



Marginalization of Women in A Matrilineal Society: With Reference To Kam Kalbut And Ka Jingieit Ba Nylla

Shijo Kanjirathingal

Research scholar, College of Social Science & Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

Women play a significant role in the history of humankind. However, their valuable contributions to the society have not been recognised and are looked upon as inferior to that of men. They are always treated as second to men and not as equal. The society has restricted them to certain roles within the domestic sphere. There are various myths and legends knitted around women in the society whereby they are projected as inferior and men as superior. The rise of feminist movements through the various waves in the late 19th century and the 20th century has paved the way for women to break the shackles of stereotypes and demand for equal rights as of their male counterparts. The feminist tries to re-evaluate gender inequality in the society. It is a common belief that only the women in the patriarchal society face such subordination by men and the society and not the women of the matrilineal society. However, at close observance we will find that even in a matrilineal society the rights enjoy by women are limited and they are often enclosed to a limited space of expression. Many literary expressions have attempted to portray this marginalisation of women even in a matrilineal society. Their experiences seem no different to the women in rest of the patriarchal society. She is treated as a passive receiver of the male dominated society. This paper aims at exposing the marginalising of women in a matrilineal society of the khasis through the feminist interpretation of the two khasi novels, KamKalbut and ka Jingieit ba Nylla. Since literature is the reflection of the society, the analysis of the position of women in the two novels will give us an insight into the understanding of their status in the society and help us to evaluate the gender equality that is present in politics, society, family, religion etc.

Keywords: Feminist, Gender, Marginalisation, Women, Society

Introduction

The word feminism may be understood by some as promoting higher status, more rights and privileges for women. However, the term refers to the belief in equality of both the sexes in political, social, religious and economic fields. It critiques the various societal myths and false beliefs of the patriarchal minded society that tend to elevate the status of men and downgrade that of the women. Biologically, men and women are different and one is not superior to the other but they complement each other. The women in matrilineal society though enjoy the privileges of right to inheritance and possession of family properties and the right to matrilineal line of descent, there are several beliefs and myths that marginalised them in the society if we closely observe the function of the society. The best way in which women are treated in the society can be known through their representation in literature. A close scrutiny of the matrilineal literature will give us an insight into the function of the society and the place that the women occupy in the society. There are many influential writers of Khasi hills. W. Tiewsoh wrote one of the first novels in Khasi called Kam Kalbut or 'A Stupid Work'. Kam Kalbut deals with the life of the male protagonist Mel and the female protagonist Noli. Noli's father named Along is the head of the village and hence has immense power and is very influential in the village. During the election

of the political representative from the village Along suggests the name of a candidate of his choice, however, Mel does not support him. This makes Along to hate Mel and refuses to have any relationship with him. Along is an arrogant and self-conceited person who does not bother much about his daughter but rules his family with an iron hand. Noli falls in love with Mel and they decide to marry. Along refuses to bless their marriage and ill-treats his daughter. Noli succumbs to suffering and sickness dies an agonising death.

Another prominent postmodern writer is Firmly Star Lyngdoh. His *Ka Jingieit Ba Nylla* or a pure love tells of the love between Daphiralin and Rangkyngjai. The relationship between them is interfered by the rumours that is falsely knitted around Daphiralin. Daphiralin being a girl is accused of immoral behaviour by Tiplin and the rumour spreads far and wide until it reaches the ears of her parents. The two lovers are separated and it is only at the verge of death that their parents reconciled with each other. These two novels present to us the status and treatment of women in the matrilineal society. The female characters of Noli, Belinda and Daphira from the *Kam Kalbut* and *Ka Jingieit Ba Nylla* are fitting examples of the women of the matrilineal society.

In *Kam Kalbut* we find the female protagonist Noli undergoes immense suffering in her quest for ideal love. Noli loves Mel but her father does not agree to the marriage. In the matrilineal society the woman has the right to choose the bride groom but the irony is that in many cases they have to choose the choice of their parents. The girl who is of a marriageable age has to choose the partner that fits the liking and expectations of the parents. The parents, thus, plays an influential role in choosing the bride groom. The freedom of the women is limited to the likings of the parents. Similarly, Noli is in a dilemma in her choice. If she chooses Mel her father would disinherit her and if she chooses her father she would lose the love of her life. Noli undergoes a mental and spiritual conflict and finally she chooses to follow her emotions and leaves the house for Mel.

Along is presented in the novel as a dominating father. Though he lives in his wife's house he behaves like an owner of the house. He is arrogant and egoistic in his relation with his family member and other people of the village. He imposes his view on others especially on his wife and his daughters. He is a "mynder shisngi" (Tiewsoh 114) meaning he is an outsider for one day in his wife's house. However, Belinda, the wife of Along has no power to help or support though she clearly knows that it is the ego of her husband that makes him to chase Noli out of the house. Belinda's opinion is not considered by Along, she has no power at all to influence her husband in her own house in decision making. She is treated as an 'angel of the house' where her duty is limited to domestic chores and taking care of the needs of her husband and children.

