

# MATRIARCHY DEBATE AND THE KHASI PRACTICE

Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University

for the Award of the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

*By*

**ROOPLEENA BANERJEE**

*Under the supervision of*

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Kolkata-700032

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## **ABSTRACT**

The interest in the matriarchy discourse can be traced as early as from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and still engages the minds of the scholars of anthropology, history, gender studies, kinship studies, and others. Later in the early 1970s the debate on matriarchy received a fresh impetus specially in the studies undertaken by feminist scholarship. This research work attempts to critically examine the debate surrounding the idea of matriarchy as available in the contemporary kinship studies, gender studies and others. The first part of the thesis provides a conceptual framework for understanding non-patriarchal or women-centric society through a critical analysis and distinguishing it from matriarchy, matriliney, matrifocality, matrilocality, and “matrix societies” by delineating the social and cultural matrix to situate its construction of self / social-identity, gender roles, and power relations. The second part of the thesis attempts an analysis of the Khasi ‘matriliney’ with the intention of juxtaposing it with the contemporary ‘matriarchy’ discourse. The third part of the thesis makes a systematic attempt to delineate forms and ways of negating / rejecting matriarchy in order to unpack the rationale behind it. It also looks at concepts like self / social-identity construction, gender relations, and power dynamics within the context of women-centered societies. The thesis makes a case for an alternative conceptual framework that would not consider domination / oppression (of women) to be natural and normal. In other words, such a position encourages one (specially feminist scholarship) to abandon dominant ways of approaching / understanding women’s oppression / situation (of male and other forms of superiority / inferiority) and to develop new frameworks which are not based on a superiority / inferiority model but one which is inclusive and empowering for redefining gender roles and power relations.