

"IDEOLOGY, REPRESENTATION, AND THE PARADOX OF GENDER: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF KIRAN KAPUR'S *GIRL GIRL GIRL*"

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Abstract

Kiran Kapur's poem Girl Girl Girl is a poignant critique of patriarchal systems that sustain gender-based oppression, examining themes of objectification, violence, and economic exploitation. The poem contrasts the enticing facade of Waikiki with the harsh truths of female oppression. This research article employs Mitchell Barrett's feminist theoretical framework to examine the interconnections of ideology, representation, and material reality in Kapur's poem. This paper pays a closer attention to Kapur's imagery and narrative to dissect how women are presented as mere objects of trade and sexual conquest in a "male dominated society". The paper also discusses the issue of patriarchy and the ways of appearance and acceptance of the gendered violence, economic subjection of women, and a range of psychological effects of systematic oppression. Feminist theory is applied in this study; thus, the poem Girl Girl Girl should motivate society's valuation and dismantle patriarchal structures as well as champion women's emancipation.

Keywords: Kiran Kapur, Girl Girl Girl, feminism, Mitchell Barrett, gender discrimination, objectification, violence, economy, patriarchy, intersectionality.

Introduction and Background

Kiran Kapur is a contemporary poet and author best known for the complexity the works which capture diverse sociopolitical and gendered issues. She nostalgically often represents mutable facts of women's existence, focusing on the presence of violence against women, and the social hierarchy. Through vivid imagery and passionate personal narratives, Kapur discusses the problems powerless women face and traces the oppressive processes that rule their lives. One can single out that Kapur combines her diverse experience and uses personal evidence with more global problems in her work. Through her poems like *Girl Girl Girl* her reflect how she understands gender, race and class in society, how she uses her voice to challenge the norms of female and tradition gender roles (Kapur 2021).

Kapur's work is in tune with feminism, especially from the perspectives of scholars like Judith Butler, bell hooks, Mitchell Barrett on matters cultural, psychological, and material that support gender oppression. Kapur employs a feminist narrative critique the selling and abuse of women products through the lens of sleaze and culture fueled by man dominated paradigms. Kapur subverts society norms and its pathologic values; her work calls for the abolition of the patriarchy and women's liberation. In the poem *Girl Girl Girl* she manages to narrate issues with gender, violence, and economic exploitation therefore making a significant input to gender equality and freeing women from systems of oppression (Kapur, 2021).

Her poem *Girl Girl Girl* is a heart-wringing reckoning of what underpins the authors of femininity and masculinity; it underlines the complicated transactions between subjectification, domination and commodification of women's bodies, and their forms of exploitation. This paper applies Mitchell Barrett's (Barrett 1991) theoretical framework to analyze the relationship between ideology, representation, and real materiality in Kapur's work.

The poet tries to arrange two different and opposite ideas: the beautiful outside of Waikiki and the real inside where women are in chains. Kapur unveils and examines these ideological processes—now unspeakable within a postmodern vernacular—through layers of storytelling that recapitulate a cultural subordination of women to market values dictated by masculine Subjectivity. Such representations are compatible with Barrett on how they culturally and ideologically define women and how representation imitates and reinforces the world of oppression.

Analyzing gender roles in the poem the researchers can see how the female characters are constructed as constantly sexualized and commodified; bars and clubs/and hotels in the poem reflect the system. In this respect the female becomes an object of male sexual desire, their power to make decisions slowly eroded. This sexualisation does not stop at objectification for sexual purposes but continues in to ordinary life domains in which women are objectified by norms and discourses. Using Barrett's analysis of representation, it becomes easier to understand how these representations perpetuate hegemonic beliefs which in turn perpetuates male domination.

Kapur also talks about the continuing global problem of gendered violence as a phenomenon that is grounded in patriarchal system. The poem shows society's lack of concern to the suffering that women go through through the two characters, J., who has had to endure violent relationships, and L., who feels guilty for having hidden the violence. Using Barrett's interpretation of cultural imperialist aesthetics to hide systemic violence, there is a standpoint to analyze the society's processes that justify such brutality as a way to uphold patriarchal systems (Barrett, 1991).

