

1. Cultural Materialism in Sail's *Khol Khol Mulam: A Critique*

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Abstract

Using the context of Gauda culture to great advantage Sail's ground-breaking novel, *Khol Khol Mulam* (2005), vividly underscores the oppression faced by this marginal community. This article explores Sail's narrative in the light of Cultural Materialism, to uncover how culture affects the people of a specific region and community, since cultural materialists advocate that the society wherein literary texts are constructed is an inseparable part of them. As such, the novel is minutely examined in close relation to its historical framework. The article comprises of three parts: the binaries of power in the said society; the interface between change, social order and cultural ecology; and finally, the impact of ideology and the consequences of the failure to adhere to societal norms on a family or an individual— particularly women. Besides, the man/woman status coming under the binaries of power has been discussed separately given Sail's emphasis on women.

Key Terms: Cultural Materialism; Ideology; Patriarchy; Social Order; Power Structures

Introduction

A literary text is an amalgamation of various facets of human society and so of human life. A typical narrative is set within a historical framework, to which fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, and demography, among others, are connected. To view a literary work merely from the point of view of 'art for art's sake' would be doing a great injustice to a work. A book is not merely a work of art but it is a product of a

society and in turn an authority on it. Among the various literary schools of criticism, that embrace this didactic feature of literature, is Cultural Materialism.

As a theory it finds itself embedded in the Marxist literary thought, It maintains that the culture of a society and its materialism are not mutually exclusive but rather influence one another to a great extent. Often compared to New Historicism, Cultural Materialism is driven by how a work of art (in the present instance, a literary text) can bring about change even in the present. This literary theory seeks to accentuate the methods followed by existing power structures to disseminate ideology. They explore a text's socio-political and historical context to grasp the dominant hegemonic position. In addition, by means of adopting a constructive approach to literary criticism, Cultural Materialists focus on the manner in which a work of literature can, and most certainly will, bring about change.

Here the term 'culture' is not used as a synonym for being 'civilised', but rather in the broad sense of being a way of life inclusive of the 'higher culture' as well as the 'lower culture'. The objective of cultural materialism is not aimed at a value judgment of certain practices but how those practices and actions (or inaction) can aid to bring about a beneficial transformation of society.

The term Cultural Materialism was originally coined by Raymond Williams, in the course of his discussions on culture, literature and Marxism. However, in recent times other theorists, such as Alan Sinfield, have given more theoretic fineness to the concept than its original argument. This area of

criticism identifies with three main cultural elements that mutually influence a text (and thereby are in turn influenced by the text), viz. residual, emergent, and oppositional. These three elements shall be employed to reinforce the thesis in the subsequent discussion. Two concepts that are crucial to its textual practice are 'dissident' and 'resistant' reading (Knellwold and Norris 55). Dissident reading is an interpretation that amplifies the ideologically subversive elements in a text (Cunningham 56), whereas resistant reading rejects the author's effort to promote a preferred reading and exploit the semiotic excess of the text (Jasinski 440).

Similar to New Historicism, Cultural Materialism is concerned with the role of power in society. In the same vein, the literary critic Frank Lentricchia asserts that Stephen Greenblatt reduces history in all its complexity to a plethora of unmarked manifestations of one overarching phenomena: power. This is akin to his major source of inspiration i.e. Michel Foucault (Jürgen Pieters np).

Humans have striven to become more powerful throughout the ages as power has come to be associated with success and grandeur. Unfortunately, in their bid to become more powerful humans have also employed a Machiavellian stance, resulting in their every action as a means to an end. Societies world over have examples of hegemony. While in India the caste system gained momentum as a rigid hierarchical power system over the centuries, in some parts of the world there have been gross class discriminations, for instance between the peasants and the aristocrats. History is evidence that when the bridge between these two broadens it leads to an opposition, as seen during the French Revolution. Similarly, in the novel under

discussion, there are incidents where the contest for power results in rebellion – thus becoming an oppositional cultural element.

