

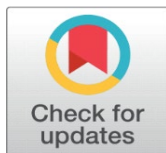
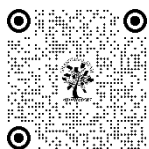
STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute one-half of the world's human population and played a vital role in socio-economic functioning of the society. As a matter of fact, since the inception of human civilization, women have been an integral part of nature, society and culture. Yet, in every patriarchal and patrilineal society, the contributions of women are underestimated and marginalized. Being characterized by tradition of sex discrimination, this is true even for the Anal women. The Anal society has the same patriarchal and patrilineal system, which discriminate women one way or the other, which affects the status of women. Customary law which is an integral part of the Anal society does not treat women equal to men in status concerning socio-economic, political, religious and cultural life. Man has the assertive manipulative power in almost all spheres of life in Anal society. By looking into those customs and certain other aspects, this paper in an attempt to highlight the status of women in the changing Anal society.

Keywords: Society, Culture, Patriarchal, Customary law.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Anal tribe who predominantly occupy Chandel District is one of the oldest indigenous tribes in the State of Manipur in Northeastern India. The Anal tribe is included in the list of the 33 recognized Scheduled tribes of Manipur. Racially speaking, the Anals belong to Tibeto - Burman family of the Mongoloid race¹. There is a small population of the anal people inhabiting Sagaing sub-division of Myanmar, though their exact population is not known. Therefore, it will not be wrong to described them as a trans-border tribe. Additionally, there are some Anal people settled in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Imphal. The Anal population as per the Touzi book records maintained at the office of the Sub-Divisional Offices,

Chakpikarong Block and Chandel Block, Chandel District, Manipur is 31028 in the year 2021.² Like in other communities, almost half of the Anal population is women. A very few works have been done on social and political status of women.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The main objective of this paper is an attempt to highlight the various historical narratives about women in Anal Society and examine the changes and its impact on the status of women. The paper is organized from personal observations, published and unpublished materials

3. ANAL SOCIETY: A PATRIARCHY IN ESSENCE

The Anal Society is divided into two social moieties namely Chanang or Mosum³ and Kori or Murchal⁴. Each moiety is divided into 'te' (clan) and are formed into chakoh⁵ (clan clusters) (Behenson, 1998: 13). Marriage is not permitted within the moieties. A Mosum man must marry a Murchal woman or vice-versa. In case anyone violates the customary marriage law and the rumors is spread in the village, the Village Authority members would summon the suspect lady for interrogation. If she does not confess and keeps on denying, her body may be pressed by 'Chahel' (wooden log used for husking) (Kanthung, 1995: 50). The offenders are heavily fined and even ostracized and expelled from the village. This act of marriage is known as 'Ajol or Ne-ii' and is strictly prohibited even in the present time. The children born out of such marriage are not allowed to partake in any social and religious activities of the society.

It could be seen that in such kind of custom the consequences and punishment is more severe for the woman. She has to go through public humiliation in front of the village elders, psychological and physical tortured before being ostracized and expelled from the village. However, the man involved in such a situation do not go through similar experienced.

4. WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL ANAL SOCIETY

In Anal society, family is the basic social institution. Traditionally the Anal society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society where men have the assertive manipulative power in almost all spheres of life. The Anal customary practices overwhelmingly give more importance to man. Women were considered good only for household chores and procreation. Men take all the major decision inside and outside the family. Men are considered as 'bread winners' and women as 'helpers. As a daughter, sister, wife and mother, Anal women play a significant role in the society. Women are regarded as greater assets in the house as without them the household chores and raising children are not possible. Women also immensely contribute as agricultural laborer in the field. Besides agricultural activities, women are also engaged in weaving and preparing different types of traditional dresses and ornaments to meet the requirement of the family members. Yet, their contribution was largely underestimated and marginalized. Men keeps themselves away from domestic activities since it is considered to be below their dignity to indulge in such affairs.

In the traditional Anal society polygamy was permissible. If wished by husband, a barren wife had no choice but to give consent and allow him to have another wife for procreation, which is also applicable in the case of couples who have no male issue (Kanthung, 1995: 46-47). All throughout her life she was under the control of her father and her husband. After marriage if a woman could not bear a child, she is called 'Ṭangkḥong', which means barren woman. In the past the funeral sites of a barren women (and man) were observed differently. A particular tree, natively known as 'Padungthing' was ceremoniously erected on her/his grave. 'Athim', a local physician would ritualistically perform the funeral rites. This was symbolically done to prevent the rebirth of the person's soul (Veronica, 2018: 22).