There is also a strong theme of economic exploitation, revealing the relations of class, race and gender for perpetuity of the oppression of women. A sharp difference in the economic status that Waikiki embodies and the impoverished western side of the island illustrates the economic dimensions that increase women's risks. The portrayal of teenage mothers struggling against social status and the portrayal of a woman as a victim of human trafficking reveal material reality of helping women to get out of a vicious cycle of oppression. The analysis, through the consideration of such intersections speaks to Barrett's call for the realization of the material substratum of ideological constructs.

The poem focuses very much on gender, and the psychological effects of injustice of women in the society, in this case through self-blaming by L. As demonstrated above, women are coerced to play the villainous role they have been given in the socio psyche by patriarchal discourses. Barrett's focus on ideology and subjective understanding provides a way of approaching internalized oppression; she discusses that patriarchal socialization permeates an astonishing amount throughout a woman's life.

Moreover, shown through the aforementioned analysis, *Girl Girl Girl* is a powerful cultural commentary against the condition of oppression embedded in gender relations stating at once the social, political, and representational construction of patriarchy. From this perspective, Mitchell Barrett's feminist theory is adopted in this study to focus on how Kapur deconstructs the social

norms of objectification, brutality, and exploitation as the true face of society. This she states requires dismantling of social assumptions that support unfair practices and discusses social justice concerns such as the emancipation of women .

Research Statement

This paper proposes to critically examine Kiran Kapur's poetry of *Girl Girl Girl* using the Mitchell Barrett's feminist perspective and focusing on the idea of ideology, representation and materials associated to gender subordination. As the above analysis of the poem reveals, this paper seeks to explain how Kapur resists Patriarchal structures and practices of objectification, violence and economic subjugation of women. The study will also explore the way in which norms of society, and cultures of representation contribute to this patriarchy and will stress on how women need to be liberated from patriarchal structures which are a part of systems that are perpetuating oppression against women.

Literature Review

Analyzing Gender Issues In her poem *Girls Girls Girls* Kirun Kapur has powerfully addressed mainstream discourses of gender, sexuality, abuse and commodification, labor. The poem eloquently denounces objectification and formation of women, psychological effects of patriarchal societies, issues of intersectionality of gender, race and class. The present article aims at discussing the current state of the analysis of Kapur's work, with an emphasis on the place of poetry within the contemporary postcolonial and postfeminist context, and analyzing the relationship of the poetess with sociopolitical issues.

A lot of studies have been done on the role that women play in literary work using a feminist literary criticism that puts much emphasis on how women are sexualized and relegated to the background. Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* published in 1949 argued that women had been depicted primarily, essentially as 'the Other' – defined in terms of male. This is particularly translated by Kapur in the portrayal of women as passive incorporative objects of male voyeurism as is manifest from the lines: "they walked like they were stars onstage, / dress[ing] like they couldn't wait to be undressed" (pp. 7–8). In her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey builds from Berger's ideas and writes about the theories of 'the male gaze' arguing that women are in anyway valuable within visual culture. Likewise, *Girls Girls Girls* angrily responds to the erasure and celebration of objectification, where women are compressed into what they provide to men.

This discourse is enriched by Judith Butler 's *Gender Trouble* (1990) which questions the ways gender is made in culture. Kapur depicted the women being forced to play the gender roles that Butler stated in gender performativity theory. Women in the poem fight/against their roles; for example, L. contemplates with violence she experiences and the violence she participates, observing 'I know it isn't my fault/ But when I think of how I let him do it over and over, even helped him cover it up – I hate myself' [16, 17]. This internalised guilt exemplifies patriarchal norms that compel women to assume responsibility for their victimisation, a concept examined by feminist theorists such as bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (1984).