Although published in the 21st Century, Mahabaleshwar Sail's *Khol Khol Mulam*, is set in the 1990s, and mainly focuses on that segment of the Goan society which often finds itself socially and politically marginalized. Interestingly, in the present novel, the marginal occupy centre-stage. The novel is an amalgamation of the main plotline which revolves around the life of Antoinette, and anecdotes of other characters. Antoinette is ostracized by her parents and most of the village after the tragic accident which resulted in the drowning of her baby brother and she is left at the mercy of her uncle and aunt for several years. When she learns that Santan, with whom she was in a physical relationship, was a married man, she impulsively decides to marry Duming, who deceives her into believing that he has a job abroad when, in fact, he had already lost it. Frustrated with the lack of support from her husband, she runs away from home and begins to earn money on her own, doing odd jobs. During this time she also meets Philip who had been estranged from his wife. After several months they begin a romantic relationship. However, being the 'other woman', she is consigned to a secondary status. The novel ends in a tragic manner when Philip succumbs to his injuries after falling to the ground from a coconut tree.

Khol Khol Mulam as a work of literature can be interpreted as a historical representation of the social and economic adversities to which the complex relations of caste, class and gender gave rise in the society and culture of the time. As such,

it constitutes a compelling read in the light of cultural materialism. Sail can be seen to uncover the pretexts of the vested interests for oppression and marginalization, and demonstrate how the hegemonic forces, through their ideological designs, influence society.

Dynamics of Power Structures in *Khol Khol Mulam*

Power is important to an individual because of the idea that with it one can control another person or idea or institution. A lack of it would signify weakness and a weak person is often vulnerable and an easy target for discrimination. In some cases power is acquired while in others it is bestowed by virtue of the circumstances to which one is born. While more power can be achieved through climbing the social ladder, it can be done by pushing others lower down in the societal hierarchy as well. Herein arises the ethical dilemma: should one scale the hierarchy even at the cost of morality?

Sail's *Khol Khol Mulam* brings out permutation in the battle for power. At times even when a character wishes to escape the ideology of power for instance in the context of land or authority, s/he is subverted by the politics of power.

Long before laws could be codified, land belonged to early settlers and there was natural ownership of the same and disputes related to claim over it might have been almost non-existent. Colonization of habitable lands at various stages must have brought along with it several changes, especially migration, displacement, and consequently an alteration in the power structures governing the community. This important aspect is brought out in the novel by way of the relationship between the land and indigenous peoples.

For centuries, the tribal communities have contributed to the cultural, ecological and social fibre of the state. However, these communities usually have not had a voice beyond the tribal settlement – not because they cannot speak but because those who matter, i.e. the people in powerful positions, are unwilling to listen. Hence they have been rendered subaltern.

The marginalised communities have had to face the brunt of the empowered hegemonic groups by way of being different from them. The concept of the “other” may have been theorized only recently but its existence in human interaction is almost as old as humanity itself. It has long been the human tendency to be wary of that which is strange, or that with which one cannot identify. This gets extended in the social context to other communities. The indigenous people of various places have had to deal with discrimination and other kinds of injustice. Irrespective of which part of the world indigenous people belong to, the one thing that they have in common is a shared history of injustice. The plot of *Khol Khol Mulam* revolves around the Gauda community, which is a tribal community in the state of Goa.

During the pre-liberation period in Goa, there existed the practice of tenancy. This relationship between the landlord and the tenant was largely that of exploiter and exploited with a few exceptions. For centuries, the tenants used to remain dependent on their landlords and this dependency in turn led to the tenants being at the mercy of their landlords, which resulted in the inevitable exploitation of the former at the hands of the latter. Liberated Goa saw a change in the laws of the land, yet this resulted in little change on the ground reality as far as caste and gender were concerned. Clearly, changes in theory are

idealistic while in practice, the reality is altogether different.

Two important areas influencing the power structures in the present novel are economy and culture. Both these areas are closely connected with the tribe's relationship with land – it forms an important part of their life (culture) and livelihood (economy). Since land is an invaluable and limited resource, the tribals directly depend on it for their subsistence. Traditionally as well they have always been farmers. This has been reiterated throughout the novel. In a conversation between Antoinette and her husband, she berates him for having neglected to plough the field and leaving it infertile and barren. The Gauda community find pride in being farmers and have a close relationship with the land. However, many a times, the land itself doesn't belong to them due to the system of tenancy that prevailed at the time.

