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SAURAJ

SPICER ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ARTICLES
JOURNAL

VOLUME 2 • ISSUE • 2 DECEMBER • 2024

ISSN: 2583-4568

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Published at:

Spicer Adventist University,

Aundh Road, Ganeshkind,

Pune-411007, India

Cover Design:

Kalangiam R

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

As we present this latest edition of SAURAJ, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the vital role that research plays in advancing our understanding of various fields of study. In a world that is constantly evolving, the contributions made by researchers and scholars are more important than ever. This journal serves as a platform for disseminating innovative ideas, rigorous analyses, and ground-breaking discoveries.

In this issue, we are proud to feature a diverse range of articles that highlight the richness and complexity of all the fields of study. These studies not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also challenge us to think critically and creatively about the issues at hand. This body of knowledge helps researchers to be deep thinkers in research.

We are particularly excited about the collaborative efforts showcased in this volume. The interdisciplinary nature of research today fosters a holistic approach to solving real-world problems, and I encourage our readers to engage with these research works actively. Your empirical and theoretical discussions are essential for nurturing an academic community that thrives on dialogue and shared learning.

As always, I would like to express my gratitude to our contributors, reviewers, and editorial board for their unwavering commitment to excellence. Their efforts ensure that we maintain the highest standards of quality and integrity in our publications.

I invite you to immerse yourself in the pages of this journal, explore the insights within, and consider how these findings can inform your own work and practices. Together, we can continue to advance knowledge and foster progress in our field.

Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to our shared journey of discovery.

Warm regards,

Carol Linda Kingston
Editor-in-Chief
SAURAJ

From the Vice Chancellor's Desk

It gives me great pleasure and excitement to welcome you to the prestigious Spicer Adventist University Journal, SAURAJ, Volume 2. Issue 2. SAURAJ continues to serve as a monument to our dedication to information dissemination and intellectual discourse as we pursue excellence in research and innovation.

As we face the complexity of the twenty-first century, it is critical that we continue to invest in research and education. SAURAJ provides an important venue for our academic community to exchange ideas, engage in meaningful discussions, and drive innovation.

The contributions within these pages reflect the hard work, dedication, and passion of our students, faculty, and staff. They offer priceless insights into the advancements, discoveries, and research that characterize our university. The journal provides a forum for academic discussion as well as an insight into the ever-changing world that influences our education and research.

As we continue to embrace new challenges and opportunities, I encourage all our readers to remain engaged with the ideas presented, and to contribute to the ongoing dialogue that enriches the fabric of our academic journey.

I applaud the contributors and editorial staff for their painstaking efforts in selecting a wide variety of research papers and articles that represent the finest in scholarly scholarship.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and I hope that this publication continues to succeed in highlighting our university's achievements. I encourage you to read the most recent edition of SAURAJ and join us in the pursuit of knowledge and greatness.

Warm regards,

Dr. Milon Rana
Vice Chancellor
Spicer Adventist University

From the Registrar's Desk

Dissemination of knowledge is the crux of the advancement and continuation of humanity. It is that one element that differentiates us with other beings. An idea or knowledge not shared will eventually be lost forever. One of the greatest discoveries of humanity is the skill to express one's idea in a written form. An expression of ideas, knowledge, and imagination as carvings, drawings, and writings that has kept us informed of the past and propels us into the future.

There is no end to learning because there is something new to discover out of the same, as the saying goes "No man steps into the same river twice". There is always something new to be discovered in life and the environment that we live in. To the one that is willing to learn, there is always something to learn from what has always been a way of life, this will break the vicious cycle of static tradition of "use to be" to a dynamic world "what can be".

Imagine a world without search and research, there will be no discoveries. Even with discoveries, if there is no dissemination of information and knowledge, we would still continue in an ignorant world. So, with or without discoveries, we would live in a tiny world where the windows of our minds remain shut. It is search and research, the opens the minds of people to imaginations beyond the obvious, leading beyond the conventional boundaries, and research to explore the world of possibilities. Researching and disseminating the idea in a written form is a skill not everyone is gifted with, but it is possible for every human to express it effectively and creatively in different media. Knowledge not applied efficiently and effectively is the greatest existential issue for humanity and the antidote to that is to research and share the findings.

Dr. A. S. Varekan
Registrar
Spicer Adventist University

THE MYSTERY OF LIFE AND THE HEREAFTER: A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST EVALUATION OF MORTALITY AND THE AFTERLIFE DEPICTED IN DISNEY ANIMATED FILMS

Joash Raj Chavakula, *Systematic Theology, MA Religious Studies Graduate*
Koberson Langhu PhD, *Assistant Professor, Spicer Adventist University*

Abstract

This concise overview critically assesses the impact of Disney's animated films on the themes of death, resurrection, and the afterlife, juxtaposing them with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. The extensive repertoire of Disney films featuring death displays varying depictions of mortality and the deceased. Disney's pervasive influence on societal norms generates controversies due to its departure from Adventist teachings concerning mortality, justice, and the afterlife, potentially fostering misunderstandings. From a Seventh-day Adventist standpoint, these narratives amalgamate diverse ideologies, straying from biblical tenets and potentially contributing to deliberate or inadvertent spiritual deception. Prudence is advised when engaging with such media, emphasizing the necessity of anchoring oneself in biblical veracity and seeking divine guidance. Given the need for brevity, the article selectively explores specific to Disney's portrayal of mortality and the afterlife and Adventist theology.

Keywords: Disney, animated films, life, death, afterlife, conditional immortality, spiritualism

Introduction

The Walt Disney Company has been renowned for playing a prominent role in distributing animated films worldwide, for the past few decades. Due to their perceived child-centric nature, many of the films are introduced to children at an early age. The films usually feature conflict between good and evil. In the process of depicting the story, death is not a theme that the films shy away from. While the Company and its films are not free from criticism due to claims-making, it is vital that Seventh-day Adventists understand how they are to relate to the films produced.

The films are made primarily for entertainment. Nevertheless, the impact these animated films have on life and culture cannot be ignored. Even in the history of the Company, it is evident that animated films have the power to change the way society acts. For example, Disney participated in making films during World War II in contribution to the war effort.

Government propaganda films featuring Donald Duck as their mascot include examples such as *Donald Gets Drafted* and *Der Fuehrer's Face* (formerly titled *Donald in Nutziland*). *The New Spirit* also featured Donald Duck, effectively motivating Americans to fulfill their tax obligations. Surprisingly, the House of Representatives was hesitant to approve the allocation of "\$80,000" for the Company, viewing cartoons as entertainment

compared to investing in artillery, despite the films boosting morale (Magazine & Chase, 2022; Walt Disney Productions, 1984, 28-32).

Furthermore, even though animated films have affected the older members of society, children are the ones that are associated with the consumption of them. Annalee Ward states "The stories children are exposed to will form the standards for assessing the truth of other stories later in life (Ward, 2002, 5)." This suggests that while fiction and fantasy (which make up Disney films) might seem purely creative, they wield transgenerational effects on the world. Considering the impression animated films have, it is worthwhile to evaluate the philosophy and world view portrayed in Disney animated films.

Additionally, Disney has influenced Adventists. For instance, Advent Health became the official caregiver for Disney World in 2021 (Disney Parks, 2021). Furthermore, in May 2023, Advent Health inaugurated an emergency room with the support of the Company. Disney-themed art characterizes the décor and ambiance of the building (Dieppa, 2023). However, the conservative religio-political right has criticized Disney for the progressive nature of its products. The Baptist Boycott of 1996 was a major attempt by concerned Christians to censor what they considered disagreeable (Pinsky, 2004, 245-246; Robert A. MacDonald & Katie McDonald, 2014). In recent times, the political left coerced Disney to stand for LGBTQIA+ rights (Fox News, 2022), which lead parents to question their view of the Company.

Seventh-day Adventists, for decades, have been divided on how contemporary media should be related to. The real ethical concerns over the nature of modern media and of fiction. Some of these concerns unfortunately are in the realm of moral panic. Due to this, the historical stance of the church on modern media and their use has been called into question. It is stated that the church leaders have not engaged adequately with the subject (Ellis, 2021). Others have endeavored to rationally consider the stakes and employ film in the classroom to enhance the experience thus advocating for a cautious use of them (Reynaud, 2002, 2008). From the influence Disney has had over the world, it is easy to see that fiction and fantasy can be as powerful as real-life stories in a large group of people to the extent of transforming culture. Hence, fiction cannot be considered merely as harmless fun just because it is unreal.

Among the various facets of theology, Seventh-day Adventists have struggled to share their view of the state of the dead due to global cultural and religious practices in relation to the dead (Akpa et al., 2013; Bahadur, 2020; Davidson, 2020; Dumitrescu, 2020; Gayen, 2020; Kumar & Cincala, 2020; Mukuka, 2020; Rimarzik, 2020). Additionally, Adventist jargon like "death as a sleep," does not help the situation either (Paroschi, 2017). Given the impressions of existing traditional, cultural perceptions of death and the afterlife, their depiction in popular media ought to be considered.

It should be noted that Seventh-day Adventist theology affirms the concept of conditional immortality that aligns with annihilationism. Thus, it is believed that life, more specifically, immortality is given on condition of obedience. Furthermore, humans die and cease to exist until the resurrection day. All those who reject God's grace will be eventually

destroyed in hell. This is because death is understood to be the result and price of sin. All those who are granted eternal life are those who have yielded to the working of the Holy Spirit and are saved through the life and work of Jesus (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, 2006, 395-397; 411-413). It is on this basis that Disney animated films are evaluated. Thus, the unique stance of Adventists on mortality and immortality necessitates that Disney animated films be evaluated to ascertain the value in relation to Seventh-day Adventism.

Death in Disney Animated Films

There has been considerable discussion in terms of the depiction of death in Disney films. Walt E. Disney is known for his preoccupation with death. Gary Laderman points out that Walt had traumatic experiences both as a child and as an adult (Laderman, 2000). He further points out that Walt did not shy away from featuring death in his productions. A short film called *The Skeleton Dance*, for example, featured a musical with dancing skeletons at a graveyard. In fact, the first feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* contains a plot to cause them in character to be in a death-like state.

In terms of the depiction of death in Disney films, it is pointed out that there is a variety of coping mechanisms in relation to death that are depicted in film (Graham et al., 2019, 10, 24-25). The study also considered that there was a difference in the depiction of death with reference to antagonists and protagonists where irreversible death is usually associated with the antagonists while death to protagonists is considered as unfair and is usually paired with death reversal/resurrection. It has also been pointed out that the films can be divided based on various themes related to death such as: “(1) unrealistic moments, (2) managing EOL (End of Life), (3) intentions to kill, and (4) transformation and spiritual connection with a subtheme of character morality” (Tenzek & Nickels, 2019,17).

Methods

A literary evaluation of the subject is done in this article. It uses data present in the thesis entitled "Beyond Life: An Evaluation of the Depiction of Death, Resurrection, and the Afterlife in Selected Walt Disney Animated Films." For ease of communication, films produced by both Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios are referred to as Disney Animated films due to Pixar being a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company. The films are divided according to their setting, type of deaths and reasons for death reversal, and the philosophy about the afterlife according to the worlds created. It is also noted that for the sake of discussion, the term Adventist is used to describe Seventh-day Adventist and all the related terms.

Furthermore, the term *biblical* and its related terms are used to describe the Adventist understanding of the Bible, thus highlighting the biblical foundation of Adventist theology. Due to the fictional nature of the worlds created within these films, the depictions of death

naturally diverge from direct correspondences with real-world cultures. Nevertheless, they often bear enough resemblance to real-life philosophies of death and the afterlife to spark meaningful contemplation. The following tables are structured to facilitate such exploration:

Table 1 delineates the various cultures or settings depicted in the films, highlighting the diverse contexts in which these narratives unfold. This diversity offers insights into how different cultural backgrounds influence the portrayal of death. Table 2 focuses on the deaths of protagonists and major supporting characters, delving into the philosophical implications conveyed through their deaths, as well as any depictions of death reversal or afterlife experiences. This analysis sheds light on how these characters grapple with mortality and transcendence within their respective narratives. Table 3 examines the fate of villains within the films, providing a lens through which to understand the treatment of moral and existential themes in opposition to the protagonists. This exploration helps discern patterns in how villainous characters meet their end and the symbolic or narrative purposes their deaths serve.

Table 1

Culture or Setting of the Films

Film	Culture/Setting
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	German
Pinocchio	Italian
Fantasia	Prehistoric Evolution/ Slavonic
Bambi	American
The Black Cauldron	European
Beauty and the Beast	French
The Lion King	African
Pocahontas	Native American/ British
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	French
Hercules	Greek Mythology
Mulan	Chinese
Tarzan	European/Ape
Fantasia 2000	American/Slavonic
Atlantis: The Lost Empire	Prehistoric Science fiction
Brother Bear	Prehistoric Inuit
Ratatouille	French
Tangled	German
Up	American
The Princess and the Frog	American
Frankenweenie	American
Frozen	Scandinavian

(table continues)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Culture or Setting of the Films

Film	Culture/Setting
Big Hero 6	Japanese American
Moana	Polynesian
Coco	Mexican
Soul	American
Raya and the Last Dragon	South-East Asian
Turning Red	Chinese Canadian

Table 2

Death, Reason for Death Reversal, and the Reason for the Afterlife / Philosophy

Film	Death	Death Reversal	Afterlife/Philosophy
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	Sleeping Death	Love's First Kiss/ Wish of the virtuous	N/A
Pinocchio	Drowning	Act of Bravery/ Wish Upon a Star	N/A
Fantasia	Natural	N/A	Dualism
Bambi	Gunshots	N/A	N/A
The Black Cauldron	Magical	The Witches	N/A
Beauty and the Beast	Knife Stab	Kiss of Love/ Beauty Within	N/A
The Lion King	Murder	N/A	Transmigration, Metempsychosis
Pocahontas	Gunshot, Natural	N/A	Animism
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	Murder	N/A	N/A
Hercules	Fate	Hercules's act of self- sacrifice	Dualism
Mulan	War casualty	N/A	Dualism
Tarzan	Predation, Gunshot	N/A	N/A
Fantasia 2000	Forest Fire	Spring Sprite	N/A
Atlantis: The Lost Empire	Natural	N/A	The Crystal/Animism
Brother Bear	Fall, Murder	N/A	Spiritism / Animism
Ratatouille	Natural	N/A	N/A
Tangled	Murder	Magical Hair	N/A

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Death, Reason for Death Reversal, and the Reason for the Afterlife / Philosophy

Film	Death	Death Reversal	Afterlife/Philosophy
Up	Stillbirth, Old age	N/A	N/A
The Princess and the Frog	Military death, Crushing	N/A	Transmigration
Frankenweenie	Accidents	Science-Galvanism	N/A
Frozen	Lost at sea, Frozen	Act of Love	N/A
Big Hero 6	Explosion, Sci-fi	programmed chip was reintegrated	N/A
Moana	Natural	N/A	Transmigration
Coco	All Types, Murder, Final Death	N/A	Land of the Dead
Soul	Accidental	Finding the purpose of life	Soul swap, Transmigration, Reincarnation
Raya and the Last Dragon	Supernatural, Murder	Learning to Forgive	N/A
Turning Red	Natural	N/A	Daoism/Anime Philosophy

Table 3

Villains and Type/Cause of Death

Film	Name of the Villian	Type/ Cause of Death
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	Evil Queen	Falling off a cliff
Pinocchio	Stromboli, Honest John Gideon, and the Coachman	N/A
Fantasia	Chernabog	N/A
Bambi	Man	N/A
The Black Cauldron	The Horned King	The Black Cauldron
Beauty and the Beast	Gaston	Falling
The Lion King	Scar	Hyenas surrounded by fire
Pocahontas	Governor Ratcliffe	N/A
Hunchback of Notre Dame	Monseigneur Claude Frollo	Falling in fire
Mulan	Shan Yu	Firecrackers
Tarzan	Clayton	Falling off trees
Ratatouille	Chef Skinner, Anton Ego	N/A
Tangled	Mother Gothel	Falling off a tower while disintegrating

(table continues)

Villains and Type/Cause of Death

Film	Name of the Villian	Type/ Cause of Death
Up	Charles Muntz	Falling off a blimp
The Princess and the Frog	Doctor Facilier	Devoured by spirits
Frankenweenie	Monsters	Impaled by a flaming piece of wood
Frozen	Hans	N/A
Big Hero 6	Professor Callaghan	N/A
Moana	Te Kā	N/A
Coco	Ernesto de la Cruz	A falling bell
Soul	N/A	N/A
Raya and the Last Dragon	Namaari, Fang Faction	N/A
Turning Red	N/A	N/A

Evaluation of the Philosophy and Worldview of Disney Animated Films

The ideas conveyed in the films are divided by various philosophies and ideologies. The worlds that Disney creates are supernatural and magical. From the films, it can be ascertained that there is diversity in the depiction of death. Moreover, most of the deaths are associated with the supernatural. Due to limited space, it is noted that most of the films have been accessed via the Disney+ Hotstar subscription service.

