

**AN ATTITUDE STUDY OF THE
MATRILINEAL SYSTEM
AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

*PHD. Thesis
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ABSTRACT

**THESIS SUBMITTED
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
EDUCATION
BY
ENID RICHMOND BASAIWMOIT**

TO



**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG
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The Matrilineal Social System

The Matrilineal System which basically traces its lineage through the mother, is the root of the cultural pattern and social system of the three tribes of Meghalaya — The Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. Though there are some variations and distinctions between them, the basic foundation guiding the matrilineal system as practised by them is the same, i.e. descent is traced through the mother and the inheritance or property stays in the female line.

The role or status of women in the three tribes are similar although there are variations as to their functions in the family and society.

There are a number of Matrilineal groups distributed throughout the world. Examples, of these are the Nayars of Kerala and the Moplahs. Some other places in Asia where the system is practised, include, Indo-China and Indonesia (Sumatra, Minangkabau, Negri Sembitam).

In Africa, there are four centres where this system is practised. In North America also there are some Red Indian tribes which follow this system, like the Hopi and the Navajo tribes.

Role of Education and other Environmental Factors in influencing traditional attitudes, beliefs, customs etc.

Development of Education and Technology has had a predominant influence in changes brought about in traditional societies - their attitudes, beliefs, mores and customs.

An attempt has been made in this study to gauge whether some environmental factors have had any effect on the attitudes of Khasi working women towards the Matrilineal System. Among the environmental factors which would probably influence a woman's attitudes towards a matrilineal society may be the following listed below:

- (a) The profession/vocation which a woman would be engaged in. It may be assumed that different professions would have varying influences on the attitudes of individuals engaged in them as a result of interaction with colleagues, training, preparation and other factors.

- (b) The age-group that an individual would belong to.
- (c) The influence of the individuals educational levels and those of their parents.
- (d) Influence of religion i.e. in terms of Christian or Non-Christian beliefs and practices.
- (e) Influences traceable to the marital status of an individual.
- (f) An individual's order of birth or position in the family.

Need and Importance

In view of the conditions pertaining to the Matrilineal Societies in Meghalaya, it may be assumed that attitudes towards the Matrilineal Society may have undergone changes due to the impact of various factors, i.e. education, technology, growth of political institutions, etc.

This study was confined to a sample of Khasi working women chosen in the city of Shillong. It was felt that restricting the choice to this category of women may be justified for various reasons.

Women in Meghalaya have certain privileges and seem to exercise a form of independence distinct from the women in other parts of the country. They may thus have a tendency

to view with greater favourability this system, which may be largely benefiting them. This study is intended to find out whether factors related to social change have had any effect on attitudes towards the system. Hence it was decided to obtain in this sample, women belonging to different professions and with different levels of education. Also in this sample women of different age-groups, religious affiliations and different marital status were selected.

Objectives

1. The objectives of the study would be to investigate differences towards the matrilineal society, if any, amongst women belonging to different professions.
2. Differences in attitudes towards the Matrilineal System if any, between women with different levels of education.
3. Differences in attitudes between women in different age categories.
4. Influences, if any, of parents educated/uneducated in the attitudes of working women to be subjected to investigation.
5. Influences of religion on the attitudes towards the Matrilineal System.

6. Influences of family position or order of birth on the attitudes towards the Matrilineal System.
7. To investigate a possible association between the mothers' attitude towards the Matrilineal Society and adjustment of their children in four areas/domains, Home, School, Emotional and Social Adjustment.

Review of Related Literature

A review of related literature revealed substantial support for the assertion above, i.e. various factors such as education, technological developments, changes in societal customs, etc. do bring about changes in traditional attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, it was decided to frame the undermentioned hypotheses to provide further direction for the study.

Hypotheses

- I. There would be significant differences in the attitude towards the Matrilineal System of women in different educational levels.
- II. No significant relationship would be identifiable between attitudes of working women towards the Matrilineal System, and the influence of their parents whether educated or uneducated.

