

CHAPTER VI
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The present study *Semiosis of Manipuri Women: A Sociological Study* is an attempt to discern an understanding of Manipuri Women and their roles and activities in the cultural context of the Manipuri society. Based on cultural studies, the work applies the concept of semiosis. In recent times, cultural studies has emerged as a part of sociological studies gaining much importance and popularity. With help of methodological tools like semiotics, cultural semiosis, social semiotic, semiotic sociology, etc. which are basically critical and interpretative approaches, cultural studies tries to examine every day culture and practices in a given specific society. The understanding and interpreting of women's role in a given society is one of the issues that the study is involved with. Title of the work is named as such since the concept of semiosis is a type of sociological study.

Understanding the concepts and theories of semiotics and cultural studies and relevant operational terms forms the integral part of introductory chapter. Semiotics or semiotic studies is an umbrella term concerning science of signs. The study of signs is not a modern conceptual development. Philosophers mused over role of signs in nature and human experiences in ancient times too. It was John Locke (1632-1704) who first coined the term 'semiotics' from the Greek word 'semeiotike' meaning 'doctrine of signs' in English in his historic work, *An Essay concerning "Human Understanding"* of 1690. Many later philosophers added to its conceptual development till Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1919), a Swiss linguist and Charles Sanders Peirce (1832-1914), an American philosopher came to picture in first part of 20th century to further define and develop it into theory.

Ferdinand de Saussure, father of modern linguistics, coined the term 'Semiology' from the Greek 'semeion' (sign), when he developed the theory of semiotic studies of language in his *Course in General Linguistics (1916)*. According to him, semiology maybe regarded as a science to study role of signs in social life. Saussure developed a

dyadic or a two-part model of sign – a signifier (*significant*) and signified (*signifie*). The signifier and the signified exist in relation to each other. A meaningful sign is constituted when a ‘signifier’, which is a representation of some object, indicates the concept of that object or the ‘signified’. Once a sign achieves linguistic and historical existence, it cannot be changed any more. When it is socially used within a system of codes, it gains a signification which gets inclusion in the culture of sign-users.

Charles Sanders Peirce, founder of philosophical pragmatism, used the term ‘Semiotic’ and developed his sign theory in 1860s. Semiotic had a close relation with logic. Peirce used it as medium of enquiry and process of scientific discovery. He developed a triadic or a three-part model as his basic sign structure i.e. signifying elements of signs or sign vehicle, object and interpretant. The ‘sign’, as Peirce used, can be considered as the signifier, for example, ‘smoke’; object as signified, e.g. ‘fire’ signified by ‘smoke’ and interpretant as signification that arises out of sign/object relation. Peirce’ sign theory of 1867-68 is generally regarded as his early initial stage. In the early account, he also classified three types of signs, namely, *icon*, *index* and *symbol*.

The term ‘semiosis’, was initially used by Charles Sanders Peirce. The term has been coined from the Greek word ‘semeiosis’ which is derived from the verb ‘semeio’ which means ‘to mark’. Peirce as well as Saussure thought that speech and writing form alone was insufficient in producing significant interpretation of language sign system. Therefore, semiosis has been developed to initiate a relational study between language and other human and non-human sign system. It implies any form of activity, conduct, or process that involves signs. It includes production and communication of meaning by developing relationships between signs which are to be interpreted by an audience.

Generally speaking, semiosis is a sign process. It is interested in producing of signs rather than signs themselves. Semiosis engages triadic and cyclic models of relations in manner Peirce had done in explaining his sign theory or semiotic. The three factors involved are the sign vehicle, the designatum and the interpretant; interpreter may be considered as a fourth factor.

Cultural studies has become an important and popular academic field of studies in recent times. It incorporates a holistic approach of various theories and studies such as feminist, social and political theory, history, philosophy, literary, media and communication, art, etc. to examine cultural phenomena in various societies. It engages in examining the manner how meaning is created and delivered through various practices, beliefs, and social, political, economic structures within a given culture.

Nowadays, semiotics or cultural semiotics has emerged as a major approach to the study of culture as a signifying system constituted by signifying practices. It is a science which handles standardised methodological tools to discern production, organisation and transformation of meaning through use of signs. Cultural semiotics became popular with the publication of *Mythologies* (1957) by Roland Barthes. Cultural studies also embraces semiosis or cultural semiosis as an essential and effective tool in tracing the cultural signs and signifiers rooted in cultural practices and beliefs, and in social, political and economic structure of society. The approach is depended on notion of *unlimited semiosis* put forward by Umberto Eco and Carlo Sini. Both of them relied on Charles Sanders Peirce and his triadic model of semiosis.

