

Portrayal of Women in Classical Brahui Fiction: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

This research leads and unfolds a discussion or discourse to evaluate the Brahui society in general and the Brahui classical literature in particular. All over the world, in the history or in present times, societies have deeper impact and footprints on the relevant literatures.

Brahui society in its make and appearance is also a tribal society, having patriarchal, patrilineal and hierarchical bases in its very foundation. This nature of society and set of values have effect on almost every subject of study and life. Take a politics, power structure, social structure, values, justice system; economy and literature specially the classical fiction, there is deep influence of patriarchy. Majority of writers and traditionalists advocate that whatever is being produced in the name of literature is the reflection of society and prevailed values. Raising questions of gender balance and female emancipation is like inviting social wrath. Tribal values, conservative thinking and following the prevailed code of society have almost become belief or sacred thing to adhere with. Modern and growth oriented societies review their ideas, intellectual evolution and learning through critical appreciations and balanced analysis. But in case of Brahui literature there is stagnation and very little need had been showed so far to tune it with gender equality and progressive thought process. In this study, we are going to evaluate the portrayal or standing of women in Brahui classical literature specially the fiction. The topic gives a bird's eye view to scholarship the overall birth of Brahui classical literature, its subjects, gender balances/imbances and its role as basic resource of understanding social construct of society.

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Introduction

Brahui is considered to be one of the oldest languages of sub-continent. Brahui speaking people are found in Balochistan, Sindh, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Iran. The 2016, 19th edition of Ethnologue reports that there are some 2.43 million speakers; out of which 2.21 million live in Pakistan, mainly in the province of Balochistan. Kalat and Mastung Divisions of Balochistan are predominantly Brahui speaking areas. Sarawani, Jhalawani, Rakhshani and Sindhi are four prevailing dialects of Brahui spoken by the common people. Sarawani is considered to be literary dialect, adopted in literature and syllabus of the language taught in educational institutions. There are different theories about the age and origin of Brahui language. Even Brahui researchers have diversified opinions about Brahui language. Following three major theories are largely circulated and debated, besides other less important concepts regarding the origin of Brahui Language:

- a. Dravidian Theory.
- b. Indo-European or Indo –Aryan Theory.
- c. Turrani (Scythian) Theory.

Though Brahui's are largely considered to be one of the oldest proto Dravidian races in sub-continent that separated from their main Dravidian ancestors some 4 thousand years B.C, yet their written literary history is very much latest. However, there is no scientific and authentic research available to stand for this claim that Brahui's are decedent of Dravidian race. There is still room of great debate and scientific evidence to prove Brahui's as Dravidian or pioneers of early Baloch migration, which journeyed to this part of land. Written or countable literary work of Brahui language dates back from the advent of Kalat State (1622A.D) and then after the fall of Kalat state in the hands of British conquerors (1843). Difference of opinion on the evolution and periodicity of Brahui Literature persists among researchers and historians, however a vast majority is agreed on following three periods of Brahui Literature:

- a. First Period (Folk Literature)
- b. Second period written Literature (From 1309 to 1947)
- c. Third period modern Era (from 1947 till date)

There is big jump and missing link between all three periods of Brahui literature. Almost entire treasure of classical fiction was based on the oral

tradition and every generation memorized and transferred it to next generation. Like most of the languages and literatures of the Sub-continent, the credit of compiling, publishing and reproducing Brahui literature goes to British and other western researchers.

“European writers and researchers like Sir Hennery Pottinger, R. leech, Captain Nicolson, T.G.L Mayor, Grierson and Sir Denys Bray had great contribution in compiling and shaping old Brahui prose, Grammar and Folk Literature.” (Brahui. 2015)

However, the work of compilation of this folk literary treasure started in the end of nineteenth century. European researchers not only collected many Brahui folk songs and folk stories but got published these in research journals and through books. Abbot T.G.L Mayor, Major R. Leech, Dinkies Dixie and Denys Bray are among those notable European historians. Among local researchers, one young man Hafiz Sultan Ahmed gathered many folk songs and published through several articles. Afterwards, famous Brahui researcher Dr. Abdul Rehman Brahui played very pivotal role in compilation and preservation of Brahui folk stories, proverbs, similes and metaphors. In the last quarter of 20th century, Traveller and researcher Afzal Mengal got published half a dozen books on Brahui folk songs and folklores.

