

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Gender in Khurkhul

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4.0 Introduction

Many people often tend to use sex and gender interchangeably; however, they are different notions. Sex is a biological category which distinguishes biological characters, while gender is distinguished by people's socio-cultural behavior, which encompasses speech (Holmes, 2013, 159). The fact that men have an Adam's apple and women don't is due their difference in sexes, and the fact that women wear foundation and men don't mark the difference in their gender.

Sociolinguists study gender because this social category is encoded in language; is reflected in the use of language. In the current chapter we make an attempt to how gender is reflected in Khurkhul.

4.1 Is Khurkhul a man-made language?

Many feminist linguists (e.g.s, Spender, 1985, Cameron, 1985, Fricker, 2007) argue that majority of the languages are man-made. This is bound to be so because in the history of mankind women have always been treated as dependents. A woman, as is projected in Genesis, is an ‘incomplete man’ and hence an ‘indecent being’. This is what the story of creation in Genesis tells us, where Eve is said to have been created from Adam’s supernumerary bone. Humanity is thus male; and man have defined a woman by some virtue of being a woman independently but in relation to himself. She is not considered to be an autonomous being. The body of men is independent; the body of women is seen as a part of men’s body that cannot be acknowledged without referring to male (Beauvoir, 1949). Thus, in Sigmund Freud’s popular theory of Penis Envy, woman is categorized based on the lack of penis. According to the theory, female adolescents experiences anxiety upon realization that they do not have a penis. Thus, humans are described from the perspective of + penis or –penis. The sense of presence gives positive meaning to man; and women is seen as ‘- penis’. The sense of absence implies that something missing/lacking in women. It can very well be described in terms of +vagina and –vagina but it is not described that way by the aforementioned philosopher at least. Many feminist linguists thus argue that we are living in the world where majority of the languages are man-made.

Gender bias in language is often studied under the term *sexism* in language. A so-called man-made language is thus a sexist language.

The use of name/surname in such a language is asymmetric. It is often seen in most societies, especially in patriarchal societies, that women have no name. She depends on either her father or husband. She entitles her father’s name/surname before the marriage, once she marries her husband’s name/surname is given to her. On the other hand, man uses only one title throughout his live. Thus, in English, he remains as Mr. whereas woman uses Miss before marriage and Mrs. after marriage.

It is mostly the body parts and sexual behaviors that are used in swear words in English and maximum number of these words is related to women (e.g. whore; son of bitch, etc.).

In English, taking care of a baby is associated with the term ‘mothering’, whereas the process of conceiving the baby is associated with the term ‘fathering’. Therefore, women is seen as care taker, and man as the creator of the baby.

Semantic derogation is a process in which a word acquires a negative connotation. Such words are often noticed in a sexist language. In English, for example, words like *master* vs *mistress*, *bachelor* vs *spinster* etc. underwent the process of semantic derogation, i.e., the words that associate with women have acquired a negative connotation and the words that are associated with men have remained with positive connotation. The word *master* means the man who is in charge, whereas *mistress* means the other woman (the woman who has an affair with a married man); *bachelor* has the connotation of a fun and independent man, whereas *spinster* means the female who has crossed her age of marriage and living alone without a choice.

English can take the masculine form to represent the whole mankind as in *Man is mortal*. The plural form of *guy* can be used to address both men and women as in *You guys, please come in*.

In Khurkhul mythology, female deities are often most powerful than their male counterparts. *Kurusidaba* is the creator of the Universe. The deities the Khurkhuls worship are *Yumlai*, i.e. deities of the inside; or *Lamlai* deities, i.e deities of the outside. *Leiramaren-sidabi*, and *Sanamahi-sidaba*, are the most important *Yumlai* deities. According to Khurkhul mythology, God *Kurusidaba* asked his son *Sanamahi-sidaba* to be on the *phamlen* (throne) of every household, but only under the supervision of *Leimaren-sidabi*, his mother.

Perhaps women are not understood as –penis by the Khurkhuls. They are understood rather as +womb while men as –womb. Thus, a man whose wife has proved to be impotent might confront such sarcasm “*nangdi nupa oina louraba?*” (“Did you marry a *nupa* ‘male’, then?”). The sentence can be seen as sarcasm in the form of a confirmatory question to an obvious fact that the addressee’s wife is impotent. The above example shows that a woman is identified and valued because of her biological function of reproduction. She is seen as a male if she cannot bear child. Khurkhul has some terms that are used to refer to the woman who cannot bear child. An impotent woman is also called *laba* in Khurkhul. Basically, the term refers to a plant which cannot bear fruit.

