was full. The boys never refused. They never seemed to think that she might be wanting to eat it herself.” (2) In these lines Kire exemplifies the inherent difference in male and female nature. Elaine Showalter in her essay ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics’ coined the term ‘gynocritics’ to highlight a critical approach to women’s writing that as she says: “begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture.” (216) She highlights the female literary tradition as autonomous and intrinsically different from male. A significant step towards distinguishing the female voice, her approach has in turn propagated a male-female binary that Easterine Kire transcends in her novel. She describes her protagonist Dielieno in her introductory note to the novel as “a powerful young woman who has not lost her femininity. She is not a feminist, but is more a womanist.” (viii) Thus she rejects the blatant gendered discourse of the feminists for a wider term ‘womanist’ that ever since Alice Walker described as ‘a feminist, only more common’ (Walker 100) has evolved out of coloured women’s culture to address myriad issues of discrimination in different parts of the globe. *A Terrible Matriarchy* thus depicts the journey

towards maturity of a young woman revealing in the process a strikingly balanced appraisal of a Naga society, its culture and values.

A Respectable Woman:

The womanism of Easterine Kire finds a more elaborate expression in her later novel *A Respectable Woman* through the first-person narrative of a young girl Kevinuo. Unlike the Grandmother – girl binary, this novel traces a mother-daughter relation which changes and improves with time. Kevinuo's mother Khonuo married a heart patient and after his death became a recluse engrossed in her personal grief. Lacking a protective guardian by her side and burdened with the responsibility of her younger brother Ato, little Kevinuo considers her mother guilty for her loneliness and insecurity. It is her mother's job as a history teacher in a school though, which enables Kevinuo to complete her school and enter college for higher studies. A student of English Literature at the degree course, Kevinuo now respects her mother's intelligence, benefits from her academic inputs and discerns her concern, not interference, in trying to determine as she says: "how long I should keep my hair, how short I could wear my skirt, and what sort of friends were good enough for me." (12) Her mature thirst for a realistic account of war-time experience is quenched by her mother in 1979 when she suddenly opens up her treasure trove of memories which hark back to the Japanese invasion and the consequent mass evacuation of Kohima in 1944 when she was ten years old and leads onwards to the long-drawn fight for Naga sovereignty post India's independence in 1947.

Kire sensitively highlights the ardent efforts of the people in Nagaland to live their lives as normally as possible despite the trying times. The revival of the education system is an important step in this regard. The number of dropouts increases, especially in the case of girl students as the schools are opened after the Kohima war in a phased manner. Khonuo's elder sister Zeu, fifteen years old, feels too old to return to regular school and is sent by father to a nursing school in Shillong from where she qualifies as a midwife after a year. Another group of girls work at home and in the fields until they are summoned for the newly introduced baking classes which begin with a minute long prayer that is basically intended to make them conversant in English. Thus, the girls who do not continue their studies are made to acquire new skills which open up new career options for them. Kire depicts a changing society gradually opening up to the concept of professional woman deeply resented by the aged grandmother in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. Thus, Zeu works as a senior midwife at the civil

hospital while Khrielieu Kire becomes an inspiration for all as the ‘first Naga lady doctor’ (45) in 1952. In fact, Khonuo’s narrative throws light on a Naga society where education and self-dependence is encouraged irrespective of gender. Khonuo completes matriculation and joins her school as a junior teacher to be regularised after some years as the History teacher. She derives pleasure in shopping with her friends, buying meat for the house and brings a radio set with her first salary to stay updated about the world lying beyond the Naga Hills. The spread of education brings about a marked change in the attitude of the people, especially women. Looking at the wedding album of her parents, Kevinuo is able to identify the women who went to school and those who didn’t. The educated women were at the forefront, wearing dresses and skirts and posing smartly with the bride; while those not groomed at school had a solemn, inconspicuous presence at the back. Thus, education is shown as a confidence booster which reorients one’s notion of the self, more so in the case of domestic women in a patriarchal society.