Belinda lives in constant fear of her husband. Along being an arrogant person, makes Noli difficult to find a suitor for herself. Belinda, as a mother, fears that her daughter would remain a spinster all through her life. She says, 'ka Noli la dei por' meaning it is time for Noli to get married. A woman who remains single is looked upon as a sign of barrenness and barrenness is looked as a sign of curse from God. A spinster is considered as unlucky and unfortunate. Therefore, in the society a woman should marry in her lifetime to avoid the prejudiced look, gaze and judgment of the people. A childless woman too is looked as a symbol of infertility which is unfortunate among the members of the clan. The society demands the necessity of having children for women as they would carry on the name of the clan and be the caretaker of the land of the family.

Noli who is supposed to be the heiress to her family's property is stripped off of all the rights that a daughter is due to entitle in a matrilineal society. One act of disobedience of Noli against her father disables her economically, mentally and emotionally. She is deprived of her right as a daughter of the family. Though Along is not the owner of the house, he has the power to outcast Noli because of the mere fact that he is a man and Noli a woman. Along's pride is hurt by the Noli's preference for Mel. He uses all his possible power to inflict pain on Noli because of his dislike for Mel. His ego and pride precede the happiness of his own daughter. He curses her and blames her of defiling his house, "pynbyrsieh ia ka ing u kpa" (Tiewsoh 137). The act of disobedience of a daughter is equalised to the act of defilement. Noli says, "ke leh ia nga kum ia ka ksew, kham

palat ban ia ka ksew” (Tiewsoh 96) meaning that they treated her like a dog and even worse than a dog. The ill-treatment is meted out to her just for the sake that she is a woman who loves someone. Hence, she is chased away from her house.

Nel Singh persuades Belianda to cede a portion of her land to Noli. Nel Singh tell Noli “phi lah ban pyndonkam ia ki” (Tiewsoh 111) meaning that she could make use of the land of her mother. Belianda has no choice but to obey and give in to his demand because he is the uncle of the clan. In the matrilineal society, though the woman receives the right to family property she has to consult the uncle of the family for any matter, whether it concerns the land or the family problems. The uncle is considered as the head of the clan and he takes important decision with regard to the clan and the transfer of property within and outside the clan. No decision can be taken in his absence. The act of going against the uncle or neglecting him in important matters is considered as an unforgiven offence. Belinda has to obey Nel Singh in parting with a portion of her property to Noli to elevate her poverty. Nel Sing, the uncle of the family, has the authority to make Belianda cede her own land. Though Belinda owns the land, she cannot part or sell it without the knowledge of her uncle. This is a typical example of the matrilineal society where the uncle has authority over the female subjects of his clan.

Noli shares the physical and mental burden of her husband to elevate the house out of poverty. As the head of the village, Along takes advantage of his position. It was during the time of war and the village had to help the British to carry their weapons across the valley. Along, the headman, decided that from every family one member should volunteer to carry the weapons or they will face heavy imposition. Along who knows that Mel is bedridden forces Noli to carry the weapons across the valley and threatens with heavy imposition “siew ia ka kuna” (Tiewsoh 137) if she refuses. Noli who has just delivered her third child is poor, sickly and no means to pay the heavy fine. Therefore, she has to carry the heavy weapons in the place of her husband. This is the typical example of the suffering that a woman undergoes in every family to alleviates her family. In the matrilineal society both men and women involve in physical work and in administering to the need of the family. The mother of the house equally contributes to the well-being of the family whether in the village or city context. However, when it comes to decision making the woman is side-lined. She is marginalised in politics and in the society too.

Disobedience against the father is looked upon as a bad omen upon the children by the society and Noli could not digest the thought of what would entail her act of disobedience. Noli goes against the egoistic and self-conceited father and she suffers. She suffers poverty, ill health and pain at the injustices and the stare of her ill fate. She becomes a mere instrument at the hand of her devilish father who has no conscience in inflicting pain and suffering on his own daughter. Though she has done nothing wrong the society and the people around her make her a grave sinner. She is depressed and in delirium speaks of her father and seeks his forgiveness “pa map ia ngi” (Tiewsoh 141) at her death bed. She breathes her last without the forgiveness of her father. Noli has done nothing wrong in choosing Mel as her husband, it is the continuous gaze and judgment of the society against the plight of Noli that leads her to suffer a tormented death.