In order to do justice to these marginalized persons, whose human rights were largely violated by those more powerful than themselves, the newly elected democratic government in liberated Goa enacted laws to safeguard the rights of the tenants and thus emerged concepts such as 'land to the tiller'. While these laws did succeed in curbing exploitation to some extent, there is also a counter argument that in some cases they were being misused. This, however, may hold true for most laws. Nevertheless, the one important fact here was how the new laws shook the power positions of both sides. The tenants now had a claim over the land; in addition to possession they could also have ownership rights.

The novel brings out how both parties viz. the tillers and the owners feel that they deserve an ownership over the land. This

emanates in a conversation between Santan Diniz and his son:

चेड्यान विचारलें, "डेडी, सांगल्यार आमकां ही शेतां परतीं मेवचीं नात?"
"ना चार्ल्स, हिस्टरी आमच्यांनी परत घुंवडांवक जावची ना. आमकां रियालिटी
मानून घेवंक जाय."
"आमकां कांयच रायट्स नात?"
"आसात, शंबरांत दोन पयशे, चार पयशे. अर्थ ना तेतूंत."
"हे इनजस्टीस न्हू डेडी?"
"आमी तेंचेर शंबरानी वर्सां इनजस्टीस केला अशें सरकार म्हण्टा." (६६)

[His son asked, "Daddy, does this mean we won't get these fields back?"
"No Charles, we can't reverse History. We have no choice but to accept the reality."
"Don't we have any rights at all?"
"We do, say two to four to a hundred... but it makes no sense."
"But isn't this injustice daddy?"
"The government argues that we have been unjust to them for centuries." (66)]

Santan Diniz believes that the land laws that had been altered after the liberation of Goa were extremely unfair. He goes on to explain to his son that the position of the rich was due to their hardwork, while the poor only complained about their position and remained complacent. Soon after, an argument ensues between the tillers and Diniz, where there is a passionate debate over who is more connected to the land – landlord or tiller:

"भाकारा, तूं तुगे शेत व्हरों येयला?"
"मुगे दिरेत सांगो येयलां."
"दिरेत आसल्यार तुवें तुगे शेत गुठलावन घेवन बोमाय व्हरपाचें. भाकारा, शेत
म्हुटल्यार बांकांतले दुडू न्ही कळंतर खांवक. तेतूंत घोळों, मरों जायें, हूम गळों
जायी. तुवें केन्ना काश्टी मारल्या, शेण भरलां, माती किरयल्या?" (६८)
["Bha(t)kara, have you come to take back your field?"
"I have come to claim my right."
"If you have a right you should have rolled up your field and taken it

along with you to Bombay. Bha(t)kara, a field is not a bank account to enjoy interest. One should toil and sweat for it, live and die for it. Have you ever donned a loincloth, gathered cow dung, or slogged in the mud" (68)]

As a man who can exercise power and extend his wealth, Diniz is astute and he says that since they are the owners of the field, they always sit at the embankment. When he states that his forerunners had earned this wealth with great expertise, the tiller retorts:

"फिशालकायेन न्ही, अन्नाडी, भावार्थी लोकांक नाडून जोडिल्ली. फटीचीं मापां आनी मेजप मेजून खळावयलें भात लोटून व्हरताले गाड्यांत घालून. आतां दीस मुदार जाल्यात. अडचल्ल्यांक आनीक अडचून कातले वोळ्याक गाय घेवचे दीस गेले आतां."

भाटकार एक व्यक्ती म्हण आपली हार मानून घेवंक तयार नासलो. तेणें म्हटलें, "दीस मुदार जाल्यात म्हण मुजें शेत तुमकां इजमोलाक दिवन उडयलें म्हणून सोमज." (६८)

[“Not with expertise, but gained through cheating the illiterate and the devout. With counterfeit weights and measures they used to push the entire crop into the cart. Times have changed now. Gone are the days when by further cornering the needy one could grab a pound of sugar for a pinch of snuff.”