Perhaps such cues indicate that women in the Khurkhul society are not considered as an incomplete man, as something -penis; they are rather seen as an +womb entity who possess the unique biological power create human beings.

Below we make some observations on possible sexism in Khurkhul.

The use of name/surname is, however, asymmetric: Like English, the Khurkhul woman has no independent name/surname. She has her father's *sagei* until her marriage. She takes her husband's *sagei* once she marries him. Thus, for example, Khangembam Tombi becomes Louriyam ongbi Tombi after she enters into someone from the Louriyam *sagei*.

Semantic derogation: In Khurkhul binary words carry the same positive meaning. For instance, in *yumbu-remba* vs. *yumbu-rambi* 'mater vs. mistress' both mean the same, i.e. 'owner of the house', who is either a male or a female. In the same way, in *pakhang ariba* vs. *leishabi aribi* 'bachelor vs. spinster' both basically mean the same, i.e. 'an adult who is not married'.

Note, however, that in Khurkhul too, like in English and in many other languages of the world, the first position is always occupied by the male term (i.e. boys- girls; master-mistress; not girls-boys or mistress-master).

Both are marked: In a language like English, the female is marked. Thus, *Mrs* is the marked form of *Mr*, i.e. we arrived at *Mrs* by marking *Mr* with *-s*. Thus, by way of another example, *woman* is the marked form of *man*. We usually mark the one which we consider as some kind of deviation from the normal or the usual. It is more 'usual' or 'normal' to be born as (or to be) a male than to be born as (or to be) a female. Interestingly enough, Khurkhul marks both the male and female. Thus, the root is marked by *-a* for male; it is marked by *-i* for female as in *maiba-maibi* where *maiba* is the gender neutral root (*maiba* refers to a male priest; *maibi* is his female counterpart). Perhaps such examples suggest that the idea of 'man-made language' cannot be taken to the extreme.

4.1.1 Age not sex

It was the American linguist Robin Lakoff whose work in early 1970s initiated the attention on the study of language and gender. Her work stimulated other scholars across the western

world. Lakoff (1973) argues that the kind of language that women use reinforce their subordinate status; women’s language express uncertainty and lack of confidence. Thus, for instance, they use more fillers, tag questions, hedges and the like more than man.

In the Khurkhul social system the elder, whether a male or female, holds a higher social position. Thus, the Khurkhul woman has the full authority to ask questions like the man. Thus, in this case, age, not gender, is the deciding factor in the Khurkhul society.

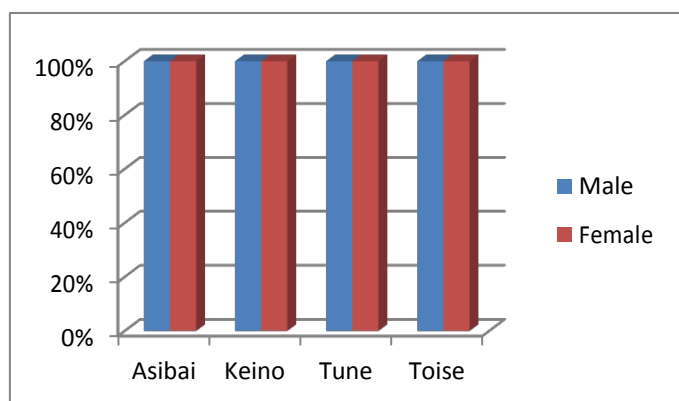
In the case of using fillers and hedges it was found from our study that both men and women use them equally in the Khurkhul society. The findings are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below. For the study, we recorded several natural conversations (total duration of them was 3 hours) between 12 informants who acted as the primary source of the data I collected for the current dissertation. These informants, as already mentioned, know and speak only Khurkhul.

Some examples of fillers in Khurkhul are *asibi* (it/that/those etc.), *keino* (something), *tune* (that’s it), *toise* (that’s what). Table 1 below shows that both men and women use filler equally.