Literature Review

There are instances of several studies in other local and international literatures on the topic of patriarchy and its influence on literature. Unfortunately, in Brahui literature no such approach has been adopted so far. Only few writers have crossed the limits from the traditional to modern day and unusual subjects. In this connection the work and research of Professor Jawed Akhter, is the first ever milestone leading to travel on this kind of literary trail? His books, “*Brahui Adab Ka Naya Tanazur (2002)*” “*Brahui Adab Ka Samaji Pasmanz (2003)*”, “*Brahui Adab Main Mutaliay(2007)*” and “*Brahuiyaat-(2012)*” are basic instigators for this article and first mile stone for a way to this kind of literary discourse. The book “*Balochistan ka Adab aur Khawateen (2006)*” compiled by Dr. Shah Muhammad Marri and Fatima Hasan is yet another effort to give strength to need of this subject. Several other books in Brahui literature help to understand the subject and provide plenty of stuff for the fulfilment of study. Yet these books are directly not written for that purpose but carry enough matter to justify patriarchal Nature of classical Brahui literature.

Much has been written on Brahui literature, but major portion of that work is in Brahui Language whereas, very little has been written for the readers other than Brahui's. No researcher focuses on the submissive role of women as alive

in the female figures of the Brahui classical literature. The feminist perspective on the subject seems near to nothing. Therefore, this research article is an attempt to fill the research gap and it will hopefully motivate the research scholars on the subject. This is a qualitative study based upon documented and character analysis of females portrayed in the Brahui classical fiction.

. Debate and Discussion

In the beginning Brahui speaking population was mostly tribal and of nomadic nature. Their profession was shepherdery. That is why Brahui's were unaware of the skill of writing. The search for meadows and vast grazing lands was sole enticement that moved them from one place to another. In that period of time most of their feelings, aspirations, ideas and expressions were verbal. After long and exhausting journeys, when they sat together with some sigh of relief, they used to share experiences and stories. Women used to sing folk songs to express their feeling whatsoever, happy or sad. In that period, poetry, which appeared as a powerful form of expression also existed as oral tradition. Different forms of poetry such as, *Barnazna, Lailimorr, Maaling, Laday lay laday, Lori, Sozo, Zahiri, Halohalo, Kelodah, Laeko, Lal na dana, Changal and Modaewere* patronized. (Beedar, 2015).

Besides folk poetry and songs a big number of folk stories are also available in Brahui literature for last many centuries. These old pieces of prose are mainly based on short stories, tales, quizzes and metaphors. Story telling has remained foremost attraction of tribal gathering through centuries.

According to Dr. Abdul Rehman Brahui,

*“ Tan Naal, Jaato, King and Farmer, Carpenter and his Nephew, Bahadur Khan, Talkhu, Magician Beggar, Four Stupid Brothers, Four Friends, Search of Husband, two Thugs, Secret, Callous Aunty, Step Mother, Step Mother and Step Daughter, Princess, Wise wife, Deception of Women, Beggar, Treasured Fairy, Lakhmir Dacoit, MulaMansoor, Lal Badshah and Bibi Kabotar and Sale of Dead bodies are some major classical stories that has great impact on Brahui life ,thinking and overall behavior of the society.”*Brahui. 2015)

In order to study and evaluate Brahui literature, it is important that we should know the Brahui society, its value system and above all thinking, of which literature is an outcome over the centuries. The Brahui's have become largely sedentary, but traditionally they are nomadic in nature. Their journey and nomadic nature was developed in many centuries following the search of pasture and grasslands for their herds.

“Nomadic Brahuis still live in “Gidan”, a black blanket like tent, mostly made of goat hair, supported by rainbow shaped flexible wooden poles. This tent “Gidan” can easily be shifted from one place to another when it is required.”(Sabir 2012).

We can observe from the tribal formation that it is very much based on patriarchal rules and there is no room for any women to hold any office in tribal organization. Brahui culture is the set of certain customs, traditions, values and common practices. Though, a largenumber of Brahuists have become sedentary and living in cities, towns and villages rather than nomadic life, but they are still adhered to their roots and customs mainly outcome of their primitive nomadic life. In general women are the creators and saviors of these customs and rituals in the society, but there are very few customs, which favour women.

