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Gender, matriliney, and politics: Negotiating the women's agency and social structure in the Khasi matrilineal society

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Abstract

Khasi society like many other distinctive societies saw political foundations of the society as the space of complete monopoly of men while women are, as some would argue, forced to the part of home-makers. Traditionally, women were viewed as incapable to manage the versatile nature of administrative issues. In the past, the traditional political bodies in the Khasi society were most likely accommodative, inclusive, and participatory in nature. However, these days, there are only a few female members in these nearby or village and local body political organisations. Studies have demonstrated that women are expressing unequivocally that it's high time to bring about change and women too should be permitted to participate in these local body political organisations and also should make their presence felt at all level of modern administration and law making organisations. There is no doubt that in all possibilities these local, urban and modern legislative bodies will remain male dominated organizations, at least in the near future. But, voices are being raised. Certainly some change can be expected in the coming years.

Keywords: Khasi society, Khasi social structure, women and power struggle

Introduction

Throughout the world, women are relishing more power than any other time in recent recollection. Men still command rudimental leadership - however, the number of ladies is on rise in parliaments and also in corporate boardrooms, legal system, and policing, formal work and of course in education sector. There is sharp increase in the women's participation in political and important public offices and all major sectors of economy, yet this does not betoken that they relish the real capability. Women's life is frequently subject to sexism and partiality ("8 Ways of Looking at Power," n.d.). Ladies assertiveness in the areas of power and authority has never been taken well. Let us ask few questions ourselves? Why do we require to associate drinking with driving? Why Teenagers indispensably should be linked with sex and condoms? Why a lady can't be too opulent meaning really too rich? Why she can't hold a potent public office like the office of Prime Minister or the President? Historically, whenever, a woman took control of any position of power, she had to pay hefty price for it ("Women and power," n.d.). There is something more interesting. Women have been often associated with power and positions of power and influence in entirely negative sense. Whenever a woman endeavored to assert herself, she either got sexualized, which has been the easiest way to rule out her potentials and simply eliminate a women from the scene itself. Even Aristotle once said to be puzzled and asked something like "What difference does it make whether women rule or the rulers are ruled by women? The result is identically tantamount." Even at the domestic front, negative and derogatory connotations have always been affixed to a woman if she appeared to be in a substantial role ("8 Ways of Looking at Power," n.d.). The old adage has it that an American woman elevates to a crisis, but that a French woman optically discerns to it that a crisis never arises ("8 Ways of Looking at Power," n.d.). For the several thousands of years, afore they became firefighters and medicos, women were made sirens, enchantresses, and snares. At times it seems as if female incapability is male self-preservation in disguise. A woman's capability and potential was a man's deception. The accepted sagacity is that women have made the longest strides toward independence, toward ascendancy and opportunity, in periods of great distress ("Women and

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power," n.d.). Is it possible for a woman to possess power without reference to her gender? Can she prove herself talented, efficacious, articulate and successful without being dismissed as either a bitch or a bimbo? Power always has been a male construct and it distorted the shape of it. The first women, who endeavored it on, only found themselves in the condition of misery. The half of humanity which could never think to be in the corridors of power and authority, are fighting hard to make a place for them. Will they succeed?

The Beginning of Power Struggle

The "Customary social forces" militate against the progress, advancement and interest of ladies in any political process. Often, women see themselves frail and defenceless against partaking in the political field, women other than profound rationality which is obviously not men's monopoly are honoured with a substantial scope of human feelings, and the force of flexibility and resilience when environment turns favourable they mostly perform in the splendid and exceptional way. Women (at least sometimes) do suffer from the absence of trust in themselves and this is one of the most fundamental explanations behind ladies' under-representation in the formal political foundations, including parliaments, governments and socio-political gatherings. Women, of course, are equal to and have the same capabilities as men, unfortunately, only they will have to fight for their rights. The masculine forces are not going to be easy on them. Women have been unequivocally very good communicators, campaigners, organisers and support-mobilizers, but they rarely get chance to contest for parliamentary posts. In many countries, women see politics as a "Dirty" game. Often, the mass media tends to minimise coverage of events and programmes of interest to women. The media, it also include the so called women's publications, does not adequately educate the public about the rights, roles and upcoming opportunities for women in society; nor does it take these issues with government authorities so that some kind of change would come in. In some countries, social, cultural and religious forces prevented women from becoming active members in polity; however, in several other countries, female candidates were elected unopposed (interesting development?). Women participated in large numbers in elections, although often are discouraged from voting by family, religious, and social customs. Among women politicians, the older group of women politicians entered politics through their family's legacy in politics, some through social work, while some of them and the new generation of women politicians have emerged from student politics. Well-educated women maintain that cultural norms, not the law which inhibits women's education and career choices.