- III. A significant difference in the attitudes of women in different professions towards the Matrilineal System would be identifiable.
- IV. There would be significant difference between different age-groups in their attitudes towards the Matrilineal System.
- V. There would be significant relationship between the attitudes of working women towards the Matrilineal System and the religion they profess.
- VI. There would be a difference between the attitudes of married and unmarried women towards the Matrilineal System.
- VII. The influences of family position or order of birth would determine the attitudes of working women towards the Matrilineal System.
- VIII. There would be no relationship between attitudes towards the Matrilineal System and the adjustment of children in the Home/School/Society/Emotional areas.

Methodology

It was proposed to involve in this investigation 500 Khasi working women employed in the city of Shillong. To select this sample and to ensure its representative character, a study of the employment patterns and trends of women in different careers in the city of Shillong was undertaken.

Literature from the Census office, the Ministry of Labour of the State of Meghalaya and literature pertaining to employment trends by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Govt. of India were examined. As a result of these studies it was found that working women in Shillong would be found mainly in Categories I - V of the National Classification of Occupations (NCO). Hence a sample of 500 Khasi working women was chosen to represent approximately equal numbers in Categories I & II, Categories III & IV and Category V of the NCO.

A study of the Census data revealed that there may be approximately equal proportions in the above groups chosen, hence supporting the stratification of the sample. The investigator undertook another initial survey to locate the organizations/offices etc. which employed these categories of working women. After the exercise of locating the various places of work where women of different professions (e.g. Class I officers, Doctors, Teachers, Nurses etc.) were employed in large numbers, an attempt was made to select the desired number of working women to represent each group without bias. Thus it may be claimed that this sample of working women chosen would suitably represent Khasi working women in Shillong.

Tools for Collection of Data

The hypotheses stated, revealed that the following data would be required:

1. Bio-data — This was to be collected by a questionnaire constructed by the investigator (Questions about age, marital status, religion, etc. were included).
2. An Attitude Scale to assess attitudes towards the Matrilineal System. This scale was constructed by the Investigator. It involved all the procedures and methods required for constructing a scale based on the Likert Method of Scale Construction.

A tryout on an initial sample of 100 Khasis in Shillong City was undertaken to evolve the final items in the scale, which when administered to the sample of 500 Khasi working women in Shillong consisted of 16 statements. The reliability of this scale was computed to be of the order of .82 (Split-Half-Correction).

3. An adapted form of Bell's Adjustment Inventory which was administered to the children of working women who were above the age of 12 years. To adapt this tool, the original form was administered to 21 high school students and their responses were analysed to determine the

discrimination of each of the 77 items. The adapted form consisting of 20 items, represented those which had the best discrimination in four areas of adjustment (Home, School, Social and Emotional).

The tools after preparation were compiled into a consolidated booklet and the investigator personally gave the attitude scale and bio-data questionnaires to members of the sample, visiting them in their places of work. Adjustment Inventories were also given to women who had school/college going children above the age of 12. The completed questionnaires and other instruments were collected later. During the process of data collection, the investigator received ample co-operation from the respondents.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

In analysing and interpreting the data, Chi-square and 't' tests were mainly utilized to verify each of the 8 hypotheses stated earlier. It is now proposed to present the results of testing these hypotheses.

The entire list of hypotheses tested were concerned with examining the relationships of attitude scores with other variables. These attitude scores were it was found not significantly different in their distribution to what

may be expected in a normal distribution. Hence this may be inferred to indicate that the sample chosen for this investigation was a representative one.

Hypothesis I - predicted significant differences in attitudes towards the Matrilineal System which may be attributable to the different educational levels of the working women under investigation. Similar tests utilized in verifying the first hypothesis revealed again substantial support for the initial prediction. The data indicated that education may have had a role in influencing attitudes towards the Matrilineal System. The results further revealed that there was a significant difference between the attitudes of Group I (Graduates and above) and Group III (below matric and illiterates) as also between Group II (Undergraduates) and Group III (below matric). This implies that the Groups I & II have a less favourable attitude towards the Matrilineal System than the groups with an inferior level of education and illiterates.

