

Changing Roles of the Maternal Uncle and Father in Khasi Matrilineal Society: An Inter-Generational Qualitative Study of Masculinity

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Abstract:

In most cultures, the alpha male represents the patriarchal ideal of masculinity. Traditional male roles in Khasi matrilineal society have been shaped by cultural concepts like *khatarbor*, literally 12 strengths. This study reviewed the evolving Khasi social system and its effect on masculinity from the viewpoint of adult males, and sought to determine if there were any inter-generational differences between the two age groups: >45 years (n=40), and 20-45 years (n=70) representing the older and younger generations. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted.

The older generation still believes in the traditional role of men, seeking respect through meeting their social and political responsibilities to their clan and to society, while domestic responsibilities are to be mostly fulfilled by the mother and her clan. According to them, the importance of men has now diminished, for example, the administrative and custodial role of the maternal uncle no longer exists with the breakdown of the clan structure and the rise of nuclear families. The younger generation of men seem to have accepted the new social formation and their broader role in the nuclear family, believing that fathers should share domestic responsibilities and show caring, love, and devotion.

The decline of the clan structure and the rise of nuclear families seemed to be viewed negatively by the older generation of men, who regret the reduction of male prestige, which has resulted in role conflict and low self-esteem, and which may have contributed to societal problems such as wife desertion, alcoholism and substance abuse.

Keywords: Matriliney, Masculinity, Maternal Uncle, Khasi

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