Table 1: Use of fillers in Khurkhul by the male and female

Khurkhul fillers	Glosses	Male	Female
<i>Asibai</i>	(it/that/those etc.)	100%	100%
<i>Keino</i>	something	100%	100%
<i>Tune</i>	that’s it	100%	100%
<i>Toise</i>	that’s what	100%	100%

Fig 1: Use of fillers in Khurkhul by male and female

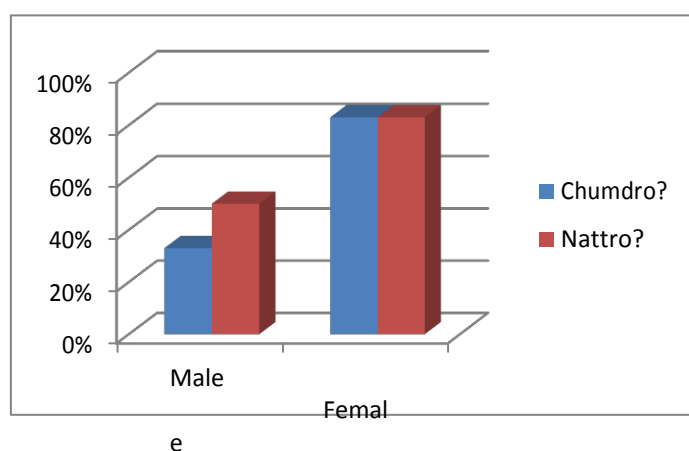


However, in the case of hedges, it was found from our study that women use it more than men. Fillers were used mostly in the question form (confirmatory in nature), i.e. they used *nattro?* and *chumdro?* at the end of their statements. The findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Use of hedges by male and female

Khurkhul Hedges	Gloss	Male	Female
<i>chumdro?</i>	Isn't right?	33%	83%
<i>nattro?</i>	Isn't it?	50%	83%

Fig 2: Use of hedges in Khurkhul by male and female



It can be seen from the two tables that the hedge *chumbro?* was used by 83% of the women and by 33% of the men. In the case of *chadro?* It was used by 83% of the women and by 50% of the men.

It is also often argued that in a cross-sex conversation the dominance of men over women is reflected in their speeches. For instance, women do not object when they are interrupted during the speech as much men do, whereas, men try to control the topic of discussion, make statements rather than possibilities etc. (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2014). Thus, as is claimed or reported, women ask more questions than men and use back channeling signals (the signal both verbal and non verbal that indicates that they are listening). The argument of men's dominant interruption in cross-gender conversation is propagated by other scholars too (e.g. Lakoff, 1973, Zimmerman and West, 1975). According to them, the interruption in a speech is contravention of a speaker's right to complete his/her turn and in turn it reveals that men deny the equal status of women in a conversation.

We have, however, observed that the right to interruption in a conversation depends rather on age in the Khurkhul social system. We can think of the following three conversation relations:

- a) conversation with an elder
- b) conversation with a child
- c) conversation with a friend who is of same age.

In the Khurkhul social system, in the case of (a) and (b) above, the elder has the right to interrupt, whether the elder is male or female. If a younger interrupts an elder in a conversation, it would be considered impolite. He can speak/ask questions only when the elder permits him/her to do so. In the case of (c) above, both participants have equal rights to interrupt. However, it is likely that the woman interrupts more than the man. Thus, she always talks more. This readily applies to bargaining in the market. It is the Khurkhul women who handle the bargaining necessary in the market in the Khurkhul society. Because, the Khurkhul society values and respect those men who talk less. Two Khurkhul terms classifying women on the basis of their verbal behavior are the following:

Nupi chonga (women hoopoe): A woman who is very talkative, good at spreading rumors, and talking ill of others.

Nupi kwak (women crow): A woman who is vociferous, noisy, always ready to indulge in quarrels etc.

But there are not such terms for men in Khurkhul. Thus, if a man talks (a lot), he is compared with a woman as in *nupi-manba nupa* ‘a woman-man’. Consider the following expressions:

<i>mācin-di</i>	<i>nupi-də(g)i</i>	<i>helle</i>
3pp mouth-TOP	woman-from	more
‘He talks more than a woman’.		