Kapur's representation of economic oppression aligns with radical intersectional feminists particularly Kimberlé Crenshaw in 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex' critiqued in 1989. Challenging the traditional civil rights bargain, Crenshaw identified intersectionality that expands elements of race, class and gender by calling for multiple oppressions. In the *Girls Girls Girls*, the division into the luxurious hotels and the relatively deprived west side of the island shows that the preconditions of the women's experience could also be considered as the class ones. The poem depicts young women, particularly from the 'west side', who endure financial difficulties and social scrutiny, shown by the line, 'Teenagers clutching newborns spit at us when we stare: "What you staring at?" 'You have nothing' (13–14 of the play). These women are economically stranded, denied any freedom over their lives, and dominated by men – purely due to their class status.

The poem underscores the normalization of gender-based violence, a significant issue for feminist researchers such as Susan Brown Miller in *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975). In the poem, J. says, "any man she dates / is more likely to hit her than pay for her dinner" personal lines showing that for some women abuse in courses a relationship is normal and expected. Similarly, Carol J. Adams compares patriarchy and maintain violence and oppression in her *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, written in 1990. The psychological dimension of this violent equation is reflected inside L., with Herman's feminist trauma theory of *Trauma and Recovery* from 1992. A self-blame to which L.'s testimony points, unveils the psychological consequences of being trapped in institutions that render women as deserving their abuse.

Finally, *Girls Girls Girls* touches on issues of silence and resistance within a discussion of a postmodern feminism as discussed by Adrienne Rich *On Lies Secrets and Silence* 1979. This struggle between silence and the demand to fight is represented throughout the poem best in the lines: "How many times have I said nothing at all / or tried to explain why we're not at home?" While Rich uses silence as a way forward and as a survival mechanism for women, Kapur counter-animating voices of socially and politically marginalized women. The whole poem is a protest against the cult of silencing women and makes a call to look into the mechanisms of women's oppression.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This research employs a quantitative approach to systematically analyse Kiran Kapur's *Girl Girl Girl* with focus on gender portrayal, objectification, violence, and economic exploitation. In the study, textual analysis is employed to examine thematic and representational features of the poem, also the way language, symbolic and approaches to narrative reveal logical aspects impacting women under patriarchal systems. The study thereby underscores intersectionality to show how class, race, and gender dependencies work together to worsen the experiences violated women. This research aims at explaining the sociopolitical and cultural dynamism that exists in Kapur's work and by extension, giving a supporting voice to feminist literary analysis and criticism, together with their condemnation of patriarchalisms.

The study embraces Mitchell Barrett's feminist critique with an aim of understanding gender oppression by focusing on the connections between ideologies, representations and genuine circumstances. The element of Barrett's theory makes it possible to discuss the ways in which the poem of Kapur reflects and resists the patriarchal models by its images and strategies of story-telling. The paper focuses on the objectification of females, the material dimension of oppression and the process of becoming a subject with patriarchal mindset. Thus, this research seeks to expose deep and complex sociocultural factors that affect women with a view of enriching the feminist critical theory by achieving both the ideological and material objectives of oppression within the study of *Girl Girl Girl*.

Textual Analysis

Kirun Kapur's *Girls Girls Girls* portrays gender relations within a patriarchal context embossing objectification, violence, and economic oppression within the ostensibly pristine image of Waikiki. The images portrayed and the manner in which the poem is written completely open the subject of the objectification of women, the feeling of shame and guilty, power relations between men and women.

The opening lines of the poem instantly find out readers in Waikiki, a space marketed as "**Paradise**" but disclosed to be a tract of exploitation. The reference to "**lipstick sunsets smudged**" and "**magazines**" (lines 2–3) mark the commodification of beauty, as even nature is faded to an object of consumption. Women's bodies are similarly commodified, as seen in the portrayal of women walking "**like they were stars onstage, dress[ing] like they couldn't wait to be undressed**" (lines 7–8). Barrett's feminist critique of representation is evident here, as Kapur critiques how societal norms prioritize male desire, reducing women to mere objects of visual and sexual pleasure.

The juxtaposition of Waikiki's posh hotels and the impoverished west side of the island emphasizes economic disparity. The line "**Teenagers holding babies spit at us when we stare: / What you looking at? You got nothing**" (lines 13–14) highlights the intersection of class and gender oppression. These young mothers are trapped in cycles of poverty, unable to escape their marginalized positions. Barrett's focus on material conditions aligns with this depiction, as the poem reveals how economic desperation reinforces patriarchal control over women's bodies and lives.