The bhatkar was not one to accept defeat. He says, “Since times have changed consider that I have given away my fields as alms to you.” (68)]

Diniz is unfazed and despite his rights over the land being at stake he speaks to the tillers in a haughty and arrogant tone, giving rise to the question whether there indeed had been an alteration in the power structure at all. Those in the position of power do not wish to lose it and as such we see that Diniz threatens the tillers despite the law. He almost wishes to teach the apparent challenger a lesson to remind him of his position.

The power holders view any change that affects their position as a social problem. This is discussed by the authors of *The Sociology of Social Problems* as follows:

[S]ocial problems reflect society and its dominant values and interests. Expressing concern about certain conditions in a society is perceived as a threat to those values and interests – that is, to the power structure in society. To maintain the legitimacy of those values and interests, the power holders seek to remove social problems from the social sphere either by shifting them through explanation or deliberate action to places and forces beyond the control of the state, or by relating such problems through residualist conversion to the characteristics of the population strata experiencing them [...] Once a social problem is effectively located in a particular population group, it may further serve to maintain the legitimacy of those dominant values and interests by being used as an illustration of the penalty suffered by those who 'fail' to actively pursue the dominant values and corresponding goals. (Jamrozik and Nocella 103)

Hence, the origin of a social problem also serves as a trigger for social change. However, those in power are not willing to relinquish it and attempt to use strategies within their means to shield their social standing. Progressivism and non-conformism are often met with obstacles because of this need of the dominant forces to protect their place of power and influence. They may do this through relocating the problem or laying the blame on a factor beyond its control. At times, the subordinate section of the society is made culpable by the dominant section by virtue of the characteristics it (the subordinate) possesses. If the force of opposition is taught a lesson, this would function as a deterrent to anyone who would dare to threaten the position of the superiors in future.

Since money is indispensable to the dominant position within the power structure, one mode in which a character can shift his/her power position is through the acquisition of money. In *Khol Khol Mulam*, the characters look towards the countries in the Gulf in order to make a decent life. However, the female protagonist, Antoinette, does not appear to be convinced by the grandeur surrounding the men working in the Gulf. As seen during one visit by a suitor, she is dismissive of the fact that he works abroad and also of being employed as a domestic help instead of working in the fields. She believed there was pride and dignity in the latter. Even during her meeting with Duming, whom she eventually marries, rather than inquiring about his job in the Gulf, she goes on to question him about his fields:

"दुमिंग, तुमगेर शेतां आहाय?"

"आहाय. हांव कुयटा, भाव मावोड्यां, पडिगच आहाय तीं."

"तुमगेर बैल आहाय?"

"आसलोले पयलीं. एकलो मेलो, दुसरो विकलो."

"तुमगेर गोठो आहा?"

"आसलोलो. भाव मावोड्या वयतकीर मोडोन पडलो."

"कैसो गावडे रे तुमी? गोरवां, गोठो, नासलोले[...]" (१२७)

["Duming, do you own fields?"

"We do. But I'm in Kuwait and my brother's at his in-laws' ... they're left fallow."

"Do you have oxen?"

"We did earlier. One died, the other was sold off."

"Do you have a cowshed?"

"We had one. But after my brother went to live with his in-laws it collapsed"

"What kind of Gaude are you? With no cattle, no cowshed [...]"

(127)]

Nevertheless, throughout the novel it is evident that moving to

an urban area brought about more prospects and only then could one rid himself of hopelessness and helplessness. This practice of looking outside the country for a better life is prevalent even in contemporary Goa. A kind of prestige is associated with working abroad. The novel does bring out that this is often superficial and people can be laid off from their jobs at the whims of their employers, as seen in the case of Antoinette's husband.

Thus, through the novel, the continually altering positions of power and the human endeavour to obtain the superior place, is constantly made out. The desire for control is inherent in human beings and the question of morals and ethics also arises in connection with power politics and ideology. Where there is power, there is also scope for resistance. This is brought about through the constantly altering social dynamics that at times lead to a revolution. The following segment briefly discusses the compelling power of change.