As reported, in the rural Malagasy community, women take more confrontational roles and their speech is more direct than man’s. In this society, women handle the bargaining

necessary in the market, they deal with family arguments and disagreements etc. Men hold the position of power in this community; however, it is indirect allusive speech which is most highly valued in their society. Therefore, in some communities the concept of associating ‘power and talk’ might be problematic because there are several other factors which can affect the relation between power and talk. Thus, the concept of ‘power and talk’ which is highly believed in the western society may be regarded as unspeakably rude and feminine in some communities (Home, 2013). Our investigation shows that this more or less applies to the Khurkhul society as well.

It is also often argued that men and women speak differently. Though they say the same thing, they mean different. As reported in Maltz and Borker (1982), in North America, men and women in a community are taught to use language in different ways which later creates miscommunication during conversation. For example, a woman uses *mhmm* quite frequently to mean ‘I am listening’, whereas a man uses *mhmm* to mean ‘I agree’. Consequently, men often believe that women always agree with them and then conclude that it is not possible to tell what a woman really thinks, whereas women get upset with men who never seem to be listening because they hardly say *mhmm*. (Maltz and Borker, 1982, in Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2014).

However, as we have observed in our study, Khurkhul does not reflect a major difference in men and women’s language. However, there are some lexical terms that are exclusively used either by males or by females.

- a) *Hingchabi/Marainubi*: Terms exclusively used by women to address female friends and female youngers to show closeness or anger.
- b) *Naaba*: Term exclusively used by men to address male friends and male youngers to show closeness or anger.
- c) *Thorabi*: Term exclusively used by men especially when they are angry with someone who is younger.
- d) *Mapa yaimbi macha*: Term exclusively used by men especially when they are angry with someone who is younger.

4.2 Khurkhul reflecting patriarchy as practiced by the Khurkhul society

In this section, we focus on the Khurkhul patriarchy as reflected in Khurkhul.

Khurkhul is a patriarchal society. So, at least a male child in the family is always wanted. The male child inherits father's immovable properties like *labuk* (paddy field), *ingkhoh* (land/the house and the compound). Besides, he inherits his father's *sagei*. Thus takes place *yum-leppa*, i.e. handling over of the responsibilities of a family from the father to the son. Only a male is considered to be the prospective candidate for taking such responsibility. A male child takes the responsibility of looking after their parents from the time they become matured. It is considered ominous if a parent has to die in their daughter's place. On the other hand, the female child inherits the jewellery and clothes of the mother. Thus, the male child seems to value over the female child in the Khurkhul social system. The female is often compared to a coriander leaf in Khurkhul. Thus goes one proverb: *nuupidi phatikomne* 'A women is a coriander leaf'. A fragrant coriander leaf is only *used* in a curry, it does not make a curry. In the same way, a girl or a woman has no permanent *sagei* like the boy or a male; she loses her father's *sagei* and becomes part of another *sagei* as soon she enters into a marriage.

The Khurkhuls treat the female child in a manner that reflects equality in their upbringing. In one of Khurkhul proverb says: *icha nupina kapnaba ichanupana thangdokpinaba* 'daughters are for crying and sons are to carry the coffin'. Thus, they acknowledge both of them, and it is seen in their upbringing (e.g. equal opportunity of education).

The Khurkhuls use some means to determine sex of the baby in the womb. One such means is *mang* (dream). It is believed that if a pregnant woman sees *khutei*, *pheichom* (men's wear); *thangchou* (a kind of knife) etc in dream at night, then the child will be male. On the other hand, if she sees *phanek*, *lei* (flower), *machu* (colour) etc, the child will be female. For the Khurkhuls dream is one of the media through which the spirits of the ancestors communicate with the relatives. Thus, Khurkhuls perform *mangtaba*, i.e. a ritual in which *maibi* (i.e. the local female priest) communicates with the spirit of the ancestors.

Thongarel (the deity of the front door of the house): The Khurkhuls believe that *Thongarel* gives the family definite hints about the sex of the baby in the womb. Thus, if the pregnant

woman lifts the right leg to cross the front door, the baby is going to a male child; if she lifts her left leg, then, she will have a female child. So, after the child is born, the *khoi* (the umbilical cord) is buried at the right side of the *Thongarel* if the child is male; if the child is female, her *khoi* is buried at the left side of it.