With her woman’s sensibility Kire traces the passage of her female protagonists from innocence to maturity. While Dielieno grows from four and a half to twenty-three in the course of *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Kevinuo in *A Respectable Woman* narrates her memories that take her back to the third year of her life. Member of a loving family, Kevinuo has an easy, carefree childhood until her father dies when she is studying in class seven. With a recluse mother and a baby brother as her immediate family, she has to grow up before time. The only support she has in these days is from her close friend and classmate Beinuo who in turn is harassed by an inconsiderate stepmother. The two adolescent girls share their concerns and console each other. They progress to High School together with the support of Beinuo’s father who luckily believes: ‘Education alone can give you a better life’. (72) A significant phase in a girl’s maturity is the onset of menstruation during puberty. In *A Terrible Matriarchy* Kire depicts young Dielieno’s feeling of shock, revulsion and embarrassment as she tries to cope with this process referred to as ‘the curse’ (125) by the older women. In *A Respectable Woman* Kire depicts Kevinuo’s maturing years with reference to the changes in her inclinations and perspectives. The arrival of Christmas festivities do not bring the usual excitement of her younger days that she finds reflected in her younger brother’s engrossment with the crackers. She enjoys instead the responsibility of herb gathering with the senior students at the foot of the mountain during New Year’s Eve.

Besides the initial excitement Kevinuo’s gradual transition into maturity has its anxieties and apprehensions as she is taught to be a respectable woman in conformity with

traditional social norms. Domestic violence is a raging problem of the times. The passing reference to Vini's recklessness as an alcoholic in *A Terrible Matriarchy* finds a more detailed exploration in this novel as Kire refers to Prohibition on the sale and consumption of liquor in Nagaland which ironically provoked illicit alcoholism. With increase in the number of alcoholics, many cases of wife beating by inebriated husbands begin to surface. In such cases while Khonuo resignedly says: 'Once she is married, we consider her to be her husband's property' (81), Zeu takes a stand against such helpless, unjust orthodoxy and advises her niece: "Kevinuo, if you should ever marry such a man, remember that you are not his property for him to beat you and break your bones...A man's responsibility is first and foremost, to provide food and shelter for his family. Then he should teach his children to be good citizens and try to be an example himself. In turn, his family members should respect and honour him. This is the way it is supposed to be. If people start beating each other, don't ever accept that as normal.'"(81-82) Such words increase Kevinuo's determination to concentrate on her studies and build her career instead of romanticize any notion of marriage. At the same time thinking of the happy married life of her parents she cannot but prudently observe: "there did exist marriages where the partners were happy and good to each other." (82) Kire's critique of the social problems thus refrains from essentialism or overt dogmatism.

Mention in this regard may be made of Kire's exemplification of domestic violence as suffered by Beinuo. While Kevinuo becomes a school teacher after graduation, Beinuo gets employed in the Deputy Commissioner's office but life takes a different turn for her when she accepts the marriage proposal from a persistent suitor Meselhou. Kire poignantly depicts the change in Beinuo from a lively, free-spirited girl to a demure, submissive woman, anxious to please her husband and in-laws. Whenever Kevinuo asks Beinuo whether she is happy she gives an evasive reply emphasizing the fact that "she was learning much about coping with a new family and fitting in." (94) This passivist approach to conform to the image of a docile wife leads Beinuo to disastrous consequences. She faces her husband's wrath when she gives birth to a girl child and shies away from discussing her marital problems with Kevinuo. The girl who had once told defiantly to Kevinuo that she would hit back at her husband if ever he raised hand on her, endures domestic violence repeatedly from a drunk Meselhou after their marriage. Beinuo's misery increases when the son she gives birth as her second child dies of meningitis. Soon after, she succumbs in the hospital after being badly beaten by her husband. A dying Beinuo confides in Kevinuo her realization that

