

Marriage – Bane or Boon: A Gendered Perceptive through the Lens of Monalisa Changkija, Temsula Ao and Nini Lungalang’s Poetic Art

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Abstract

Monalisa Changkija, Dr. Temsula Ao and Nini Lungalang addresses gender inequality through their poetic output wherein is portrayed the clarity of patriarchal prejudices towards gender parity. Through their poems, they raise consciousness to the need of a breakthrough from the many archetype images and expectations of gender identity. This paper is contrived with the intent to study the perception of the poets who writes from a socio-cultural set up which is deeply wedged in patriarchal tenets and customs and how brazenly they depict the dynamics of Gender relationship through the lens of marital Institution.

Key Words: gender parity, patriarchal, Gender relationship, archetype, marital Institution

Monalisa Changkija, Temsula Ao and Nini Lungalang come from the society of Nagaland that is stridently drawn along Patriarchal lines. Nagaland by nature of it being a traditional patriarchal society, its people has continued to hold its cultural customary practices as the core of their living system regulating their social and domestic life, in the realms of which women are relegated to an entity of the subaltern. The Naga Society despite traversing from the traditional past to the modern time, the persistence of patriarchy in its pristine state have continued to consciously perpetuate Gender Inequalities where the clarity of patriarchal prejudices towards gender roles is unmistakable and its spin-off is that despite paradigm shift of social development the strategic position of both the man and the woman remains unchanged. Monalisa Changkija in her essay entitled *The Naga Marriage* opines that, “However educated, exposed and enlightened, Naga men and Naga society have not abandoned our patriarchal core. Now, as far as Naga women are

concerned, this means that they have to meet the demands and dictates of both traditional Naga society as well as that of the modern market.” (Changkija 80). This paper is contrived with the intent to study the perception of the poets writing from a place deeply wedged in patriarchal tenets and customs and how brazenly they depict the dynamics of Gender relationship through the lens of marital Institution.

“Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) ushered in a new era of thinking about woman’s position in society, and it has become a classic of feminist philosophy. De Beauvoir (1908-86) offered a new understanding of social relations between men and women.” (Jenainati 82). Simone de Beauvoir opines that tradition expects woman to consider marriage as her destiny and she writes, “Marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity; women have never constituted a caste establishing exchanges

and contracts on an equal footing with men. Man is a socially autonomous and complete individual” (Beauvoir 452). She further opines that Marriage for man, “is advantageous to unload some of the chores onto woman; the man himself wishes to have a stable sexual life, he desires posterity, and society requires him to contribute to its perpetuation.”(ibid 452).

C. Pateman in her book, *The Sexual Contract* argues, “In the marriage contract, for example, men gain rights of access to women’s bodies and to their labour as housewives and mothers. Although changes in law mean that wives now have a recognized legal existence independent of their husbands, the wedding custom of a bride being ‘given away’ by her father to her husband acts to reproduce the sexual contract, as does the tendency for most married women to take on the family name of their husband, rather than retain their own.” (Pilcher & Whelehan 153). All the three poets addresses this notion of the marriage contract by painting it through the dark reality of the devilry dowry practice which have women objectified denigrating them into materialistic acquisition commodities. In such kind of marital contract the plight of women is reduced to ashes if she is unable to provide her price; for her value is gauged according to the amount dowry. Over this issue, Temsula provokes the thoughts and hearts to a deep questioning of the culture of dowry. She endorses the fact that oppression with its myriad faces challenges the existence of a gender fair society. The poet talks about an incidence of dowry death in the poem *Requiem?* In the poem, the woman becomes a hopeless victim of avarice but the bitter reality is that it will merely be another accident

accompanied with no sign of compunction. Recompense for the man is Freedom and the man scuttles to *rehearsing for another round of phera*. And so the poet Temsula laments for the women in grievous apprehension:

Who will mourn?
Mothers and Fathers
Millstones with daughters?
Or daughters who are simply
born? (BoS 41)

In an almost mystical connection to the poem *Requiem?*, Nini Lungalang bridges it with her poem carrying the same title *Requiem for ‘I’*. It is as if the poet here is mourning together with her compatriot bard Temsula over the death of the pitiable woman in *Requiem?* Nini puts the woman to rest in peaceful death from a life that was led in ‘anger and tears..’ and so she says,

And so, dear one, sleep,
I do not gridge your rest,
And wake, when you will,
To a finer, plane of living
In peace. (Lungalang 34)

On a more sagacious note, Temsula dwells on a type of contractual approach to marriage institution in her poems *Man to Woman* and *Woman to Man*. In *Man to Woman*, the man haggles his side of the case to courting the woman into marriage with him. In so doing, the man flickers alive, the otherwise vainly amorous desires of the woman’s heart with tactful use of flattery through which Temsula clearly demarcates the distinctive roles of both the men and the women in the institution of marriage. The woman’s place is, at the loom. Besides the fire-side and besides the passionate connotation to the proposal, the man also promises to carry out that which

is his responsibility, to provide for the woman and *build a new house*. In the poem, the man says *I want you by my fire-side* in exchange of his promise- *For I am an honest hard-working farmer who will always cherish his daughter*. Perhaps then in a marriage, the woman has a servitude nature of function where she is to service the man and the society with procreation. It is to the responsibility of the woman to satisfy the male's sexual needs and to take care of the household in exchange of the man's support and his gifts or a marriage settlement.