Diverse Showcase of Death

Diversity in death concurs with reality in that it happens for various reasons and is caused by various factors. Death happens due to natural causes or is caused because of villainous intent. It is also something that many heroes opt for as the ultimate display of virtue. Villains on the other hand experience death as a means of cosmic judgment.

Supernatural Mortals and Immortals

The way power is distributed in Disney films poses certain issues. Supernatural beings include humans such as witches and wizards and other fantasy characters like fairies, spirits, and demons. In the films, the source of life is not the focus, but some beings are seen to possess power over life and death. Due to this, it can undermine the biblical emphasis of God as sovereign over life and death. From a biblical perspective, supernatural power is given to creatures as gifts for specific purposes. In terms of humans, it is the Holy Spirit that blesses the church with gifts for the purpose of strengthening it (1 Cor 14:12). The illustration of Jesus demonstrates that His extraordinary abilities were not wielded carelessly or for self-serving purposes. His use of power was not about displaying Himself but directing attention towards His Father. While films often distinguish between the ethical and unethical use of magic, highlighting virtuous and altruistic applications, the portrayal of magic could inadvertently encourage individuals to experiment with actual magic, potentially leading to biblically detestable practices.

Credit should be given to Disney films for their ability to conceptualize the perils of granting flawed beings supernatural abilities. This portrayal effectively underscores the

wisdom of God in offering immortality contingent upon allegiance to Him. Consequently, it gives credence to the prerogative to always limit the power and actions of evil. Moreover, these films adeptly inform audiences about the potential existence of the supernatural in our reality.

Another aspect to consider is the employment of elemental magic in films like *Frozen* and *Raya and the Last Dragon* as well as the consideration of elemental spirits in *Pocahontas*. The former two feature the manipulation of elements such as earth, wind, water, and fire. Thus, the magic used in films corresponds to the Chinese, Japanese as well as recent Western forms of witchcraft and the occult (Disney Music VEVO, 2020; Hennessy et al., 2020, 51, 55, 242, 271; Hurley & Shurer, 2021, 51; Julius, 2019, 10-11). In this way, the films are potential gateways into the occult.

Immortality of the Soul

The immortality of the soul as portrayed in the films can be divided into the following: Dualism and Trialism; Astral Realms and Astral Projection; Transmigration and body swapping; Shamanism and Divination; Necromancy and Realms of the Dead and the Living.

Dualism and Trialism. Both dualism and trialism are alluded to in Disney animated films. The reality of ancestral spirits or the ability of a soul to separate from the body, not just for comedic purposes but as a main plot and force of many films indicates that the worlds created by Disney have dualistic or trialistic foundation for its worlds.¹ Although dualism and trialism may be argued for, using the Bible, Adventist theology does not find merit in this view. It is understood that ancient Jewish teaching had a holistic view of humanity. Hence, there is no existence of a sentient soul or spirit separate from a body (Davidson, 2020, 4-5; General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, 2006, 95).

Astral realms and Astral Projection. Astral projection and astral realms are featured by films such as *Soul* and *Turning Red*. Astral projection refers to “a person’s attempt to detach their soul or consciousness, known as the astral body, from their physical form to allow it to travel through the astral realm (between the divine and human planes)” (Hennessy et al., 2020, 304). In *Turning Red*, a significant connection between its storyline and Daoism is apparent. Specifically, the Red Moon Ritual depicted in the movie, allows Mei to access an astral plane. Notably, the filmmakers portray the ritual in a way that depicts a shaman directing the light of the red moon onto Mei’s forehead. During this ritual, the radiant light precisely

¹Dualistic nature refers to the idea that the body and soul as two separate entities are merged in life and separated at death while trialistic nature refers the idea that the body, soul and spirit comprise the separate entities that are merged in life and separated at death.

targets the area conventionally linked with the third eye, leading her into an astral realm. Within this astral realm, Mei encounters her ancestor, Sun Yee. This portrayal suggests the existence of various realities and the idea of the soul's independent existence. Consequently, it challenges the Genesis Creation narrative and the biblical holistic perspective on human nature. In the movie *Soul*, the astral plane serves as a space where individuals from various locations can gather and interact regularly. This concept is portrayed by integrating elements from eastern mysticism. The film depicts a lifestyle where practices like transcendental meditation and astral projection are viewed as normal, healthy, and even viable social activities. Additionally, the protagonist is advised to meditate and concentrate on his "crown chakra" to facilitate his reconnection with his physical body. Such concepts introduced in the movie might conflict with certain beliefs outlined in the Bible, potentially introducing concepts the viewers need to contend with.

Transmigration and Body-swapping. The theme of transmigration² is explored in various Disney films. *Soul* touches on this concept, while *The Lion King* suggests it through the "Circle of Life." In *Moana*, Grandma Tala transforms into a manta ray spirit, post-death. Body swapping or transformation occurs in *Brother Bear*, *The Princess and the Frog*, and *Soul*, portraying physical changes for personality growth and self-discovery. These narratives depict mystical ideologies and disciplinary actions of nature or ancestral spirits. However, they sidestep the issue of cosmic justice. The films challenge the biblical salvation paradigm and the significance of the role of the Holy Spirit in life. This leads to films that overlook the concept of human responsibility and accountability to God for the singular opportunity of one life to make essential moral decisions in the cosmic conflict, as depicted in the Bible.

Moreover, transmigration adherents perceive it as a path to divinity (Mana, 1941, 77). This notion conflates birth and death and promotes beliefs like reincarnation, undermining the Bible's promise of eschatological resurrection. Thus, Disney's portrayal of transmigration may seem appealing compared to the traditional Christian view of eternal punishment, potentially clouding the truth about death, resurrection, and the afterlife in the Bible. For instance, Quincy Howe, Jr. exemplifies an acceptance of reincarnation, attempting to reconcile it with biblical teachings. Nevertheless, disregarding the inherent challenges linked to concepts such as reincarnation, might cause even professed Christians to mistakenly believe that significant biblical characters supported this notion (Howe, Jr., 1974, 88), as is the case with Quincy Howe, Jr., even without the influence of Disney.

Consequently, when presented in a fantastical context by Disney, these ideas may possess higher potential to negatively influence the Christian faith. Yet, when understood critically, the themes in the films illuminate how real-world justice may be undervalued.

²Reincarnation and metempsychosis originate from Eastern and Western belief systems, respectively. Both propose the migration of souls from one body to another, typically after death. However, they diverge in crucial ways. Reincarnation correlates with karma, highlighting the cycle of birth, life, death, and subsequent rebirth. Metempsychosis centers on the soul's development as it gathers wisdom from various life encounters. Transmigration, a broader term, encompasses these notions and can be employed in a more general or superficial context. Regrettably, because of their resemblances, these concepts are frequently confused or conflated.

Shamanism and Divination. Shamanism is used to refer to “the spiritual practices of people in the steppe land of Central Asia and Serbia” but also used generally “to refer to wider spiritual and magical tribal traditions. A shaman is thought to have special powers to communicate with and influence good and evil spirits, in order to gain insight into past and future events” (Hennessy et al., 2020, 307). Shamanism is a recurring feature in many movies, featuring characters like Rafiki, Tanana, Kekata, and Mr. Gao, who portray shamans. These shamans play significant roles in representing the cultures depicted in these films. However, the presentations often glorify their roles and powers. For instance, Mr. Gao openly identifies himself as a shaman and later performs the potent Red Moon Ritual with great emphasis. Such portrayals can validate and glorify the shamans’ functions in society.

In earlier films, characters like Rafiki and Tanana are depicted as having the ability to summon spirits and communicate with them, influencing real-life events and altering the course of history. However, engaging in such practices in real life is considered risky as it may make individuals susceptible to the influence of Satan and his agents. Consequently, the Bible, specifically Deuteronomy 18, denounces these practices and urges adherence to purity by abstaining from them, as cautioned by God.

Necromancy. Multiple films display conversations with the dead. Although Disney is not original in this aspect, copying from the likes of Shakespeare, it is evident that key aspects of many plots rely on communication with the dead. For example, *The Lion King* features the protagonists communicating with his deceased father. In *The Princess and the Frog*, Doctor Facilier practices necromancy for his own personal gain. Although all depictions are not made equal, they are a point of concern. *Mulan* and *Moana* feature characters communicating with dead ancestors.

Sadly, these portrayals are risky in the real world due to the possibility of deception. Paul Volk, for example, recounts an encounter with a spirit masquerading as his deceased girlfriend after the funeral of three cheerleaders, including her. He vividly describes interacting with this entity, believing it to be his girlfriend, receiving comfort and reassurance. Later, upon returning to school, another cheerleader claims a similar visitation from the deceased, stating they were allowed by God to bid farewell due to their sudden deaths. However, Volk, upon studying the Bible at a later date, recognized this encounter as a demonic apparition (Little Light Studios, 2021). Such experiences, though surprising, align with Christian beliefs cautioning against spirits impersonating the deceased, emphasizing the importance of discernment, and understanding biblical truths to distinguish spiritual occurrences.

The Bible extensively cautions against the deceptive practices of evil spirits. King Saul’s experience in 1 Samuel 28 serves as a prime illustration within scripture, urging people against attempting communication with the deceased. This account stands as a stark example, emphasizing the biblical dissuasion from seeking contact with departed souls due to the potential involvement of deceitful spirits, highlighting the risks associated with such actions (Kent, 2014). Moreover, there is a cautionary note about Satan’s ability, along with his angels, to mimic humans, leading them astray through deception.

He has power to bring before men the appearance of their departed friends. The counterfeit is perfect; the familiar look, the words, the tone, are reproduced with marvelous distinctness. Many are comforted with the assurance that their loved ones are enjoying the bliss of heaven, and without suspicion of danger, they give ear “to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” (White, 1911, 552).

Despite societal secularism and scientific advancements, psychics retain influence. Psychologists note psychic guidance’s potential in aiding grief, even if detached from truth. With declining interest in organized religion and a surge in personal spirituality, younger generations are susceptible to embracing ideas contrary to biblical teachings, as seen in Disney films (Stay Tuned, 2023, May 9; Stay Tuned, 2023, June 6).

Realms of the Dead and the Living. The afterlife portrayed in *Coco* and *Soul* introduces the concept of realms for the departed. The Land of the Dead in *Coco* suggests coexistence between the living and deceased in harmony, mirroring life on earth with a structured society influenced by individual legacies. However, it leads to a nihilistic existence, tied to remembrance. Forgotten souls face eternal misfortune, creating a hierarchy favoring the most remembered.

The Great Beyond (the realm where souls go after death) in *Soul* remains open to interpretation, leaving viewers to contemplate the soul’s destination after death. Alternatively, the Great Before, consisting of premortal souls and deceased mentors, touches on death-related themes. This realm partially aligns with Mormon beliefs, proposing diverse pre-existing souls (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019). These souls are assigned with certain inherent inclinations upon their creation. This challenges personal responsibility for evil. Furthermore, the conflicting philosophies of the mentors depicted point to relativism, challenging the notion of eschatological judgment. In the Great Before, souls vary in their personalities, and some acquire sinful inclinations before transitioning to Earth, suggesting a lack of responsibility for evil.

Adventists have disagreed with the concept of preexistence, and some of these arguments echo in Canright’s discourse, which disputes the creation of souls in heaven (Canright, 1885, 52-53). Thus, it is understood that the concepts used to make the world of *Soul* do not agree with Adventist thought. It challenges the concept of a definitive eschatological judgment within the film’s world. Thus, Disney’s portrayal diverges from biblical doctrine, presenting death in ways conflicting with scripture’s teachings on judgment (Heb 9:27).

Justice and the Afterlife. Most of the films arrive at a feel-good conclusion. This is due to the desire to portray the victory of good over evil and have marketable endings. Nevertheless, the films feature concepts of the afterlife in a way that supports sinful actions and lifestyles. In *Coco*, the Land of the Dead suffers from a similar inequality to the Land of the Living as the dead that are remembered the most are higher in the socio-economical hierarchy. In *Soul*, the pre-born souls of the great before are mentored by successful historical figures. The film also presents the idea that absolute truth is elusive, as mentors with differing philosophies influence pre-existing souls, leading to philosophical contradictions that promote relativism. In the film, it is suggested that mentors move on to the Great Beyond after their mentorship

ends. This portrayal, shaped by inclusivity and a utilitarian ethic, hints at a narrative that avoids the concept of final judgment. This poses an issue because there is no ideological differentiation between the historical and philosophical figures featured. *Turning Red* also features an afterlife where the ancestor retains her sinful propensities. *Mulan* also shows the ancestors of Mulan as ghosts who retain their past characters. It is thus understood that there is no emphasis on the need for sanctification before death, supporting the idea that the afterlife is like the sinful, everyday life.

Characters that are made for film imitate everyday people. Due to this, faulty traits of character are excused, especially in protagonists, sometimes due to bad writing and others on purpose. This leads to unjust worlds that are governed by permissiveness. While it is true that there is a dichotomy of good and evil in the films, it only reflects human perceived realities, ignoring many vital aspects of reality the Bible teaches. Due to an imperfect paradigm of justice, protagonists get away with rebellion and are even incentivized to rebel. To excuse and even reward sinful actions, leads to a preference for a permissive, utilitarian ethic over true, biblical justice. For the Bible clearly teaches that all who do wickedly will be destroyed (Mal 4:1).

Veneration of Ancestors

The Lion King, *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *Brother Bear*, and more recently, *Coco* and *Turning Red* show the protagonists involved in veneration of their ancestors and seeking their guidance. Films also feature rituals for the veneration of dead ancestors. While it is true that the depiction of these practices is for the purpose of showcasing the culture that is represented, ancestors are also shown to exist separated from their bodies in some sort of a spirit form.

Nevertheless, the Bible unequivocally condemns ancestral veneration, emphasizing seeking God over consulting spirits or mediums, as He has amply instructed His people (Isa 8:19-20). It asserts Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between humanity and God (John 1:14; 1 Tim 2:5). Instances like the transfiguration (Matthew 17), where glorified humans are depicted, do not endorse ancestor worship. Jesus never endorsed such veneration while Moses and Elijah were not disembodied ancestors but had distinct encounters with God (Jude 9; 1 Kgs 2:11) where they were bodily taken to heaven. In addition, the worship of supernatural beings is discouraged; even an angel redirected worship toward God (Rev 22:9). This contrasts with Disney's depictions, undermining the Bible's teachings. The Bible stresses a direct relationship with God through Jesus, opposing reliance on spirits or intermediaries, thereby disapproving of ancestral veneration and worship of supernatural entities.

Spirits of Nature

The belief that nature consists of spirits that pertain to both animate and inanimate is present in many films. The portrayal concurs with animistic ideas of the world. *Pocahontas*, *Brother Bear*, and *Moana* employ animistic elements to build the world and move the story. Disney films often anthropomorphize animals and nature, blurring the line between humans and animals. This artistic choice blends magical realms and animism, reflecting Disney's support for environmentalism while potentially inspiring public advocacy for nature preservation. However, this anthropomorphic portrayal tends to depict human interaction

with nature negatively and often features virtue signaling.

Films like *Pocahontas* illustrate nature as a realm with various spirits that deserve respect, often depicting modern humans as adversaries to nature due to ignorance of animistic philosophies. Gordon Doss divides the animistic worldview into three tiers: the Upper, Middle, and Lower Zones, emphasizing the manipulation of natural forces by humans or anthropomorphic characters in problem-solving, leaning on practices like divination and mediation (Doss, 2015). Many films have worlds built around similar ideas rendering them animistic.

Furthermore, Disney's incorporation of animistic elements in films, such as totems and magical tools, aligns with animistic cultures while sidestepping associated issues with such. This portrayal risks confusing truth with error, potentially leading to spiritualism. Moreover, the Bible contrasts the formulaic world view of animism by affirming human stewardship of the earth while emphasizing the distinction between humans and nature. It also attributes malevolent, supernatural forces solely to Satan and rejects the idea of vengeful nature spirits, offering a distinct perspective from Disney's animistic environmentalism.

Absence of the Biblical God

Disney films tend to avoid featuring the biblical God. Nevertheless, they feature characters inspired by deities of mythologies and folklore. There is a culture of steering clear from endorsing any religion (Korkis, 2010, p. 68). The creators of *Frozen* attest to this (Lopez & Anderson, 2014). Nevertheless, due to the incorporation of world cultures, the Company eventually sidelines the biblical God. Thus, Disney uses the supernatural in their films without assenting to the biblical God, creating a metaverse that is pluralistic.

Adventist theology affirms the sovereignty of God over life and death (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association 2006, p. 388). Disney, by leaving God out of the picture in the film while featuring other mythological deities places the biblical God on the sidelines and hinders Him from being seen as sovereign over life and death. This has the potential to encourage alternative concepts of death and the afterlife that would be deemed unhealthy, according to Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Musical Ideologies and Philosophies of Death

Music plays a key role in most films, as they are musicals. It is an accepted fact that music has the power to wrest emotions dynamically and immerse the viewers in the films. Disney films do a respectable job of moving the story forward through song while capturing the emotions. Nevertheless, the films employ songs that communicate concepts of life and death that Seventh-day Adventists cannot agree with.