In Ka Jingieit Ba Nylla, Daphiralin tries to move out of her village because of her education. The parents worry about her because they fear that she would misbehave in public and their names in the society would be affected. The parents of Daphiralin doubts their own upbringing and give her a long lecture on how to behave with other people in the city “wat ju ia Pyrshang pynryngkat ne bud tyrneng” (Lyngdoh 3) meaning not to follow the bad examples of others. Daphiralin submissively accepts the advice of her parents without any word of interference. She obediently promises her parents to do what is right in their eyes. The family feels insecure to send the girl child far from the family for work or studies because of the fear that she would bring a non-Khasi as her life partner. The family seems to think of the girls as weak and liable to all kind of abuses. The girls are not usually send far away from the family. She is supposed to care after the family and most of them are kept away from higher education. Even these days, the girls are usually not send to a distant land far away

from the vigilant watch of the family. The family is often looked at the safe heaven of women. The girls too seem to submit readily to subjugating rules of the society. even in Kam Kalbut, Nori did not dare to challenge the injustices that are meted out to her by her own father. She submissively accepts and bears all the sufferings. The act of revolt is often looked upon as a great offence in the family and society. However, in Euripides Medea we find Medea revolts against the ill-treatment of Jason, her husband. She breaks all rules and norms when she takes revenge against her husband by killing her own children. However, in the Khasi literature we find many folklores like the Nohkalikai where a woman is presented as weak and incapable of protesting against her own oppressor takes her own life. With regard to domination, Gramsci speaks domination as not limited to a strong group dominating a weaker group but also the fact that the weaker group consents to the domination. The strong group manipulates culture and makes the weaker group to believe through the cultural institutions like education, belief, mores that they are inferior and hence, should be ruled or dominated. Similarly, in the society, the males and patriarchal minded people make the females to believe that they are weak and inferior and hence should be dominated. Several myths and belief system are created to prove the superior of male over female. For instance, in the Khasi society it is commonly believed that the female has 'shibor' meaning 'one strength' while the male has 'khatar bor' or 'twelve strength'. This type of belief is inculcated in the minds of the girls and through repetition it becomes a part of the person's belief system.

Daphiralin goes for an outing with her beloved Rangkynjai. While they are involved in the act of love making, Tiplin sees and spreads rumours about Daphiralin. Tiplin spreads false rumours about the character of Daphiralin which tarnish her character. Tiplin says "ka snar bah hi kein" (Lyngdoh 28) meaning Daphiralin is expert in the field of immorality. The rumours tarnish the character of Daphiralin and not Rangkynjai because of the fact that she is a girl and he is a boy. The mother of Rang kynjai even calls Daphiralin "ka khun Ksew" (Lyngdoh 28) or bitch. In many religions too the girl is looked upon as the cause of all evil. In the story of Adam and Eve, Eve eats the forbidden apple and seduces Adam to eat the same. In some Islam countries, the woman has to wear the burqas because her body is looked upon as an object and as evoking a sense of lust in male. Daphiralin becomes the victim of false rumour in her village. The rumours made the people to gaze at her as the culprit and this cause her to get sick and ultimately dies.

Conclusion

Kam kalbut and Ka Jingieit Ba Nylla bring to us the complete depiction of women in a matrilineal society. Both the novels show to us that the subjugation of women starts at home. As Beauvoir says, "one is not born a woman but rather becomes, a woman"(Borde 293).The way a woman is treated at home, in the same way she will be treated in the society. She is not born weak but made to be weak by the society. The role that the society attributes to women limits her to the domestic chores. At times, she is looked upon as a baby producing machine. The subjugation of women in the society is not entirely by the men but also by way the women think about women. In Ka Jingieit Ba Nylla Tiplin spreads false news at the expense of Daphiralin. Tiplin has a tendency to speak ill of others because she cannot do as they have achieved. Many of the developed countries like Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, America etc., have higher female sex ratio. Many of the women in these countries are highly educated and equally is a way of life. However, many of their political leaders are males and we have a handful of women as political representatives. Women in these countries may think that men are better leaders or may be out of jealousy do not want another woman to be a leader. However, we live in a society where we need each other. Each individual irrespective of sex is a person and does contribute to the well-being of the society. Therefore, everyone should be entitled to equal rights in the family, society, country and so on.

References

- [1]Borde, Constance, and Sheila Malovany, translators. The Second Sex. By Simone de Beauvoir, Vintage Books, 2011. Gurdon, P.R.T. The Khasis. Akansha Publishing, 2012.
- [2]Kar, K. Bimal. Women Population of North East India: A Study in Gender Geography. Daya Publishing House, 2002. Lyngdoh, Firmly Star. Ka Jiingieit ba Nylla. M.G Publication, 2011.
- [3]Mawrie, Barnes. The Khasis and Their Natural Environment. Vendrame Institute Publications, 2000.
- [4]Roy, David. A Khasi Remembered: A collection of His Writings on the Khasis. Don Bosco Press, 2012.
- [5]Subba, T.B, and G.C Ghosh. The Anthropology of North-East India. Orient Longman, 2003.
- [6]Tiewsoh, W. Kam Kalbut. Ri-khasi Book Agency, 2012