Masaa Lumba (her body weight): if the pregnant woman weights her body more on the left side while walking, she will have a female child; if she weights more on right side of her body, she will have a male child. In a similar way, if her left breast is bigger than she will have a female child; and if her right breast is bigger, she will have a male child.

It was found that gender determination is done when the woman is at 7th or 8th or 9th month of pregnancy. But this in turn implies the Khurkhul practice of gender determination has nothing to do with abortion as is the case with many other male dominated patriarchal societies, even in several parts of India.

As a matter of fact, the Khurkhuls, although it is a patriarchal society, treat the female child in a manner that reflects equality in their upbringing.

Decision making: The right of decision making is an important issue in gender study. In a family, decision making can be studied into two contexts in the Khurkhul social society: between a husband and a wife; and within the family (a traditional large family)

Between a husband and a wife: Though the Khurkhul society practices patriarchy, a woman has a right to decision making. Metaphorically, a husband and a wife in the process of decision making are compared with the bulls and the person who whips the bulls and holds the robe of the bulls in a bullock cart, implying that it is the person who makes the decision, the man simply carries out the decision. Thus, goes a popular Khurkhul saying:

<i>nupa-nə</i>	<i>sənkari</i>	<i>nupi-nə</i>	<i>tʰəwba</i>
man-ADV	bullcard	woman-by	drive

‘Man is the bull and woman is the driver’. (Literal)

This proverb gives a contrast view to the usual concept of ‘a patriarchy system of society’ in which mostly, it is the man who takes all the decision.

Within the family: As noted in the earlier chapter on kinship, age is a very important factor in the Khurkhul society. In decision making also it plays an important role. For example, after the death of the father, it is the mother who becomes the head of the family and the decision making is done by her. Therefore, it can be considered that the decision making in a family is primarily done by the eldest person of the family; gender is completely irrelevant here.

Economic status: In most patriarchy system of societies, men are the economic supporter as well as the owner. For example, in Nuer community, the economic mainstay cattle are owned by men, wives are given certain cows to milk by husbands, but they did not really own them and had no right to dispose them off (Evan-Pritchard, 1990, 128, in Stone, 2010, 82). However, in the Khurkhul society, the immovable properties like *lou* (paddy field) and *ingkhol* (land/campus of a house) are owned by men, but the movable properties like *saa-san* (cattle, hen etc), *phou* (paddy rice) etc. are not entitled to any particular ownership; it is owned by the husband or the wife. In addition, most Khurkhul women rear *leimatin* (silk worm) which is the second important source of income next to cultivation. It is largely done and owned by women in the Khurkhul society.

The major expenditure of the family is expected to be borne by the husband, for example, marriage and education of children. However, women also contribute here through *mahum yonba*, i.e. selling of silkworm cocoons; *lang yonba*, i.e. selling of yarns; *langnaiba* i.e. processing of silk threads from the cocoons; *chengkokkaba* 'business of rice' etc. Though the immovable properties are owned by husbands, their earnings are handed over to the wives. Thus, there are shared roles and responsibilities between a husband and a wife in a family.

Man outside/Woman inside: In most patriarchal societies, men working outside (e.g. earning for the family) and women working inside (cooking, washing, taking care of babies and their husbands etc) has been the norm. Here, Rosaldo (1975) argues that the 'private sphere' i.e., domestic works of women, is seen less worthy because in the 'public sphere' of men both political and economic activities is involved.

However, in the Khurkhul patriarchy, women are not confined to the four walls of the house. Thus, we have in Khurkhul the following expressions, which are defined below.

***Kabrang mana thiba* (searching for mulberry leaves):** Both men and women have to walk miles in order to search for *kabrang mana* (mulberry leaves). Some of these places are the Koatruk village (5.2 km away from Khurkhul); the Phayeng village (12.1 km away from Khurkhul); the Lanka Hill (85.9 km away from Khurkhul) and the Taphou village (40km away from Khurkhul).

***Lasing thiba* (searching cotton):** Earlier cotton was used for many purposes, e.g. making mattresses; pillows and the like. So, both women and men had to go to far off places, especially to the hills in search of cotton.

***Sing chanba* (collecting firewood):** Both men and women go to far off places, climb hills to collect firewood.

***Long khonba*:** *Long* is a type of basket which works like a sieve mostly used by women for catching fish. Catching fish with the help of *long* is called *long khonba*. This is mostly done by women. Women search for fish in the streams and lakes which may at far off places.

