

Sanskritization, Genderization and Process of Making of A Woman

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Abstract

Learning of gender roles is a complex process of power relation in where family plays a vital role in assigning different roles to new born according to their sex. As assignment of gender roles is an integral part of society so accordingly society develops different mechanism to maintain these gender roles. In this study, an attempt is being made to critically examine the gender roles among men and women considering the existing power relation at both household and societal level. Moreover, in this paper an attempt is being made to understand this socialization process from the angle of Sanskritization which talks about the process through which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, 'twice born' caste.

Keywords: Socialization, Sanskritization, Tiwa, Gender Role, Patriarchy

Introduction

It is true that there are biological differences between a boy and a girl child. However, by birth they do not inherit all those traits, which a society expects from them in due course of life. These traits are 'conceived, enacted, and learnt within a complex relationships' (Dube, 2001:88) and internalized by both the sexes i.e. man and woman. Since society expects different roles from different sexes, the girl child and the boy child undergo a different process of learning which first starts at home and the surrounding environment (Oakley, 1972).

'Gender roles and gender identities are not acquired mechanically by the child from the parent, but because the child identifies with the parent in a variety of ways' (ibid:179). As the process of socialization begins at home, so the learning is inherited by the new born from the earlier generation and these learning are transferred from one generation to the other and different sexes are trained differently, i.e. the boys and the girls are trained in different fields. Therefore, as a boy or girl 'grows older society provides a string of prescriptions, templates, or model of behaviour appropriate to the one sex or the

other' (Connell, 1987:191). This process of learning of different roles by different sex is known as learning of gender roles, goes through four different phases (Oakely, 1972)¹. A child accepts these norms mainly because 'they are scolded, reprimanded or punished if they do not. Or worst, they are shamed if they dare to be different' (Geetha, 2002/2006: 32). Therefore, the process of socialization is based on legitimate power¹ relations where the agent of socialization has the right to influence those who are being socialized.

As a child has to undergo through the process of socialization and learn different sets of roles as decided by the society (Beauvoir, 1949/1997; Oakley, 1972; Connell, 1987), so the child has to act differently and plays different roles in future. Accordingly, some play the role of bread winner or domestic workers and so on. Whatever role they play in future, thus, it primarily depends upon how they were socialized. Therefore, it can be assumed that process of construction of gender is nothing more than mobility from sex to gender. Considering the process of socialization of different sexes both at household and societal level, an attempt is being made to analyse this process from the preview of another prominent theory of social mobility i.e. Sanskritization.

For the purpose of understanding the process of gender construction in the preview of Sanskritization, the empirical data collected from *Tiwa*-one of the major tribes of Central Assam and data was collected from two Tiwa dominated villages of Morigaon district of Assam namely *Udahinbori* and *Kapurpurabori*. Although, major tools of data collection were participant observation and interview, yet this research also deployed Focus Group Discussion for collection of primary data. For secondary data, the researcher has made extensive literature review on the said group of community.

Tiwa Women in the Study of Tiwa Society

Tiwa- originally a matrilineal tribal group changed to patrilineal group through the process of assimilation with Greater Assamese society, yet they maintained some of the traits of matrilineal society. Existence of *Gabhiyarakha*² marriage at field shows that still many of the matrilineal traits are being existed among them. As traditionally Tiwa was a matrilineal tribal group, thus it is expected that the status of women among Tiwas would be higher than other society. However, the field data gave a reversed picture and the life of Tiwa women was not different from other non-tribal societies of Assam. Like other societies, their daily routine begins from 4.30-5.00 AM and ends at 9.00-9.30 PM, which reveals that Tiwa woman 'does not go to work, she wakes up to work. Home is work and work is home' (Rowbotham, 1973/1981: 71).

As A Woman Tiwa Woman Has No Own Identity

It is generally said that name is not mere label rather 'naming is a powerful tool for identity construction' (Dzimiri, Runhare, Dzimiri and Mazorodze, 2014: 227). However, in case of Tiwa women, as suggested by the field data, personal name has no role in life of Tiwa women rather it was father's name in case of unmarried girl or husband's name in case of married women which play the major role in identity creation of Tiwa women. Thus, most of the women at field was not recognized with their name but with the name of her husband or father, creating a master-property relationship between man and women, in where woman became the property of her father or husband being identified by their name. Accordingly, being rooted in the natal house, this relationship transferred from father or brother to husband after marriage.