Impact of Change on Social Order and Cultural Ecology

A reading of *Khol Khol Mulam* shows the relevance of change in the contexts of socio-cultural environment. For a society to function sans chaos, there is a need for law and order. In order to peacefully co-exist, social order is governed by mores and norms to which a society adheres. In relation to social order, Friedrich A. Hayek opines :

[L]iving as members of society and dependent for the satisfaction of most of our needs on various forms of co-operation with others, we depend for the effective pursuits of our aims clearly on the correspondence of the expectations concerning the actions of others on which our plans are based with what they really do. This

matching of the *intentions and expectations* that determine the actions of different individuals is the form in which order manifests itself in social life [...]. (Emphasis added; Hecher and Home 222)

To avoid being ostracized and to elicit cooperation from fellow members of society one needs to behave in accordance with the intentions and expectations of society. Deference to social norms is essential for hegemony to survive, and the individual feels socially secure in the compliance rather than defiance of such norms. There are unwritten rules of society which are required to be followed, and default of the same results in dire consequences.

In tune with the Marxist proposition, cultural materialism also adheres to three primary influences on cultural change – infrastructure (technology, economics, demographics), structure (cultural and kinship systems), and superstructure (ideology, religion). As aforementioned 'emergent' cultural elements are an important aspect that cultural materialists are interested in.

Not one to submit to the norms of society, Antoinette herself is an epitome of change and an emergent element. When first introduced to the reader, she is depicted as a submissive girl who is a victim of circumstances. This damsel-in-distress image is slowly but surely wiped away as Antoinette evolves into a strong woman who stands tall in the face of adversity. In the conclusion of the novel, it becomes apparent that her spirit will always emerge stronger no matter what happens to it.

Through her actions, Antoinette upsets the social

equilibrium more than once. After marriage, she takes it upon herself to earn money, while her husband refuses to play any role in. Later, when she runs away from her husband's home she decides to do rigorous manual work that was considered by society as a man's job, thus challenging what was previously acceptable. Due to her actions Antoinette is neither within society nor outside it.

The novel depicts how, although the non-indigenous world has moved towards an individual-centric future, the tribal community does not seem to be too keen to shed its comfort zone in continuing to be a community-centric society. This being the status quo, it is necessary to emphasize that social delinquency is a far more serious matter within their society than the former. They are a tight knit community and an issue within a house soon becomes an issue of the village at large.

Khol Khol Mulam, although Antoinette's story, has excerpts of little details of other characters. One such sketch that is significant in the present discussion is that of Caetan. He was a mundkar who sought to achieve the status of a bhatkar. The community is against this venture of his and yet he proceeds to fulfill his ambition. Eventually he, as well as, his wife and four children are left to fend for themselves when his landlord asserts his authority over his property. Caetan, although not having been in contact with his community, during those dire straits finds himself at their mercy. The novel thus brings to light how any kind of change was not looked upon kindly by either the bhatkars or the mundkars.

The Gaudas have their own practices and beliefs; and although other communities may question their social order, it

is community specific. The author describes the way of life of the Gaudas in the following manner:

ह्या गावड्यांच्या गावांत सदा कोणा ना कोणाच्या घरांत झगडप, मारबडय करप, रडप, चलतालेंच. कोण कितेंच गंभिरतायेन घेनासलो. दुसरें म्हटल्यार आज हाणामारीचें झगडें झगडिल्ले फ़ाल्यां गळ्यांत गळो घालतना दिसताले." (७३)

[In this gauda community brawls, fights, tears in somebody or the other's home was the norm. Nobody would take anything seriously. Besides, if some had a fight today, they would be seen arm in arm the following day. (73)]

Thus domestic violence was hardly looked upon as nonconforming. A matter between couples or within a household was considered as a matter of the community at large. Sail also discusses how a small group of the Gauda community was kept at bay because they were different from the others and didn't seem to follow any specific religion.

गुडयेर पाड्यावटेन गावड्यालीं दोन-तीन घरां आसलीं. पूण ते अशे विचित्र लोक, हेरां वांगडा तुदूनशे रावताले. [...]

ना धड हिन्दू ना धड किरिस्तांव. मदींच हुमकळटाले. (१०५)

[Towards the hillock, at Guddyer, along the Paddy side there were two or three homes of gaudas. However, they were strange folks. They would stay aloof from the rest. [...] They were neither truly Hindus nor truly Christians. They oscillated in between. (105)]

Once again, here the binaries of self and other are evident. Humans have a need to categorize and compartmentalize. Things need to be labelled in order to be made sense of. If something lies out of the ordinary, avoidance is seen as more desirable than association, by the community.