The first two films of Disney feature songs like "I'm Wishing" and "When You Wish Upon a Star." Both songs endorse a marketable version of fate and determinism. The first song, for example, supports the idea of wishes coming true by wishing in a wishing well. The second song is also about wishes coming true with fate in charge of granting wishes. The song even personifies fate as being kind, impartial, and the rewarder of the wishes of those with pure hearts. In *The Lion King*, "Circle of Life" deliberates about life that aligns with concepts that support transmigration. *Pocahontas* is not so subtle in its endorsement

promoting an animistic take on nature in the song “Colors of the Wind.” In *Brother Bear*, “Great Spirits” indicates that ancestors play a role in the affairs of the living as guides for future generations.

Disney, Eschatology, and the Great Controversy

Disney films illustrate the dichotomy between good and evil, with the consistent triumph of good over evil. Some of the films like *Fantasia*, *The Lion King* and *Hunchback of Notre Dame* even have hell-like scenarios. This narrative framework mirrors the biblical meta-narrative, particularly the Great Controversy motif. This motif delineates the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan, with the assured victory of good over evil. It posits that sin is the cause of death and that only through Christ can death be conquered. The narrative anticipates a series of eschatological events, culminating in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Regarding death, individuals who have placed their faith in Christ prior to their demise and have been vindicated in the investigative judgment are promised resurrection with new physical bodies at the second coming of Jesus. Those who are alive during His return will be transformed and will join the resurrected, to meet their Savior. Conversely, those not aligned with Christ will undergo a resurrection for judgment and subsequent execution. Following the annihilation of the wicked, the world will be recreated, and eternal peace will be restored with Christ as sovereign.

The Great Controversy motif is extensively elaborated in the work *The Great Controversy*. A notable event in the eschatological timeline is the widespread deception facilitated significantly through spiritualism, which by one definition is the belief in the ability to communicate with the dead. Spiritualism emerged in the 19th century and exerted a significant influence on 20th century American and British societies. An illustrative example of the appeal of spiritualism is found in the perspectives of Arthur Conan Doyle, who argued that spiritualism represented an ontological reality that could be reconciled with Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Hinduism. (Doyle, 1926, 246). In America, Emma Hardinge shared her views early on. She believed that spiritualism fulfilled of Bible prophecy and the cause of the downfall of Babylon. One example of this is Emma Hardinge’s quotation of texts from the book of Revelation. She used these texts to support the idea of spirits bringing light to the world (Hardinge, 1872, 18, 21). Furthermore, she saw the doctrine of annihilation as a “hopeless belief” and a “horrible doctrine” (Hardinge, 1872,18).

The depiction of immortal souls and practices associated with spirits in various forms within Disney narratives indirectly connects to the concept of soul immortality. Additionally, there is an indirect link between this depiction and the theory of evolution, which some argue serves as a gateway to spiritualism, particularly due to recent scientific and metaphysical developments (Donker, 2015, 237). Consequently, Disney’s endorsement of Darwinian evolution poses serious issues for Adventists. In considering the reasons why Disney features spiritualism, Giselle Sarli Hasel recognizes the significance of examining Disney from a business perspective. She suggests that Disney is able to create stories involving spiritual themes because of public interest, implying that their storytelling aligns with popular preferences. She indicates that one of her colleagues stated that the use of

spiritualism in Disney films is not primarily about conspiracies but simply that spiritualism is financially profitable (Hasel, 2018). Since, Disney does not follow a biblical Christian ethic, it amalgamates various philosophies and ideologies of death from all around the world, thus creating environments that are syncretistic.

When considering Disney's history of syncretism, implied pluralism, and support for evolution, it becomes apparent that the Company plays a significant role, whether intentional or not, in disseminating spiritualism. This influence is woven into Disney's narratives, thus potentially shaping beliefs about soul immortality and other related concepts. But this is not something to be alarmed about as Adventists consider spiritualism to play a major role in deceiving the whole world before the coming of Christ (White, 1911, 588). Furthermore, Revelation considers deception and religio-political conflict to play a major role in the end.

In Revelation 13, it is suggested that the world will be drawn to and intrigued by certain powerful entities often referred to as *beasts*. These entities are interpreted as representing religio-political powers that will employ deception to influence and mislead the entire world. Additionally, Rev 16:14 describes a scenario where the forces of evil, represented as devils, will work to gather people together in opposition to God.

Hugo Cotro highlights in Revelation 13 a cautionary message about the dangers posed by religious practices existing outside the formal structures of the church. Moreover, he emphasizes the threat of syncretism, the blending of different beliefs or practices which were prevalent within the church at that time and is anticipated to reemerge as a characteristic of the church in the future (Cotro, 2016).

Considering that Disney is syncretistic in its use of culture in its media, it is not farfetched to state that its ideas and ideals have the potential of affecting members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Moreover, the captivating and theatrical essence of films, particularly Disney productions, can potentially draw individuals away from important life responsibilities. Ellen G. White, insightful about Satan's tactics, foresaw the perilous consequences of such distractions on the younger generation, hindering their spiritual growth and involvement in meaningful work. This diversion, facilitated by the allure of dramatic entertainment, can detract from essential aspects of spiritual development and purposeful labor. She comprehended the influence that sports and theater held over the impressionable minds of young individuals. Witnessing the distraction that these activities posed to the youth of her time, she issued a cautionary warning,

Satan's work is to lead men to ignore God, to so engross and absorb the mind that God will not be in their thoughts. The education they have received has been of a character to confuse the mind, and eclipse the true light. Satan does not wish the people to have a knowledge of God; and if he can set in operation games and theatrical performances that will so confuse the senses of the young that human beings will perish in darkness while light shines all about them, he is well pleased (White, 1900).

Therefore, it remains crucial to judiciously avoid distractions from life's fundamental elements and steadfastly prioritize Christ and His mission to the world. Simultaneously, maintaining an eager anticipation for His imminent return, His Parousia, is of paramount importance.

Conclusion

The Walt Disney Company, renowned for its global distribution of animated films, often introduced to children at a young age, show cases themes of good versus evil and the triumph of good. While depicting death in its stories, these films have. Yet, their influence extends beyond entertainment, influencing culture and societal norms. However, controversies involving Disney's progressive products, such as the Baptist Boycott in 1996 and LGBTQIA+ rights have arisen.

Seventh-day Adventists divided on modern media's ethical implications, prompting reevaluation of the church's historical stance on media. With the transformative power of fiction and fantasy in shaping culture, fiction's influence is highlighted as more than mere entertainment. However, the depiction of death in Disney films sparks considerable discussion, show casing arrange of coping mechanisms and thematic divisions, creating varied perceptions on death within the movies.

In these films, deaths occur due to various circumstances and reasons, with villains often meeting frequent demises in contrast to heroes. The diversity of these depictions provides a platform for discussions about death, death reversal/resurrection, and the afterlife.

Disney animated films present diverse and supernatural deaths, portraying a power distribution that challenges biblical concepts. The depiction of immortality diverges from Adventist teachings as they explore dualism and transmigration while featuring mystical places like astral realms. Justice in the afterlife portrayals lack biblical grounding, veneration of ancestors and spirits contradict scriptural warnings. Musical themes often endorse fate and animism, differing from Adventist beliefs. The films' conflicts reflect aspects of the Great Controversy motif but blend cultural beliefs, sidestepping the biblical God. Death reversal lacks theological essence, and fire-associated destruction hints at hell. Overall, Disney's narratives, while engaging, often diverge from Adventist teachings on death, spirituality, and God.

Despite the seemingly innocent appearance of these stories, they carry mature undertones that are discernible. It is established that they amalgamate diverse philosophies and ideas, diverging from Seventh-day Adventist theology. As these beliefs are accepted by many in the real world as accurate or acceptable representations of reality, the films can inadvertently foster deception. Thus, from the standpoint of Seventh-day Adventist theology, The Walt Disney Company, whether intentionally or not, contributes to the spread of spiritualism, which is believed to deceive the world before Christ's return.

Hence, individuals interested in engaging with Disney films, or films in general, should approach them with utmost caution, anchoring themselves in the truth of God's word while seeking divine guidance and protection. This article acknowledges its limitations in not exploring in depth the ethics of fiction and fantasy, the history of media perception in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the relationship between theology and film. While these topics are considered to some extent in the thesis on which this study is based, understanding films through the lenses of history, contemporary culture, and biblical teachings, can better equip Christians to effectively communicate the Gospel in today's post-Christian culture.

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About the Authors:



JOASH RAJ CHAVAKULA is an alumnus of Spicer Adventist University, where he completed a Master of Arts in Religious Studies, specializing in Systematic Theology. He also earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Mountain View College, Philippines. Currently, he serves as a Pre-press Technician at the Oriental Watchman Publishing House. His diverse interests span Adventist theology, education, psychology, and the arts, and is passionate about discovering and building connections between these fields.



KOBERSON LANGHU is an assistant professor of church history and systematic theology at Spicer Adventist University. He holds a Bachelor of Theology, MA Religion, and PhD in Church History from AIIAS in the Philippines. His main areas of interests are Adventist history, reformation history, Adventist studies, and systematic theology. He is passionate about gospel music, lawn tennis, reading, writing, and traveling. He is married to Sanita Phawa, PhD (AIIAS), head of the Education Department. They are blessed with two daughters (Audrey and Stacey) and a son (Danny).

UNIQUENESS OF THE MATRILINEAL SYSTEM AMIDST THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF THREE MAJOR TRIBES IN MEGHALAYA: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Jharendra Bishwakarma, PhD Candidate, *Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth*
Ranjith Kingston Gladstone, PhD, *Assistant Professor, Spicer Adventist University*

Abstract

This research explores the unique matrilineal practices of Meghalaya, India, home to the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintiya tribes, known for their matrilineal culture where inheritance and family titles are passed through the maternal line. This study aims to document and analyze these practices to understand their role in female empowerment and their implications for social, political, and economic domains. Key research questions include the uniqueness of matrilineal practices, their interplay with cultural diversity and comparisons with the major tribes of Meghalaya. Meghalayan matrilineal systems are distinguished by their flexibility and robustness, promoting social cohesion and economic stability by retaining property within the maternal lineage and enhancing family wealth. These systems afford women significant social standing and control over family and community affairs, challenging traditional gender roles and power dynamics. They shape social structures, influence marriage customs, and kinship networks, and foster community cohesion through matrilocality, which strengthens extended family bonds and maternal ties. However, contemporary socio-economic changes pose challenges to maintaining these cultural traditions. Despite these pressures, Meghalayan matrilineal societies continue to offer valuable insights into social structures, women's roles, and inheritance systems within indigenous communities. This study contributes to sociological theories on gender roles and family structures, highlighting the adaptability and diversity of kinship systems across different cultural contexts. Policy recommendations include funding for community-led projects, integrating indigenous knowledge systems in education, and safeguarding matrilineal inheritance rights. Empowering women within this framework is crucial for enhancing broader social structures and community cohesiveness. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, comparative analyses, policy advocacy, and interdisciplinary approaches to further understand and support these matrilineal societies. By examining the matrilineal practices in Meghalaya, this research provides important insights that could inform policies aimed at advancing women's rights and gender equality in other regions of India and beyond.

Keywords: Matrilineal System, Meghalaya, Culture, Customs, Sociology, Khasi, Garo, Jaintia

Introduction

Background and Overview of Meghalaya and its cultural diversity

Meghalaya, often called the “abode of the clouds” hosts nature’s beauty. The easygoing nature of people, the beautifully crafted waterfalls and slopes by Mother Nature, the sunset views, and the frequent rainfall make this state a go-to place for tourists around the world. The CEIC data (n.d.) noted that 9,37,100 individuals visited the state. The state remains among the hot spots that can be expected to be targeted by quite lightly funded pockets too. The state is well known for the Steel Bridge at Cherrapunji, the Tekken Falls at Cherrapunji, the Golf Course, the Spread-Eagle Fall, the Wards Lake, the Butterfly Museum, the Elephant Falls, and the Lady Hydari Park at Shillong.

The state of Meghalaya with a geographical area of 22,429 sq. km joined the Indian Union in 1972. Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya. (n.d.) reports that the State hosts a population of about 38 lakhs and a forest cover of about 76%. The state has over 6,500 villages and is bordered by Assam in the north and Bangladesh in the south. Meghalaya to its belt is home to two national parks and five wild life sanctuaries.

Meghalaya is home to The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintiya tribes and they are among the many aboriginal groups that call the state home. Additionally, Meghalayan culture is deeply associated with nature, and it is known to be one of the world’s most matrilineal communities.

Introduction to the concept of matrilineal systems

Matrilineal systems are significantly less common than patrilineal one’s while being the exact opposite of the former in that they place more emphasis on the mother than the father in determining a child’s ancestry and inheritance rights. Matrilineal civilizations allow women to be powerful members of the family and clan, and women inherit property and titles through their families. Sanday (2002) expressed matrilineal systems as another type of social and family structure that gives women a significant role in the upbringing of their families and communities. These systems are found all over the world, from the Minangkabau people of Indonesia to the Akan people of Ghana and several First Nation peoples in North America. They serve as examples of diverse cultural environments where matrilineality is the norm (Schneider & Gough, 1961).

Thus, from a sociological perspective, the effects of matrilineal systems are extensive, influencing social connections in general, the inheritance system, and the responsibilities that women are assigned. Nongbri (2003) notes that although there is clear male dominance over females in many facets of Khasi social life, particularly in marriage and divorce, in Meghalaya, a state in northeastern India, the matrilineal structure supports females and gives them considerable freedom to manage their own and their families’ affairs. This system affects not just family relationships but also social relationships and even the institutions that comprise entire towns.

According to B  teille (2002), a thorough examination of matrilineal civilizations clarifies many of the tenets of traditional sociological theories, which by default draw comparisons and contrasts between patrilineal and patriarchal systems. Nonetheless, the placement of matrilineality offers sociologists a further highly societal kind of adaptable and varied human organization.

Research Problem

Importance of studying the matrilineal system in Meghalaya

Studying the matrilineal system in Meghalaya is crucial for several reasons, mainly because of its distinct sociocultural and economic ramifications among the various ethnic people in the area. The largely matrilineal lifestyles of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes provide a striking contrast to the patriarchal standards that permeate most of India. Nongbri (2003) emphasizes that knowledge of these matrilineal systems offers important perspectives on gender roles, inheritance customs, and alternate types of social structure.

This understanding can challenge and expand sociological theories that often generalize based on patrilineal frameworks. Furthermore, analyzing these systems considering Meghalaya's great cultural diversity can help understand how regional traditions and customs adjust to and become part of larger socio-economic trends.

Furthermore, Studying Meghalaya's matrilineal system also has important ramifications for gender studies and policy making. Bereh (1997) writes in Meghalaya, matrilineal customs have been associated with greater degrees of female empowerment and autonomy in the social, political, and economic domains. By documenting and analyzing these practices, Researchers can offer important information, which could help shape policies intended to advance women's rights and gender equality in other regions of India and elsewhere. Sangma (1981) asserts that the adaptability and endurance of matrilineal systems in the face of modernization stresses highlight the value of conserving and gaining knowledge from these cultural legacies. Such studies not only add to the knowledge in academia but also support indigenous communities' empowerment and cultural preservation.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite the extensive documentation and analysis of matrilineal systems, there are still large study gaps in our understanding of the distinct dynamics of matrilineal systems in the context of the cultural and customary variety of Meghalaya both internationally and within individual Indian communities. While the fundamentals of matrilineal practices among the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes have been well-studied (Nongbri, 2003; Bereh, 1997), there is a notable lack of comparative research among these distinct groups within the same region. The research that already exists tends to examine these tribes in isolation, ignoring how they interact and are influenced by one another, as well as how this adds to the distinctiveness of their matrilineal systems. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the present issues and changes these systems encounter because of modernization and globalization. Further research is needed to fully understand how gender, the economy, and policy connect within these matrilineal frameworks. A lack of comprehensive research exists about the effects of economic shifts, educational progress, and legislative reforms on gender dynamics and matrilineal structures, even though certain studies discuss women's empowerment and social standing in matrilineal communities (Sangma, 1981). The extent to

which non-indigenous influences and state actions shape or undermine traditional matrilineal traditions remains little studied. By addressing these gaps using a sociological perspective, it may be possible to gain a more thorough understanding of the adaptability and resilience of Meghalaya's matrilineal systems, which could have significant implications for gender studies and cultural preservation in a world that is changing quickly.

Objectives

1. To explore the uniqueness of the matrilineal system in Meghalaya.
2. To analyze the interplay between matrilineal practices and the diverse cultures and customs of the region.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Sociological Theory

This research makes a substantial contribution to sociological theory by scrutinizing and extending existing frame works that mostly concentrate on patriarchal and patrilineal systems. By examining the matrilineal systems in Meghalaya, this study highlights the diversity of family structures and inheritance practices, offering a different perspective on the frequently universalized conceptions of kinship and family. Demonstrating how matrilineal civilizations function and flourish in the face of cultural variety enhances the conversation about gender roles and power relations within families.

Additionally, this study offers fresh theoretical viewpoints on how social systems adapt and endure, especially when it comes to the ways that customs endure and change in the face of globalization and modernity. By incorporating the unique sociocultural context of Meghalaya, this study contributes to the wider sociological discussions on gender, kinship, and cultural diversity by providing an alternative perspective of social organization by considering the distinct sociocultural setting of Meghalaya.