Battle of Ideas on the Power Struggle

Social Scientists have for some time been occupied with the study of women in tribal society. Distinctive perspectives and propositions have been highlighted and express concerning the part and status of tribal women. There are researchers who are of the feeling that primitive social orders, for the most part, allot high status to women while the other viewpoint suggests that in the tribal world, women are by and large stifled gathering, have low status and are under enslavement, persecution or under male strength (Lodha, 2003). Status and Role are two sides of a similar

coin. These are two ideas which are indistinguishable. All things considered, it is important to notice that these are two altogether unique ideas. Status is an accumulation of rights and obligations and can be communicated through the medium of a person. This is the position one holds in the public arena. Part, then again, speaks to the dynamic parts of status. The individual involves the status which is appointed to him socially and he/she does as such in/with the connection to different statuses. Finally, the individual plays out his/her part when obligations and rights connected with status are put into action. In actuality, there are no statuses without parts or parts without statuses. As per Ralph Linton, status, as particular from the person who may possess it, is basically a gathering of rights and obligations. He additionally made a qualification between the idea of "Ascribed role" and the "Achieved Role". Linton highlights that credited parts are those which the individual has definitely no decision; while accomplished parts are which the individual has some feeling of the decision, in any case, the extent of the decision (Robert, Sutherland, & Milton, 1961)^[45]. Linton additionally explains that credited statuses are on the premise of sex, age, birth, and so on and parts are found out on the premise of statuses, either foreseen or current. He keeps up that part and status might be particular or widespread depending whether they are shared by the all individuals in a given society or only a portion of the previously mentioned society. Statuses are essentially connected with specific parts, and it might be said here that the two ideas are in no way, shape or form one and the same from an individual's see point. Parsons (Parsons, 1949)^[41, 43] pronounces that the status of a person in a stratified arrangement of a general public might be viewed thus of basic valuations fundamental to the attribution of status to him in each of these angles, that is, participation in the Kinship framework, individual qualities, accomplishments, belonging, specialist and power. He additionally contends that both ideas (part and status) are the fundamental building squares of a given social system. A social system is a system of statuses and their related parts. Youthful and Mack (1972:139-140)^[28] contends that a status is a deliberation, a portrayal of one's place in a social gathering with respect to different positions in the gathering though a part is the capacity of the status. Youthful and Mack states that when an individual possesses a given position, the situation of that position over some others underneath still others will have outcomes for his/her connection in the masses. The outcomes of possessing that status are called his/her part. They have expressed that like status, part is a reflection and it continues as before regardless of the possibility that the desires are being met by various people. Hence, Status and the so called part or just the x-factor of the person is equally important and plays a very significant role.

The Khasis

The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya is one of only a handful couple of matrilineal groups on the planet whose social structure is pretty much in place. A one of a kind component of the Khasi society is the matrilineal standard of lineage, progression and legacy. The Khasis take after the matrilineal type of family life in which the line of the descent is through the mother's ancestry and the legacy of the hereditary property is by means of the most youthful girl (KaKhadduh); yet the progression to political office is from the maternal uncle to the sister's child. Another exceptional