Hypothesis II - asserted that there would be no significant relationship between the attitudes of working women and the influence of their parents whether educated or uneducated. To test this hypothesis working women's parents were divided into four groups (graduates, matric,

below matric, and no education), and differences if any, between the four groups of daughters' attitude scores were investigated (The four groups of daughters were categorised in accordance with their parents' educational levels). This test revealed no significant differences and hence the hypothesis was accepted. Thus this implies that the influence of parents' educational level was negligible in determining a working woman's attitudes towards the Matrilineal System.

Hypothesis III - asserted significant differences in attitudes towards the Matrilineal Society between women belonging to different professions. A Chi-square test to investigate differences between Categories I & II, III & IV and V of the NCO revealed a chi-square equal to 12.34 which was significant at the .05 level. Further 't' tests between the groups compared revealed significant differences between Categories I & II and III & IV when compared with Category V. Hence it was concluded that the data provided substantial support for the hypothesis, i.e. differences in attitude towards the Matrilineal System would be associated with differences in professions.

Hypothesis IV - predicted significant differences between different age groups in their attitudes towards

the Matrilineal System. Similar tests utilized in verifying the other two hypotheses revealed that no differences in attitudes towards the Matrilineal System seem to be associated with the age of the respondents. In this case the hypothesis had thus to be rejected.

Hypothesis V - noted that a significant relationship would be identifiable between the attitudes of working women and the religion they professed. The differences in attitude scores between three religious groups (Roman Catholics, Protestants and Non-Christians) revealed a significant difference between the Christian groups and the Non-Christian ones. Hence the hypothesis framed earlier was supported with the data available, implying that religion is associated with attitudes towards the Matrilineal System.

Hypothesis VI - suggested differences in attitudes towards the Matrilineal System between married and unmarried working women. A 't' test to verify the difference between the Means of these two groups indicated a significant difference at the .05 level. Married women had a higher Mean attitude score (60.30) in comparison with their unmarried counterparts (57.14). It is probable this result indicates a greater tendency towards conservatism on the part of the married women.

Hypothesis VII - stated that the order of birth (whether eldest, middle, or youngest) would determine the attitudes of working women towards the matrilineal system. Differences in attitude scores between these 3 groups indicated no significant Chi-square value. Hence the hypothesis was rejected indicating that the order of birth in a family would not be associated with attitudes towards the Matrilineal System.

Hypothesis VIII - predicted no relationship between the adjustment of children and their mother's attitudes towards the Matrilineal System. Only 47 children (those above 12 years) qualified for inclusion in testing this hypothesis which revealed no association between mother's attitude scores and the overall adjustment of children. Tests to determine whether there were adjustment differences in specific areas (home/school/emotional and social) also revealed a similar result. Hence there seems reason to believe that the attitude scores of working women are not associated with the adjustment of their children.

Conclusion

The results of testing the hypotheses referred to above, indicate agreement between this study and others reviewed in the following areas/domains.

1. Education/Professional status are related to or determine prevalent traditional attitudes, beliefs, customs, etc.
2. It would thus be expected that parental educational levels would also be associated with their children's attitudes, beliefs, etc. however this study did not obtain data to support this assumption. It is probable that the reason for this was the large proportion of uneducated parents (70%), who could not significantly influence their more educated offspring.
3. This study found no influences attributable to the age of the respondents in determining their attitudes towards the Matrilineal System. However, marital status did seem to be associated with attitudes towards the Matrilineal System as also the religion one professed. The latter association may be attributed to the greater tendency towards conservatism on the part of the married as also the followers of the traditional Khasi faith.

The order of birth in a family did not seem to be associated with attitudes towards the Matrilineal System, also these attitudes did not influence adjustment levels of the children.

The study made the following principal recommendations:

1. A larger study involving other sections of the Khasi Society than working women only, may provide findings which may be more amenable to wider generalisation.
 2. Attempts to investigate relationships if any between attitudes towards the Matrilineal System and political views/values may provide interesting data/findings.
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