There is a myth about Anal women which placed her at a high position in certain aspect. Women are associated as 'Chanu Bālṇu' meaning goddess of wealth, prosperity and fertility. This clearly indicates that women also contributed as much as men to the economic stability of the family as well as the community. Despite their hard work, women are neglected by men. They are refused to managed and owned property. Similarly, a wife is considered as 'Phungka riil' meaning head of the family and husband as 'Hmalpa' i.e. stranger or nominal head. It is true that in most of the time, it is the women who keep the home hearth burning while man was away from home especially during 'Rālsa-lṭ-idon' head hunting days. The wife was required to take the responsibility for the overall security of the family in his absence. She would cook food, take care of the children, fetched water, collect firewood, reared animals, bring fruits and vegetables from the forest etc.

In spite of performing all these duties, women are treated as inferior to men and their roles undermined by customs and traditions. The gender differences and discrimination that put women all over the world always at a disadvantage position is also visible in the Anal Patriarchal society.

5. WOMEN AND RIGHT TO INHERITANCE

The Anal women from her girlhood till her marriage undergo through a long period of training to do the household chores and jhum cultivation. She has to toil and work and not to own or inherit the fruits of her labor. The traditional customary laws are so rigid that it does not permit women to have the right of inheritance of property either in their parent's home or after their marriage. Only the male members of the house have the right to inherit property. Usually, a father divides his property among all his sons before he dies where the lion-share of the property goes to the youngest son. The ancestral dwelling house is generally given to the youngest son in the family. The inheritance includes all the household materials, domestic animals etc. The man in the family has complete controlled and dominance over the property. In the absence of sons, the property is inherited by the nearest relatives of the father even if there are daughters. When the husband dies, a widow is at the mercy of her son since she has no legal right over the property. The widow nor the daughters have any claim or right to property except to movable property such as paddy, clothes and other essential materials. If a woman has no son, her life is more insecure. So long as she remains a widow, she is entitled for maintenance of the deceased husband's property. If she decided to marry, she loses the right over her husband's property. She has to forfeit and leave the house only with her clothes and ornaments. In case the marriage is to someone outside her deceased husband's clan, the man has to pay 'Hmikhun_u Min' meaning widow's price to the late husband's family.

This is a clear case of injustice and discrimination against women in access to resources and the distribution of resources. This not only makes her dependent on male members of the family for survival but also weakens her position in the society.

In recent years, the Anal customary law is being revised and some provision is made to accommodate women the right to inherit immovable property. For instance, Article 82, clause c (ii) of 'Anal No' Anal Customary law permits agricultural land 'Hlibing' bought by married couple during their life time together to be given as gifts to their daughter. However, this is also with a conditioned that the daughter must take the responsibility of looking after the aged ailing parents till their death. In fact, the Anal conventional idea is that women are not expected to inherit any immoveable property for free. As a patriarchal society, economic authority in the Anal society has always been exercised by men.

6. WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

In the oral history of the Anal community, there is no mention of any women who have directly participated nor occupied any high post in the village administration though she possessed the required qualifications. All the heads of the different Institutions were occupied by men. The reason being that, in olden days, due to frequent inter-tribal feud, the sole responsibility of safeguarding and protecting the village was given to men. The village administration and polity were looked after by few men with extra ordinary gifts of nature. They were - Kh_olpu (High Priest), D_opu (Physician) and Th_olpu (Blacksmith).

The priest 'Kh_olpu' governed the village according to his sense of justice, wisdom and vision. He was the main source of all socio - political laws of the land and the tribe. He was well versed in customary law. As enthroned by virtues of his manifold qualifications, he acted as the administrator and guardian of the ancient Anal village. No women, though gifted with the same talents, however could become 'Kh_olpu'. It seems that women were considered not capable of doing the difficult work of village administration. (Sardar,1997:94) No women were allowed to occupy a seat in the village Assembly though they were known to have played a major role in the society especially during 'R_olsa-l_u-idon'(head - hunting days) and inter-village feud. Women were not even allowed to go and observe the meetings. No important discussions were taken in the presence of a woman for fear that she might leak out the secrets. The situation today is not different from that of the past. Women are still not allowed to occupy the seat of 'Khuruwng' the Village Chief, who is the custodian and guardian of the village's property. In a true sense, the Political Institutions of the tribe is not a democratic one. Anal women who constitute one half of the population is not allowed to head the village administration.