Division of Labour

Basics of sexual division of labour in the Tiwa society is allocation of power. The arrangement is being made in such a way that all economically and socially recognized productive works were being control by the men. Thus, in return women do not gets any cash income. On the other hand, by keeping the economically productive works, men at the village maintained economic dependency of women on men. The consequence of this division of work among sexes gave the upper hand to men, as being the controller of most of the economically productive activities; men controlled not only the economic resources but also the labour of women. Therefore, in this way, the division of work among sexes exploited women thrice. At first, woman had to give her labour without any reward or economic income. Secondly, as she was not getting any reward or income, thus her control over economic resources decreased as compare to men because by appropriating her labour without payment men could divert this income for appropriation of other resource which men might had to pay if hire others for doing the same in place of woman who was not paid. Further, because of this practice woman had to depend upon man over the question of her decision-making and mobility (Kakati, 2016).

Different social norms were being constructed to control the labour of women or to prevent them from controlling economic resources. For example, women were not allowed to touch the plough at the village like almost all the societies of Assam. However, a woman could hire and could invest in her field, but for this, she needed to invest extra money. Thus, by considering the plough as men's exclusive right, men at the villages not only controlled this economic resource but being the exclusive owner of this resource

men also controlled the exclusive right over land as without ploughing cultivation is not possible. Therefore, control of economic resources by men at the field led to exploitation of women both as a labourer and as a cultivator. Thus, due to lack of economic resources, 'symbolically women are forced to sell herself to men or become bondage labourer' (ibid: 217).

Women and Decision Making

Although in domestic life Tiwa women had some control over some decision as said by the respondents basically in selecting life partner and over some strategic life decisions but only in few occasions, women were invited to give their opinion in public matters. It was informed that traditionally Tiwa women occupied some important office bearers' positions such as *Hadi Kumari*³ in religious hierarchy and some time they were projected with higher social status through different rituals such as *Akumari r ashirwad*⁴. However, it does not assure their claim over power as the field study shows that they could not exercise this power in secular life as this power assumed by them being Hadi Kumari or at Akumari r ashirwad was religious centric. Moreover, these powers are very limited and remain to the women who assume these positions for a short period of time as her services are not used in all through the year.

Women and Property Right

Traditionally Tiwa women did not own any property. Although few women at the field hold a few portions of paternal land those who follow the matrilineal system but it was not equal share to her man counterpart. Two reason associates with this -first to control women in power relation as property is one source of power (Tumin, 1967/1987) and secondly to ensure the retainment of property by the clan. As they follow in clan exogamy so giving property to woman means loss of clan property with her marriage as she became member of other clan after marriage. Thus, socially the distribution of property among the men and women is being arranged in such a way that women are excluded from the property.

Women and Nutrition

Food and nutrition are one of the most important aspects of gender discrimination (Dube, 2009). Almost all the respondents of both the villages denied the presence of any kind of discrimination in regards of food and nutrition against the girl child. They said, "children are children, no matter, whether they are boy or girl" and according to them, they provide food equally to all children irrespective of any sex. An observation over

the pattern of distributing food reveals that children were served with equal quantity of food irrespective of any sex but in most of the cases women who prepared the food got less quantity of food. Thus, in day to day life, unmarried young girls were not deprived off in terms of the quantity of food. But when it comes to quality, sometimes they were being deprived off. Tiwas at these villages generally did not prefer milk, yet a section of rich families started to consume milk for its nutritive value. However, it was observed that generally milk was served to the boys only. They took food in one sitting together except the women who prepared the food. Although it seemed to be an issue of gender discrimination as a section of women took food late, however, these sections of women considered this process differently. According to them, being the cook, it was their duty to serve the food to other family members first. If all of them take food at the same time then who would serve the food. Interestingly, women had the sole responsibility of cooking food but most of the food menu, as informed by some respondents, were decided by preference and need of the men and the boys in the family.

