



GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI: MATRIARCHY AND FEMINIST FAMILY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Greek Mythology explains Amazons, a race of warrior women who refused to live with men. To sustain their survival, they visited the neighbouring tribe, once a year. The sole purpose of this visit was to satisfy their sexual pleasure with the male inmates (known as Gargareans). Having read this, most of us are likely to conclude that Matriarchy would mean sperm stealing, and spear snapping. However, anthropologists time and again stressed that matriarchy is not the opposite of patriarchy. A matriarchal society is one where a woman is not disadvantaged because of their identity. Gangubai Kathiawadi, the matriarch of Kamathipura, is a young woman betrayed into commercial sex-work, who fights for opportunities for fellow commercial sex workers and their children. The story of Gangubai Kathiawadi is not only a reflection of matriarchy but also reflects elements of feminist family theories. Feminists are of the view that contemporary families are not only realms of choices but also realms of constraint. Gender hierarchy in our society has led to sexual dominance and violence. In this paper, a case study methodology, through the journey of Gangubai, I hope to draw parallels between her experiences and Matriarchy and Feminist Family Theory.

KEYWORDS : Hierarchy, Feminism, Matriarch.

INTRODUCTION:

"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women", said Maya Angelou. A society that is led by the female member is called matriarchy and the female head is called matriarch. While I was gathering resources for this paper, I read a website state the concept of matriarchy to be a "hypothetical social system." Thus a society based on matriarchal principles may sound unfathomable to many of us. However, history suggests otherwise.

Matriarchal societies have always have existed throughout centuries. Matriarchy, unfortunately, is understood as woman controlling and lording over society. In other words, matriarchy is falsely understood to be the opposite of patriarchy. Matriarchy is one where woman are not disadvantaged because of their identity. Heidi Goettner, the founder of the International academy HAGIA for modern Matriarchal studies said "the aim is not have power over others, but to follow maternal values, i.e., to nurture the natural, social and cultural life based on mutual respect."

J. J. Bachofen began the modern debate about matriarchy with his book on "mother right," in which he said that one early social formation was a family which traced descent through the mother, and in which "government of the state was also entrusted to the women". Bachofen developed a three-stage model: In the barbaric or hetaeristic stage (from the Greek hetero, meaning both), men and woman were described as individuals with lack of ,and people engaged in indiscriminate sexual activity, worshipping Aphrodite and valuing the erotic above all else. This set was tiresome for woman and they gathered together for their own defence.

This led to the creation of Matriarchy, in which Artemis and Athena emerged as the main deities. Agriculture was developed during this period, and so were the stories of Amazons and Furies. Bachofen argued that "matriarchal people feel the unity of all life, the harmony of the universe" (p. 79), and embraced a philosophy of "regulated naturalism" in which maternal love was the basis of all social ties. In the final stage, he explains the battle between Zeus and Titans, which elaborates about the mythical historical transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. Friedrich Engels developed his version of this theme in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), arguing that matriarchy developed from a situation of group marriage, in which

paternity was uncertain so only female blood lines could be traced reliably. Early human societies were presumed to have been egalitarian, and inequality stemmed with the emergence of private property, which further gave birth to patriarchy. The early twentieth century saw the demise of the term matriarchy, a victim both of the tendency to confuse it with exclusive female rule and the exhaustion of the evolutionary paradigm. While the anthropological description may have fallen out of existence, it remains current as a concept in feminism. In feminist literature, matriarchy and patriarchy aren't viewed as mirrors of one another. Feminist theorists agree that gender is socially constructed and that these roles are learned than being determined by biology. Since the 1950s' feministfamily theorists are working on understanding matriarchal and patriarchal influence on family dynamics.

While Gangubai is known for her efforts in fighting for the rights of commercial sex worker and legalisation of commercial sex work, she also fought for the rights of girls education and single woman rights. This makes it very imperative to understand her character through the lens of matriarchy and feminist family theory.

METHODOLOGY:

Research Question

Understanding Gangbai Kathiawadi from the lens of matriarchy and family theory (feminist/Bowens)

Objectives

In this study, we are going to be understanding

- Matriarchal influences on Gangubai's character
- Feminist Family Theory

Interpretive Framework

Ontology: The ontological position held by the study is constructionism.

Epistemology: The epistemological position of the study is interpretivism.

Axiology: The study uses the Hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition which looks upon social action as being meaningful to actors and therefore needing to be interpreted from their point of view within that context.

Methodology: The study follows an deductive logic and an emergent design.

Research Strategy/ Approach

The design adopted for this study is descriptive, single case study. I have drawn parallels between Gangubai's experiences and theories to refine our understanding of patriarchy and feminist family theory.