The figure of the noodle shop owner, who later appears on the news for "**smuggling women in refrigerated trucks**" (line 22), serves as a chilling metaphor for the dehumanization of women under capitalist and patriarchal systems. His ownership of a bar called "*Girls Girls Girls*," with its "**neon legs that kicked and kicked until they were a stain of light**" (lines 23–25), underscores the commodification and erasure of women's agency, as their value is reduced to their capacity to entertain or serve.

Kapur's depiction of violence against women is both personal and systemic. J.'s confession that "**any man she dates is more likely to hit her than pay for her dinner**" (lines 11–12)

normalizes abuse as an expected aspect of relationships. Similarly, L.'s self-loathing—"I know it isn't my fault, but when I think of how I let him do it / over and over, even helped him cover it up, I hate myself" (lines 16–17)—exemplifies the internalized guilt and shame that victims of abuse often endure.

Barrett's attention to internalized oppression is critical here, as Kapur reveals how patriarchal systems shift blame onto women, forcing them to carry the burden of their victimization. This psychological dimension underscores the far-reaching effects of misogyny, which not only physically oppresses women but also undermines their sense of self-worth and agency.

The poem also explores the tension between silence and resistance. The speaker's repeated self-recrimination—"I hate—L.'s voice, mine. When I think / of how I—how many times have I said it?" (lines 38–39)—reflects the difficulty of articulating trauma within a patriarchal framework that discourages women from speaking out. The chief of security's casual sexism, regaling stories of "wallets stolen off of businessmen / by ladies visiting their rooms" (lines 33–34), shifts blame onto women while erasing the systemic exploitation that places them in such precarious positions.

Kapur critiques this erasure by giving voice to these stories, transforming the poem into an act of resistance. By documenting these narratives, *Girls Girls Girls* challenges the ideological constructs that normalize and sustain women's oppression, aligning with Barrett's call for literature to resist and subvert patriarchal norms.

The geographical contrast in the poem mirrors the dichotomy between the "right sort of girls" and the "wrong" (line 37). Waikiki's glamorized spaces of wealth are juxtaposed against the grim realities of women forced into roles as caretakers, victims, or objects of male consumption. The image of "a girl washed up" (line 28) evokes the physical and symbolic violence that erases women's identities, reducing them to anonymous casualties of systemic oppression.

Through vivid imagery and intimate confessions, *Girls Girls Girls* critiques the ideological and material dimensions of gender oppression. By applying Mitchell Barrett's feminist framework, the poem exposes how patriarchal systems commodify, exploit, and silence women, while also highlighting their internal struggles with guilt and identity. Kapur's work becomes a powerful tool of resistance, challenging readers to confront the systemic inequalities embedded in societal norms and advocating for the liberation of women from these oppressive structures.

Conclusion

This research analyse Kiran Kapur's Girl Girl Girl with reference to Mitchell Barrett feminism where concepts of ideology, representation, and material reality will supplement the analysis of the representation of gender relations, objectification, violence and economic exploitation in the present film. As the paper shows, Kapur effectively employs a visual and literary text to subvert patriarchy that objectifies women, rationalizes sexual violence and perpetuates economic and psychological subjugation. The poem concerns itself to the representation of the suffering of marginalized women, and the ways in which cultural and societal structures that advance

patriarchy, in forms such as work places like pubs, clubs, and hotels further compound their misery by virtue of their gender, class, and race.

In pointa Outraying the psychological damage of internalized guilt and self-blame caused by Patriarchal socialization, Kapur shows how women, too, internalize these adverse effects and become oppressive to themselves. Barrett's framework speaks to how ideology and materiality intersect in order to mobilize for a politics of everyday oppression of women that is materia)lly grounded. Girl Girl Girl blossoms as an effective expose on how structural imbalance is sustained together with a call to disassemble ill liberation and the emancipation of women. Nonetheless, this paper shows how the poem can be read to provide important insights into feministic scholarship and the need to address ideological and material aspects of gendered subordination for effective social justice.

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