

‘Subtle Discrimination’ of Women and Cultural Phrases within the Social Fabric of the Hmar Community in Manipur

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Abstract

The need for analyzing women’s status in tribal societies becomes crucial due to the absence of common ‘gender-discriminatory markers’ like female feticides, dowry, ‘purdah system’, etc. In the absence of these markers in tribal societies, women are often assumed to enjoy a higher status than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Hence, this paper explores and assesses the condition of tribal women, especially the Hmar women in Manipur, within the gendered social structured world they live in. This paper points out that cultural phrases like *Nuhmei I nikha!* (literal translation could be ‘You are a woman!’), *Nuhmeitete* (literal translation could be ‘Mere Woman’), *Nuhmeilungril a put* (literal translation could be ‘Heart/Outlook/ Temperament like a Woman’), act as hindrances to women’s emancipation. This paper is a part of my PhD fieldwork in 2017 in Churachandpur, Manipur where I undertook a semi-structured interview. In this paper, I have used autoethnography to describe and interpret the cultural phenomena under study and semi-structured interviews as my tools for data collection. The paper concludes by highlighting the necessity to analyze tribal women’s status based on their respective social fabric, instead of hastily labeling their status as ‘more empowered’ or ‘less empowered’ than others. It is indispensable to dive deep into the socio-cultural settings of the tribal societies to access their ‘true’ status. To comprehend the ‘subtle discrimination’ of Hmar women in the cultural phrases of the Hmar community, constant analysis and frequent checks on one’s attitude and re-socialization is required.

Keywords: Cultural Phrases, Hmar women, Manipur, Re-socialization, Tribal

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