Women and Education

Although there were many evidences of attaining higher education by both boys and girls at these villages, yet it was not equal between boys and girls. In general, girls at the field, studied up to class tenth standard. Only a few girls got the chance to attain higher education after class tenth standard. In general, after that, most of the girls either got tied-up with marriage or assisted their mothers in domestic works. However, lack of educational institutions at the villages or nearby villages forbidden many girls to go for higher study but it is not the sole cause of not attaining higher study by these girls. Further, the condition of girls' education was worst in those families which were economically backward or had school going boy children. This research found number of cases at field which shows that girl child dropped out from school education to support the education of their brother(s). As their families could not afford the cost of two children at one time, so they preferred to cut down the cost of education of the girl child even if the girl child was more brilliant than that of boy child. The main reason for this was the prevailed in the cultural notion of family assets. As boys were considered to be the real assets of the family, so they preferred boys' education first. They considered that, as the girl would move to her husband's family then there was no reason for supporting her education. According to them the boy would only generate income for the family. In such a situation, they preferred boys' education. Further, in some cases, division of work by sexes was

also found to be one of the major factors behind discontinuation of girl in education, especially for those families which had no adult women to carry out the domestic chores. Therefore, other family members to earn extra income for the family appropriated the labour of the girl especially in the domestic sphere. Therefore, here we can conclude that girls' education at these villages depends on three factors- the number of children attaining education at family, the number of women who can carry out domestic chores and number of women can earn some income for the family.

Dicussion

Among Tiwas the basic unit of social system is family. In all spheres of life from decision making to mobility of its members, family plays an important role among them. Therefore, it is not only the primary group of production and reproduction but it also decides the way of life of its members. For example, it is the family who decides who should own property, who will generate livelihood, who will take education, and who will attend different meetings etc. Moreover, family only has right to decide about the membership of different religious and economic groups for its members. Therefore, in spite of having very few families in both the villages, they have numbers of religious *khels* (groups), different economic groups and different political parties. Similarly, boys and girls have to play different roles that were identically different from each other. There are many evidences, which reflect the moulding of girl child to undertake socially recognized feminine works and boy child to undertake socially recognized masculine works. So, from the very beginning, that is, at the age of about 8-9 years, the family exposed the Tiwa girl child to different kinds of socially recognized feminine works such as cleaning, fetching water, collecting fire woods etc.

Moulding a girl child to carry out these works starts at very early years of her age so that she becomes familiar with these works in a very early period of her life. They considered that knowing these works are important for her future life, otherwise it would be difficult for her survival. On the other hand, it was found that no boy child was taught to carry out these feminine works. This process of a socialization of a girl child can be defined as the process of Genderization that derived from the term Sanskritization⁵. In simple, Genderization can be defined as the process of socialization of a girl child which paves the way for the patriarchy to dominate over her body and mind right from her birth to death.

The reason why this research is trying to incorporate the Sanskritization process

which deals with upward mobility in Hindu caste society with secular process of socialization of different sex is that 'gender is a system of power relations, and way of signaling or signifying power' (Brush, 2003:11). 'In fact, the set of roles, behaviours and attitudes that societies define as appropriate for men and women ('gender') may well be the most persistent cause, consequence and mechanism of power relations from the intimate sphere of the household to the highest levels of political decision-making' (Koester, 2015:2). Similarly, 'Sanskritisation leads to heightened sensitivity to ideas of purity and pollution, and to the performance of elaborate life-cycle, calendrical, and other ritual' (Srinivas, 1972/2011:229) and through these women hold an important position in family. Thus the 'feminine preoccupation with ritual provides them with power over men' (ibid:229). Those women who gained high status because of mobility in social hierarchy, however, got this status in the price of immurement (ibid) as they have to face many restrictions on their life. Thus, when a woman marries a man of upper caste she not only attains higher social status but she has to follow the rules of her husband. Similarly, in the process of Genderization a girl is train in the traits of feminine gender. Although a Tiwa girl was forbidden to do many things, which are considered boys' work, but it was found that until her marriage the restriction on girl child was not rigorous. For example, although there is some restriction on girls' mobility, there is no strict restriction on their dress code, etc., which was observe among married women. A married woman among Tiwa needs to follow restricted dress code, her mobility is highly dependent on her husband and her life is governed by a set rule as decides by the society. However, for this she enjoys high status as compare to unmarried girls in religious hierarchy. An unmarried girl among Tiwa does not have a high status in the religious arena. Only the married women are allowed to distribute food in community feast and can take food with men only in community feasts, but not along with them. Unmarried girls can take food only after all men and married women have finished eating. However, in case of boy there are no such norms. Thus, the Genderization is a process of adopting values, customs, rituals, ideology of a married woman by an unmarried girl wherein she was trained to accept whatever her husband decided. So that she can attain high religious status in future. This process of Genderization ended with marriage of girl and it is expected that she will follow whatever she learned during the process of Genderization throughout her life.

