

Original Article

# Matriarchal Tribalism in Neela Padmanabhan's Where the Lord Sleeps

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Received Date: 25 September 2023

Revised Date: 15 October 2023

Accepted Date: 08 November 2023

**Abstract:** This paper signifies the matriarchal society and how the women are wealthy by their laws, beliefs, values and customs. At the same time, the fall of women in the role of mother and wife; reflect the status of men in family when women forget her duties in her role. Matriarchal tribalism can be seen in tribes somewhere and this novel lights this type of practice in Nair community in Kerala. Mainly matriarchal tribalism is focused, highlighted and continued the women role, the consequences of misleading women empowerment in ruling family is elaborately described as a main theme. The author's intention is to celebrate the women empowerment as a golden one to care for family, but it results in disaster when rules are free to access in unconditional manner.

**Keywords:** Matriarchal Tribalism, Women Empowerment, Family, Matrilineal, Nairs

## I. INTRODUCTION

Neela Padmanabhan, an Indian English writer and Tamil and Malayalam novelist, wrote novels, essays, volumes of poems, short story collections and gained various award from Tamil nadu government in 2003 and 2007 for his notable works and translation. The Tamil classical novel "Pallikondapuram" is translated into English by M.Dakshinamoorthy who has been an English teacher in Thiruvananthapuram for many years. This novel was written by Neela Padmanabhan in 1969 and published in 1970. This is the sixth novel of Neela Padmanabhan. Sri Neela Padmanabhan has captured the soul of Trivandrum in a wide and clever dimension of his vivid imagination to the eyes of readers. This novel portrays absolutely peaceful and rigidly hierarchical social order where the Nair's maintained their dominance of chivalry, the uninhibited easy virtues of their matriarchal tribalism and the peaceful slow pace of an ambitionless and tension free life. It is this mood of deep nostalgia throwing its dark shadow over the dejected soul of the city of Trivandrum that Sri Neela Padmanabhan has portrayed in this novel in such effortless detail.

## II. MATRIARCHAL TRIBALISM; A LIGHT TO WOMEN

A group or society is Matriarchal when it is run by women. A tribe is a group of people that includes many families and relatives who have the same language, customs, and beliefs. An anthropologist describes Matriarchal societies as those, "in which women have equal rights, as well as families or tribes headed by mother or grandmothers".

Tribalism is the state of being organized in or advocating for a tribe or tribes. In cultural terms, it refers to a way of thinking or behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribe than to their friends, country, or any other social group. (<https://vocabulary.com>)

Therefore Matriarchal Tribalism refers to the phenomenon where women in a particular tribe play a significant role in that tribe and are fiercely loyal to their tribe and place the interest their tribe above anything else. This novel "Where the Lord Sleeps" depicts Nair community practices and particularly deals with Matriarchal Tribalism in that Community in Kerala. The role of women in the matriarchal society is the analysis done in this paper to ponder the actual face of the community.

A dominant role of woman and sufferings of man. A woman described in her role as head of a household, or as the mother of her children. According to tribal custom, the materfamilias (woman centered family) gave the final decision and enjoys her freedom in that society. Such type of society in which women have most of the authority and power, or a society in which property belongs to women and is given to children by women rather than men. But now, this type of law not in practiced in Nair community

Here "Domination of woman" is brought through the character of Kartyayani in this novel. She dominates and controls her husband and her children. So she loses her honor and her freedom and she submit herself to Patriarchy.



Women utilise society's values and norms more to their advantage in order to meet their personal needs. She lost her own family, her own children, and herself along the road. Anantan Nair, the novel's modest protagonist, allows us to witness the tragedy of ancient Kerala culture and princely India caught up in the whirlwind of vulgar modernisation. Anantan Nair begins to doubt his value as a husband, father, and man as the rigid hierarchical social structure of the Nair's, with its easy qualities of Matriarchal tribalism and the languid pace of an ambitionless life, begins to fall apart. The city of Trivendrum, the Nair community, and the novel's characters were all depicted by the author fairly.