The first chapter is a systematic exercise to elucidate various theories and concepts applicable to present study. It has made an appropriate and comprehensive attempt to define and illustrate different approaches and methodological tools employed in the study. Relevant operational terms are incorporated wherever necessary. This chapter will enable to provide an idea of applying a critical theory and approach to the study of Manipuri women, presenting a new interpretation of women in the context of Manipuri culture and society.

The next i.e. second chapter deals with main components or framework of study, that is, origin and development of study, statement of problem, scope and universe of study, objective and hypothesis and the methodology employed for data collection so as to portray the procedure and projection of the study. This chapter tries to present a culturally specific picture of a Manipuri woman. She ossesses some defining attributes that establishes her existence in the Manipuri societal structure. Her attributes can be assumed as sign-vehicles that convey a social meaning. These signs are culturally organised into sign systems that has achieved historical existence.

Therefore, she can be subsumed as a producer of signs or a sender of messages, more than her male counterpart, inducing a significant representation of the cultural ethos of the Manipuri society. It is possible to make an effective and critical study of these cultural signs and signifiers of the Manipuri women which are embedded in the cultural practices of the Manipuri society. Thus the main research question of the study is – **Can we not aptly use the tool semiosis to study and investigate the producing of cultural signs and signifiers that relate to the signified women in Manipuri society?**

The review of literature being integral part of second chapter denotes books and journals which have been consulted in the course of the study. The chapter also tries to elucidate how the theories can be put to application to analyse women and their cultural attributes in a given culture and society. The work may set to initiate an interpretation and signification of the activities of Manipuri women and an understanding of their true identity in the context of the Manipuri societal setup.

The third chapter deals with general profile of Manipuri community. It begins with topographical features of the region of Manipur, its historical background and polity which are specific attributes that make up distinctive framework of a particular society. Nevertheless, knowledge of her societal pattern of families, clans, kinships, and marriage norms is also of vital importance. Her economic indicators portray process of development the region has undergone in course of time. Understanding cultural milieu of the society and the rites de passage is also pivotal as people of the region give a sensitive attachment of existence and survival to these issues. This chapter provides an appraisal of all these features of the region and its people which are considered to be relevant to the concerned work. It also tries to relate to and bring into focus other fields of study in the following chapters.

The fourth chapter concentrates on Manipuri women in ancient, medieval and modern period. Women's role and activities in various walks of life is a vital necessity to study of the given society. Their societal status can be construed as a pointer to a nation's development index. Moreover, how the society sees and treats them lay enough emphasis on their condition and place in life and society. From these perspectives, Indian women are generally marginalised in their respective androgenic societies and consequently, their status is quite low even in recent times. However, the

status of women in Manipuri society appears to be quite better, if not the best. This brighter outlook maybe due to the fact that Manipuri women, with some commendable qualities, traits and aptitudes inherent in them, could command respect and support from the society in their various roles and activities of life. The chapter concentrated on the manifestation of Manipuri women from several facets, beginning from the pre-historic era through the medieval period till the modern age. The chapter tried to depict how their status had several paradigm shifts during the course of Manipur's history.

The fifth chapter took account of process of creation of signs and finding contextual signification within cultural framework of Manipuri society for women signified. The chapter throws light on aim of fulfilment of objectives and also validation of hypothesis of this particular study. It also provides an insight into the research question whether semiosis is a relevant tool to study cultural signifiers that can be interpreted to the signified Manipuri women. The chapter makes an attempt to further solidify that conviction of the major purpose of the study.

Initial component of the chapter focuses on signifier tracing signified through cultural codes as marks of identification of Manipuri women. Every society aims at constructing an image of 'woman' to be projected in the society. Semiotically speaking, women of that society become a composite of varied signifiers which assist in forming that projected image. The extraneous elements such as dress, hair-style, appearance, etc. can be considered as signs indicating the identity of Manipuri woman. Accordingly, a study has been made of these signs in detail and of their relevance to identification of Manipuri women as per cultural code of Manipuri society. The method employed is semiosis which as "a process of interpretation" is an essential interest of semiotician/ semiologist. Moreover, signs as signifiers, infer to objects, these extraneous elements are also signifiers for interpretation of object "Manipuri Woman".