Tiwas consider unmarried girl as impure and a girl can only become pure if she marries a man. So, marriage of girl is considered to be one of the most important aspects

life of Tiwa girl. The principle of purity was so strict among them that the unmarried girls are not allowed to prepare community feast. Further, they do not have any say in the society. Except those religious meetings or ceremonies, no body invites them to attend any other secular or religious meetings and ceremonies. Akumari r ashirwad is such prominent example of such customs that organize for unmarried girls. However, with the marriage of girl, the whole situation changes. Now they become social assets and attained different social responsibilities. They can now perform different rituals. Thus, like Sanskritization in which the upward mobility of any caste does not affect Hindu cast hierarchy, in the process of Genderization the upward mobility of a girl child due to marriage does not have effect on the structure, as it is the positional change of a group of sex. As Genderization does not affect the power relations, so it is acceptable to the Tiwa patriarchal society. Moreover, in a patriarchal society like Tiwa society the Genderization process is found to be acceptable as it is the process, through which a man can control the labour of woman by controlling her body. Thus, as mention above, Genderization is only a positional change as it does not ensure upward mobility of Tiwa woman in social hierarchy where man hold the top positions. Further, this status is subject to her husband being alive. If any woman loses her husband then her position again changed and she was demoted to the position of an unmarried girl.

It will not be wrong to say that the process of Genderization begins much before the process of socialization among the Tiwas. They have different arrangements for different sexes to welcome the new born to the family. First birth ritual of the new born is observed differently for different sexes. For example, during *Asujiya* (first birth ritual), the child and the mother come out from the room for the first time from the birthplace in case of home delivery. In case of institution delivery, they need to stay particular room when they return to home up to *Asujiya*. The household arranged this ritual to get bless from *Giyati*⁶. One may make some interesting observation here. In case of boy child, the *Giyati* blesses the child to become the primary breadwinner of the family and hand over a bow as a symbol of physical strength made by his father. On the other hand, in case of girl child, the *Giyati* blesses the child to become the domestic worker and weaver and hand over cotton as a symbol of weaving. Further, they also sacrifice a cock in the name of deity in case of the boy child and a hen in case of the girl child. However, one of the prominent scholars of Tiwa, Balairam Senapati (2009) while discussing the Tiwa culture reveals that Tiwa maintained unequal numbers of the sacrificing cocks and the

hens for this ritual but due to economic reasons now this number decreased to one cock or hen. Earlier they sacrificed seven cocks during the Asujiya of a boy child and five hens for the Asujiya of a girl child (Senapati, 2009). Thus, when a child does not even know who she or he is, they fix different gender roles for boys and girls. Although the above description merely reflects the gender difference, it also reflects the power relation among these sexes. Sacrifice of a greater number of cocks than the number of hens reflects how the power was being distributed unequally among these sexes. It also reflects how the boy is projected as more powerful than that of girl. Therefore, gender difference is not only practiced in reality but was patronized through different cultural norms and customs.

The entire women of these villages have undergone through such processes of Genderization as it was expected by the society and through this, a girl's sexuality was tied to her future as a wife and mother. Therefore, division of works among the sexes was the outcome of such socialization process (Kelkar and Nathan, 1991; Geetha, 2002/2006) where in a girl is socialized to become a wife, who at any condition would under control of her husband.