Practical implications for understanding gender roles and family structures in Meghalaya

Practically, this research provides valuable insights into the gender roles and family structures in Meghalaya, while emphasizing how matrilineal customs affect social and economic dynamics. Understanding the distinct roles women play in Meghalaya can benefit Policies and initiatives aiming at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It can also serve as a roadmap for facilitating the development of culturally sensitive interventions that promote socioeconomic advancement and traditional practice preservation. Furthermore, this study can help government officials and social workers solve issues that matrilineal societies face, such as legal recognition of inheritance rights and the impact of external socio-economic changes.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Structural Functionalism

According to structural functionalism, society is a complex system whose elements cooperate to uphold stability and social order. From this angle, the Meghalaya matrilineal system can be viewed as a social framework that helps keep tribal groups stable and functional. Matrilineal societies rely on women to fulfill specific duties and obligations that guarantee the continuation of lineage and inheritance, which are essential for preserving social cohesiveness. According to Talcott Parsons' theory, family structures—including matrilineal ones—serve crucial purposes such as helping children develop social skills, fostering economic cooperation, and providing emotional support (Parsons, 1951). Meghalaya's matrilineal system supports these roles by maintaining social balance despite the region's variety through unique cultural customs.

Symbolic Interactionism

The meanings and symbols that people construct and employ in their daily interactions are the main subjects of symbolic interactionism. Understanding the subtle cultural differences and unique experiences inside Meghalaya's matrilineal cultures becomes easier with the help of this theory. It highlights how social roles and identities are created and maintained via day-to-day interactions and the application of symbols like inherited practices and family names (Blumer, 1969). In the context of Meghalaya, Symbolic interactionism can investigate how women understand and perform their responsibilities within the matrilineal framework as well as how other community members comprehend and support these roles.

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory examines how social structures challenge and support gender inequality. It provides an analytical framework for examining Meghalaya's matrilineal system, especially in terms of how it impacts gender relations and women's empowerment. In contrast to patriarchal structures, matrilineal civilizations often provide women considerable authority over assets and decision-making (Nongbri, 2003). In this context, Feminist theory sheds light on how matrilineal practices contribute to gender equity as well as the limitations and challenges faced by women.

Social Exchange Theory

Meghalaya's matrilineal system can also be understood through the lens of Social Exchange Theory, which sees social relationships as exchanges in which people try to maximize advantages and minimize costs. This theory plays a crucial role in analyzing how kinship networks and matrilineal inheritance affect social and economic exchanges in these communities. The allocation of property and resources along the female line, for instance, may impact social obligations, alliances, and marriage patterns, illuminating how social and economic incentives shape familial and community interactions (Blau, 1964).

Cultural Ecology

The study of cultural ecology looks at how social institutions and cultural practices adjust to their surroundings. Understanding how Meghalaya’s matrilineal systems have changed in response to the physical and ecological environment of the area is made easier with the help of this theory. It investigates the relationship between cultural norms—like matrilineal inheritance—and the natural world, offering insights into how these norms support groups in managing resources and sustaining their way of life in a diverse and often challenging landscape (Steward, 1955). By integrating these sociological theories, the research can offer a thorough understanding of the distinctiveness of the matrilineal system in Meghalaya.

Matrilineal Systems Globally

A comparative examination of matrilineal systems in various cultures reveals notable differences as well as similarities that shed light on the various ways that different society’s structure kinship, inheritance, and social roles. For example, the Minangkabau people of Indonesia, the Akan people of Ghana, and the Khasi people of India all display distinctive matrilineal customs specific to their cultural environments. Minangkabau practice- "adat” is a body of customary law that emphasizes marital inheritance and female leadership in the household, thus ensuring that property remains within the maternal line (Sabbath, 2002). Similar to this, the Akan people of Ghana place a high value on matrilineal descent when it comes to inheritance and succession planning. Mothers are the primary source of ancestry for these people, and women frequently hold important positions of social and economic influence in their communities (Schwimmer,1990).The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya, in contrast, combines matrilineal inheritance with a system where the family property is inherited by the youngest daughter (Nongbri, 2003). This highlights the role that women play in preserving social stability and familial continuity (see Table 1).

Table 1

Culture and Key Features

Culture	Key Features
Minangkabau (Indonesia)	-“Adat” customary law emphasizing marital inheritance and female leadership in the household - Property remains within the maternal line
Akan (Ghana)	- High value on matrilineal descent for inheritance and succession planning - Mothers as the primary source of ancestry - Women hold important social and economic positions in communities
Khasi (India)	- Matrilineal inheritance combined with the youngest daughter inheriting family property - Role of women in preserving social stability and familial continuity

Notwithstanding these variations, recurring patterns show how flexible and robust matrilineal systems are. Matrilineal practices can improve social cohesion and economic

stability in all three cultures by ensuring that property and resources stay in the maternal lineage and consolidating family wealth. Furthermore, these systems frequently give women more social standing and significant control over family and community affairs, which is in direct contrast to the patriarchal norms prominent in many other societies. According to Schneider and Gough (1961), matrilineal systems put women at the center of social and economic life, which challenges traditional notions of gender roles and power dynamics. This comparative analysis emphasizes how matrilineal systems can take on diverse forms while emphasizing how they all share the ability to promote gender equity and social organization in a variety of cultural contexts.

Matrilineal System in Meghalaya

The historical background and development of matrilineal systems in Meghalaya are deeply linked with the region's indigenous tribes, especially the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia communities. Historically, these tribes have long been known for their Matriliney, or the practice of tracing ancestry and inheritance via the mother line. This system has been essential to their social structure for many years. One of the major matrilineal groups, the Khasi tribe, has long upheld a societal structure in which property and family names are passed down through the female line, guaranteeing that women play a central role in both familial and community affairs, according to Bareh (1997).

The origins of these practices can be traced back to ancient times, where they were likely influenced by the need for stable land tenure and social cohesion in a pre-dominantly agrarian society. According to Sangma (1981), the Garo and Jaintia tribes also created matrilineal customs that were tailored to their particular economic and environmental circumstances. These customs served to maintain social continuity and stability in the face of outside influences and historical shifts. These matrilineal systems have proven remarkably resilient over time, adjusting to the demands of globalization and modernization while retaining their core cultural values and practices (Nongbri, 2003).

The Khasi tribe is primarily matrilineal, meaning that inheritance and lineage flow through the mother's side of the family (Nongbri, 2003). In Khasi society, the youngest daughter, referred to as the "kakhadduh" or "kakhadduhshi," usually inherits family names and property. This practice gives women a great deal of economic and social power and emphasizes their pivotal role in family and community affairs (Bareh, 1997). Marriage customs among the Khasis often involve a matrilineal residence pattern, where the husband moves into the wife's household, contributing to the continuity of matrilineal ties (Sangma, 1981).

Matrilineality, in which descent and inheritance are traced via the mother's lineage, is another cultural practice of the Garo tribe (Roy, 1993). Women have a significant influence on family and community decision-making processes in Garo society, where the youngest daughter inherits ancestral property (Karotemprel, 1982). Though there are variations depending on local customs and preferences, Garo marriage customs typically involve a patrilocal residence pattern in which the wife moves to live with the husband's family (Sangma, 1981).

Like the Khasis and Garos, the Jaintia tribe is matrilineal, with inheritance passing through the maternal line (Roy, 1993). Women are essential to maintaining cultural traditions

and customs in Jaintia society, as well as playing important roles in managing family affairs (Karotemprel, 1982; see Figure 1). Rituals and ceremonies that highlight the continuation of matrilineal ties and community solidarity are common components of Jaintia marriage customs (Bareh, 1997).

Although all three tribes follow matrilineal customs, there are differences in inheritance laws, family structures, and marriage customs that are a reflection of their distinct cultural backgrounds and surrounding circumstances. Comprehending these disparities is imperative to grasp the complex dynamics of matrilineal systems in Meghalaya, as well as their wider consequences for social structure and cultural identity.

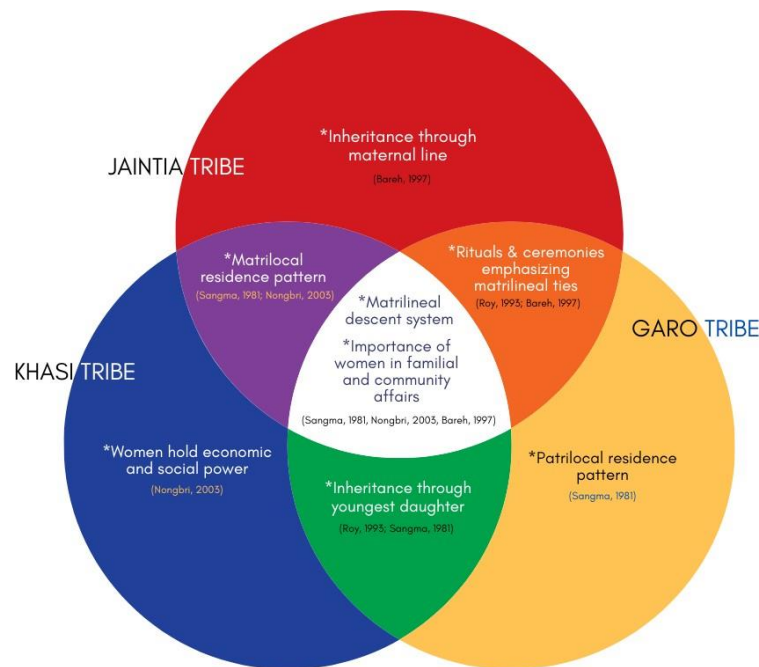


Figure 1: Significance of Matrilineal System across Three Major Tribes of Meghalaya

Diversity in Culture and Customs

The Khasi's yearly Nongkrem Dance festival, which honors the local deity U Lei Shyl-long and celebrates successful harvest, is one of their distinctive cultural customs. Invoking blessings and prosperity, the festival features traditional clothing adorned with silver ornaments and headdresses, as well as rhythmic dances performed to the sounds of drums and the tangmuri, a type of flute (Sangma, 1981). The ShadSukMynsiem festival, which heralds the start of the planting season and involves rites to thank the gods for a bountiful harvest and to ask for blessings for upcoming crops, is another ritual practiced by the Khasis.

The Garo tribe, known for their agrarian lifestyle, festivals, and rituals, are integral parts of their society. The Wangala Dance, a post-harvest celebration honoring Misi Saljong, the sun god, for granting a bountiful harvest, is one of their distinctive cultural practices.

Bamboo flutes, drums, and gongs are some of the traditional musical instruments that accompany the lively dance's rhythmic motions (Karotemprel, 1982). Another important ceremonial dance, the Songsarek, is performed at festivals and community events to represent the Garo people's unity and sense of cultural pride. The Garo people have complex marriage customs that involve gift-giving and traditional clothing exchanges as a means of fostering close family and socialties.

The Jaintia tribe is primarily found in Meghalaya's eastern region. One of their distinctive cultural customs is the Behdeinkhlam festival, which is held to ask gods for blessings for a bountiful harvest and the well-being of the community. The ceremonial race of wooden poles, which represents cooperation and communal harmony, is the festival's main attraction (Bareh, 1997). The Jaintia people are renowned for their exquisite weaving and bamboo crafts, which showcase their exceptional artistry and reflect both their cultural legacy and means of subsistence.

The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes have different cultural practices and customs despite having matrilineal systems in common. These traditions demonstrate how their social structures, histories, and environments, which form the foundation of their cultural identities, have allowed them to endure over time. Knowing these distinctive customs enables us to better appreciate Meghalaya's rich cultural diversity as well as the close ties that exist between the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes' traditions, spirituality, and sense of community.

Research Questions

What is the uniqueness of Matrilineal practices?

What is the interplay of Matrilineal Practices with Cultural Diversity

How do you compare matrilineal practices with the major tribe of Meghalaya?

Analysis and Discussion

Uniqueness of Matrilineal Practices

Inheritance and Property Rights

Meghalayan matrilineal customs, which trace ancestry through the female line, subvert traditional ideas about inheritance and property rights. Property is usually passed down from mother to daughter in the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, guaranteeing continuity within the maternal lineage (Nongbri, 2003). Women benefit economically and socially from this special inheritance system because they frequently have control over family assets and decisions about the use and management of land (Sangma, 1981). Unlike patrilineal systems prevalent in many societies, where male heirs traditionally inherit property, matrilineal practices in Meghalaya provide women with a foundational role in familial wealth distribution and resource allocation. Though women have a great deal of autonomy when it comes to property, the matrilineal system also raises concerns about gender equity and the way that contemporary legal frameworks regarding inheritance and property rights interact

with cultural traditions.

Role of Women in the Family and Community

Meghalayan matrilineal societies place a high value on women's roles in the family and the community at large. According to Karatmpall (1982), matrilineal descent guarantees that women have significant roles in preserving cultural continuity and family lineage. They frequently participate in economic endeavors like business ventures and agriculture, acting as decision-makers in household affairs (Bareh, 1997). Furthermore, women are leaders in the community, participating in village councils, social rituals, and ceremonies that influence daily life in addition to leading in the home (Roy, 1993). By giving women social standing and influence, the matrilineal system empowers them and promotes an egalitarian and co-operative view of family and community dynamics. Gender norms and cultural expectations can also limit women's autonomy, especially when it comes to assuming roles outside of conventional domains. This underscores the intricate nature of gender dynamics in patrilineal societies.

Impact on Social Structures and Relationships

The social structures and relationships in Meghalaya's tribal communities are greatly influenced by matrilineal practices, which also shape marriage customs, kinship networks, and community cohesion. Marriage customs are influenced by the emphasis on female ancestry; matrilocality—in which husbands move into their wives' homes—is a common practice (Roy, 1993). According to Sanday (2002), this practice fosters social solidarity and mutual support by fortifying the bonds between extended family members and strengthening maternal ties. Furthermore, the matrilineal system encourages cooperative decision-making and shared responsibilities within families by promoting a balanced power dynamic between the sexes (Nongbri, 2003). However, the matrilineal system in Meghalaya faces difficulties in adjusting to contemporary pressures while maintaining cultural identity and community traditions because of socioeconomic changes and cultural shifts, including urbanization and educational advancements (Sangma, 1981). Comprehending these dynamics is imperative in evaluating the adaptability and durability of matrilineal societies in Meghalaya, as well as their wider consequences for social theory and policy formulation.

In conclusion, Meghalaya's distinctive matrilineal customs provide a unique perspective for examining social structures, women's roles, and inheritance systems in indigenous communities. Through the examination of these three fundamental areas—property rights and inheritance, women's roles in the home and community, and effects on social structures and relationships—this research advances our knowledge of how matrilineal traditions influence cultural identity and societal dynamics within a heterogeneous socio-cultural setting.

Interplay with Cultural Diversity

Influence of Cultural Practices on Matrilineal Customs

Meghalaya's matrilineal system is intricately entwined with the customs and practices of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, both influencing and being influenced by their distinct cultural environments. Matrilineal customs are reinforced and perpetuated in large part by cultural practices like rituals, ceremonies, and social norms (Bareh, 1997). For instance, the Khasi Nongkrem Dance Festival honors the importance of female ancestry and the role that women play in maintaining cultural identity in addition to celebrating the harvest (Sangma, 1981). Similar to this, the Wangala Dance and Songsarek rituals among the Garos signify the power of maternal bonds and communal unity in addition to celebrating agricultural prosperity (Karotemprel, 1982). Cultural practices play a crucial role in shaping the functioning of matrilineal systems, impacting gender roles, inheritance customs, and kinship structures in these communities.

Variations in Matrilineal Practices among Different Tribes

Although matrilineality is practiced by all three of the Meghalayan tribes, there are some noticeable differences in the ways that these customs are applied and understood. For example, inheritance usually goes to the youngest daughter among the Khasis, but it can go to the daughter or the sister's daughter among the Garos (Roy, 1993). The Jaintia tribe also demonstrates variances in their matrilineal customs, which are specific to their cultural context and reflect historical and geographical influences (Nongbri, 2003). These differences demonstrate how matrilineal systems are adaptive, changing over time in response to historical developments, environmental changes, and regional customs. Comprehending these subtleties is essential to recognizing the diversity among the indigenous communities of Meghalaya and to placing the intricate matrilineal customs of various tribal groups in context.

Integration and Coexistence of Matrilineal System with Other Cultural Norms

In Meghalaya, the matrilineal system coexists with other cultural practices and norms, exhibiting a dynamic integration within larger socio-cultural frameworks. Other cultural practices, such as patrilocal marriage customs and religious rituals, also have an impact on social dynamics, even though matrilineality shapes kinship relations and inheritance patterns (Sanday, 2002). For instance, although the Garos' matrilineal system dictates inheritance through the female line, patrilocality—where the husband relocates to live with the wife's family—is a common aspect of Garo marriage customs (Karotemprel, 1982). The way matrilineal customs are incorporated with other cultural norms highlights how adaptive and resilient Meghalayan Indigenous traditions are at navigating challenging social environments without sacrificing their sense of cultural identity or communal cohesion.