The Nair caste is a collection of castes and sub-castes in India. These people still reside in Kerala, India, the location where they once inhabited.

This essay discusses the matriarchal tribalism that exists in the Nair community. Matriarchal and matrilineal systems are observed by the Nairs. The source of food (or, in modern terms, income) in any civilization determines the lineage of a system. In societal norms, only older Namboodhiri are permitted to marry Namboodhri women. The need for younger brothers to meet their own biological requirements led to the emergence of a matriarchal and matrilineal society.

According to that system property is inherited from and to the mother, women are free to choose their bridegrooms for marriage and also free to divorce. In some areas of Kerala people still follow this system. Hyper gamy and polyandry were practiced but is not practiced now.

The Nairs have a long history of participating in wars in the area. As a result of the battles, the population of the men was skewed toward that of the women. This is one of the theories underlying the development of matriarchy and polyandry in their society. Women had to take care of the entire family and their properties if the men were absent or deceased. They adopted the matrilineal system as a result inside their group.

The matrilineal or matriarchal system is not exclusively practised by Nairs in Kerala. Muslims in North Malabar used to adhere to the system in some parts. It is still practised by several groups in northeast India. In these circumstances, women's position has advanced greatly. In addition to Kerala, there are other Matriarchal societies in the world. The Mosuo are the most well-known matrilineal civilization in China, and they live around the borders of the provinces of Tibet, Yunnan, and Sichuan. The matriarch of each of the huge houses where the Mosuo reside is extended family. The female side of the family is used to track ancestry, and the same matrilineal system is used to pass down property. The largest known matrilineal society is the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, Indonesia. They also adhere to a matriarchal society.

The Nair family followed a number of traditions and rituals that are no longer common in the neighbor hood now. These are frequently intricate systems. The matrilineal joint family structure known as "Tharavad," in which families descended from a single common ancestor reside under a single farmstead, is one of the practises they have adhered to. In the main house, there was just the woman. Along the female lineages, the family estates are divided. Due to equal rights for men and women to dissolve their marriages, the divorce rate was exceptionally high.

In the book the "The Ivory Throne" by Manu S Pillai. As a review titled "what led to the end of Kerala's Matrilineal society" the scholar K. Saradamani points out that - Nair woman always had the security of the homes they were born in throughout their lives and were not dependent on their husbands. Sexual freedom was also remarkable so that while polygamy was happily recognized in other parts of India, in Kerala women were allowed polyandry. Nair women could, if they wished enter to more than one husband and, in the event of difficulties were free to divorce without any social stigma.

She publicly announced her decision to leave Sankunni Nair and to leave with Kochukrishna Karta. (120)

Matriarchy is more than just tracing ancestry and inheritance down the female line. Women are in charge of "all activities connected to allocation, exchange, and production, as well as sociocultural and political authority" in a matriarchal society. (Extracted from nitawriter.wordpress.com)

JulienBouissou, 2011 refers on when women of India rule the roost, and men demand gender equalityfrom "the Guardian"it remarks that the Khasi people of Northeastern India are a matrilineal society and some men aren't happy.

Likewise,Anantan Nair's family property is given to his aunt Kunjulakshmi, Anantan Nair and his brother does not inherit anything from his father's property. It particularly affects Anantan Nair and his brothers economically

It is clear that some men in the Nair community are not happy. Kunjulakshmi, the aunt of Anantan Nair and BhagavathiPillai's sister had left her husband Sankunni Nair and remarried Kochukrishna Karta who was already the father

of five children. Because she concluded Sankunni Nair was impotent, she did not live with him even for a year after marriage.

The Nairs engage in a practise known as "Sambandham." Sambandham is one of the numerous types of polyandrous practise where women may take one or more partners and have children by them. The Nair women interact with both fellow Nairs and Brahmins in Sambandham partnerships.