characteristic of the Khasi society is the extraordinary “clannishness”. Truth be told, it might be said that the whole society is the mixture of families known as “Kur” or “Jait”. A large number of the families follow their descent from an old ancestress that is styled “KaLawbei Tynrai”. It is important to say that the Khasis take after the matrilineal type of residence where the prep, as a rule, lives at the wife's home. Despite the fact that the Khasis take after the matrilineal type of drop and legacy, the maternal uncle (U Kni) is the leader of the Khasi family unit. Society is known through factions. Root Ancestress is most important. In Meghalaya, the Khasi lady appreciates a specific measure of flexibility in contrast with ladies in different parts of the nation. As said before, the Khasi custom endorses the decentralisation of familial property by means of the female line. As per Tiplut Nongbri (1997) male children have no privilege to the genealogical property of the family with the exception of in uncommon instances of there being no female issue in the family. There are standards over the manner of self-gained property too. On account of women's self-obtained property, the run is straightforward. A woman amid her lifetime may give her self-gained property to either her child or her youngest girl, yet in the event that she bites the dust without giving any sign about its transfer, it goes to her youngest girl. What's more, if a lady kicks the bucket unmarried, her self-obtained property goes to her mom or sister. Obviously, there is an inclination, particularly among the educated and modern Khasis, that their guidelines of family relationship and legacy are one-sided for women and are excessively prohibitive. The decision that women alone can acquire tribal property is seen as being prejudicial towards men. The Succession Act is along these lines seen as an endeavour at evacuating such confinements and at remedying the apparent female inclination in the Khasi custom.

The Khasi Women

Women's position in the Khasi society is to some degree foreseen by investigations of matrilineal connection frameworks. A few anthropologists have highlighted the innate disagreements in the Khasi matrilineal framework. Audrey Richards (1950) alludes to these disagreements as “the matrilineal puzzle”. The term may not be totally fitting but rather it is without doubts astounding how matrilineal frameworks have made due progress regardless of their intrinsic inconsistencies. One such inconsistency emerges from the disjunction between the line of plummet and legacy, then again, the structure of specialist and control on the other. The previous one connects the mother to the youngest girl comes in the struggle with the last which interfaces the mother's sibling to sister's child. In the present situation, however, the legacy of family property, both tribal and obtained, goes from the mother to the youngest girl, a small amount of the property is likewise offered out to the next little girl senior little girls of that given family. Mention that the youngest girl who acquires the lion's share of the property is just yet the caretaker of the tribal property and not the proprietor of the same. The maternal uncle manages and ends up even with control over the property while the children are totally denied of the said property. As indicated by Valentine Pakyntein (2000), the maternal uncle and the youngest girl go about as the family minister and priestess individually, in playing out the ceremonies relating to the family. Advance, it is likewise the

obligation of the most youthful little girl to see that the demise customs of her relatives are completed as needs be. Other than religious obligations, she is likewise socially capable towards all individuals from her family. It is a given obligation that the most youthful little girl houses and takes care of her senior un-wedded or in an unexpected way even able siblings and sisters, widowed or separated sisters and their youngsters, widowed or separated siblings and furthermore vagrants of her expired sisters, if they are still youthful or unmarried. The place of the youngest girl is viewed as an asylum to all her relatives. The religious, monetary and the social duty of the family fall on the maternal uncle and the youngest girl. It is the conventional political circle that ladies, all in all, in the Khasi society can't take an interest, neither do they have the privilege to challenge any type of office in the customary committee nor are they allowed practising their establishment. The customary gathering would comprise of just male individuals and the voting procedure to choose those individuals are likewise practised by the male people.