To conclude, the interaction of Meghalaya's matrilineal systems with its diverse culture underlines the complex interplay among customs, adaptation, and collective identity. This research adds to a nuanced understanding of how matrilineal traditions evolve within diverse socio-cultural contexts, providing insights into the dynamic interactions that shape identity and social structures in Indigenous communities. These explorations focus on three key areas: the influence of cultural practices on matrilineal customs, variations in matrilineal

practices among different tribes, and integration with other cultural norms.

Comparative Analysis

Differences and Similarities between the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia Tribes in Terms of Matrilineal Practices

Meghalaya's Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes all follow matrilineal traditions, but they all differ slightly from one another in ways that are specific to their own cultural backgrounds and geographic settings. The youngest daughter, or "kakhadduh," is usually the one to inherit from the Khasis, guaranteeing property and lineage within the maternal line (Nongbri, 2003). On the other hand, the Garos practice matrilocality, in which the husband moves in with the wife's family, and they may also pass an inheritance to the daughter or the sister's daughter (Karotemprel, 1982). Matrilineality is also practiced by the Jaintia tribe, who are distinguished from the Khasis and Garos by subtle differences in inheritance customs and cultural rituals (Roy, 1993). All three tribes emphasize the significance of maternal lineage in forming kinship networks, family structures, and community identities despite these distinctions. Matrilineal practices exhibit both continuity and variation in response to historical, social, and environmental influences, offering insights into the varied ways in which cultural traditions adapt and evolve within Meghalaya's tribal societies.

Influence of External Factors (e.g., Modernization, Globalization on the Matrilineal System

Meghalaya's matrilineal system is subject to external influences that affect sustainability and adaptability, including modernization, globalization, and socioeconomic shifts. Traditional livelihoods and cultural practices are coming under more and more pressure in Meghalaya as a result of economic development and urbanization (Nongbri, 2003). Younger generations are exposed to alternative lifestyles and value systems through the infusion of modern education, technology, and media, which may change their perceptions of traditional matrilineal practices (Sanday, 2002). In matrilineal societies, globalization also brings with it new consumer culture and economic opportunities that have the potential to alter gender roles and social hierarchies (Bareh, 1997). Furthermore, inheritance laws and property rights may be impacted by legal frameworks and policies that are influenced by national and international norms, which may have an impact on the application of matrilineal customs (Sangma, 1981). Matrilineal systems in Meghalaya display resilience in the face of these outside pressures, as communities work to balance cultural continuity with the realities of a changing global environment. This highlights the ability of indigenous traditions to adapt to new circumstances.

The comparative examination of matrilineal customs among the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, in conclusion, highlights the diversity of Meghalaya's cultural landscape and provides insights into how customs change and adapt in various sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, analyzing how outside forces impact the matrilineal system offer sacrificial view point on the dynamics of cultural continuity and change within Indigenous communities, adding to larger conversations about identity formation, heritage preservation, and socioeconomic development in an increasingly globalized world.

Implications and Conclusion

Theoretical Implications

Contribution to Sociological Theories on Family Structures and Gender Roles

Studying the matrilineal system in Meghalaya makes a substantial contribution to sociological theories about gender roles and family structures. By emphasizing ancestry and inheritance through the maternal line, matrilineal societies challenge conventional patriarchal norms and provide a distinctive viewpoint on kinship and familial structure (Nongbri, 2003). This study emphasizes women's roles as decision-makers and keepers of cultural heritage, highlighting how matrilineal practices shape gender dynamics within households and communities (Karotemprel, 1982). The study highlights the variety of gender roles and responsibilities that exist beyond the Western paradigms by examining the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes. This helps to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cultural traditions influence social structures (Roy, 1993).

Furthermore, Meghalaya's matrilineal system challenges conventional theories that primarily concentrate on patrilineal societies by providing insights into alternative models of family cohesion and societal organization. By highlighting the diversity and adaptability of kinship systems in various cultural contexts, this contribution broadens theoretical frameworks within sociology and enhances our understanding of gender relations and family dynamics worldwide.

Insights into the Adaptability and Resilience of Matrilineal Systems

Research on Meghalaya's matrilineal systems also sheds light on how resilient and adaptive Indigenous cultural practices are in the face of globalization and socioeconomic shifts. Matrilineal societies in Meghalaya show a remarkable ability to maintain essential cultural values while adjusting to modern realities, despite external pressures like modernization and legal reforms (Bareh, 1997). The study reveals how matrilineal traditions change over time, balancing established norms with new possibilities and challenges (Sangma, 1981). By examining factors such as urbanization, education, and media influences, the research illustrates how matrilineal systems maintain cultural continuity while responding to shifts in societal expectations and economic opportunities (Sanday, 2002). This adaptability underscores the dynamic nature of indigenous cultures and their ability to sustain traditional practices in a rapidly changing world, offering lessons for cultural preservation and community resilience (Nongbri, 2003).

In conclusion, researching the matrilineal system in Meghalaya has theoretical implications that go beyond comprehension of gender roles and family structures to include a broader understanding of cultural diversity, adaptability, and resilience. This research emphasizes the relevance of Indigenous knowledge systems in forming modern conceptions of kinship, gender, and community dynamics by showcasing their contributions to sociological theories and offering insights into the adaptability of matrilineal systems. These findings highlight the significance of Indigenous perspectives in the global discourse on societal change and continuity, and they contribute to ongoing discussions on cultural heritage

preservation, social equity, and sustainable development.

Practical Implications

Policy Recommendations for Preserving Cultural Heritage

The study of Meghalaya's matrilineal system provides an important context for policy suggestions meant to protect cultural heritage. Policies that support the documentation, protection, and promotion of indigenous cultural traditions must be put into place as matrilineal practices face challenges from modernization and outside influences (Nongbri, 2003). Funding for community-led projects to preserve oral histories, traditional arts, and rituals that are essential to matrilineal societies should be included in government initiatives for cultural preservation (Karotemprel, 1982). Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems should be included in educational curricula to ensure that the next generation of learners recognizes and values their cultural heritage (Sangma, 1981). Matrilineal inheritance rights should be acknowledged and safeguarded by legal frameworks, guaranteeing women in their communities' fair access to resources and property (Roy, 1993). Through the implementation of these policies, Meghalayan policymakers can foster social cohesion and cultural diversity, all the while supporting the resilience and continuity of matrilineal systems.

Recommendations for Empowering Women within the Matrilineal Framework

Targeted interventions that strengthen women's economic, social, and political agency are necessary to empower them within the matrilineal framework. According to Bareh (1997), policies ought to give precedence to initiatives that facilitate women's leadership roles in community governance and decision-making processes. Women can be empowered to actively participate in local development initiatives utilizing leadership training, mentoring opportunities, and capacity-building programs (Sanday, 2002). Women can effectively contribute to household income and community development through economic empowerment initiatives like training in entrepreneurship and credit facilities (Nongbri, 2003). Expanding educational opportunities is also necessary to guarantee equal access for women and girls, promoting higher education and skill development that meet their goals, and advance society (Sangma, 1981).

To sum up, the research on the matrilineal system in Meghalaya has practical implications that emphasize the significance of policy interventions that protect cultural heritage while empowering women in their communities. Policymakers can enhance social cohesion, encourage inclusive growth, and support the sustainable development of matrilineal societies in a world that is changing quickly by putting specific policies and recommendations into practice. By celebrating the rich cultural diversity that characterizes Meghalaya's Indigenous communities and defending their rights and dignity, these initiatives ensure the resilience and vitality of these communities for the coming generations.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This research investigates Meghalaya's matrilineal system's uniqueness in the context of the region's varied cultural and customary practices. Several important conclusions are drawn after examining a variety of academic sources, such as sociological theories, anthropological studies, and regional analyses:

First of all, the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes in Meghalaya are known for their matrilineal systems, which are distinguished by unique inheritance customs in which property and ancestry are passed down through the maternal line. This system offers insights into alter- native gender roles and family structures, while also challenging the traditional patriarchal norms that are common in other parts of India (Nongbri,2003;Bareh,1997).

Second, matrilineality has a cultural significance in Meghalaya that goes beyond family dynamics to affect larger social structures and cohesiveness within the community. Matrilineal traditions are essential to the construction of identities, to cultural practices like ceremonies and rituals, and to the governance of communities. They demonstrate a robust response to past and present transformations (Karotemprel,1982; Sangma,1981).

Thirdly, the study emphasizes how flexible matrilineal systems can be to external influences like globalization and modernization. Matrilineal societies in Meghalaya show that they can incorporate new elements while maintaining essential cultural values, despite the challenges these influences pose to traditional practices (Sanday,2002; Roy,1993).

Reflection on the Significance of the Matrilineal System in Meghalaya

Meghalaya's matrilineal system is extremely important on a local and international level. Within indigenous communities, it acts as a cultural anchor that shapes gender relations, family structures, and social norms. These societies preserve women's roles as tradition keepers and decision-makers in the home by tracing lineage through maternal descent (Thomas, 1986).

In addition, the matrilineal system provides a prism through which to view alternative social organization models and adaptability to changing socioeconomic conditions. As a counter weight to the homogenizing effects of globalization, it emphasizes the significance of cultural heritage in preserving community identity and cohesion (Goswami,2000).

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on the matrilineal system in Meghalaya should explore several avenues to deepen our understanding and address emerging challenges:

Longitudinal Studies: Monitor changes in matrilineal practices over time by conducting longitudinal studies and investigating the effects of cultural and socioeconomic changes on gender dynamics and family structures (Singh, 1992).

Comparative Analyses: Extend comparative analyses to other matrilineal societies worldwide, encompassing the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, offering insights into similarities, variations, and adaptive strategies (Schneider&Gough,1961).

Policy and Advocacy: Within these frameworks, support policies that uphold women's empowerment and gender parity while preserving matrilineal traditions (hooks, 1984).

Interdisciplinary Approaches: To investigate holistic perspectives on matrilineal

systems and their implications for societal well-being, and encourage interdisciplinary collaborations between anthropology, sociology, law, and cultural studies (Lipman-Blumen, 1976).

Scholars may further their understanding of Meghalaya's matrilineal systems and their significance in the current conversation about gender equality, cultural diversity, and sustainable development by pursuing these research avenues. Maintaining cultural integrity, social justice, and indigenous rights in a variety of international contexts depends on the results of this ongoing investigation.

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About the Authors:



JHARENDRA BISHWAKARMA is a research scholar at Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune, focusing on Technology in Education, Sociology of Education, and Teaching Methodology. With seven years of teaching experience at Siang Valley Academy and Spicer Adventist University and three years in corporate roles at Infosys, WNS, and Better Technology, he integrates a diverse professional background into his research. His interests include Nationalism, Challenges in Education, School-Level Sociology, Social Culture, and Globalization, reflecting a commitment to exploring how these factors influence educational practices and outcomes in a globalized world.



RANJITH KINGSTON GLADSTONE was born in Tamil Nadu, India, to Adventist parents, Mr. D Gladstone and Mrs. Patricia Gladstone. He is married to Mrs. Carol Linda Kingston, and they have a son, Carl Jason Harston Kingston. He has vast experience in teaching across many fields and places, such as Spicer Adventist University (India), Adventist University of Africa (Kenya), Andrews University (USA), Dewey International University (Cambodia), and AIIAS (Philippines). He has authored and co-authored books, blogs, peer-reviewed journals, magazines, and so on. Also, presented and awarded at International and National Research Conferences across the globe.

AGE COHORTS AS DETERMINANTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: A STUDY OF THE TANGKHUL NAGAS

Hokhuimi Ramrar* PhD, *William Carey University, Shillong.*

Maitreyee Roy, *Department of Environmental Management and Science, William Carey University, Meghalaya, India.*

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Abstract

The study investigates the relationship between age and environmental awareness among the Tangkhul Nagas in Manipur, India. It emphasizes that environmental concerns are significantly correlated with age, suggesting that younger individuals exhibit greater ecological awareness compared to older generations. The research highlights the impact of generational experiences on environmental attitudes, indicating that the decline in environmental concern with age may be attributed to differing life experiences rather than age alone.

Keywords: Manipur, Environmental concerns, age, relationship, generational, experiences.

Introduction

There is a growing recognition that human actions are causing harm to the natural environment. According to polling statistics, a significant number of individuals worldwide consider environmental issues to be one of the most significant societal concerns of our day (Dunlap, 1991; Dunlap, Gallup, & Gallup, 1993)^{i,ii}. As a species, humans have significantly influenced the land, water, and air of the globe, surpassing the impact of other species. We have extensively altered the world to accommodate our comfort and perceived necessities, leveraging our exceptional technical prowess and agility. Through our actions, we have extensively utilized a significant number of the Earth's natural resources, displaced various species, and deposited the waste generated from our endeavors to enhance our way of life in various locations worldwide, including bodies of water such as pools, pits, seas, lakes, and rivers, as well as landfills on land, even on the most elevated mountains, and in the atmosphereⁱⁱⁱ. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that environmental issues are just in their initial stages, and their intensity is expected to escalate in the forthcoming years^{iv}.

As more and more people become environmentally conscious, a growing number of social scientists are investigating people's opinions on environmental issues through survey research, leading to the conclusion that Various factors, including as education, age, place of residence, political ideology, and others, have been found to be associated with different measures of environmental beliefs^v.

Research conducted by Zuschlag and Whitbourne in 1994^{vi} has revealed that the impact of an individual's birth group on their behaviour is more significant than the influence of their education. Numerous other research has also consistently found that age is a significant determinant of the environmental attitudes (Arcury& Christianson, 1993; Honnold, 1984–

85)^{vii,viii} of survey participants when considering their socioeconomic factors. Thus, Age is a crucial determinant of environmental attitudes, as younger individuals tend to be more ecologically aware. (Tran Cong Chinh, 2021)

The Tangkhul, similar to all tribal communities, possess a strong connection to the natural world. This is evident not just in their myths or folktales but also in their daily lifestyles. Tangkhul villages are typically densely populated and located atop hills, surrounded by dense forests. The village has traditionally served as the paramount political, social, economic, and religious entity, fostering profound spiritual, social, and cultural connections among its inhabitants. The village councils served as forest guardians and overseers, ensuring the proper management of village forests and other ecosystems for the conservation of natural resources. In addition, they would designate the specific location for huming cultivation each year. To facilitate the restoration of the land's fertility, the area would be left uncultivated and off-limits to locals for a minimum of four to five years.

Significant changes have occurred among the Tangkhul Nagas in various aspects such as economics, politics, social dynamics, and religion. The shift from a traditional to a modern way of life has been complex and challenging. As the people enthusiastically abandon their previous religious beliefs in favour of Christianity, their attitudes towards customs, cultural practices, and their perspectives on the natural world's guidance have also transformed. Christianity diverged from the majority of customs and traditions. The dynamics of the human-nature relationship have undergone transformation since the advent of Christian missionaries in the Tangkhul Naga highlands. Meanwhile, the pursuit of financial gain in the contemporary economy has led to the exploitation of the abundant resources in the land of Tangkhuls, driven by the desire for progress and enhanced material living standards. Ho-ram contends that due to their lack of awareness of the worth of their products and resources, they willingly relinquished all trade and commerce privileges to other groups. In the face of these difficulties, the Tangkhuls are grappling with the task of preserving the symbiotic connection between humans and nature that was once an integral aspect of their cultural heritage.^{ix}

Literature review

Van Liere and Dunlap (1980)^x demonstrated in a significant review that the coefficients for age exhibit considerable strength. The coefficients generally fall within the range of -.2 to -.4, indicating a moderate negative correlation between age and environmental concern. He suggested that elderly adults may have lesser levels of environmental concern compared to younger individuals because their actions are influenced by their desire to retain or alter their position within the prevailing social hierarchy.

Stephen L. Klineber (1980)^{xi} found that age and education are the only two demographic characteristics that consistently show a correlation with environmental concern, among the eight variables examined (gender, education, age, ethnicity, income, religion, etc.), across several metrics. It is evident that younger individuals with higher levels of education tend to show greater concern for environmental issues and demonstrate a stronger dedication to environmental conservation, regardless of how the dependent variable is assessed.

In his 1979 publication "Age and Environmental Concern," Frederick H. Buttel^{xii} explores the relationship between age and levels of concern for the environment. A Multivariate Analysis has firmly established age as the primary socioeconomic factor influencing public environmental opinions, based on the data from the study and related research findings.

Tran Cong Chinh (2021)^{xiii} The study identified a correlation between gender and environmental concern. The regression models conducted in the study demonstrated a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between males and environmental concern. This implies that men are more inclined to be concerned about the condition of the environment compared to women. Additionally, it has been observed that younger individuals exhibit a higher level of environmental concern compared to older individuals.

Hypothesis

1. H1 Younger individuals exhibit greater concern for environmental degradation compared to older individuals.
 - H1a people in the 80s show similar environmental concerns to those in the 20s
2. H2 there is sig. correlation between age and environmental concern.