has come too late: 'I was wrong all along but I was afraid to tell you because you would get angry and you would insist that I leave him.' (107) She finally dies with the comforting promise from Kevinuo that she will take care of Beinuo's daughter Uvi. Kire presents the plight of Beinuo as a case study of domestic violence, a social evil which needs to be resisted at all fronts. Meselhou's arrogance and violent possessiveness is analysed as the outcome of the undue privileges attributed to the male heir. As the only son and decision-maker in his family, the egoist Meselhou selects Beinuo to be his docile wife, in view of her economic inferiority and lack of brothers to stand by her in case of his misbehaviour. At the same time, with all her respect for the culture and customs of her native land, Kire very discerningly separates Meselhou's obnoxious behaviour as an individual's misconduct and misinterpretation of the customary laws of the Naga society. Khonuo points out to her daughter: 'It's not the culture. It's the individual...her brothers had the cultural right to take a woman away from a cruel husband. Sad to say, Beinuo had no brothers. But in the absence of brothers, her male cousins could have stepped forward and taken her away. Even her father had every right to do that. But he did not.' (112) Khonuo also throws light on the system of internal governance in a Naga society where the elders respond to appeals and settle disputes. 'Even without the option of sending Meselhou to prison her father could have brought a case against him by making an appeal to the elders. He didn't do that.' (112) However, unable to accept Meselhou going scot-free, the new-age woman Kevinuo stresses the need to look beyond male relatives and ensure justice to the tortured woman. 'An outsider should be able to interfere and help when a child or a spouse is being abused and beaten within the family.' (113)

As a foil to Beinuo, Kevinuo, the protagonist of the novel, emerges as a strong individual who combats all pressures from her relatives to tread on the beaten track. 'There is a time for everything. In a person's life, there is a time to marry. It is good to marry when the time is right for it.' (94) Such stereotypical advices keep on coming, more so, when Kevinuo turns down two marriage proposals from well-settled men. As a dutiful daughter she takes leave from her school and tends to her mother Khonuo when she accidentally falls down the stairs and fractures her ankle. Khonuo desires to see her daughter happily settled but chooses not to push her into a hasty marriage with wrong person. She tells: 'Kevinuo, perhaps you should just wait. Let that dream man of yours come along and you'll find the wait was worth it all.' (99) She is also sensitively aware of the possibility: 'You may be quite happy on your own. I do consider that too.' (99) Kevinuo's strength of mind and profound love for Uvi is

palpable when for the sake of Uvi's safety she contemplates going away to Shillong and raising Uvi there as her own daughter despite the concomitant social disgrace awaiting a single mother. As a divine justice Meselhou gets beaten to death for pelting stones at the CRP patrol in an inebriated state. Kevinuo next decides to adopt Uvi and make her a part of her family. To get Meselhou's mother's consent for the same, they dig up the roots of the two families until they arrive at a connecting link with three ancestors in common and appear before the aged woman as relatives of Uvi. With her permission Kevinuo becomes Uvi's 'second mother' (121) The little girl settles down nicely in her new home, tops regularly in school, mourning silently at the same time the departed she loves. As the single mother of Uvi, Kevinuo worries at times if Uvi would try to find her father in the growing years of adolescence. But she is hopeful "If we give her the right kind of love, chances are she would be satisfied enough not to want to go looking for the other kind." (122) A strong assertion of woman's self-sufficiency is palpable here. The novel ends with thirty-five years old Kevinuo mocking at traditional approach to marriage as she calls herself 'a registered spinster' (122) unable to enter the so-called 'respectable society' (122) unless some 'rich, old widower' (122) arrives in her life.

Kire in these two novels has presented a balanced portrayal of the social upheavals in Nagaland and the concomitant effect on the position of woman therein. With her profound love and sense of belonging to her native land she has depicted the Naga society, its customs, culture and values that have evolved with and despite the trying times. It is a society in a state of flux when the emerging voice of conscientious humanity is becoming more and more audible. With a staid approach that steers clear of any essentialist, gendered remark, Kire depicts women outgrowing regressive orthodoxies and surging ahead towards a better future. The path to woman's maturity that is enunciated with the educated and employed Dielieno settling down at the age of twenty three in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, moves a step forward with the thirty-five year old, single mother Kevinuo in *A Respectable Woman*. This is the new-age woman, educated, self-dependent and complete in herself.

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