Thus, though a Tiwa woman even undergone different pain throughout her life due to different expectations of the society, yet she never tries to violate these learning. Further, instead of resisting these norms, they insisted their girl children to follow the same⁷ throughout their life. Thus, this process of Genderization wherein a girl is prepared to accept the domination of her husband in future reflects the process of preparation of the girl child for submission of herself i.e. marrying a man. This submission is also reflected in the form of cultural traits. It was observed that all married women irrespective of age, religion, education, needed to take *urani*⁸ in front of the men. Taking urani in front of men was a symbol of such submission. Moreover, it was observed that women never speak in front of elderly men in community forum until they are asked to do so.

Conclusion

Construction of gender is a social process in where different sexes are being traits with different gender (Oakley, 1972). Those biological process when changes to social process it becomes gender and this is attaining through socialization process through disciplinary power⁹ in where the agent of socialization process itself works under the control of patriarchy. Although process of socialization is mostly responsible for construction of gender but this process actually take place much before the birth of child. People expect for boy child rather girl child. People had different traits for different sexes

so that they may be moulded to different genders. This is called Genderization. In simple this process is more psychological than physical.

Although the theory of Genderization can give a clear picture about the process inheriting values, attitude, custom of married woman by an unmarried girl, yet this theory is based only on understanding of Hindu families, especially among the Tiwas of Morigaon, as they were the bases of the study. Further, we may need to understand the Genderization in different castes and religious societies on basis of fundamentals of the society which could not be done in this study due to lack of time and resources as well as because it is not covered in the specific study.

End Notes

ⁱLegitimate power is one of the important bases of six power bases. Other bases of power are Informational, Reward, Coercion, Expertise and Referent. These bases provide the resource bases for the influencing agent or power figure to influence the action of another person or target of influencing agent, which in turn led to change in belief, attitude or behaviour of target of influence. The legitimate power depends on certain bases. These include cultural values inherited by the society, acceptance of social structure, designation of legitimizing agent. For further details, see French, R.P., and Raven, B.H. 1959. 'The bases of social power', in D. Cartwright (ed.), *Studies in social power*, Institute for Social Research, Ann Arbor: 150-67.

ⁱⁱIn this system the boy needs to move girls house as well as take the surname of his wife after marriage.

ⁱⁱⁱWoman only occupy this position and to occupy this position a woman must be the daughter of the Bongsha (Clan). Although after marriage, the daughter of Tiwa families leave the own clan and incorporated the clan of her husband, but in case of Hari Kuwari, the husband had to accept the clan of her. For further details see, Senpati, B.2009. 'Tiwa Janagosthir Janmo-Mritu aru Bibah Pradhati', in K. Mili (ed.), *Tiwa Sanskritir Rehrup*, Hills View Publication, Guwahati: 98-106.

^{iv}In these ceremonies, the family feed all the girl children of their clan or neighbours who had not attained puberty and in return, these girls blessed them to be happy. Only women could perform the rituals of this ceremony.

^vSanskritization is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and

frequently, 'twice born' caste. For further details, see Srinivas, M.N.1972/2011. *Social Change in Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad.

^{vi}They performed the rituals in place of host families and represented the host families in the rituals. Each family had their own Giyatis selected from different clans of their own religious division. The Giyatis were selected from different clans, so that they could perform those activities, which could not perform by the host families due to social norms.

^{vii}Even most of the married women at the field did not have a good outlook towards the girl child who attended different educational institutions situated outside the village. According to them these are the institutions where they learn different elements of different cultures from different people and brought back to their villages when they returned to the village during vacation. Many of such elements of different cultures were new to the village women who had not gone beyond the district; hence, they considered them as foreign cultural elements, which according to them had no relevance in their society. Further, sometimes many school going girls behaved like boys, which the rural village women discard as foreign elements.

^{viii}It is the process of covering the head of woman with her sadar (Saree).

^{xi}It is a process of controlling the powerless by powerful. In this process the powerless supervised themselves in a disciplined manner and power was retained by the powerful. Thus, the powerless considered the tradition and social behaviour as the rules, which they should abide by and maintain for running the society. Therefore, there was no social control imposed from the above through outright coercion, but by disciplining people in serving power themselves. For details see, Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon Books, New York.

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