Denys Bray (2014) writes in the preface of his book as under:

“The Brahuists are scattered over a wide stretch of country. Little as we know of their early history, we know that they are not of one race, but a medley of people, inheriting diverse traditions and customs from the various stock from which they originally sprung .Moreover, in the East, much more than west in West, it is women who is the true guardian of ancient customs, and Brahui himself cannot lift the veil save from the few women who live within the narrow circle of her family life.” (Page-XLIII)

In his book *Brahuistyaat* Javed Akhtar (2012) argues about the social evolution of Brahuists as thus:

“The piece of land where Brahuist live presently was a set of primitive communism and matriarchal system. According its natural history of evolution the society was gradually moving towards initial stage of slave-owning and patriarchal system with the invention of heavy tools of cultivation and having control of hordes of grain and herds in few hands. This indigenous process was very much interrupted by the Aryan invaders in the region. The excavations of old archaeological sites and presence of Mother Goddess and other sculptures are the remnants of Dravidian life and society here. It is evidence of the fact that there was Matriarchal culture and civilization based on importance of fertility cult, where Mother Goddess was worshipped as supreme power and women had great importance in the society.”

This new approach gave rise to the concept of male dominance over Brahui women too, Brahui living and primitive communism which existed here, were replaced by new tribal system. To ensure the land tenure, possession and grazing rights a reliable and influential person was chosen as tribal head. Women and elderly people were spared to domestic tasks, whereas young population was assigned a role of shepherdry and cultivation. With the passage of time society adopted social inequality, gender differences and rivalry between women that was a result of new patriarchal system, where men were dominant and women were weak and slave, somehow ghastly character and above all commodity like other goods. The element of contempt and abhor can

be seen in the old Brahui similes and metaphors too. “Woman is the shoe of feet”, “Woman’s wisdom lies in heel of her foot” , “Woman is loyal to no one” , “Woman is an idiot and thankless” and “Do not trust women” are some of the saying and expressions.

People adopted words and certain grammatical formations in their language. Gradually art of detailed conversation and storytelling was developed. This art was used as first wider communication among the population. In this period folklore, quizzes, panegyrics, odes, satires, dirges, elegies, epigrams and eulogies were also developed as verbal part of literature. These classical stories also reveal the social life, issues, values, thinking and level of intelligence of the people of that period.

In Brahui prose we go through several mythological characters, such as: *Mamli, Mama, Pirah, Balah, Jatu, Dat, Chukbar, UchNahar, Yak Tangi, Shetaan, Pari, Jin, Bauanto, andGamaeti.*

Dr. Abdul Rehman Brahui (1982) writes about these characters in this way:

“Jatu (witch): This character completely resembles with woman and has big sharp teeth and wings to fly. It is common perception in Brahuis that when someone falls seriously ill, and no attendant is around the patient, *Jatu* comes to eat heart of very person.

Balah: She resembles to an old woman. *Balah* sits on roads and trails, from where people come and go. She asks passers-by to check and clean her head full of lice. If someone refuses to do so, she attacks and kills that person on the spot.

Datt: She is also female character. *Datt* keeps changing her shapes and identity. She becomes an ass, mare, hen and goat.

Jamaeti: This is Female ghost, which lives in District Chagei. *Jamaeti* has abode on trees. Her plate is always kept under the tree on which she lives. Every passer-by puts some food or edible items in the plate. *Jameti* inflicts loss to that individual, who fails to add food in her serving saucer.

Mamma: *Mammas* are both male and female characters. They used to come in the human habitat and knock the door of individual who is fixed for pursuit. Female *Mamma* comes on the door of some man and calls her out in human voice. On attending her out, she drags that man to her burrow, where she releases a fluid by sucking feet of the victim, as he cannot run away.

Pari (Fairy): *Paris* are very winsome female characters. That is why beautiful women are always compared to Paris. It is common in Brahui’s that if someone

sees *Pari* flying, he/she will faint on the very sight. *Pari's* shadow on men causes serious ailment to him."Brahui AbdulRehman Dr.(2015) P-80-81& 82

One can observe from description and acts of these mythological characters that there is disdain towards women and female gender. Almost all characters are harmful in nature and show greed, furry and unkindness without any big motive. Almost all are unsolicited to human world and trespass the territory for their nefarious designs. It is evident from these characters that these are the creation of patriarchal era, where women or female gender is seen harmful, witchlike and disgusting.

