



Effects of Polyandry System in Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi's SONAM

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ABSTRACT:

The present paper attempts to focus on the effects of polyandry system in Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi's famous novel Sonam. The novel is basically concerned with the native Monpa culture of Arunachal Pradesh which evinces social conflicts and tension prevalent in the Monpa tribe. Though feminism has given freedom to women to come out from the age old customs & tradition of patriarchy, they remained chained in the clutches of men in the age of globalization also. Polygamy and polyandry customs are responsible for the social conflicts in the Monpas. The novel has a hopeful message that every human beings should treat with love, kindness, sympathy, courage, emotions etc. and allows them to live peacefully as a human being.

KEYWORDS:

Polyandry, Monpa, Feminism, Customs, Tradition, Globalization, Patriarchy

INTRODUCTION:

Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi was born in 1952 in Arunachal Pradesh who is a prolific writer of great capability and merit and a winner of Sahitya Academy Award in Assamese. His famous novels are Sonam and Mauna Outh Mukhar Hriday (Silent lips, Murmuring Heart). After his retirement as an IAS Officer, he has been actively engaged in literary and creative works.

As a creative writer of deep social commitment Thongchi uses Assamese language to evince the specific feature of his native land, Arunachal Pradesh. Sonam was originally written in Assamese and translated into English by Mridula Borooah in 2001. The primary basis of this novel was the oral narrative that Thongchi heard from a certain person called Sonam Tsering. The novelist focuses on the way of tribal life, their customs, beliefs, marital relationship, polyandry system and its effects in society.

“A culture does not allow itself to look clearly at the obvious through the universal accessibility of art is a culture of tragic delusion, hardly viable” (Cynthia Ozick 450)

Polandry system involves the practice of two or more men sharing a common wife like Draupadi in The Mahabharata shared by five Pandavas. It was a common traditional practice among the Monpa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh which creates social conflicts & tension among these communities. The novel depicts such feminist issues as gender, sexuality and polyandry system which affects the life of Monpa tribe. Polygamy and polyandry systems are widely accepted in the Brokpa community where a woman is socially allowed to marry more than one man is the conventional custom around which the story of the novel revolves.

Sonam is a feminist, woman centric novel. Sonam, the central character, chooses to have two men in her life because her husband Lobjang has to live away from home for long time to earn for the family. It is a difficult task for any woman like Sonam to kill all her desires in the darkness of night and she decides to opt for a second husband in absence of Lobjang that leads to conflict, tragedy, sufferings and reconciliation etc.

Lobjang, the major character of the novel and husband of Sonam, is a young shepherd of Brokpa, resident of the Sakteng village but spends most of his time in the animal farm (Broke) at the top of the choksum hills. Lobjang always wants to meet his young & beautiful wife Sonam whom he loves better than anything else in the world. He desires to take her to the farm but due to community restrictions and complications he is not able to do that.

When Lobjang found Sonam's illegal relationship with Pema Wangchu he broke inwardly as he loved her from the bottom of his heart. But what should Sonam do? She innocently pleaded and expressed her sorrows with the following reply:

“What wrong have I done? It's me who sleeps alone every day and finding me staying all alone in the house the boys of village come and trouble me all the time” (Thongchi 20).

Though Lobjang became too angry towards Sonam's affair with Pema, he kept himself as peaceful as he was a true lover of Buddhism and finally unwillingly accepted the rules of polandry customs. No man in the world can accept his wife who has to opt second husband when he is alive. It is too panic and pitiable for Lobjang and Sonam also.

Lobjang's absence in the house forced Sonam to opt for the company of another man Pema Wangchu who satisfied her thirst physically and emotionally. Youths of the village were eager to take advantage of Sonam's loneliness. As a silent and suffering woman Sonam craves for the fulfilment of her sexual desires. The result is that she involved in illicit relationship with Pema. Though Pema Wangchu belonged to different caste, through polyandry customs Pema has to be accepted as a co-husband of Sonam. The village hierarchy played a vital role in deciding the matrimonial relationship of people in the Brokpa society. There are some traditional laws of the polyandry system which controlled the life & destiny of the Brokpa community.

“Secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universal, a pan-cultural fact” (Sherry Ortner 1998: 21)

As per polyandry system Sonam is divided into two husband Lobjang and Pema Wanhchu when one is in the home, second is in the farm. But when two husband remained in the house whom Sonam will allow to fulfil her desires. Once, it is happened. Lobjang was lying alone in one corner of the room and Sonam and Pema shared the same bed sleeping together happily. In such direction polyandry system failed to solve such problem. Happy family life of Lobjang has broken into pieces. Though both loved each other, Lobjang’s continual absence from his beloved young wife proved responsible to opt for co-husband for Sonam. In contrary Pema Wangchu was lusty and hungry sexually. He wanted to suck every drop of nectar from Sonam’s young and beautiful body. Pema also wanted some part of property from Lobjang as he borrowed money from Ngawang and sold one of Lobjang’s cow to pay his debts.

Finally the polyandry system depends on faith, devotion, responsibility, mutual understanding and coordination of each and everyone. As we have different faces, how can we have same thinking and understanding? Both Lobjang and Pema Wangchu are different characters by nature. One is suffering, second is enjoying.

Lobjang mostly believed that some better things will happen to him. He is optimistic towards life that again Sonam will come back to him while leaving Pema Wangchu forever. After Pema’s entry in their family Lobjang suffered intensely. He remained calm in such difficult time while believing in Budha’s teachings that man is responsible for his suffering and only he will come out from such difficulties & hardships believing that alls will be well again.

“Struggles for women’s emancipation were an essential and integral part of national resistance movements” (K. Jayawardena 1986: 8)

Sonam’s sudden death was a great loss and disaster in Lobjang’s life who left two children for him. In such period of dilemmatic situations, such changes came in the sorrowful life of Lobjang. The arrival of Tsering Dolma, the sister of Sonam in the barren life of Lobjang proved a rays of hope in the shadows of his frustrated life. Tsering Dolma decided to reconstruct the broken world of her sister. In her new world there would be her sister’s children, Lobjang and she herself. There would never be any place for Pema Wangchu. Revolutionary, she broke the rules of polyandry system while deciding not to commit the same mistake like her sister Sonam. She realized the value and importance of being a woman. As a rebel, Tsering Dolma came to know that the polyandry system can not provide a useful and proper solution to men and women of the Brokpa community. The novel has a hopeful message through the revolutionary views & spirit of Tsering Dolma as against the views of what Lord Tennyson remarked.

“Man for the field and

Woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and

For the needle she”

CONCLUSION:

Through this famous novel Sonam, the novelist, Yashe Dorjee Thongchi focuses on the marital status and effects of polyandry system in the Brokpa community.

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