Another part of the chapter focuses on signifier tracing signified through role and activities as signifiers of interpretation of Manipuri women. Their role and activity in family and societal affairs can be assumed as cultural signifiers in which signs appear conveying social meaning and interpretation. Therefore, a Manipuri woman can be construed as a producer of such signs where signification is inherent in multifarious

societal context. To comprehend these signs, the signifiers relating to them culturally at traditional as well as post-traditional level, and meanings generated thereon are being traced. Body of a woman can also be regarded as a signifier which indicates 'womanliness' as a sign. Therefore, it can be safely said that dress, hair style, etc., are all symbolic as well as indexical signs attached to womanliness. These elements become signifiers to a woman of a particular social group within its socio-cultural codes and ethnic parameters. The symbolic and indexical signs arouse a sense of iconic sign in mind of Manipuri woman naturally (of a particular).

The chapter also focuses on post-traditional Manipuri women as signifiers subverting the paradigm as speaking subject. Subsequently, in process of semiosis, Manipuri woman as signifiers has been given a projected image of a speaking subject rather than a mere mute subject thereby overthrowing the paradigm set by the patrilocal society. The projected image of the speaking subject is the feminist stance that is noticeable in the little endeavours of post-traditional Manipuri woman. A few select Manipuri women social activists and writers have put forward that sort of endeavour which has been incorporated in the present work as tools to justify objectives and hypotheses.

Further in concluding part of the study it could be perfectly argued that in semiotic process, we make an inquiry with help of sign (signifier/sign vehicle) to know the object. For this, we are engaged in process of sign interpretation by what Peirce calls "some informationally incomplete facsimile of dynamic object generated at some interim stage in a chain of signs" (immediate object). And then, we reach at "goal and end point that drives semiotic process" (dynamic object). To put in other words, to verify semiotic process, we have to be engaged in a two-pronged endeavour – (i) employment of semiosis and (ii) the process of inquiry. This is why we have first traced the signifiers that are related to the signification of Manipuri women and then driving at home cultural relation that signifiers have with object in question – Manipuri women – through various interview schedules, unstructured interviews, interview guides, participant observation and diary from field employed as a part of empirical study. The present work, therefore, brings into focus some facts in the form of findings that semiosis can be safely employed as a reliable tool for a case study as social semiotics (relating to social meaning making processes):

Major Findings

1. Manipuri women since time immemorial have been playing indispensable roles in all societal, economic, political and cultural spheres of Manipuri community.
2. Manipuri society, though, patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal, its social structure is always summation of roles and activities of the Manipuri women.
3. So as to know Manipuri women society thoroughly, a consideration of the Manipuri women and their roles and activities in the society is a must and always comes to forefront.
4. Since semiotics is closely associated with sociology in evaluation of everyday life of a community in a social set-up, case of Manipuri women and their roles and activities can also be studied semiotically.
5. As semiosis is a part of semiotics which is concerned with production of signs and sign-activities, it can be safely employed as a useful tool in evaluating roles and activities of Manipuri women as signifiers for production of different signifieds associated with different signs of Manipuri women in process of signification.
6. Semiosis being a cultural study having sociological paradigms, empirical studies undertaken with interview schedule, unstructured interview, interview guide, participant observation and diary from field are feasible to prove validity of methodology adopted.

Implication of the study

The study may reflect one of the ways of understanding true identity of woman belonging to a particular micro society and their role and status in the society. The study will prove a sure-mark why woman of a particular society differs from that of another society from a synchronic perspective. I am confident that the present inquiry will successfully reflect one of the ways of understanding true identity of women belonging to a particular society and their role and status in such society. It will give a new understanding of interpretation of women in the context of a given culture and society. The study will prove a sure bench mark why woman of a particular society differs from that of another society from a synchronic as well as diachronic perspective.

Scope of further study

Due to time and space constraints, an extended and elaborate study dealing with other important aspects of the Manipuri women could not be incorporated in this present work. Over and above, semiotic studies of women of other communities and tribes inhabiting in Manipur as well as in various other regions outside Manipur have not been touched upon. It will be quite interesting and innovative to make further studies into those areas. Some related topics on which work can be done in the future are cited below:

1. Gender sensitisation in a traditional society: A study of women in Manipur
 2. Social Exclusion and Women: A Case Study of Manipur
 3. Subject of subversion: Role of Manipuri Women in Contemporary Society
 4. Semiotics and women of Manipur: A study of women of Kuki-Naga tribes
 5. Semiosis and/of Manipuri Muslim Women
 6. Semiotic studies of Maibis of Manipur
 7. Social Inclusion- Exclusion: Case study or sociological study of Lois of Manipur
 8. Cultural Semiosis of Manipuri Dance Form
 9. Cultural Semiosis of Manipuri Performing Arts
 10. Marginalisation, Deprivation and Exclusion: Manipuri Women in Present Era
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