As far as, Brahui classical folktales are concerned, most of these stories are included in Brahui literature through the translation and literary works of western researchers and people who were associated with governance, education and other stocks of British Balochistan. Dr. Abdul Rehman Brahui's book "*Brahui loakKahnnyaan (2015)*", second edition carries some thirty eight different Brahui folktales.

In a story titled "*Amir Hamza and Jamal Ajzdha*" all male characters in the story are mighty, supernatural and in position to claim their right by might and fight or by eliminating opponents. On the contrary women are weak, vulnerable and meant for sacrifice or inclined to deception. In story the hero Amir Hamza is very mighty; during journey he defeats two other powerful men. Amir Hamza beats both in wrestling and befriends them after defeat. At one stage in story narration is like this:

"Amir Hamza asked the girl, why are you crying? She replied! "I live here in little kingdom, where there is a blood thirsty Python. It eats one camel and one human in daily meals. If some day he could not get his full meals, he will come for sure and destroy the entire city. Every household has fed him accordingly and it is turn of our home to nourish the Python. My father has passed away; I have two brothers and mother back home. My mother said to me that instead of my brothers, I should go along with our camel to scarify my life. Mother also said, as I am of no use, therefore, my brothers would be saved with this act. (Brahui. 2015)

This part of story tells that women and animals are equal and meant for sacrifice. A girl was sent by another woman (her mother) to give her life, as two brothers can be saved from the hunt of Python. This shows that the society at that time also needed men to run the wheel of life as they were important and valuable beings. In the same story an old lady is portrayed as charlatan, who kills Amir Hamza and deceives his wife and sister.

Another folk tale “*Raaz*”(a secret) from Brahui classical literature is based on a lesson to learn the very fact that never ever share a secret with wife (women), as she has weak disposition and can put a man in great danger. The saint, while breathing his last, tells the very fact to merchant’s son that never ever share secret with your woman (wife). To testify the last words of that white beard saint, the King and the Merchant’s son, who is friend of king, make a little tricky strategy. The story concludes as follows:

“King ordered that the woman should be offered several lashes in the center of city and this harbinger should be spread all around the kingdom as all women should show loyalty with their husbands in any case.”

The moral of the story was very obvious that dying white beard Saint was true that “never ever share the secret with your wife.” In this story, it has been portrayed that women is untrustworthy, superficial and imprudent. She is supposed to be loyal at any cost.

In the story “*Nairi Na Bewafai*” betrayal of woman, a very beautiful and wealthy prince, that came to know about his beauty by looking into the mirror with coincidence. He was so beautiful that his father “King” ordered everybody around prince, not to show him mirror. On realization of his beauty, Prince went out to search equally beautiful woman. Through long journey and efforts prince meets a saint (*Qalandar*), who first warned him not to marry women, because of their disloyalty. In words of Brahui story:

“Qalandar, shazada y baz samjhafy, paray zaifa wafadar mafak”

Translation: Qalandar tried to convince Prince very much and said, “Woman is disloyal”(Mengal, 2004)

With the passage of time, Prince’s wife bridges a relation with certain wealthy merchant, who manages a clandestine tunnel from his residence to the castle, in order to meet the princess. Prince with the help of his friend succeeds in tracing her wife’s suspicious acts and kills her on justification of betrayal. Story ends with the moral that women are disloyal and cannot be trusted. Prince recalls the early words of Qalander, “*Dasaoday Qalandar Badshanaheetyat bus kay zaifawafadarmafak.*” (Mengal, 2004).

In classical story “*Dhobi Na Massaar*” Washer man’s Daughter, a sage old man says to king as under:

“If you have baby girl, you will become extreme poor and beg in the streets, on the contrary if you have a baby son, you will flourish and have bright future ahead.”