Data analysis

Thematic Analysis has been used to analyse the data referred from the "queens of mafia" book written by Hussain Zaidi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

While most of us are aware of Gangubai as a commercial sex worker, we are less likely to pay attention to her character that reflects patriarchy and feminist family approaches. In the introduction, I briefed about JJ Bachofen's work on patriarchy. Further patriarchal societies can be categorised into,



On the economic level, matriarchies are most often agricultural societies. Under such systems, goods are distributed according to a system thus preventing accumulation of resources by one person or special group. Although, Kamthipura (the red light area ruled by Gangubai) wasn't an agricultural society, she fought for an egalitarian approach. Whether it was celebrations or education of woman she made sure to make them accessible to all the members of the Kamthipura zone. On the social level, matriarchies are trusted upon union of extended clan. Kinship is acknowledged in the female line. These matri-clans are self-supporting groups. This sphere is only influenced by patterns of marrying, termed mutual marriage between clans. Although, mutual marriage isn't applicable to kamathipura, we cannot negate that the zone thrived on female kinship and self-supportance. While reading Gangubai's narrative, after the death of Sheela Maasi (the governance of the brothel), unanimously Gangubai was requested to take over.

From the political criteria, patriarchy refers to egalitarian societies of consensus. This means everyone has a voice and decisions are drawn after hearing each one. The narratives around Gangubai are standing example, that she was a very political matriarch. While she had established her rule over Kamathipura, she gets to know that a young girl named "Madhu" isn't cooperating with brothel guidelines. She is starved and punished across in various ways to work as a sex worker. When Gangubai intervened, she heard Madhu's side of the experience as well before arriving at a decision.

Similarly in the Asaad, she fought for the rights of sex workers. Children of the sex workers were condemned from receiving education. Sex workers did have access to medical care. She voiced for it all and ensured to create an egalitarian space for the members from the red zone. She not only fought for legalising commercial sex work, she fought for the rights of single woman and female empowerment. While that may explain the patriarchy Gangubai has been, I have also attempted to understand her character from the lens of feminist family approach.

During the Victorian era, naturalist Charles Darwin elucidated on man's evolution. Early feminists such as Blackwell were dissatisfied with female sex being described as "unevolved". The Sexes throughout Nature (1875),

Blackwell took issue with the presentation of the male sex in evolutionary theory as an unquestioned ideal against which all other sexes (e.g., female and hermaphroditic) were measured. "Current physiology," she complained, "seems to be grounded on the assumption that woman is undersized man, with modified organs and special but temporary functions, which like other abnormal activities are a direct deduction from the normal human energy"(1875, 233). Calling upon women to make use of the resources they had, rather than wait for society to change in their favour, Blackwell encouraged women to bring their own knowledge to the study of biology.

Whilst that happens to be the origin for gender roles and differences from the biological space, early take on feminist family approach was concerned with woman oppression that woman was facing. The two dominant arguments were

- Socialising girls to accept subservient roles
- Socialising woman to take up only "housewife" role for woman hood.

Feminist approach today has branched out into three and each of these branches have explained their approach in the realm of family dynamics.



Liberal Feminism

This is the variety of feminism that works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure. Its roots stretch back to the social contract theory of government instituted by the American Revolution. Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft were there from the start, proposing equality for women.

Radical Feminism

Provides the bulwark of theoretical thought in feminism. Radical feminism provides an important foundation for the rest of "feminist flavors". Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. This term refers to the feminist movement that sprung out of the civil rights and peace movements in 1967-1968. The reason this group gets the "radical" label is that they view the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system. Thus they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system. Socialist feminism is the result of Marxism meeting radical feminism. While that explains the different facets of feminist approaches, these were also applied in family dynamics. The Feminist theory focuses on gender role which is essential in the family because each individual that makes up that family has to make certain contributions in other for the family to function.

Shulamith Firestone in her book *The Dialectic of Sex* (1972) opines that the material basis for the inequality between men and women is produced within the biological family. The family requires that women are dependent on men, and children on adults, for their survival. This pattern of dependence according to her gives rise to a "psychological pattern of dominance submission" (1972, p.45).

Growing up Gangubai dreamt of entering the movie business. Unfortunately the man who promised her to help her achieve her dream, sold her off to the business of commercial sex work. He promised her a world of love and deceived her off that as well. Coming from an academic family, Gangubai decided not to return back and was also being gaslit by Sheela maasi on how families won't welcome woman who have been to brothels. The soft spoken girl she is described as, makes her fellow woman her family. She is described to have transformed into a feminist who fought for the rights of her fellow members. Oppression which is seen as a central phenomenon of feminist family approaches, was a major battle ground for Gangubai. It was concluded that consent isn't required for sex workers. Gangubai fought for various challenges. "A social worker from the area who was initially sheltered by Gangubai, describes her as 'the queen of Kamathipura'. Even today, framed pictures and statuettes of Gangubai are there in the brothels of Kamathipura." (Excerpt From, Mafia Queens of Mumbai, Zaidi, Hussain S). This gives us an understanding of Gangubai through the lens of Matriarchy and Feminist Family approaches.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

This case study helped to look at Gangubai through the lens of matriarchy and feminist family dynamics, beyond commercial Sex work.

Limitations and Future scope of the study:

I have analysed only one case to draw inferences. The inferences are based on secondary data. Future studies can focus on understanding Gangubai through attachment lens and gender roles. Studies can also be conducted, interviewing commercial sex workers to understand how these phenomenon's play out.

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