The unusual legislation Sambandham was created to stop people (Nair males) from their love and attachment to their wife and children, according to Wingram in *Malabar Law and Custom*, published in 2010. They might be more eager to devote themselves to serving in combat, for which they were born, since they are free from all familial responsibilities. The matriarchal system was chosen because it grants women property rights and ensures that children inherit from their moms rather than their fathers. As a result, fathers were largely disregarded when it came to caring for or raising their children."

The marriages of Kunjulakshmi and Kartyayni and Anantan Nair serve as examples of this in the book. Sambandham marriages were not recognised by the law or considered binding. The participants might remarry without consequences and the relationship could cease at any time.

Domination of woman is brought through the character of Kartyayni in the novel. She dominates and controls her husband and her children through their tribal traditions, "tribal" here, is in the sense of her needfulness and selfish determination, not loyalty towards her husband and children. She claims to have certain beliefs in her community but in the real sense she behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs.

Kartyayani marries Anantan Nair, because he works in the office of Padmanabhan Swami Temple. Anantan Nair's low salary and his diseases make her to dislike him. Kartyayni who has a Sambandham law marriage claims her children and wants to reunite with them later in the novel. She had left them when they were child. She fails to fulfill her role as mother to her children as per her community's law. VikramanTampi not marries Kartyayani but sexually abuse her and make his friends an improper advances to Kartyayani.

Kartyayani does not like this meaningless life with Tampi. Hence she intends to get back to her children and Anantan Nair to secure her old age life. So she thinks of returning to Anantan Nair.

Kartyayani meets her son Prabakaran and to move close to him. Prabakaran accepted her mother and reunite with Tampi. Because he has no job Tampi and Kartyayani make sure him to get a job at scooter Factory. Prabakaran wants to live like her mother. So he reunites with Kartyayani and he leaves off his father Anantan Nair and to live with her mother Kartyayani.

Then, Kartyayani moves to Madavikutty, through her friend Vilasini. She intends to get back Madavikutty too. So without Anantan Nair's knowledge Kartyayani meets her children.

Kartyayani creates a situation to fight with Anantan Nair. She does not mind his heavy work in the office as well as his physical weakness.

The happiness of her children gets destroyed and they loses their mother's love. As per the society's law every children are cared by the love of mother, but these particular children are grown up by their father. And thus the modernization as well as the social reforms affects the children.

She has a prosperous life with VikramanTampi and has two children by him. She enjoys a lot of luxury in her second marriage. But Anantan Nair he never marry any girl for the sake of his children. After Kartyayni eloped, his only hope is his children, he has taken mother role to bring up his children. This study examines women's role in Nair community and Kartyayni took more advantage for her selfish life, and not loyal to his society and her own family.

Kartyayni is greedy. She wants wealth and higher economic status. So she leaves Anantan Nair for poverty and elopes with Tampi only for status and money. She wants to lead a fashionable life with Tampi, she does not want to lead a poor life with Anantan Nair, and so, she chooses her life for her own self.

Kartyayani longs for the fashionable life. She hates to live with her husband and thus she expresses her hatred towards her children. Kartyayani deliberately beats her children and shows her anger towards Anantan Nair. Because of her

longingness of the fashionable life, the rural life gets collapsed. She is unable to follow the matriarchal system because of the influence of the modernity.

Kartyayni's selfish determination turns to take fashionable life and she herself comes under the VikramanTampi. Kartyayni's selfish determination for a comfortable, fashionable life affects her whole family. And it will leads to Anantan Nair's Sudden death. She concerns only for herself and not for the needs or feelings of other people.

According to their matriarchal custom, a women should handover the legal form of the divorce to Nair Service Society in karayogam. But in the novel she fails to follow the legal procedure and here the writer NeelaPadmanabhan brings the elements like disobedience of the law, use of law for her own purpose and submit herself to patriarchy.

Anantan Nair's pain of losing his wife for fifteen years leads him to suffer severe mental agony and moreover he gets anxiety of Kartyayni's meeting his children. He fears losing his children and this state of his mind causes his death.