Another area of the society that change affects is that of their cultural ecology. Living beings are largely dependent on their environment and it is this environment that shapes their livelihood as well as their culture. Cultural ecology is an offshoot of human ecology and studies:

“ [...] many aspects of culture and environment, including how and why cultures do what they do to solve their subsistence problems, how groups of people understand their environment [...] cultural ecology is the study of the ways in which culture is used by people to adapt to their environment.” (Sutton and Anderson 3)

The novel itself begins with a general background to tribal peoples and shows how often they are displaced because of colonization, migration, industrialization and so on. Due to this constant movement from place to place, it becomes imperative that they to adjust to their surrounding; hence the significance of cultural ecology in their lives and in the present analysis.

The occupations of the people from the Gauda community change with the changing times. Indigenous peoples and tribals are known to be forced to adapt to changes. Their habitat is directly connected to their livelihood. A change in habitat means that they need to find an alternate source of subsistence and adjust to the new environment.

This is portrayed in the novel as well. The marginalized labourers, being from the lower socio-economic background, are also forced to adjust to the whims of the changing law. Due to the imposition of the ban on mining, they leave their homes and move elsewhere in search of work. They get involved in smuggling wood during the night, which is a risky business.

Later, they are forced to take odd jobs to enable them to make ends meet. When Antoinette and Philip are forced to relocate, she suggests that he become a coconut plucker as Gaudas were considered to be good at that job. This initially helps them to build a new life until the unfortunate death of Philip.

Change through its emergent elements attempts to alter the social order and influences the cultural ecology of a society. However, it is evident through the novel that when these cultural elements turn oppositional in nature they are regarded with wariness by the rest of the society.

Subtle Mechanism of Ideology in *Khol Khol Mulam*

An ideology is a set of cultural beliefs, doctrines or principles that usually guide an individual, social movement, institution, class or other group. Ideologies either function as strategies of containment and justify the status quo, or strive to change it.

Ideology forms an important aspect of Cultural Materialism. The specific material conditions connected with a cultural practice inevitably lead to ideological consequences. By introducing 'structures of feelings' within the interpretive model of Cultural Materialism, Raymond Williams added to the range of its outlook. These are values that are changing and being formed as we live and react to the material world around us. They challenge dominant forms of ideology and imply that values are organic and non-stagnant.

Authority plays a determining role in the formation of the dominant ideology in society, politics, and literature. In the novel as well, the hegemonic ideology is a social construct subtly created by the higher rungs of society. While the Gauda

community itself is a marginal one, within it there are the further marginalized individuals. This is especially true in the case of gender. Women are often doubly marginalized in the third-world countries including India. In fact, patriarchy is an imposing hegemonic presence in the Indian social dynamics. Sail brings out the plight of being a woman in *Khol Khol Mullam* which almost coincides with the image of womanhood under patriarchy, sketched by Deepika Dhand. In her article "Representation of Subaltern Voices" Dhand observes: "[P]atriarchy's hegemonic character creates an image of docile, vulnerable, subordinate, inferior, powerless and silenced women" (314).

The protagonist of the novel *Khol Khol Mullam* is a woman i.e. Antoinette. Her trials and tribulations are magnified by virtue of her being a woman. When first introduced to us, she represents the above-mentioned image of womanhood described by Dhand. However, as the novel progresses there is a determination on the part of Antoinette to rise above the shackles of the prevalent ideology and not succumb to it. In the very first instance, when her brother dies in her care (although not expressly mentioned), it is clear that this son born after three daughters was considered almost sacred by the parents. They did not hesitate to disown Antoinette after this incident although she was their own child. They attempted to make amends only after another son was born to them, but these attempts were met with rejection by Antoinette who had by then already grown immune to their absence.