Methods

Participants

The significance of an individual's birth group has been discovered to have a greater impact on moulding the behaviour of the group (Zuschlag and Whitborune 1994)^{xiv}. Various demographic categories are employed to accurately quantify the size of a group and categorise its behaviour. (Marker, 2004; Collins, 2001; Duisenbekova, 2023)^{xv}

- *0-20 years-* The current stage of development of this entity is still in its early stages, but certain attributes are already becoming apparent. These include a high level of proficiency in technology, a strong awareness and concern for social and environmental issues, and a propensity for entrepreneurial endeavours. Additionally, in comparison to earlier generations, they are typically more outspoken, personally driven, and value oriented.
- *21-40 years-* An extremely gregarious cohort that utilises social media, mobile devices, and the internet to maintain communication with their acquaintances, relatives, and coworkers and exhibiting certain traits commonly found in individuals in the previous age group.
- *41-60 years-* were open to more freedom and the first to accept television and films. They have seen historic shifts and might be referred to be the original prophets of social and economic transformation.
- *61-80 years* Experienced the process of nation-building that occurred after India gained independence from British domination. The political, social, and economic transformations that occurred during this age had a significant impact on the perspectives and principles of this generation. Initially, their perspectives were conservative and adhered to the prevailing social norms of the time. Despite the fact that they may not possess the same level of technological proficiency as younger generations, they have embraced technology more rapidly as time has progressed.
- *81 years-* They appreciate hard effort, discipline, and tradition. Excellent workers, frugally, selflessly, and incredibly practical. Not much space was left over for "dreaming." They watch society's frenetic transformation with considerable disapproval since they have no experience with modern technologies. Hence, they were also known as traditionalists.

Research design

The sample was examined using a quantitative "after-the-fact" research design, or x post facto research design. The quasi-experimental-demonstrate a cause-and-effect link between a dependent and an independent variable- research technique known as "x post facto" looks at how an independent variable influences a dependent variable that was already present before the investigation.

Location

The study was done in Ukhrul district, one of the districts of Manipur. Ukhrul District is situated in the northern part of Manipur State. It is a hilly district known for its picturesque landscapes. The district is inhabited by the vibrant Tangkhul people, who are the predominant tribe. There is also a small population of other tribes, such as the Kuki.

Sampling and data collection

The study focused on the citizens of Ukhrul district as the target group. The sample was chosen from the four blocks of the Ukhrul district, with each block being represented by three to four villages. The age range of residents is from 0 to over 80 years old. Sample conducted using a random sample method.

Data collection was conducted using the methods of observation, interviews, and questionnaire completion. Observations were conducted to ascertain the prevailing conditions at the study site. The interview instrument consists of a series of questions. A survey was administered to the local populace in order to gauge their level of environmental consciousness. A Likert scale with five possible responses was utilised in the survey tool; the scores ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In total, there were five possible outcomes.

Findings and results**Descriptive statistics and t- test**

Table 1

Sample details

Gender	Total	percent	Age	Total	Percent	Occupation	Total	Percent
Male	240	60.3	0-20 yrs	12	3	Cultivator	136	34.2
female	158	39.7	21-40 yrs	224	56.3	Teacher	72	18.1
			41-60 yrs	98	24.6	Self-employed	44	11.1
			61-80 yrs	56	14.1	Student	32	8.0
			>81 yrs	8	2.0	Others	114	28.6

The whole sample comprised 39.7% females (n=158) and 60.3% males (n=240). 56% of the respondents were within the age range of 21-40, while only 2% were in the category of individuals older than 81. Among the respondents, farmers comprised the largest occupational group, accounting for 34.2%, while students were the smallest group, representing only 8%.

Determination of the Significance of Differences in Mean Score for Environmental concerns.

Table 2

Environmental concerns

<i>Age</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
0-20	4.59	.539	Cultivator	4.21	.603
21-40	4.38	.534	Teacher	4.25	.533
41-60	4.27	.461	Self-employed	4.47	.299
61-80	4.15	.500	Student	4.50	.417
>81	4.39	.680	Others	4.42	.465
Total	4.33	.522		4.33	.522

Table 2 displays means and standard deviations for all study variables according to respondent age and occupation. The descriptive statistics for environmental concerns indicate that the total mean score is 4.33, with a standard deviation of 0.522. Among the different age groups, those aged 0-20 and students exhibit the highest level of environmental concern compared to others in the group. This demonstrates that the respondents hold a firm view of environmental events, particularly those pertaining to biodiversity and its constituents.

Table 3

Independent t- test

					Lavene's test for Equality of Variances		t- test for Equality of Means						
Sl.No	Group	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error Difference	95% confidence interval of the Difference	
												Lower	Higher
1	0-20	12	4.59	.539	.002	.966	1.330	234	.185	.211	.158	-.101	.523
	21-40	224	4.38	.534									
2	0-20	12	4.59	.539	.025	.876	2.217	108	.029	.318	.144	.034	.603
	41-60	98	4.27	.461									
3	0-20	12	4.59	.539	.211	.647	2.742	66	.008	.442	.161	.120	.763
	61-80	56	4.15	.500									
4	0-20	12	4.59	.539	.745	.400	.747	18	.465	.204	.273	-.369	.777
	>81	8	4.39	.680									

The Independent *t*-test was utilised to determine if there were any disparities in the average scores among the various age groups and occupations. To achieve this objective, the sample was categorized based on the independent variable. The independent samples *t*-test, also known as the independent *t*-test, is used to examine the level of ENVIRONMENTAL concerns (EC) amongst different age groups.

The study revealed that the various groups exhibited varying levels of significance in relation to different age groups. Specifically, groups listed under Sl.No 1 and 4 did not display any significant differences ($t(df) = .185$ and $.465$, $p > 0.05$) in the scores. The mean scores of the age group 0-20 ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.539$) were slightly higher than the mean scores of the age groups 21-40 and >81 ($M = 4.38$ & 4.39 , $SD = 0.534$ & $.680$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.211 and 0.204) was not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that both age groups in Sl.No 1 & 4 exhibited a somewhat comparable level of variation in their environmental concerns. Therefore, it has been demonstrated that H1 and H1a are valid.

Correlation between environmental concerns and age

In order to have a more precise understanding of the relationship between age and environmental concerns, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The resulting findings are presented below.

Table 4

<i>Correlations between environmental concerns and age</i>			
		age	concerns
Age	Pearson	1	-.155**
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	398	398
Concerns	Pearson	-.155**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	398	398

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient between environmental concerns and age has been shown to be -0.155 , which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The value of r above demonstrates a negative association between environmental concerns, age, and social values. Hence, the strong link between two variables implies that environmental concern is contingent on age, specifically, environmental concerns diminish with increasing age, with younger individuals exhibiting greater concerns towards environmental issues than older individuals. Therefore, the proof of H2 is established.

Discussions and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to examine how individuals in different age groups responded to environmental topics, to what degree their concerns varied from one another and the reasons behind the varied responses.

The age group- environmental concern relationship

Upon examining the correlation in table 4, it is evident that there is a negative correlation between environmental concerns and age. This means that Overall, younger individuals exhibited a greater level of care for the environment compared to older individuals. This result aligns with the majority of research on environmental concerns, indicating that younger individuals express higher levels of environmental concern compared to older individuals (Arcury & Christianson, 1993; Honnold, 1984–85, Buttel, 1987; Van Liere and Dunlap, 1980). Given the assumption that young adults have more significant interest in environmental matters than older ones, it is necessary to contemplate the enduring nature and possible repercussions of this situation. Many researchers who study youth politics have noted that movements focused on young people are frequently susceptible to instability and vulnerability (Flacks, 1971)^{xvi}. Hornback (1974) suggests that the process of ageing and the associated obligations are likely to reduce the youthful enthusiasm for their original goal. This phenomenon can be elucidated by using the research undertaken by Arnett (2000)^{xvii}, which posits that emerging adulthood is seen as the period of deliberate choice, as it presents the most potential for exploring one's identity in the domains of romantic relationships, employment, and personal beliefs. During this period, individuals undergo the process of acquiring the essential attributes required for achieving independence, establishing serious and dedicated partnerships, taking on more mature roles and obligations, and acquiring the necessary education and training that forms the basis for their future professional endeavours^{xviii}.

The sustained exposure to information regarding environmental degradation through news media or mandatory environmental courses in Indian educational institutions during and from the 1990s may have contributed to the emergence of a "youth movement" characterized by heightened awareness and concern for environmental issues. A similar pattern may have been observed in the circumstances in Ukhrul. Since the liberalization of India's economy, advancements in technology, the internet, and social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, vlogs, and Twitter have made knowledge more readily available to individuals, particularly the younger generation. With organizations such as the Tangkhulkatamnao Long and Tangkhul Mayar Ngala Long beginning to focus on the environment insisting it is time to reevaluate the Naga people's traditional customs as a more eco- friendly, sustainable way of life^{xix}.

Prior to the advent of the missionaries in the 1920s, the economic, social, cultural, and religious activities in the Tangkhul region were centered around nature and deeply interconnected with their way of life and culture. Perhaps, this is because the inhabitants of that era placed a premium on tradition, were very disciplined, and worked very hard since they relied on the natural world for their survival. As is evident in those born in the 1920s (table 2, Sl.No. 4) specifically those who are currently in their 80s and above. They have demonstrated a significant level of care for the environment, which is comparable to that of individuals in the younger age groups (0-20 and 40s). The correlation between age and environmental concerns seen in table 4 and the independent t-test analysis, which is presented in Table 3, which shows that the impact of old age on environmental concerns does not diminish suggests that the association between age and environmental behaviour among the Tangkhuls is more likely due to generational experiences (known as a cohort effect) rather than simply being a result of age.

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Women in Lesotho: Overcoming Socioeconomic Barriers

LisemeloLethoba, MA Economics Graduate, University of Kerala

Milimo Mwami, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Economics, University of Kerala,
Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram-695581

Abstract

This study aims to tackle the social and economic challenges that women encounter in Lesotho. To address the problems, the study gives data from several credible sources. On this premise, the author suggests that the government of Lesotho should close the gaps in the economy and restore some of the concepts and structures that help women be empowered, as well as reconsider its approach and put resources at the disposal of women, in particular, in order to achieve equality and equity. Women's empowerment, while a reality, will not rise above average unless such challenges are addressed.

1. Introduction

Lesotho, a landlocked country in Southern Africa, presents a complicated environment when it comes to women's socioeconomic standing. The former British Protectorate of Basutoland gained formal independence on October 4, 1966, and adopted the new name Lesotho (Ward, 1967). Lesotho's economic difficulties have heightened worries about inequality. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, Lesotho ranks 141st out of 169 countries. Despite its middle-income position, Lesotho has one of the highest levels of inequality (Gini of 0.66%), with over 60% of the population living below the US\$1.50 per day poverty line (World Bank, 2014). Lesotho presents unique reproductive health, gender inequality, and restricted resource access difficulties, making it critical to investigate the complex impacts encountered by women in this environment. While considerable emphasis has been placed on the medical and emotional effects of unwanted pregnancy, there is a need to comprehend its economic implications for women.

The goal of this research is to get insight into the issues that women in Lesotho face as they strive to overcome socioeconomic barriers. By shedding light on these characteristics, this study hopes to add to the existing body of knowledge, guide evidence-based therapies, and ultimately empower women to overcome socioeconomic barriers.

Women may find it more difficult to obtain the knowledge and credentials required for better employment opportunities if there are disruptions in their education, obstacles in their way of finishing their studies, or problems obtaining educational resources. Unwanted pregnancies can make Lesotho women's socioeconomic struggles worse. Women's economic well-being can be hampered by a number of factors, including an increased need on social assistance programmes, unstable housing, and the possibility of sliding into poverty. Policymakers and other stakeholders may create comprehensive interventions to lessen the negative effects and encourage long-term

economic empowerment for women who become pregnant unexpectedly by looking at these socioeconomic issues.

Gender inequality has permeated society extensively due to a patriarchal social structure and cultural traditions that restrict women's responsibilities and possibilities. Obstacles to the advancement of gender equality include differences in education, employment in the informal sector, the effects of HIV/AIDS, and persistent issues. The acknowledgment and empowerment of women is essential for the general development of Lesotho, even with the efforts undertaken to resolve these obstacles. This article will explore the socioeconomic situation of women in Lesotho, focusing on four main factors:

- i. The demography and social systems of Lesotho
- ii. Sexual and reproductive environment in Lesotho
- iii. Health, income and education disparities in Lesotho
- iv. Employment patterns

2. Methodology and Data Source

The current study relies heavily on secondary data sources and takes an explanatory approach. The major goal is to get a thorough understanding of the socioeconomic situation and position of women in Lesotho. The analysis uses data from 2001 to 2023 to do this. Academic literature, government records, census reports, and data from internationally recognised entities such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, Our World in Data, and publications from both national and international organisations are used to compile the data. This broad range of sources guarantees that the research is well-informed and relies on a rich tapestry of data to present a comprehensive examination of women's socioeconomic issues in the Lesotho.

3. The Demography and Social Systems of Lesotho

Lesotho is a sovereign nation situated in southern Africa and entirely surrounded by South Africa. It covers an area of 30,355 square kilometers, making it one of the smallest landlocked countries on the continent. The people of Lesotho, known as the Basotho, are a homogenous community united by their language, Sesotho. They follow a common set of traditions related to marriage, child-rearing, and other cultural practices.

Lesotho had a population of approximately 2.2 million people in 2021 (Worldometers, 2023). The population has been growing steadily over the years, but at a relatively slower rate compared to some other African countries. 31.4 % of the population is urban (Worldometers, 2023). The population of Lesotho has a relatively young age structure, with a significant proportion of the population being under the age of 25. In 2021, Lesotho's female population amounted to approximately 1.16 million, while the male population amounted to approximately 1.13 million people (Worldometers, 2023).

The country faces several health challenges, including a relatively high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, which has had a significant impact on life expectancy. However, in recent years, efforts have been made to improve healthcare services and combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

On the education front, Lesotho has made strides in improving access to education. Primary education is free and compulsory, but challenges such as high dropout rates and limited resources in rural areas remain. Historically, Lesotho has been recognized for having the highest literacy rates in southern Africa, and it stands out for a unique trend where females are more likely to receive an education compared to males(UNWomen, 2015-16). In 2021, adult literacy rate for Lesotho was 81%(IMF African Dept., 2022).

3.1.1. Sexual and reproductive environment in Lesotho

Lesotho, faces several challenges in the area of sexual and reproductive health (SRH). The country's SRH environment is influenced by a combination of cultural, social, economic, and political factors. Lesotho's fertility rate has been relatively high, although it has been gradually decreasing over the years(WHO, 2021). In this discussion, we will explore key aspects of Lesotho's sexual and reproductive health environment.

3.1.1.1.HIV/AIDS and other STIs:

Lesotho has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world(WHO, 2021). The epidemic has had a significant impact on the country's SRH landscape, leading to increased vulnerability and various challenges. Lesotho developed and launched the National HIV and AIDS policy in 2019. It sets direction for coordination and management of the HIV and AIDS response. It calls for renewed investment in HIV prevention programming and removal of bottlenecks and structural barriers. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is widely available, and efforts are being made to reduce the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS(WHO, 2021). Lesotho has also made significant progress in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV by providing pregnant women with access to HIV testing, ART, and other interventions to reduce the risk of transmission to their babies during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.

3.1.2. Maternal Health:

Maternal health in Lesotho has been a significant concern, with the country facing challenges related to maternal mortality and access to quality healthcare for pregnant women.

- **Maternal Mortality:** Lesotho has had a high maternal mortality ratio, which is the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. According to the World Bank, as of 2017, Lesotho's maternal mortality ratio was estimated to be 487 deaths per 100,000 live births(UNICEF; World Bank Group, 2017). However, as per WHO 2021 report, maternal mortality in Lesotho had increased to 544 deaths per 100,000 live births, an increase of 11%(WHO, 2021). This indicates that the risk of maternal death was relatively high in the country.
- **Access to Healthcare:** One of the primary reasons contributing to maternal health issues in Lesotho is limited access to quality healthcare services, especially in rural areas. Many

pregnant women in remote regions face challenges in accessing prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, and emergency obstetric services.

- **Teenage Pregnancy:** Lesotho has also been grappling with a high rate of teenage pregnancies(WHO, 2021), which can pose additional risks to maternal health. Teenage mothers may face higher health complications during pregnancy and childbirth compared to older women.
- **Government Initiatives:** The government of Lesotho, along with various international organizations and NGOs, has been working to improve maternal health outcomes(UNICEF; World Bank Group, 2017). Initiatives include promoting maternal health education, increasing access to reproductive healthcare services, and implementing strategies to reduce maternal mortality.