### **III. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: ITS USE AND ABUSE**

In most of societies women are always inferior to man. Women are put aside as a "stereotype." All domestic works and chores are made to be the duties of women.

Nair women enjoyed equality with men and in most cases even superior status to men. Ancient Nair women had a right to choose their husbands and divorce if she found it was impossible to maintain healthy relationship. They enjoyed high degree of sexual freedom.

Nairs have a complex family system. Nair males were mainly warriors by profession and hence could not concentrate on the day to day affairs of the family. Old males involved in agricultural activities and looked after families. Women had the right over crop yields of the certain portions of the land. This gave them, economic freedom to a certain extent.

However, in this novel Kartyayani takes advantages of their community law only for her selfish intentions. The allure of fashionable life changes her mind completely, and turns her to take a different path in her life. She uses the right to divorce her husband to leave Anantan Nair for VikramanTampi

In the Nair community women enjoyed full freedom, but Kartyayani fails to keep up to that freedom in her life; she spoils that freedom for her selfish, modern life. Matriarchal tribalism is followed by them to safeguard their children and family and properties. But Kartyayani breaks this system too by even leaving her children; leading her to live a meaningless life with Tampi. She losses herself and also her family.

She turns away the empowerment traditionally bestowed on her by her communities' law to bind herself in a patriarchal relationship with VikramanTampi.

Kartyayani is contrast toVilasini. AnEzhava girl, a caste lower to the Nairs, even when she is suffering from cancer she strives and passes her university exams very successfully. She empowers herself through education. Unmentioned in the novel it would not be wrong to make the assumption that her self-empowerment through education will lead her to lead an economically independent life. A life where her economic status might not be high and dependent on whims and overt desires of luxury and comfort but completely hers to control.

Madavikutty, is similar to Vilasini in her endeavour to be empowered and financially independent. Her refusal of her mother's offer to come to her and live a financially safe and stable life and her intention to work for herself and not abuse her community' s law to marry a man of her choice and secure her life is an attestation of this endeavour.

This novel clearly depicts women's empowerment in the Matriarchal society of the Nairs and the abuses of this empowerment by some of them, making them lose the power and submit to patriarchy. Later this system was not seen in Nair community till now.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In this novel "where the lord sleeps" the author NeelaPadmanabhan mostly highlighted Nair community, because it has some difference values, beliefs and customs than others. The Nair woman particularly they enjoyed more freedom than man. They have a freedom to choose to the bride and free to divorce their husband without any social stigma and are also they have polyandry and hypergamy systems. Most importantly properties in such social systems are not patriarchal.

The role of Nair women is different from women in other communities. The novel “where the lord sleeps” clearly expresses this through the character of Kartyayani. She is portrayed as a hypocrite in this novel. Kartyayani on one side follows customs and beliefs for her own need and on the other side she breaks her beliefs for the purpose of comfortable life with money and status.

According to their community’s Matriarchal system she has the rights to choose any number of husbands, but she has to care of her children, she cannot leave the children. Kartyayani does it: she leaves her husband and children for VikramanTampi only for money and status. In this way, she follows the system as well as breaks it. She fails to take care of her children and divorce is not properly done. As any women, who want to divorce her husband, she has to publically announce to the president of their community. But Kartyayani doesn’t do it, hence she is not divorced from her husband.

She has complete freedom in her life, but she submits herself to VikramanTampi. When she was with Anantan Nair she was strong, bold, powerful, but she is in VikramanTampi’s house she is weak, modern life overwhelm her traditional life. These two incidents clearly states that she is a hypocrite; a double -faced woman.

Kartyayani is example of how a woman going against the traditional social system and values endangers herself personally. According to their matriarchal system woman have freedom, power and property. Any woman failure to follows their tradition values, it makes their life harmful and meaningless. Kartyayani rejects her freedom and property so she loses her freedom and honor, she submits herself to Patriarchy. She puts on a false appearance of virtue in her community like a Hypocrite in her life.

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