7. MARRIAGE SYSTEM AND BRIDE PRICE

Marriage in Anal society is strictly based on cross-clan moieties and not within the same clan. A mosum man must marry a murchal woman or vice-versa. Usually, marriage takes place either through proper consent arranged by parents 'Nupa-

pisuh' or elopement 'Narel-pe-isun'. The community follows certain procedures to finalized the process of marriage settlement. For instance, in case of arranged marriage 'Nupa-pisuh', the boy's parents ought to approach the girl's family. Generally, negotiation starts when the boy's parents and some elderly persons are made as go-between. They would visit the girl's house which is secretly done early in the morning known as 'Nahla-pe-isun'. They carry gifts 'Kuh-thuwl' to be given to the girl. In case, the response is positive and the gifts accepted by the girl, a convenient date is fixed for the engagement ceremony called 'Zuha' (a small jar of wine) used for arranging the ceremony in a traditional way. Finally, a day is chosen for the wedding ceremony known as 'Zupum' (a big jar of wine) and is performed accordingly. From the day of 'Zupum', the newly wedded couple is allowed to become husband and wife 'Pakhum-ichin'. One peculiar identity of the bride in Anal society is, even after her marriage she cannot change her maiden surname. She continues to retain her father's surname and not take her husband's surname.

Once 'Zupum' the wedding ceremony is performed, it is mandatory according to the Anal customary law for the groom to stay in the bride's house for three consecutive years on probation. The groom is expected to work hard in every household activity and earn enough money to pay his Father-in-law the bride's price. This practice is known as 'Nahlahihlo' (earning of bride). On completion of one year, a customary annual visit called 'Chahla' of the groom's parents to the bride's parents is paid. In case the groom fails to stay and work for three years at his father-in-law's house, he is bound to pay 'Min' (bride's price) in cash, paddy, cattle, pig etc. In olden days the bride's price was fixed at Rupees 3 (three) Khon. 1 Khon was equal to Rs. 6/-. At present 1 Khon is equal to Rs. 1000/-. Hence, 3 Khon would be Rs. 3000 only/- is being paid to the bride's parents. (Khelhring,2021:97).

Once the probation period of 'Nahlahihlo' is over, a customary feast 'Hmārsha' is arranged by the son-in-law on fulfillment of his service in honor of the in-laws. This is his last traditional obligation towards his parents' in-law. Soon after this customary feast, the couple are blessed to start their family in their new home. It is told that, the groom who could extend his probation period to four years in his father-in-law's house, may be exempted from hosting this customary feast 'Hmārsha'.

Nowadays the Anal customary law has undergone many changes after the conversion of the Anals to Christianity. The traditional system of marriage ritual is no longer practiced. It is replaced by Christian rites. The engagement ceremony is called 'Chadu-piiso' and wedding ceremony as 'Luchin'. Hmārsha is still practiced by the Anals keeping in tow with their old traditional custom.

We can find that certain liberties were given to both man and woman where marriage was concerned. For example, consent of both man and woman were taken into consideration. But in actual principles of the customary law, it was more in favor of man. The practice of taking 'Min' bride's price sends a wrong impression about the status of women. It implies that a woman is owned by her father before marriage and husband after marriage. It also implies that the bride is worth only that amount of cash or kind offered to her father. In the Patriarchal system of family structure, the woman has to leave her parent's house and set up residence in the man's house. She has to embrace the religion or denomination of her husband soon after her marriage. She is expected to abide by certain traditional norms and cultural values of her husband's family.

8. IMPACT OF EDUCATION AND CHRISTIANITY

The spread of Christianity and western education in the early 19th century had tremendous impact on the life of the Tribal people in the North Eastern part of India as a whole. This advent of Christianity to Anal areas also brought a remarkable beginning of a new life (Behenson, 1998:57).

When modern education was first introduced in Anal society by the Christian Missionaries, boys were given preference and were sent to Primary schools. Most of the girls were confined at home to take care of the younger siblings, helped their mothers in domestic chores and worked in the field. Almost every parent was reluctant to send their daughters to school due to one reason or the other. Many Anal parents thought that educating a girl was wasteful because after her marriage she should become other's property.