Meghalaya's Women and the World of Politics

From centuries, governmental issues have largely been viewed as a male privilege, history also suggests, majority of humanity firmly believed that political control by women or matriarchy happened just in the initial stage of advancement of social institutions. This view held immovably by evolutionists. As indicated by them, matriliney, where plunge is followed through the mother, was an exceptionally primitive type of association. Matriliney, as indicated by them, would prompt to matriarchy or centralization of monetary, political and custom power in the hands of ladies. In their unilineal perspective of mankind's history, matriliney would, all around, eventually be prevailing by patriliney, evidently a him her type of family association in which women hold a less commended position (Gibbs, 1977). To the question of why men have, at any value in this way, quite often overwhelmed the political circle of life, some have recommended that men's part in fighting gives them the edge in a wide range of political initiative, especially on the grounds that they control weapons. Fighting supposedly is identified with political power as it unmistakably influences survival, happens at a customary premise, and that choice about war might be among the most critical sort of governmental issues in many social orders (Ember and Ember, 1995,). The prevalence of men in legislative issues has been ascribed to the reason that men move around more than women in the outside world, their exercises benefiting them away from home while women tended the home, and that they know more about the world and as such are picked as leaders (ibid). As per Fried (1977), even in known social orders with matriliney and matrilocality, men have commanded political segments of the way of life. What he watches is that the issue is knottier than such basic explanations recommend. His thinking is that if sex is worked as a pervasive element prompting to in any event in transitory imbalance, it was not because of distinction in size, quality or perseverance, but instead needed to do with the aggregate social designing of early human culture and its ensuing authentic advancement. Culture is seen to influence cooperation through sex-part desires, behavioral codes and convictions, and in addition singular inspirations. In many social orders, there are broadly held convictions that women need insight, are

mentally powerless, sincerely unequal, nonsensical and unreliable. Besides social biases, there are additionally auxiliary hindrances to women's dynamic part in legislative issues. Such auxiliary components are likewise observed to possess a place of need in deciding access to support (Sertel, 1979). Women's absence of training and lack of time for governmental issues after obligations as house-spouses and wage-earners...etc., epitomise these hindrances. Other than the question with reference to why men for the most part rule legislative issues, there is additionally the need to clarify why women's support in governmental issues is exceptionally insignificant. With respect to, various reasons have been given extending from diligent work, commitment, political abilities, money related security ... and so forth that are required for a political profession (Short, 1996)^[37]. Additionally, it has been watched that the proceeded with the male prevalence of governmental issues permits a specific and select sort of manliness to rule the way of life of political associations (Lovenduski, 1996). Other than these factors other barriers such as – absence of certainty incorporating inability in broad daylight talking or dread of making a trick of themselves, have been referred to as imperative components that kept women from putting themselves forward. A setup truth in the investigation of legislative issues is that men and women are distinctive political creatures, women taking an interest not as much as men.

The Polity In Khasi Hills

Meghalaya has a unicameral political system. Like many distinctive states of India it has, the State Legislative Assembly. In the State Legislative Assembly, there are 60 members. Meghalaya has two MPs in the Lok Sabha; one from Shillong and the other from Tura. It, moreover, has one MP in the Rajya Sabha. The State regime is headed by the Chief Minister. To build a local-level political system at the neighbourhood or local level the Panchayati Raj Institutions were set up. Tribal areas in the state have their own particular indigenous political bodies. In order to give a sensible kind of local self-governance to the tribal groups, the 6th schedule was added to the Constitution under the direction of Mr Gopinath Bordoloi. The Sixth Schedule has the arrangement for the constitution and organisation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) and set out the road for formation of the ADCs. There are three ADCs in Meghalaya, viz., Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Garo Hills Autonomous District Council and the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. The public memory suggests that the political structures of the Khasi States were initially participative, accommodative and inclusive in nature and worked uninhibitedly and there were no rigid structures as well. The prelude of "Syiemship" can be credited to the vital paramountcy which was imagined by the "Basans" and "Lyngdohs" (H Bareh, 1997: 234). These "Basans" and "Lyngdohs" hailing from the better off or elite families are accountable for making, the "Syiemship" and withal the "Khasi Hima" (traditional states or early states). These States were managed by a "Dorbar" coordinated by the supervisor or the authoritative figure, the specialists of the elite families and towns inside the State. The State included the "Syiem", "Ki Bakhrav" i.e. the "Lyngdohs", the "Basan", the "Dalois", and the "Pators" including the town chambers. The authoritative figure or the supervisor organised the "Dorbar" and goes about as its pioneer and