Antoinette, despite being a child is 'punished' for what would appear as mere carelessness on the part of one who is

innocent. The incident is a turning point in her life and this marks the last, as well as, loss of her innocence. At a high price she learns that her only fault was that she was their daughter. That alone was enough for them to disregard their relationship with her, and with little or no thought, reject her. This incident is indicative of the double standards through which society functions. When Antoinette stands up for herself and refuses to return to her parents, it is indicative of an individual who refuses to be bound by the whims of social pressure. It also serves as a precursor to later instances in the novel where she resists social norms. Her unyielding resolve to break the fetters of ideology serves as an inspiration to every woman who wishes to rise above the hegemonic unit of patriarchy.

The community is also superstitious in nature and at times their logic can be questionable. Antoinette was considered to be possessed by an ominous spirit. As such, when her parents cast her away, hardly a soul came forward to attend to the child. Even the aunt, who took her under her care, did so not without hesitation.

Being one of the vulnerable sections of society, women are more often than not the gender that is subject to sexual assault. Antoinette's troubles continue well into her youth. As a teenager she became a victim of sexual assault when she was molested by Harry. Violence against women is once again reflected in the novel when Govi, a migrant worker is raped and killed. Antoinette is also tricked by a married man to concede to a sexual relationship with him. She however goes through all this with courage and hardly allows the social norms and stereotypes to get the better of her.

Daughters are considered as a burden in some families because of the notion that they are cost rather than an investment. Sons are believed to earn and maintain their parents in old age, daughters leave the home taking along with them dowry that is expenditure incurred by the parents. In the novel as well, Antoinette is more often than not, considered a liability which is antithetical to her actions. From the moment she is disowned by her family, she wishes to be independent and often assumes responsibility even in the presence of men, such as her husband Duming and her lover, Philip.

The concept of equal pay for equal work is largely gaining momentum in recent times. However, ground reality is often quite different from what is put down in theory and the novel displays the absence of pay parity. Antoinette decides to take upon the work of lifting and moving laterite bricks. The women were being paid less than the men although both genders invested an equal amount of energy and effort to discharge this duty as seen in the novel:

"[...] बायलांक कितले? आदसाक वीस मुरे?"

आंतोनेतान मदीं विचारलें, "आनी दादल्यांक?"

"दादल्यांक आदसाक तीस. दिसाक साठ." (१५६)

[..]how much do the women get? Twenty for half a day, right?"

Antoinette suddenly asked, "And men?"

"Men thirty for half a day. Sixty per day." (156)

Antoinette is even forced to make the difficult decision of inducing a miscarriage since she knows that in the event in which she gave birth, she would be spurned by the village and left to raise the child on her own, while Philip would probably shun responsibility over the same. She constantly feels that she is the 'other woman'. This incident is indicative of the manner in

which ideology can threaten an individual's freedom of choice. Even though Antoinette arrives at this decision on her own and does not inform Philip of the pregnancy, it is her experience as a woman, which leads her to believe that her plight would only amplify if she carried the child to term. Also, having seen the callous face of society she knew a child born out of wedlock, would have to go through similar adversities as she did, or worse. Although this may come across as her defeat, instead it strengthens her to move on and face the other hardships to come. It is pertinent to note, that these adversities do not drive Antoinette to adopt a ruthless approach to society. She assumes a compassionate stance throughout the novel. An example of her selfless nature is seen when she urges Philip to pawn the gold chain given to her by her aunt, so he could use the money for the wellbeing of his legitimate wife who was hospitalized.

Sail has brought out the deplorable condition of women and the reason they are twice marginalized. The patriarchal ideology is a residual element of Indian society being carried on for several generations now. Cultural materialism often associates itself with feminism and other disciplines dealing with the marginalized. Ergo the treatment of female characters in the novel is noteworthy in light of the fact that a change should be brought about in the dominant position of the patriarchal ideology. The social bigotry in the form of blatant preference of sons over daughters, the violence against women and the discrimination against women at the workplace ought to alter and give way to a non-prejudicial society.