But with time things have changed. At present, parents have realized the importance of quality education as the only means to enhance the quality of life. They felt the need to educate both male and female children. The education of women is advancing without sex discrimination among the Anal people. Most of the girls know that without education their life will be difficult. In fact, in the past few years, Anal girls have performed better in the field of education than boys. Women have taken up various professions which was long being denied to them. There are a good number of teachers, nurses, police personnel, medical graduates, post graduates in various discipline. Many young girls have taken up jobs in

Government, Semi - Government and Private sector. This to a great extent has given them financial freedom as well as economic empowerment.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that their status has improved. Women are still deprived of inheritance rights under the customary laws. Similarly, their participation in the decision-making processes is still very low. No woman is allowed to be the head of the Traditional Institution till today.

It is well understood that all patriarchal structure demands that a wife should be subordinated to her husband. Whatever may be her educational status, it is restricted to challenge the authority of a man. Speaking about India women Kamala Devi pointed out that, "their world has been composed for centuries of traditional commitments which meant deep involvement in family, obligation to immediate need, individual problems; all of which may be turned 'root functions'. Where the women are also in profession, the burden grows even heavier, for these only become additional jobs, over and above the root functions". (Kamala Devi, 1983:6). The Anal women no exception to the above said situation, share the same burden with her other sisters from the rest of the Country.

9. THE FORMATION OF WOMEN ORGANISATION

Recognizing the need to create a common platform to voice women's issue, the first Anal Women Society was formed on the 20th November, 1955 (Veronica 2005:141). The pioneer leaders were mainly the first Christian converts among the Tribe. The main focus of the women organization was to preserve and promote art and culture and to proliferate the doctrine of Christianity and education. Unfortunately, the organisation could sustain only for few years since they did not have proper organisational structure. Moreover, it was difficult during those days to organise people from different villages due to difficult terrain and lack of resources.

With the need of time, the Women Organisation was once again reorganised on 20th January, 1994 under the banner of 'Anal Sinnu R_uwl' (ASR) Anal women's Union. Ms. Nula Khungam of Lamphou Pasma and Ms. RT Hringlun of Chandel Khubol were appointed as the first President and General Secretary respectively. On 24th February, 2003, under the Presidentship of Ms. RT Hringlun, and Dr. RD Samery, General Secretary, the Women Union could successfully draft its Constitution with the help of Dr. BD Thumdal and Mrs. ST Hringlum.

The Constitution of the Anal Sinnu R_uwl consists of the Preamble and twenty-four Articles. Under Article seven of the ASR Constitution, the aims and objectives of the Union shall be as follows-

- i. To uphold peace and prosperity
- ii. To stand for the rights of women
- iii. To promote the traditional values
- iv. To develop SELF so as to lead and live life meaningfully

This is an exclusive women organisation and the highest body for women with its Jurisdiction extending to the whole of Anal inhabited areas.⁶ The Motto of the Union is "Towards Peace, Unity, Prosperity and Rights of women".⁷ Every bona fide Anal woman is a primary member of the Union.⁸ The General Assembly is the highest decision making body.⁹ The organisation headed by the President and five other Executive Council members supervised the functioning of the organisation.¹⁰

The Anal Sinnu R_uwl has been conducting meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops from time to time to create awareness among the Anal women on their position and responsibilities in the society. The Anal Women Union also recognizes the significant role women played as peacemakers and create an atmosphere for peace and understanding among the different ethnic community and groups residing in Chandel District in particular and Manipur as a whole.

Since the time of its inception, the Anal Sinnu R_uwl has continuously voiced its concern with regard to Marriage, Domestic violence, Divorce, Property inheritance rights, inclusion of women in the Traditional Institution of the tribe, participation of women in the decision-making processes and many other social issues such as abolition of alcoholism, drug abuse which are rampant in the State. It has been observed that, in recent times the Anal Women Union has been playing multiple roles according to the situation. The women union has been relentlessly working together hand in hand with other civil society organisations of the Tribe such as Anal Naga Tāngpi the highest traditional apex body of the tribe, Anallon Chief Association, Anal Lelruwl Tāngpi (Anal Students Union), Anal Christian Forum and Anal Literature Society on issues concerning the Tribe. These organisations mentioned above are headed by men.