these gregarious affairs were customarily held at his sister's home i.e. "Iing Syiem" or "Iing Sad" and neither in his wife's home nor in the business centre (N. Laloo, 2014)^[32]. The folklorists traditions of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills suggest that such "Ka Li Dohkha" and "KaPahSyntiew", exhibits that in the commencement point of some factions and "Syiem" or bellwether of the "Sutnga" and additionally of the Shillong Syiems independently (Bareh, 1997), was taken after back in the last few centuries and for bringing in this change the personality is generally epitomized in a lady. Khasi society did not have a single, perplexed and incorporated political body; the political bodies were basically independent of each other and were headed by the supervisor or the ascendant figure known as the "Syiem", with the help of his "Myntris". The "Dorbar Hima" or the state committee was the supreme governing body. The council comprised of the "Syiem", "Ki Bakhrav", that is, the "Lyngdohs", the "Basans", the "Dalois", and the "Pators" including delegates of the "Raid" and of the "village councils". The ascendant figure or chief amassed the Dorbar and headed as its bellwether and the congregations were generally held in his sister's home, that is, "Iing Syiem" or "Iing Sad" and not in his better half's home nor in the bazaar. At all levels of the Dorbari .e. "Dorbar Hima" (State Dorbar), the "Dorbar Raid" (territorial Dorbar), Village Dorbar or Clan Dorbar, only the senior and elected individuals were allowed to attend its proceedings. As per custom of the Khasi society only male individuals were sanctioned to go to the "Dorbar Shnong" but, of course, there is marginally unwinding. The Dorbar were concerned with giving the mandate for day-to-day governance and administrative issues and also goes about as the court to take up cases and impose fine as well as give punishment to the miscreants. It actualized development plans, for example, making new street and bridges, the arrangement of water supply and giving training for the skills required in the local administration and self-regime. It was mandated for the detection of wrongdoing and trepidation of offenders. It conducted elections and sent delegation of representatives to State chambers. It used to recommend the moral code of conduct and because universal village participation, it also acted as a training centre in citizenship, welfare, rhetoric and even in the resumption of financial issues. It used to act as agency of resource generation as well as resource mobilisation for inculcating skills in young fellows, giving young men training for warfare, music, local administration, social service and nurture specialists in different subjects (Bareh, 1997). The Khasi "Dorbar Shnong" can be somehow compared to the Legislative and Judicial type of the present regime (Bareh, 1997). All of the issues important to state administration and for its decision-making were discussed in the "Dorbar Shnong". After India procured independence, the institutions of the "Syiem" and of the "Dorbar Shnong" were put to work under the District Councils. So, it is pellucid now, that Khasi Society is characterised by a local form of administration and local governance. The unique institution which is responsible for this model of governance is the village council or "Dorbar Shnong". This "Dorbar Shnong" is the gathering of all grown-up male which works under an elected headman or boss called "Rangbah Shnong". The "Dorbar Shnong" takes care of the welfare of the general population and postulates the responsibility for the standard customary practices and imposes order and

discipline among the individuals. It is through the “kur” the framework of entire political structure was built in the Khasi Hills. With advancement of time, a more complicated and efficient political framework was required effective management of social and political issues and additionally because of the ever incrementing size of the “kur” some kind of change in political system was inevitable. Among the commoners or the general public, “kni” or uncle (mother’s brother) enjoy a special prestige and authority. He is the sole authority and takes care of customary and religious rituals in the “Dorbar”, “kur” or faction. With advancement of time a “Lyngdoh” who is the administrator or the “Basan” who is a senior from the “headmen” in the state or “Hima” was picked up in a meeting with the elderly tribe people to deal with the pledge of association of the town known as the town Dorbar or “Dorbar Shnong”. A political unit including neighbouring Khasi towns kened as “Dorbar” “Raid” or regional tribal committee was mandated to reinforce the political units of different “shnong”. One of the headman or “Lyngdoh” would organise the meeting of neighborhood towns. This chamber was mandated for taking care of both administrative as well as legal issues like the issue of delimitation between towns and additionally deals with the land and timberland of the “Raid”. Further, a couple “Raid” consolidated to shape the State or “Syiemship” where an authoritative figure or head was chosen and called “Syiem”, who would later under his guidance and supervision framed the “Hima Dorbar”. This Dorbar can make new laws, settle disputes and execute the law. All adult male members went to and participated in the discussions and deliberations of the “Hima Dorbar” (N. Laloo, 2014) [32].