***Chengkok kaba*:** This is one of the traditional means of earning for women in Khurkhul. It involves the whole process of buying paddy crops, husking it and selling it. Women may have to carry the crop or rice on their heads and walked several miles to neighboring villages for selling or buying.

Those women who perform such works can't be considered weak. It also allowed them to be independent economically.

Nevertheless, some of the works that are not done by women are *lou khoiba* (ploughing); *saa tanba* (hunting) and *louri thonba* (repairing the walls of paddy field) etc.

The different roles of man and woman are seen in *yumlai* (deities of home) and *lamlai* (deities of forest). Man and woman equally pray to both *yumlai* and *lamlai*, but it is woman who offers daily prayer to *yumlai*, but she is not even allowed to enter the *pungsang* (the hut of drum). It is the place where the *pungchao* (big drum), one of the most important instruments of *Ichum Lairembi* temple is kept. Most of the important works like *sarantuba* (sacrificing pig in front of the temple), cooking for deities are done by man. Women are not supposed to enter inside the temple, she is allowed only up to the courtyard of the temple. This practice reflects that men handle political affairs or the village level affairs.

The authority over child: Though lots of interest and importance are given to woman in relation to create child, it is the husband, his family, and his *sagei* who get the full authority over the child. For instance, if she divorced her husband, according to the social rule, the children belongs to her husband. In case, her husband is deceased, the children belong to his family and *sagei*. Thus, a mother has her right on the children only when she is in relation with her husband.

Different views on the female: It is observed that in Khurkhul male child is considered more important than female. In fact, it is one of the features of every patriarchy society. However, when one talks of patriarchy society, it does not mean they favor only male over female; this type of society sees two types of women, some time: one affinal and consanguineal. Stone (2010), “but in the same system there is also a filiafocal (focused on the daughter) undercurrent: Women are important, not in their roles as wives but in their roles as daughters or sisters. In contrast to affinal women whom they see as divisive who can part the males of patrilineal, these consanguineal women are considered sacred to their fathers and brothers (as well as to their mothers and some other kin), and they are literally worshipped by fathers/brothers on certain occasions (Stone, 2010: 108). In similar way, Khurkhul also sees these two types of women in the society. The patrilineal often felt threaten by those affinal women; as they think those women has the power either to *yumthukaiba* (break the house) or *yumpanba* (run the house).

Maiba vs Maibi: The traditional way of treatment involves lots of *lairon* ‘God’s language’ and folk medicines. The local priests are called *maiba* ‘male priest’ and *maibi* ‘female priest’. Both of them have different tasks in the society. They need to learn *lairon* ‘God’s language’ under the guidance of a kuru (each *maibi* and *maiba* has kuru who teaches them *lairon* and also the culture). The difference is that *maibi* is chosen by God; it means a spirit of a God possesses her. They called it *laitongba* (possessed by the spirit of God). In this situation, she can either *laiphaoba* (a Kuru assists the novice *maibi* to become a full-fledged *maiba*) or *lainamsinba* (a kuru suppresses the revelation of the god’s spirit). Many women prefer to *lainamsinba* because *maibi* ‘female priest’ is not considered a desirable profession, even though no one denies the need of her service in the society. On the contrary, for becoming a *maiba*, any male can acquire it by learning. They equally contribute to the society. Thus, when a child is sick, the parents or the kins of the child go to *maibi* for *senhunba* (the act of maibi communicating with God in the special language called *larion*). After maibi performs *senhunba* she conveys

the message she has received from God (which is called *laiphao*) to the parents of the sick child. Then, *irat-thouniba* (prayers) is offered to God either by *maiba* or *maibi*, depending on the nature or content of the message received from God.