It is seen that though there is a gradual and modest change to include women's organisation in partnership with other traditional institutions, in many cases their representation is as 'observers'. Women cannot say and decide anything on important matters. They are mere partners in assisting their male counterparts. Perhaps, it is time for woman who have

the will and calibre, should be allowed to perform the works which man can perform. Merely on the basis of her sex and physical weaknesses, she cannot be denied the opportunity to serve.

10. CONCLUSION

The traditional socio-cultural and economic life of the Anal society is gradually ebbing away to be taken over by the influence of modernization. The traditional customs and cultural practices which were essential part of their socio-cultural life are replaced by Christian teachings and practices. Christianity and western education among the Anals have helped to uplift the status of women to some extent. Most of the people are realising the importance of promoting women's education. The result could be seen from the various occupations taken up by them. While accepting the fact that with education the status of women in Anal society is gaining higher position on one hand, they are still bounded by the traditional customary laws which made them to be wholly dependent on men.

Though efforts have been made to include participation of Anal Sinnu Ruwl (Anal Women's Union) in partnership with other traditional institutions of the tribe, yet they are still denied the privileges and opportunity enjoyed by men.

Women are still deprived of inheritance rights and participation in the decision-making processes no matter how educated they may be. It's time for Anal women to be given opportunity to take part in the administration of the village. Their presence is very much needed in various organisations. Because the absence of women's participation can lead to unfavourable decisions against women in male dominated societies. Lastly, legal provisions should be made to protect women in case of violence.

NOTES

1. Since the Anals belong racially to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongoloid race, it is believed that the migratory route of the Tribe is traced from Mongolia through China, Tibet and migrated to upper Burma of Kabaw valley in the trans Chindwin basin. Then they crossed Irrawady, Chindwin and Ningthi rivers. They moved towards Chin and Arakan Hills and proceeded towards Lusai Hills from where the Anals entered into Manipur State and finally settled in Chandel District situated in the South-Eastern part of Manipur. Though there are no relevant literature and recorded history of the migratory route of the tribe, it is supported by the Folk-songs and folk-lore.
2. Personally, collected the information from the concerned Office.
3. Chanang or Mosum clans include-Angpate, Bungdon, Chalkam, Chalkham, Chalkhum, Darpasun, Hanthat, Hrangbung, Hrangvol, Kethun, kharhlih, Kharpoh, Khular, Kolchung, Langhu, Lehing, Lenning, Lunkhu, Nangsel, Pahrang, Pakhiing, Pan, Pashel, Pari, Rangang, Rilang, Rituwn, Ruwndar, Sellah, Seltoh, Selto, Sinte, Seltun, Sinruwng, Sumpi, Thumhlin, Thumpaning, Wanglar Wanglum, Wangmatum, Wangmathung.
4. Kori or Murchal clans include- Bunghrang, Bungleh, Bunglel, Bungsong, Bungtong, Chaltung, Daryal, Haansu, Hrangliin, Hulang, Hutun, Inbung, Jasha, Kanthuwn, Kanthur, Khartol, Khuhring, Khumlo, Khuwnghe, Kolchal, Kolchung, Kolchor, Kollah, Kolngoh, Kollum, Kolzoh, Koltung, Lensung, Nula, Paya, Phangsong, Runlel, Ruwnglal, Ruwngtol, Sengul, Thuhsung, Tophung, Tongsin, Wango, Wangsol, Jongvum.
5. Prior to the advent of Christianity, the Anal tribe had their common burial ground/grave known as 'Chakoh Thānbum' according to their clan-cluster. The mortal remain of the same clan were buried in the same grave. The sharing of the grave was not possible. The closest family and kinship relationship of Anal society is reflected on the basis of Chakoh. The names of the Chakoh are- Hranghlu Chakoh, Turiim Chakoh. Mate Chakoh, Kholthu Chakoh, Sintaruwng Chakoh, Sello Chakoh and Bunghlim Chakoh.
6. See Article Two of the Anal Sinnu Ruwl (ASR) Constitution.
7. See Article Three of the Anal Sinnu Ruwl (ASR) Constitution.
8. Section 1(a) of Article eight of the Anal Sinnu Ruwl (ASR) Constitution.
9. Section A (viii) of Article sixteen of the Anal Sinnu Ruwl (ASR) Constitution.
10. Section 2 of Article thirteen of the Anal Sinnu Ruwl (ASR) Constitution.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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