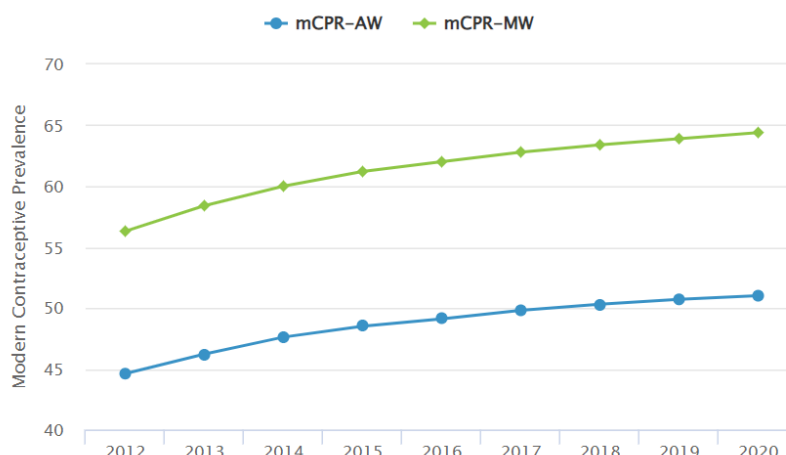
3.1.3. Family Planning:

The use of contraceptive methods empowers women to delay pregnancy, adjust the time between pregnancies, or prevent pregnancy altogether. Couples have a variety of contraceptive options to choose from, and the decision-making process is influenced by factors at different levels. These levels include national and regional policies that determine which methods are part of public and private family planning programs. At the community and clinic level, available resources and administrative decisions impact the accessibility of specific contraceptive methods. At the individual level, people seeking to avoid or delay further childbirths must make decisions about the most suitable method for them.

As a result, it is essential to comprehend the factors that influence family planning in Lesotho, with a particular focus on the quality of care and access. Understanding these aspects is crucial for assessing the economic implications of unintended pregnancies on women. Access to family planning services in Lesotho has improved over the years, but there are still barriers to its widespread use(WHO, 2021). Factors such as limited availability of contraceptives, lack of awareness, and cultural and religious beliefs contribute to lower contraceptive prevalence rates(UNICEF; World Bank Group, 2017). Government and NGOs are working to raise awareness about family planning methods, expand access to contraceptives, and promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Figure 2.2.3a below shows the trend in contraceptive use between 2012 and 2020. As evident we see that use of contraceptives is increasing but at a diminishing rate.

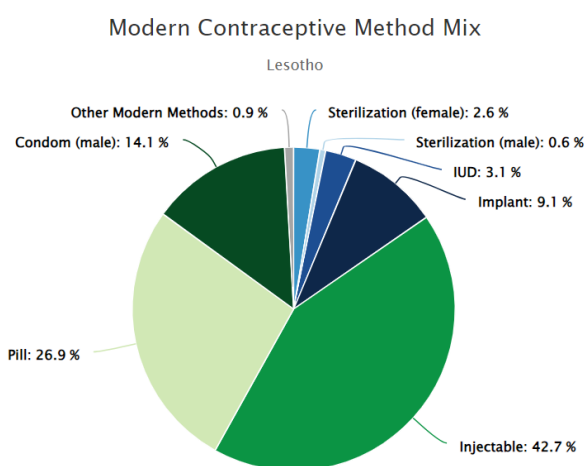
Figure 2.2.3a
Contraception Use 2012-2020



Guttmacher Institute. (2022). Country Profile: Lesotho. Retrieved from Guttmacher Institute

Another important dynamic in family planning is the type or most preferred method of contraception as it affects accessibility and availability. Figure 2.2.3b shows the modern contraception mix. We can see that injectables are the most preferred method of contraception recording 42.7%, followed by the pill recording 26.9%. we can observe from the chart that even though standing at number 3 in the share of most used contraception method, use of condoms is not a very popular or preferred method. This can be used as a tool to explain the reasons why HIV/AIDS and other STDs are so prevalent in Lesotho.

Figure 2.2.3b



Guttmacher Institute. (2022). Country Profile: Lesotho. Retrieved from Guttmacher Institute

3.1.4. Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health

Teenage pregnancy remains a significant challenge in Lesotho. According to the WHO report of 2021, adolescent birth rate was reported to be 92.7 per 1000 women aged 15-19(WHO, 2021) , with rates varying across different regions. The reasons for early pregnancies include a lack of comprehensive sex education, limited access to contraceptives, early marriages, and poverty. Teenage mothers often face higher risks of maternal mortality and morbidity due to their bodies not being fully developed for childbirth, coupled with limited access to quality healthcare during pregnancy and delivery.

Limited access to contraceptives and family planning services is a major contributing factor to high teenage pregnancy rates. There is a lack of youth-friendly health centers that offer confidential and non-discriminatory reproductive health services. Stigma surrounding contraceptive use and traditional beliefs also hinder adolescents from seeking these services. One of the biggest complaints from adolescents is about the treatment they receive at health centers. Many say they don't get the impression that they are free to ask questions about their sexual health(UNICEF; World Bank Group, 2017).

As has been reiterated throughout this paper, HIV prevalence in Lesotho among the highest in the world. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to engaging in unprotected sexual activity and lack of knowledge about HIV prevention and transmission(Ministry of Health Lesotho, 2020). Additionally, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) also pose a significant health concern among adolescents. Sexual behavior among adolescents is also a major concern in Lesotho. The median age at first sex among young people is 17.1 for males and 15 for females(WHO, 2021). In a survey conducted by WHO it was found that 67.2% and 78.2% of females and males respectively aged 15-19 who participated in the survey had multiple partners. In 2021, the HIV new infections among people aged 15-24 2600 for females and 1100 for males(WHO, 2021).

Comprehensive sexual education is crucial for equipping adolescents with accurate information about sexual health, relationships, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections. However, there are challenges in implementing such programs in schools and communities due to cultural and social norms, lack of trained educators, and resistance from conservative groups(Ministry of Health Lesotho, 2020). It is most difficult to implement these programs in the rural areas where sexual intercourse is still treated as taboo.

Gender inequality is prevalent in Lesotho, which affects adolescent girls' access to education and opportunities. Early marriages are not uncommon, and some girls may be married off at a young age, leading to early pregnancies and disruptions in their education. Percentage of young girls married before age 18 was 16% as of 2021(WHO, 2021).

Adolescents, particularly girls, are at risk of experiencing sexual violence and exploitation. Factors such as poverty, limited access to education, and traditional gender norms contribute to this issue. Victims often face barriers in reporting cases due to fear of stigma and retaliation.

Lesotho has taken steps to address adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues through policies and programs. The Lesotho Ministry of Health has developed a National Adolescent Health Strategy that aims to improve access to health services and information for young

people (Ministry of Health Lesotho, 2020). However, the implementation and effectiveness of these policies face challenges due to limited resources and capacity.

Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies work in Lesotho to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health. These organizations focus on providing sex education, increasing access to contraceptives, promoting gender equality, and supporting survivors of sexual violence.

3.1.5. Gender-Based Violence:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant concern in Lesotho and has implications for SRH. Women and girls experience high rates of physical, sexual, and emotional violence (United Nations Lesotho, 2022). GBV can have severe health consequences, including unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and mental health issues. The government and organizations are implementing strategies to address GBV, including legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and support services for survivors (United Nations Lesotho, 2022).

3.1.6. Cultural and Social Factors:

Traditional and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping Lesotho's SRH environment (UNFPA Lesotho, 2023). Some cultural practices and beliefs, such as gender inequality and early marriage, can hinder women's and girls' access to education, healthcare, and decision-making power. Challenging and changing these norms is essential for improving SRH outcomes in the country.

3.2. Health, Income and education disparities

3.2.1. Health Disparities in Lesotho:

Health disparities in Lesotho, particularly among women, remain a significant challenge. The country faces a high burden of HIV/AIDS, with a prevalence rate among adults that is one of the highest in the world. According to Public Health Sector Expenditure Review of 2017, Lesotho has the world's 3rd highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS at 23.4% (UNICEF; World Bank Group, 2017). Women, in particular, are disproportionately affected by the epidemic, accounting for a significant portion of new infections (WHO, 2021). This not only poses a threat to their health but also increases their vulnerability to poverty and socio-economic instability. Figure 2.3.1 below shows the prevalence by gender and age groups.

Figure 2.3.1
HIV Prevalence in Lesotho by Age and Gender

HIV		 Number of new HIV infections ¹⁴	 Number of people living with HIV ¹⁵	 Number of AIDS related deaths ¹⁶
 Child (0-14)		<1,000	12,000	<1,000
 Female (15-24)		2,600	20,000	<500
 Male (15-24)		1,100	8,900	<200
 Female (25-49)		2,700	130,000	1,200
 Male (25-49)		3,100	91,000	1,600
 Female (50+)		<500	42,000	<500
 Male (50+)		<500	35,000	<1,000
Total		11,000	340,000	4,800

Sexual And Reproductive Health and Rights Infographic Snapshot. World Health Organization

According to the figure above we can observe that even presently the HIV/AIDS prevalence in Lesotho is very high and women aged 25-49 are the most affected. However, we can also observe that the number of males die from AIDS is higher than women. This can be explained by the social structure and norms that men are more reluctant to accept their HIV status and seek treatment than women. In Lesotho, women are more open to accessing healthcare facilities than men.

In addition to HIV/AIDS, Lesotho grapples with other health challenges, including high maternal and infant mortality rates. Limited access to quality healthcare services, especially in rural areas, contributes to these disparities. Women often face obstacles in accessing reproductive healthcare, resulting in higher rates of complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

3.2.2. Income Disparities in Lesotho:

Gender-driven income inequality is a significant issue in Sub-Saharan Africa, where traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and discriminatory practices contribute to disparities in income between men and women. While progress has been made in some areas, considerable challenges remain, hindering gender equality and economic development in the region.

Recent data suggests that gender income inequality persists across Sub-Saharan Africa. Women continue to earn less than men and face limited access to economic opportunities. According to the World Bank's 2020 report, women in Sub-Saharan Africa earn, on average, 25% less than men. The gender wage gap is even more pronounced in specific sectors such as agriculture, where women form the majority of the workforce but earn significantly less than their male counterparts. Income disparities are another critical aspect of the socio-economic status of women in Lesotho. Women tend to have lower incomes and face challenges in attaining economic independence. This can be attributed to various factors, including limited educational opportunities, gender discrimination in the labor market, and women's concentration in low-paying jobs in the informal sector.

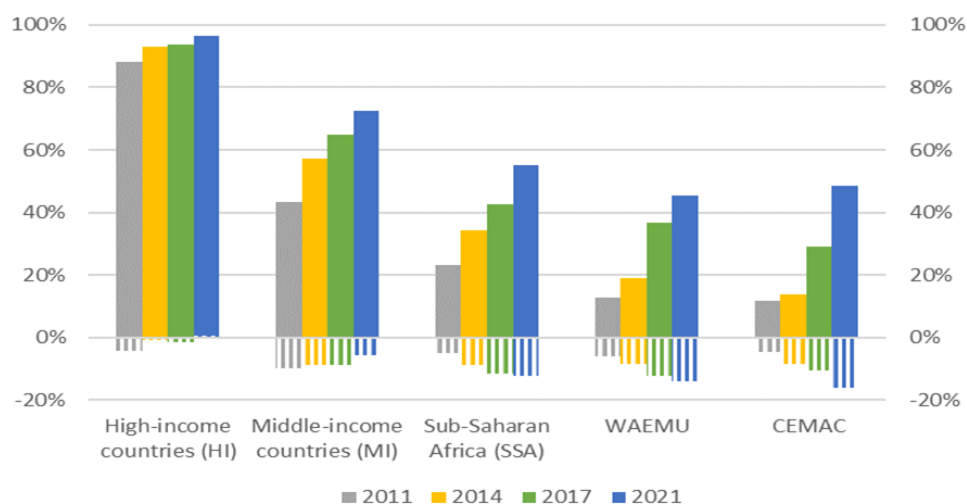
i. Financial Inclusion:

Over the past ten years, there has been a notable rise in the financial inclusion of both men and women in SSA. With catch-up effects compared to middle- and high-income countries (where 72% and 96% of the population, respectively, have accounts), the World Bank reports that the majority of the population in SSA now has an account with a bank or other financial institution (55% in 2021, compared to 23% in 2011). This is a result of the rapid development of mobile banking and telephony, which makes up for the shortcomings of traditional banking and fixed-line telephone infrastructures. One-third of the population in SSA had mobile money accounts, which are an underutilized but expanding source of credit access (Ferrer, Perrin, & Jacoulin, 2023). In 2021, 7% of the population used mobile money to borrow money, compared to 10% who used the formal financial system and 56% overall, including informal finance.

Women in SSA have not, however, seen a comparable growth in bank enrollment as males have. The gender gap in bank access has grown by 7 percentage points (pp) since 2011, reaching 12% in SSA (World Bank, 2022). When it comes to loan availability, the gender difference in SSA is comparable to that found in middle- and high-income nations (1-3%). Despite the fact that women are overrepresented in the portfolios of microfinance institutions, that is 80% of clients globally and 64% in SSA, and informal savings and credit clubs, credit from these organizations (or informal credit) is primarily targeted at the most disadvantaged populations, and the lending conditions are different from those provided by banks (Ferrer, Perrin, & Jacoulin, 2023).

Figure 2.3.2

Bank coverage (adult population with an account, %) and gender gap (hatched)



Sub-Saharan Financial Gender Gap Between Men and Women. All About Finance.

Lesotho is no exception to this situation. Due to barriers preventing women from obtaining formal credit, a lack of credit history, and a high rejection rate for female loan applications, access to finance for women is particularly difficult. They face challenges in accessing financial resources, credit facilities, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Low-income rural women are particularly susceptible in this sense. Because they lack access to collateral, women-owned enterprises

frequently start off small and stay that way, relying excessively on unofficial sources of funding and credit. This also limits their ability to invest in income-generating activities, and accumulate wealth.

For example, just 27% of Basotho women had credit histories as of 2021 (Central Bank of Lesotho, 2021). The absence of women's credit histories may in part be attributable to Lesotho's lack of market and user data for the development of targeted policy interventions, as well as the relatively recent incorporation of more gender-informed credit reporting systems. As a result, women face larger legal and regulatory obstacles to financial inclusion. Lack of financial inclusion exacerbates income disparities and restricts women's economic empowerment.

While microfinance has had little success, mobile money is a key factor in Lesotho's push towards financial inclusion (Finmark Trust, SADC and UNCDF, 2019) 40 percent of women made or received digital payments compared to 35 percent of men, and 31 percent of women had mobile money accounts compared to 24 percent of males. Mobile banking has the potential to have a greater impact, particularly for rural enterprises.

ii. Entrepreneurship and Leadership:

Compared to males, women are more likely to be entrepreneurs and to have higher levels of education in Lesotho. However, they tend to be concentrated in small and micro businesses, which are frequently low-value industries, and have little ability to provide high- and sustained revenue or growth. Women are disproportionately underrepresented in high-tech and engineering industries, where they make up just 1.5% of the entrepreneurs compared to 9.5% of males (UNDP Lesotho, 2022). Retail and wholesale sectors are mostly female dominated, where 15% of enterprises are run by women compared to 11% by men (UNDP Lesotho, 2022).

As mentioned before, generally access to credit for entrepreneurial endeavors is still a major constraint in Lesotho. Compared to its SACU peers, Lesotho scores relatively lower. The existing legal system also places restrictions on the usage of collateral by lenders. Due to the intricacy of the procedures, MSMEs borrowers sometimes have trouble obtaining the required paperwork, such as business registration, licenses, and tax clearance, and some choose to instead take out more expensive consumer loans. Particularly for rural and non-salaried households, limited access to financial services is caused by a weak credit infrastructure and informational gaps.

Women are in even more of a bind in this case as even though significant strides have been made the government to equalize property and landownership, there are still cultural and societal restrictions that prevent women from being owners of property thereby lacking means of collateral in order to access credit. Access to capital, business networks, and supportive policies are crucial for women to start and sustain their businesses. Encouraging entrepreneurship among women, providing business development support, and promoting women's representation in leadership positions can foster greater gender equality in employment.

iii. Unpaid care work:

Unpaid care work is a critical but often overlooked aspect of the economy and society in Lesotho. It refers to the unpaid labor performed within households, including domestic tasks, caregiving for children, the elderly, and sick family members, as well as other household chores. Despite its

significance in sustaining households and communities, unpaid care work faces several challenges around the world. Women in Lesotho disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid care work. World Bank in its 2023 report on proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work states that women spent approximately 20% of 24hrs while men spent only 6%. The time and effort devoted to these responsibilities reduce women's availability for paid employment and limit their income-generating potential.

3.2.3. Education Disparities in Lesotho:

The gender gap favoring males in education is largest in low-income countries. However, in Lesotho this is not the case, the ratio of female-to-male enrollment rates in secondary education is the highest in the world, with 1.6 females enrolled for every male (UN Women, 2015-16). That is the gender gap favors females. While there have been improvements, girls continue to face barriers in accessing quality education. Early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and household responsibilities often lead to high school dropout rates among girls. According to (IMF African Dept., 2022) pregnancy and early marriage are reported as some the major reasons for girls' school drop-out. This limits their educational attainment, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and hindering their ability to secure better employment opportunities in the future.

This further marginalizes women, restricting their access to information, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes. Addressing education disparities and promoting girls' education is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty, empowering women, and fostering socio-economic development in Lesotho.

