

**DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN THE KHASI MATRILINEAL SOCIETY****Jecinthal David Koilpillai & Abhishek Tripathi, Ph. D.****Abstract**

The North Eastern region of India is one of the most ethnically, linguistically, socially and culturally diverse regions in India. In this region, both patrilineal and matrilineal social structures exist side by side. The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya follows the matrilineal system, where lineage and inheritance are traced through women. In such societies in order to promote full respect for human dignity and achieving equality between men and women, women are expected to play a pivotal role and hold a place of pride in the social setup, unlike their counterparts in a patrilineal society. The main purpose of this study is to unravel the veracity of the belief that women are not discriminated against in the Khasi society. The study reveals that discrimination against women is an unfortunate reality among the Khasi community of Meghalaya. A close-ended questionnaire and a semi structured interview were used for collecting data.



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Introduction:

The issue of empowerment of women has been much discussed at various levels to find out the solution to age-old problem of gender discrimination, exploitation of women and for the upliftment of their status and position in the society. The Khasi society of Meghalaya is such a society, commonly known as matrilineal where authority, title, inheritance, residence after marriage and succession are traced through the female line. They are supposed to be the heads of their families and have the power to take decision what to be done or not etc.

But a recent survey that was conducted for this study in the rural areas of Meghalaya shows that the number of families headed by the male is more than the families headed by the female. This paper is thus an attempt to examine the dynamics of status and role of tribal women in Meghalaya, especially the Khasi women. The study is mainly descriptive and exploratory.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Though Meghalaya is known as a matrilineal society, many of the families are headed by the males. Hence the men make most of the decisions for the family though they might consult with the women in the household in the decision making. With the expansion of education and the increasing involvement of male participation in the socio-economic activities the tendency of male domination is increasing. However discrimination against female child is

less prevalent in the family. Though traditionally the women are supposed to inherit ancestral property, men also inherit property under different circumstances in the Khasi society. The study shows that relatively more females are illiterate than male. Data reveals that, profession jobs mostly occupied by the males and the income of the female-headed households are significantly less. The income of female – headed families are less than the families headed by men. Yet the female better manage the family and give more emphasis on the human development indicators like education, health etc. Women in the rural Khasi society are free to participate freely in any function of social and religious importance. The Khasi women are not well aware of their political rights or they are reluctant to join politics. Rather they like to devote more on their social and economic activities for their welfare. It is however essential to adopt measures for the improvement of education, income of the females to fill the gap between male and female. As female manage family better they would be able to further the welfare of the family members and the society. As far as power divisions between male and female were considered, majority affirmed that there was more or less equality in the roles that men and women had to play.

Taking into consideration all the inferences, based on the collected sample, it can be said that the Khasi society of Meghalaya is matrilineal but cannot be referred to as a Matriarchy parallel to the dominant patriarchal world culture. The culture is more like a balance of both the sexes and both the genders fit into each other in their social functioning.

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