Validating to Simone de Beauvoir's opinion that, "in primitive times, the clan, the paternal gents, treats her almost like a thing; she is part of payments to which two groups mutually consent and that for a long period the contracts were signed between father-in-law and son-in-law not between husband and wife. Thereby, a girl's free choice was highly restricted and celibacy-except in rare cases where it bears a sacred connotation – ranked her as a parasite and pariah; marriage was her only means of survival and only justification of her existence. Beauvoir goes on to say that, "Even civilizations that ignore the father's generative role demand that she be under the protection of a husband; and she also has the function of satisfying the male's sexual needs and caring for the home." (Beauvoir 452), Tamsula too gives the readers a glimpse to the miniscule role played by women in marriage talks and agreements. The execution and decisions becomes man's prerogative which gets highlighted in lines:

When the time is right
My maternal uncle will bring
my offer in the night

So tell your mother to tell your
father

To accept my offer (BoS 288)

In *Woman to Man*, the woman speaks in preference to the marriage proposal of the simple yet hardworking and honest man over the other seemingly better proposal. The poet paints the picture of the woman where she readily and happily acknowledges her domestic role in exchange of the promised passionate love of the simple man. Marriage thusly painted by Tamsula is quite an ideal contract wherein fixed notions on gender relationship is deeply drenched in the psyche of both the male and female gender to the point that it almost appears to be a natural thing and quite crucial to maintain and sustain a blissful gender relationship seen through the portrayal of marriage. Symbolically, the woman's consent in lines below portrays the deep attitudinal consensus to the differentiated gender relational dynamics:

That his daughter prefers
The house of Bamboo and thatch
Where the bonfire of our hearts
Will shame the flames of the hearth
And in that house I shall place
My precious loom (292)

Beauvoir considers marriage, "to be obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations, which should be founded on spontaneous urge." (Bhagwat 112). If Beauvoir considers marriage to be obscene as far as it transforms into rights and duties which otherwise should be actually based on spontaneous urge between the man and woman, Monalisa paints the institution of marriage to be a totally lopsided arrangement where every right belongs to

the man and every duty belongs to the woman in line with what Simone de Beauvoir says that marriage institution becomes a space where the woman is “integrated as slave or vassal into the family group dominated by fathers and brothers, has always been given in marriage to males by other males.” (Beauvoir 452).

Marriage as proposed by Temsula in her poems *Man to Woman* and *Woman to Man* which should be founded on the idea of mutuality and love gets out rightly negated with its polarity of utter dishonor manifesting into torturous indenture on the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the woman with the man becoming a dangerous perpetrator to her very existence reducing marriage to a sort of legit display of the men’s physical prowess over the woman as penned by Monalisa as thus:

Violence-induced miscarriages,
Black-eyed and bloodied-lips
Blue-bruises and broken- ribs
Within the sanctity of marriages
And security of homes... (WWPP 7)

Changkija writes that “Naga women have not attained equality in today’s Naga marriage simply because our society and our males have not abandoned the foundation and roots of our existence – patriarchy.” (CFABD 80). The modern marriage today even though not strictly ruled by traditional exchanges, is still governed by a society where ancient structures and values still survive. Perhaps, the same thought urges Beauvoir to state that even, “modern marriage can be understood only in light of the past it perpetuates.” (Beauvoir 451). In *Just So You Know That....* Changkija interrogates into the binary dynamics of gender

relationship about marriage poetizing it as below:

So we live islands unto ourselves
Submerging totally into
The lives of our Best Halves,
As if we never have our own
Or had before our marriage vows.
But yet we allow
Matrimony to consume our past,
Present and future
And surrender to it without queries.
(WWPP 41)

Therefore, the poets advocates that the better way is to live as islands unto ourselves with is compared to ‘paradise’ instead of being treated as ‘animals’ and ‘servants’ for the sake of being in a marriage:

‘Walking alone
Through the
Passage of time
And falling into
The abyss of
The irredeemable
Would be paradise,
Than living in
“Sacred matrimony”
With anyone
Who sees no
Difference between
Animals, servants
And wives (9)

Idealistic passion of love in the swathe of romantic relationships comes under serrated ironical whip of the poet. Futility of yearning for a man’s love never to be reciprocated is caught in the versification of the poem *After the Party* by Nini Lungalang. Nini Lungalang harmonizes with her compatriot bard Monalisa who draws the realistic sharp line of distinction to women’s position pre and post marriage

where she verbalizes on how a female's identity and freedom gets extinct post marriage and she step into invisibility over-shadowed by the man. Lungalang too whips up a lamentable visage of marriage in her poem *Anniversary Celebrations*. She caricatures marriage as a phony defunct institution which is portrayed as merely a vilification quarter of two separate souls glued together for trepidation of societal stigmatic backlash. She views marriage as "a compound-duple contrapuntal pulse" (Lungalang 23) and she poetizes marriage as thus:

We think in different languages now.

What is it to you, then,
If I should leave or not?
For even in our deepest moments
You and I are always separate.
(TMY 22)

Conclusion: The artistic sweep of the poets in focus burrow deep into the root cause of gender inequality and they

identify marriage contract as one of the crux to the matter of harboring and perpetuance of gender quandaries. All the poets prove accurate to that, "Feminist literature highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women—the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender" (Kumar 9). As female poets belonging to the same existential social set up surmised around gender predicaments, they all write with deep insight and dexterity from the perspective of one with experiential knowledge of women being discriminated in varied forms through the cover of marriage. Through their poetic sensibilities, the poets in focus brilliantly portray their commitment to gender equality and unveil their deeply felt concern and speak out for women in a quest to locate women's fair share of identity in the whole paradigm of gender equity.

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