

The Wick

A Compilation on Women and Society



Editor :

Dr. Kanan Medhi Patgiri

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MASHREE HITESWAR SAIKIA COLLEGE
GUWAHATI, ASSAM

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Editorial ...

It will not be an exaggeration to state that problems and issues that women, irrespective of their social class and creed, face are not hidden from anyone. In fact, women's issues are one of the most hotly debated topics among academicians, policy makers, social activities, students and the masses. Annually, a host of books and journals are published as well as policies are framed that try to solve various problems and difficulties that women face. However, the circumstances have not changed much. Women are still widely discriminated against, in almost every sphere – be it economic, political, cultural, religious, social or legal. Many of these problems are well-documented and discussed. However, the question is, is it enough that these issues are being discussed? What about implementation? Are women's issues only research topics? These are some of the questions that are still remained unanswered.

The present volume is a contribution to the already rich academic field of women and gender related concerns that deal with numerous issues starting from women's empowerment, education, to that of widow re-marriage, sex work and marital rape. The writers have combined various theoretical perspectives with ethnographic narratives that try and denounce patriarchal arguments and justifications. Although the articles in this volume deal with one common issue – women – their concerns are different. As an editor, I have enjoyed reading each one of them and I hope that the reader will also find them very thought promoting and fertile. We decided to title our journal 'The Wick' keeping in mind the fact that just as without the wick, the candle or the lamp cannot burn; similarly, without women, this world cannot survive. Hence, it is imperative that women are given equal rights and opportunities in every sphere so that they can keep the world going. However, it is not only the duty of women to fight for their rights.

Men too must support them as women's well-being equally impacts them. On this hopeful note, let the wick light the world.

Dr.Kanan Medhi Patgiri
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RE-INTERPRETING MOAMARIYA REBELLION WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Nipon Panging

The Buranjis of the Ahoms recorded the Moamariya rebellion as a revolt of the Morans¹, most of whom were disciple of Mayamara Satra and known as Moamariyas or Mayamariyas. But soon it took the nature of a mass discontentment against the Ahom state machinery. The rebels fought against the state army and the first series of these rebels witnessed the defeat of the Ahoms and the capturing of the throne by the rebels. It totally shook the root of the state machinery and finally became one of the major reasons of the downfall of the Ahom manarchy². Scholars term the Mamariya rebellion as a mass uprising³, a class struggle⁴ etc. This paper will reinterpret the other side of the rebellion with a gender perspective through the citing of instances of women participation in the rebellion.

The study area being the middle ages witnessed the superiority of men over women in all respects of life. The womenfolk of Assam did not get the interest from the male recorder and hence they found no place in their writing of the past. But fortunately, the recorders unknowingly or unintentionally left certain valuable traces of the activities of women by which position of women could be ascertained in the society.

Queen Phuleswari, wife of Ahom king Siva Singha, was responsible for the outbreak of the Moamariya rebellion⁵. By taking the title of 'Bar Raja' or Chief King, Phuleswari become the in-charge of the state. She was originally a temple dancer and under the influence of Parvatiya Gosain and attempted to make saktism the state religion. The Queen performed Durga

Puja in the state ordered the Sudra Mahantas to bow before the goddess and to besmear their foreheads with the blood of the sacrificed animals. This insult to the Mayamara Mahanta made him furious against the state and he decided to take vengeance in the future which finally became as Moamariya rebellion.

The rebellion was raised by the Marans first the interestingly the wives of Nahar Khura, named Bhatuki and Bhabuli, who were later renamed as Radha and Rukmini as found in *charit puthis* took the leadership and refused the people of the state from entering their area and did not allow them to cut timbers openly and thus, declared a rebel against the Ahom. Radha and Rukmini fought against the royal army and it is said that they received bullets in their laps⁶.

Kuranganayani, the Manipuri queen of Rajeswar Singha and later of his brother Lakshmi Singha in whose reign the first Moamariya rebellion broke out, helped the Ahom loyalists to restore the Ahom Monarchy by taking part in a conspiracy against the Moamariyas. She was the first who wounded Raghav Maran, the Moamariya leader, with a sword.

The rebellion became a vengeance for the Ahom monarch and after the restoration, Ahom king ordered a mass murder of the Vaishnavas. The widows of the Vaishnavas moved to the north bank of the Brahmaputra and they too incited the people of the locality to rise against the state machinery. This is known as 'Stri-Vidruh' in *buranjis* and *charit puthis*⁷.

The instances of women association in the rebellion bear evidence to the view that women were not absent or passive observers in the society. The women of different position held their own status in the society through their active participation in very respect. The religious belief of Phulswari Kunwari for goddess Durga itself marked the power of women worship in the society. She, being the temple dancer gave a status to the Nati class and increased their importance in the society. The Natis were the bearer of dance and music of that time and hence culturally they were very advanced. Renaming of Bhatuki and Bhabuli as Radha and Rukmini shows the ideology and outlook towards the women in a vaishnavite society as Raha and Rukmini are associated with god Krishna or Vishnu. Neo-vaishnavism might propagate equality between men and women and hence the people accepted the two women as

their leaders. This shows the outlook of the vaishnava society towards women. Kuranganayani proved that when given the opportunity and power, women could take part in political matters even in worst situation. The widows' rebel revealed the position of widows in the society and the social response towards them. A study on gender relation and gender history in Assam with the above instances reveal the real position and social outlook towards women during the Ahom period.

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