The Real Politic

The Khasi society is a matrilineal society where ancestry is followed through the female line and the youngest girl acquires the hereditary property. One would actually accept that women in this general public category have the almost equal position as men folks. This is contrary to the general perception that women enjoy the much higher position in Khasi society. However the fact that family legacy works through women is no certification of the female political strengthening in any sense. In the Khasi society, the perfect Khasi woman is one who is docile, prudent, legitimate, noble and persevering. It is from the women that the faction reproduces and keeps up family coherence. She cares for the home and is the overseer of the family property. Custom then again does not permit women to interfere in the undertakings of the state. In the present circumstances the political inclusion of the Khasi women in these conventional political foundations has not seen much change. On the political front, the Khasi women are lagging behind like all women in different social orders. Despite the fact that women speak to half of the world's liberated populace, her representation is grim in the political field. Explanations for women's lower rate of support in governmental issues are very much settled upon. Women have been delineated pretty much as the ones who take care of the home while important socio-economic issues are gone to by the male individuals. Traditions that must be adhered to, culture, folkways, mores and dispositions of people groups appear to support men more than women. There are chances that women as people and as a class have separated themselves in the social circle, therefore, in the political sphere they are yet to make their

mark. At the conventional level the general maxim of male establishment still wins. Though few of the nearby “dorbars” inside Shillong have women individuals the same can't be said of a lion's share of the neighbourhood “dorbars”. The individuals from the “dorbars” themselves are extremely hesitant to relinquish the customary routine of aggregate male individuals (Bawri, “Electoral Politics in Meghalaya.”). Men still tend to look upon women as unequipped for taking care of matters that are outside the home front. The cutting edge regulatory framework then again legitimately and naturally puts no bar on ladies' interest in the legislative issues of the country. Regardless of the freedom given to them not very many women accept the open door to make full utilisation of this privilege. There is a boundless uniqueness between women' formal political fairness and their significant practice of political power. Despite the fact that women practice their establishment they lag behind when it comes to involving prestigious political workplaces or positions. The representation of the Khasi women in the administrative bodies is also poor (Bawri, “Electoral Politics in Meghalaya.”). The state of mind of the urban Khasi women towards governmental issues is one of distrust and disgust. The majority of women believe legislative issues as too dirty to get involved in. The purpose behind this doubt and sicken discovers its root in the observation that lawmakers neglect to stay faithful to their commitments after being elected. The promise of advancement and creating employment, promises of distributing funds and providing aid, do not materialise once the candidate is chosen. Lawmakers are often caught up with profiting for themselves and this has baffled the general population, who thus observe legislative issues are not good enough get involved in. All things considered, the general perception is that politics and governance are filthy issues. Legislative practices give a terrible picture to women folks in general. Hence, the majority of women show no interest choosing politics as career. A fascinating perception here is almost everyone is of the opinion that more women should join politics and they should play important role in lawmaking and governance (Bawri, “Electoral Politics in Meghalaya.”). Women's tend to regard women as being more honest, hardworking, are more congenial and of better understanding, and thusly are of the feeling that they absolutely would make great and skilled political pioneers. What can be finished up here is that women are still hesitant to venture into a part commanded by the men and appear to be pretty much comfortable with the way things are. The vote is the simplest and most common form of political cooperation. From the many studies done by renowned academicians, it has been observed that lion's share of them have practised their entitlement to vote at any rate once, if not more, after attaining voting age. Voting did not necessarily mean demonstrating enthusiasm for political exercises or in governmental issues by any stretch of the imagination. In actuality what the majority belief is that it is merely a demonstration of practising one's entitlement to vote (Bawri, “Electoral Politics in Meghalaya.”). Women are exceptionally mindful of their voting right. They are similarly mindful of the force of voting. When it went to the women voters' perception in picking a specific hopeful, they appear to demonstrate an inclination for the individual benefits of a competitor as opposed to gathering affiliations. It is just amid the race time frame that women in vast numbers take an interest in governmental issues by

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