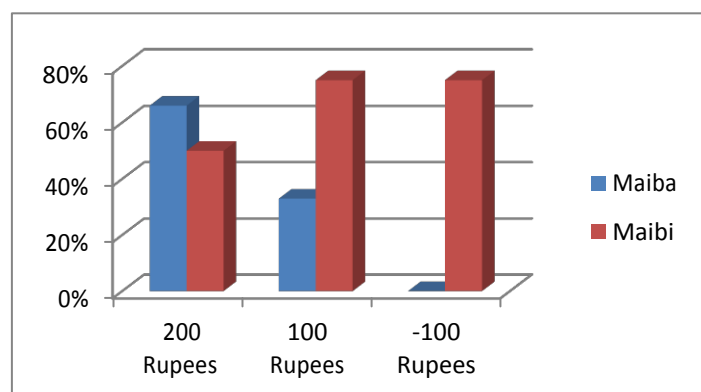
Since, the society believe so much in God, they also believe in witchcraft, which they call *nungsitpubi* (*nungsit+pubi* =carring +air ‘witchcraft’), and *lai amuba sannaba* (*lai + amuba + sannaba* = plying with black God ‘black magic’). *Nungsitpubi* (witchcraft) is mostly practiced by wives in a polygamous marriage. Out of jealousy for co-wives, they lean on witchcraft to get more attention and love from the husband. Those women are not expelled from the society but people hesitate to get along with them. If such a woman passes by someone who is eating something at the moment, a piece of what is being eaten is thrown at her back. This is called *nugsit thakpa* (*nugsit + thakpa* = air + feeding ‘offering her share’); if one does not do it she/he might suffer from severe stomach pain which they call *nungsit changba* (*nungsit + changba* = air + enter ‘possess by her demonic power’). Thus, in polygamy the woman seems to suffer more than the husband in the Khurkhul society. But polygamy is rarely practiced by the Khurkhuls.

Though the Khurkhuls consider both *maiba* and *maibi*’s work equally important, *maiba* is often paid more than *maibi*.

Table 3: maiba and maibi’s fees

Payment	200 Rupees	100 Rupees	-100 Rupees
<i>Maiba</i>	66%	33%	0%
<i>Maibi</i>	50%	75%	75%

Fig 3: maiba and maibi’s fees



It can be seen from Table 3 above that 66% of the *maibas* get 200 rupees; 33% get 100 rupees, and 0% gets below 100 rupees. On the other hand, 50% of *maibis* get 200 rupees, 75% get 100 rupees, and 75% get below 100 rupees. The study was done on seven *maibas* and *maibis* (out of which three were *maibas* and the rest four were *maibis*).

4.3 Khurkhul reflecting perceived biology of plants

The system of changing gender is seen in the animal world, for example, clown fish (nemo fish). Clown fish change gender in order to maintain dominance in the hierarchy. The largest and the most aggressive female is at the top of this hierarchy. If this female suddenly dies, the biggest and the most dominant male of the group becomes female to take her place.

In the Nuer society, a woman who can't bear child can divorce her husband and remain in her father's house. Due to her barrenness, she is counted as a male by her natal patrilineal, and a marriage to another woman is arranged. After that, the barren woman finds a man to sleep with her. The children born out of this union belong to her natal patrilineal i.e., her father's group (Stone, 2010).

In a similar way, the Khurkhuls adopt some means to change gender of plants. Plants which cannot bear *mahie* (fruit) are considered *laba* (male), e.g., *awathabi laba* (male papaya), *nobap laba* (male pomelo). On the other hand, those plants that bear fruit are considered *amom* (female), e.g. *awathabi* (papaya), *nobap* (pomelo), *yongchak* (parkia). Here, morphologically, Khurkhul makes the female the default root. Thus, for example, *awathabi* (papaya that bears fruit); but *awathabi laba* (papaya who doesn't bear fruit). Thus, in the case of perceived sex of plants rather the male is marked (with *laba*). Recall that in the case of humans, both the female and the male are marked in Khurkhul as in *maiba-maibi* 'male priest-female priest'.

Again, if a tree, especially *yongchak* (parkia), *awathabi* (papaya), do not bear fruits, a *phanek* (Manipuri women's ethnic wear) is wrapped around the tree as an act of converting the sex of the tree. It is done by a *ningol* of the family who has several children. It is performed on *cheiraoba* (the Khurkhul New Year). They believe that this would give the tree sexual power to conceive and reproduce. Thus, one hears the personified Khurkhul

expression: *yongchaktu nupine kaore phanek chetlo* ‘This parkia has forgotten that she is a woman, wear her with a *phanek*’. In Image 1 below a personified parkia can be seen.

Image 1: *parkia* wearing a *phanek*