Caste and class, consequently, also add to the working of ideology in a society. The author has depicted that each caste is very self-preservative. When Antoinette's cousin Michael gets

into a relationship with Mary who belongs to a different caste, it is a cause for worry. To quote from the text:

आंतोनेतान मनांत म्हटलें, "[...] पूण चाडड्यागे चेडूं खूंय, केहें जातलें? तितीव आपली जात म्हण्टलो आनी ते आपली जात म्हण्टले!" (११६)

[Antoinette thought to herself, "[...] but it seems she's a Charddo girl, how will it work out? Uncle will insist on his caste and they, on theirs." (116)]

Both the caste groups do not wish to disturb their compositions. To justify Antoinette's concern, Michael himself voices out his thoughts:

"जाणा आंतोनेत तें चाडड्यांगेलें. आमी गाये मांस, दुकरा मांस खायनाय म्हण तेंचेपरस जातीन व्हड मानतांव. पूण ते आमी पाडेली, खणपी, हांडपी वावराडे म्हण उणाक लेखताय आमकां. आमचीं पाडीं मातयेचीं, शेणाचीं घरां. तेंचीय चूक न्ही. फ़ाल्यां काजार जावन हांव चाडड्यागे चेडवाक खूंय हाडून दवल्लो?" (११७)

["You know Antoinette, she's a Charddo. We believe we're superior because we don't eat beef and pork. But they consider us lower than themselves since we do odd jobs like coconut plucking and manual work like digging and chopping. Our wretched homes are made up of mud and cow dung. They can't be blamed. Tomorrow if I marry, where will I keep this Charddo girl?" (117)]

The issues that he raises are not non-negotiable ones and eventually he is driven to elope and marry her. This act of defiance is representative of many couples who attempt to rebel against the norms of society. Many a times, disobedience towards what is acceptable by society leads to terrible consequences which non-conformists have to face, for

instance honour killings. Nevertheless, this is not indicative of the failure of such individuals, but rather the failure of a society which refuses to accept the exceptions to the rule. Elopement is a clear illustration of the operation of hegemony and the attempt to elope is a response that shows resistance not by force but by non-collaboration and so non-complicity.

Ideology also raises its hood in other parts of the novel. For instance, it is visible in the manner in which the gaudas regard migrants. Antoinette refers to them as *ghati* which is usually considered as a term bearing a derogatory connotation. She also says that she was surprised that Govi was so pretty, implying there existed a stereotype that migrants were not particularly good looking. It is evident that such preconceived notions are more often than not, baseless. Through further association with Govi a bond is almost established between the two until the untimely death of the latter.

Clearly ideology is the force behind the actions of various characters in the novel. It is the tool of hegemony and functions as the sustaining prop of societal hierarchy of class and caste. If a change in society is to be wrought, ideology would have to be certainly addressed. If we are to embrace Williams' perception of 'structures of feelings', as the material world around is constantly modifying the positions of men and women, high caste and low caste, self and other, are also undergoing change. If this is so, there is the need to alter the ideology of exclusion and discrimination, and replace it with one that fosters acceptance and inclusion.

Conclusion

It can be seen from the above discussion that *Khol Khol Mulam*

is an embodiment of a literary text that stimulates change. The novel highlights the contest for hegemony and the politics which surround it. Further, it depicts how material conditions connected to a cultural trait may lead to ideological consequences. *Sail* induces the reader to consider the influential elements of the age in which the text is written and how they can be developed to change the successive generations. The novel particularly reveals the dire condition of the women in society and thereby helps demonstrate the need to elevate it. Undoubtedly, women on the whole need to be emancipated but, when they also belong to a so-called lower class or caste, this need is even more pronounced.

Cultural Materialism is consciously political. It recognizes that literature – in fact, Art itself – is a powerful tool for social change. As such, putting literature to use, it aims at changing the existing social order. Irrespective of whether a work of literature can locate its object in the past or not, what is of value is how it can be utilized to make a difference now, in the present moment from which the critic speaks and writes.

As against this, the traditional humanistic critical approach to literary works tends to subsume the marginalised. Cultural Materialism, however, directly ventures into that which aggrieves the marginalized and aggravates as well as alleviates their marginality. Thereby, it attempts to bring to the fore both: the consequences of marginalization on the marginalized and the impact of the marginalised over the dominant culture.

As an analytic tool, the role of Cultural Materialism needs to be underscored here. Reminiscent of an ellipse, by focusing on the past and present, cultural materialism thus attempts to

generate a change in the contemporary society and challenge the previously dominant ideology, cultural hegemony, and social order.

[Unless otherwise specified, all translations from the Konkani text are by this author.]

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