(Mengal-1988, P-61)

Classical story “*Chaar Eelum Na Kisa*” story of four brothers narrates at one stage as under:

“The thief (one of four brothers) went to her wife and said to her, my brothers have come a long way, now you have to do something for their welcome. Wife replied I do not see any clear way out right now, but there is one thing; king’s son is interested in me since long nevertheless, I have not given him any response. Today I will go to him for your brothers’ sake. Thief said, “Do whatever you want, because I have to give honour and feast to my brothers at any cost.” (Afzal, 2004) P-33, 34

Story “*Duzzna Kisa*” a tale of theft, portrays a plight of a minister who takes loan from some wealthy merchant by using her wife. ‘Minister says, I have taken loan and other things from merchant, tonight you have to visit his home. On refusal of her wife, Minister beats her black and blue.’ (Mengal. 2004).

In another story” *Nari Na makurfraib*” (a deception of woman) focused on moral that women’s art of deception and falseness is very part of their nature and they can show it any time. One day husband says to her wife, “I have heard that women are very deceptive in nature and artistic hypocrite, but I have never seen you showing that.” Her husband demanded to show him, true nature of her. According to story, after few days wife started showing her true colors. Story concludes on the final conversation of husband and wife as under:

“When villagers tied her husband with ropes and left him in the isolated room, her wife went to husband and said, “Did you see my deception? How easily I proved that your mind has gone off the hinges. Then she unchained her husband. Husband said, “Oh I see! Now I realize that a woman is the statue of deception and lies. When she uses her very power, no one can understand her. (Brahui, 2015)

In above story the fabricator or teller wants to prove that deception is deep rooted virtue of women. It is inside her genes and can be ignited at any stage.

Other classical stories in Brahui literature like *Hussan Darr*, Callous Aunty, Step Mother, Step mother and step daughter, *Lal Badshah*, *Bibi Katoor* and Four friends have almost similar message that women is weak, disloyal, greedy, charlatan and lesser creature and on the complete mercy of men.

Folktales are the best way to judge the overall thinking of then society, its social structure including the gender standing. Most of these stories available today in Brahui literature have several commonalities in way of presentation, opening, characters, objectives, journey and conclusion. In these stories we find certain worldly king, princess, Merchant, landlord, fairy, witch, python, and monsters. Almost every story begins with the praise of unnamed king,

whose kingdom and territory is unidentified. There are certain princes who are in search of beautiful fairy, treasure and territory. In stories they are bound to fight for women, wealth and worldly things. Almost in all stories except few, women are secondary characters, exposed as greedy, conspirator, infidel, witchlike and villainess. The contempt for old women is very obvious; therefore, she is portrayed as inquisitive, spy, problematic and full of negativity. From the study of these stories it is seen that these stories are made or fabricated during the ripe patriarchal age of Brahui society, where men in the name of king, prince, merchant, commander, farmer, shopkeeper and artisan is very potent, kind, philanthropic, avenger, generous, indefatigable and above all indispensable. Whereas, women except in few cases of beautiful women and princess is largely portrayed as conspirator, greedy, witchlike and foolish in nature.

There is huge jump in Brahui written literature in the whole mapped history of literature. We do not see any continuity between that classical literatures based on mythological characters and folktales as well as literature available in later stages of socio- political development of Brahui society.

Conclusion

The study of Brahui classical prose concludes that, there is an element of amusement, thrill, travelling adventures and art of storytelling for common reader in it, but as far as, portrayal of women and gender roles are concerned, this literature depicts very gloomy picture of women. Being a source of folk wisdom and initial literary treasure, this prose has deep impact and foot prints on overall thinking of society, especially when it comes to address the role of women in the Brahui society. Though centuries have passed while classical literature came into actuality, but society in its conduct and understanding about women has changed very little. Acceptance of this literature coupled with the heroic actions of male characters and subdue role of women strengthens the ideas of patriarchal values. We can say that classical literature help to give information and understanding regarding past times, but there is no need to count this literature as matter of pride. The lessons learnt from these stories and other mythological characters have misled many generations of Brahui-Baloch society.

Women's subdue and negative role cannot be eradicated until deep rooted philosophy is replaced by rational discussion and healthy criticism on those aspects of literature. Women's subjugation is rooted in the socio-economic and political conditions of system and women's emancipation and equal role cannot be attained without changing the basic ideas of common reader, in order to show him right and just path of thinking.

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