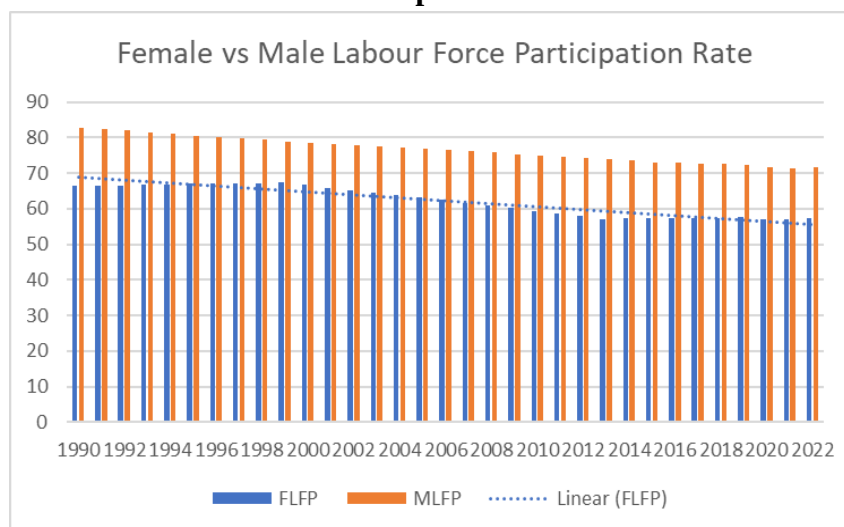
3.3. Employment patterns

Employment patterns in relation to gender in Lesotho exhibit significant disparities and inequalities. Cultural, social, and economic factors contribute to these patterns, shaping the labor market dynamics and opportunities for men and women. Let's discuss some key aspects of gender-related employment patterns in Lesotho:

3.3.1. Labor Force Participation:

Gender disparities exist in labor force participation rates. While men's labor force participation is relatively high, women's participation remains lower. This disparity can be attributed to multiple factors, including cultural expectations that prioritize women's roles in the household and limited access to education and skills development opportunities for women. According to International Labor Organization, as of 2022 the female labor force participation was 57.4% while that of their male counterparts was approximately 72%, a difference of 14.6 points which is below the world average of 29.2 percentage points (ILO, 2023). Looking at the figure below we see that for the past 20 years the labor force participation of both women and men has been on a decline. This can be attributed to the increasing levels of unemployment in Lesotho. Though the difference in participation between men and women is not that big it is also not improving.

Figure 2.4.1
Labor Force Participation Rate in Lesotho



IMF Staff Country Reports 2022, 162

3.3.2. Occupational Segregation:

While the gender gap in labor force participation is not that sizeable Basotho women's labor force is typically concentrated in low-skilled sectors such as small-scale agriculture and informal employment, while men dominate industries like mining and manufacturing. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often steer women toward lower-paying, less secure, and less formal employment options, limiting their economic opportunities and career advancement. In the past, a significant number of Basotho men moved to South Africa for employment in the mining industry, which had a positive impact on the ratio of women to men participating in the workforce. However, over the last two decades, the South African mining sector reduced its workforce, leading to job losses for Basotho workers. During this time, the textile and apparel industries in Lesotho experienced growth, creating more job opportunities for women seeking employment. Consequently, female participation in the labor force improved considerably, although there remains a larger gender gap compared to other countries in the Southern African Customs Union (IMF African Dept., 2022). Simultaneously, while Basotho men migrated to South Africa for mining jobs, women tended to migrate to work in domestic help roles.

Generally, women are more likely to be employed in low-skilled positions and dominate labor-intensive industries such as manufacturing, domestic services, wholesale and retail trade, and education. These sectors are mostly low-paying and insecure. As we saw they were the sectors predominantly severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The figure below shows the distribution of female workers as compared to men in different sectors.

Figure 2.4.2**Female-to-male employment ratio per sector**

IMF Staff Country Reports 2022, 162

3.3.3. Gender Wage Gap:

The gender pay gap is the disparity in average earnings between men and women in the workforce. Despite efforts to reduce this gap, women in 2022 continued to earn, on average, 17% less than men, with the discrepancy being particularly pronounced as women age. Discrimination, occupational segregation, and limited bargaining power contribute to this wage disparity. Women's economic empowerment and closing the gender wage gap require promoting equal pay for equal work, improving access to education and skills training, and creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

3.3.4. Informal Employment:

In sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of jobs held by women (89%) and men (83%) are classified as informal (UN Women, 2015-16). Among these jobs, agriculture stands out as the primary sector, providing employment for 59% of women and 56% of men (UN Women, 2015-16). It is worth noting that almost all agricultural employment in the region is considered informal.

The informal sector plays a significant role in Lesotho's economy, employing a large portion of the population. Women are more likely to be engaged in informal work, such as subsistence agriculture, street vending, and domestic work. Informal employment often lacks social protection, benefits, and job security, further exacerbating gender inequalities.

3.4. Efforts to Address Disparities:

The government of Lesotho, along with civil society organizations and international partners, has implemented various initiatives to address health, income, and education disparities among women. Efforts include improving access to healthcare services, implementing HIV prevention

and treatment programs through the NAC, expanding educational opportunities through the Free Primary Education Program and the Orphan and Vulnerable Children Program (OVC) which was established in 2000 and covers secondary school children with sick or disabled parents, promoting gender equality in the labor market, and advocating for women's empowerment and leadership. Authorities have made efforts to remove gender-based legal constraints, yet significant strides are needed to address structural gender disparities. Gender equality in law has been achieved in property ownership, inheritance rights, freedom of movement, and pension entitlements, as reported by the World Bank in 2021. The Land Act of 2010 ensures equal land access for both genders, potentially enhancing women's access to collateral and consequently, financial services. This presents an opportunity for female entrepreneurs, who predominantly operate micro and small businesses, to transition to formal financing and expand their ventures. Lesotho demonstrates comparative advancement in women's financial inclusion among regional counterparts, with a minimal disparity in account ownership - 33 percent for women compared to 34 percent for men, according to some indicators(IMF African Dept., 2022).

The country has developed national laws and aimed at tackling gender disparities through its National Gender and Development Policy of 2003 and its subsequent iteration, the Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030 (Government of Lesotho, 2018). The legal framework encompasses measures such as the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2006, which eliminated the legal status of minority for married women; the Land Act of 2010, facilitating joint land ownership for couples; the Education Act of 2010, mandating compulsory education for all; the Companies Act of 2011, permitting women to serve as directors and shareholders in companies without spousal consent; and the Sexual Offences Act of 2003.

However, persistent challenges remain. Limited resources, infrastructure gaps, cultural norms, and deep-rooted gender inequalities continue to hinder progress in narrowing these disparities. Continued investment in healthcare infrastructure, expanding social protection programs, strengthening educational systems, and promoting gender-responsive policies are essential for achieving significant and sustainable improvements in the health, income, and education status of women in Lesotho.

Lesotho has implemented a wide range of social assistance programs aimed at reducing poverty, improving the well-being of vulnerable populations, and addressing various socio-economic challenges. These initiatives reflect the government's ongoing efforts to support individuals and families, particularly in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and growing poverty. Below is an overview of the key social assistance programs(Jaya &Ratshitanga, 2021):

Child Grant Program (CGP): Launched in 2009, this program provides cash transfers to households with children under the age of 18. It aims to reduce child poverty and enhance the well-being of children in vulnerable households by improving access to education, healthcare, and essential services. The program reflects a growing focus on the specific needs of children within the broader context of socio-economic challenges(Davis et al., 2015).

Public Assistance Program: This initiative provides financial support to individuals and families facing extreme poverty or hardship. It specifically targets vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled, or those in severe economic distress, ensuring they can maintain basic living standards.

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Bursary Program: Established in 2000, this bursary program provides educational support to orphans and other vulnerable children at risk of dropping out of school due to financial constraints. It helps cover tuition fees and other educational costs, ensuring that vulnerable children have continued access to education and a better chance for future opportunities (Ntuli, H., 2023).

School Feeding Program: Initiated in 1965, Lesotho's school feeding program provides meals to children in schools, ensuring they receive adequate nutrition. This program is particularly important in regions with high food insecurity, as it not only promotes school attendance but also supports children's physical and cognitive development. The program expanded significantly between 2000 and 2006 to align with the Compulsory Free Primary Education policy, which aimed to ensure all children aged 6 to 12 years had access to education and nutrition.

Labour-Intensive Public Works in Rural Areas: Known as *fatofato* (dig-dig) projects, these public works programs provide seasonal employment opportunities to rural populations. Focusing on activities such as soil conservation and community improvement, these programs offer cash income for rural laborers while contributing to environmental sustainability and local development (Jaya & Ratshitanga, 2021).

Non-Contributory Social Insurance (Old Age Pension): Introduced in 2004, the Old Age Pension is a cash transfer program that provides financial support to elderly citizens who do not have pension savings or other forms of social security. This program helps ensure that older individuals, especially those without family support, can maintain a basic standard of living (Mhango, M. 2023).

Tertiary Bursaries (Ministry of Development Planning - MoDP): The Ministry of Development Planning offers bursaries to students pursuing higher education, especially those from low-income families. These bursaries cover tuition and related expenses, enabling students to access tertiary education and improve their future employment prospects (Ret'Selisitsoe, N. K. O. (2021).

Lead Agency for Managing Covariate Shocks: This program coordinates emergency responses to disasters or shocks, such as droughts, floods, or economic crises. The government provides targeted social assistance to those affected by such events, helping individuals and families recover and meet their basic needs during times of crisis (Boko et al., 2021).

Evolution and Support from International Partners Lesotho's social assistance programs reflect an evolving understanding of vulnerability across the life cycle. These initiatives have increasingly focused on addressing the specific needs of different demographic groups, depending on their age or stage in life. In response to the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and growing poverty, key programs such as the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Bursary Program (2000), the Old Age Pension (2004), and the Child Grant Program (2009) have been introduced to support the most vulnerable, particularly children and the elderly. International organizations such

as UNICEF and the European Union have played a crucial role in supporting the establishment and implementation of these key social assistance programs in Lesotho (Koali, 2023).

Some of Lesotho's social assistance programs have long histories and continue to evolve. The national school feeding program, which first reached national coverage in 1965, has become an integral part of the country's efforts to ensure that children have access to education and nutrition. The program was adapted to align with the policy of Compulsory Free Primary Education, which was phased in between 2000 and 2006 to ensure education for all children aged 6 to 12. Additionally, public works programs, like the fatofato (dig-dig) projects, which focus on soil conservation, have been in place for over fifty years. These projects provide seasonal work for rural laborers while addressing environmental concerns and contributing to community development (Jaya & Ratshitanga, 2021).

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, gender-related employment patterns in Lesotho highlight disparities in labor force participation, occupational segregation, wage gaps, and limited access to education and training. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach encompassing legal reforms, investment in education and skills development, promotion of inclusive workplaces, and initiatives to support women's entrepreneurship and leadership. Creating an enabling environment that ensures equal access to employment opportunities, fair remuneration, and advancement prospects is essential for achieving gender equality in the labor market in Lesotho. Lesotho's sexual and reproductive health environment faces numerous challenges, including high HIV prevalence, maternal mortality, limited access to family planning services, and gender-based violence. However, the government, along with NGOs and international partners, is working to address these issues by implementing various initiatives and programs (UNFPA Lesotho, 2023). Continued efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure, increase access to services, promote education and awareness, and challenge cultural norms are vital for enhancing the overall SRH environment in Lesotho.

Furthermore, addressing health, income, and education disparities is crucial for improving the socio-economic status of women in Lesotho. Reducing the burden of HIV/AIDS, improving access to quality healthcare, promoting income equality, and ensuring equal access to education are key steps towards achieving gender equality and empowering women in Lesotho. Reports show that as of 2020 Lesotho achieved and surpassed its five-year targets dubbed "90-90-90" which were launched by UNAIDS in 2015 to drive momentum towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 (Lesotho Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment- LePHIA, 2020). This initiative sought to ensure that 90% of individuals diagnosed with HIV are aware of their status, 90% of those with HIV receive vital antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 90% of those undergoing treatment achieve viral suppression, effectively controlling the virus (UNAIDS, 2024). To address the challenges that still persist in Lesotho effectively, sustained efforts are required from multiple stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and the international community. Collaborative approaches that involve parents, community leaders, and

religious groups are crucial for promoting positive changes in attitudes and behaviors towards adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Furthermore, research and data collection on the specific needs and concerns of adolescents in Lesotho will help in designing targeted interventions and policy improvements. An increase in the contraception coverage, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and enforcement of laws against child marriage are essential to giving women the freedom to decide when they want to have children, decreasing unwanted pregnancies thereby improving the economic outcomes of women and society at large. Access to legal and safe abortion is also highly recommended as it gives women the safety and choice about their fertility therefore improving their economic and health outcomes.

Another problem hindering effective development of policies targeted at gender related issues is lack of adequate data. As of December 2020, merely 33.6% of the indicators necessary for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective were accessible, revealing significant deficiencies in crucial domains, notably labor market metrics like unemployment rates and gender pay differentials (UN Women, 2024). Moreover, various areas such as gender-based poverty, instances of physical and sexual harassment, women's entitlement to assets like land, and gender-related environmental concerns lack consistent methodologies for routine assessment. Bridging these disparities in gender data is imperative to fulfill gender-related SDG objectives in Lesotho. Lesotho's social assistance programs represent a comprehensive approach to addressing the country's socio-economic challenges. By focusing on vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those in extreme poverty, the government aims to improve living conditions, reduce inequality, and promote long-term social and economic development. These initiatives, supported by international partners and supplemented by long-standing programs, are vital in helping Lesotho navigate its complex social landscape and respond to pressing challenges like the HIV/AIDS epidemic and poverty.

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PAULINE APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN ATHENS: A VIABLE STRATEGY FOR DISCIPLESHIP IN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Alexander Mwita, PhD
University of Arusha, Tanzania.

Abstract

African societies are known to have a strong worldview that embraces the belief in gods, ancestors' worship, and mystical powers which may bless or curse. The worldview affects Christians and non-Christians since both consult mystical powers in times of need and crisis. This paper aims to establish a method that may help Africans rely on God of the Bible. The trajectory of this paper follows Pauline mission's entrance in Athens. It discusses the influence of biblical view of God on discipleship, how Athenian's view of God affected their discipleship, how African's view of God affects their dependence on God of the Bible, how Paul introduced God to the Athenians, and how Pauline's application of the doctrine of God in Athens can help in developing a strategy for discipleship in the African context. The paper reveals that the view of God has impact on discipleship. While biblical view of God leads to the worship of God of the Bible, African and Athenian views of God lead to pantheistic and polytheistic view of God which accommodates the worship of gods. It concludes that the strategy that Paul used to introduce God in Athens may be applicable for discipleship in African context.

Keywords: African View of God, Athenian View of God, Biblical View of God, Discipleship, Doctrine of God.

Introduction

The objective of the great commission recorded in Matthew 28:19-20 was to make disciples of all nations. Discipleship according to the book of Acts led to the mission strategy which focused on church expansion from Jerusalem to different geographical locations. This move was empowered by the fulfillment of the promised power of the Holy Spirit who enabled the disciples to break the immediate language barrier during the Pentecost scenario. Moreover, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit aimed to remove both the cultural and the spiritual barriers (Park, 2009).

Email address :mwitaa@aua.ac.ke

When it comes to African context, the church under the influence of early church fathers such as Clement and Origen established mission in Alexandria, Egypt on the northern part of

Africa. However, the church grew mainly in Europe and did not penetrate the southern parts of Egypt which is the large mass of the African continent (Masuku, 2003). In later centuries, western churches through their mission activities in Africa did not accomplish much in terms of eradication of unbiblical cultural practices (Masuku, 2003).

Since every society has its cultural practices, African societies have been known to have a strong worldview that embraces the belief in divinities and mystical powers which may bless or curse. This worldview affects Christians and non-Christians because both consult mystical powers in times of need and crisis (Amanze and Makinde, 2011). These practices affect their dependence on God of the Bible and fall into idol worship. Thus, the worldview suggests that there should be a strategy that will orient Africans to the God of the Bible and be able to build their relationship with Him in their contextual setting. Therefore, this paper aims to find a strategy for discipleship that may fit the African worldview from the study of Pauline application of the doctrine of God in Athens.

The trajectory of this paper follows the Pauline mission's entrance in Athens. For a conclusive discussion of the issue, this paper aims to answer five key questions. First, how can biblical view of God enhance discipleship? Second, how did Athenian's view of God affect their discipleship? Third, how does Africans' view of God affect their dependence on God of the Bible? Fourth, how did Paul introduce God to the Athenians? Fifth, how can Pauline's application of the doctrine of God in Athens help in developing a strategy for discipleship in the African context?

This paper involves literary approach to research that employs bibliographic data. It employs descriptive, analytical, and complementary methodologies in five sections. The first section describes biblical views of God and its influence on discipleship. The second section describes the Athenian's view of God and its consequences on discipleship. The third section describes the African's view of God and its effects on dependence on God of the Bible. The fourth section gives an analytical discussion on how Paul introduced God to the Athenians. The fifth section complements Pauline's strategy and discipleship in the African context.

Biblical View of God and Its influence on Discipleship

Christian theology hangs on the fundamental teaching of God's existence (Erickson, 1998; Canale, 2000). The Bible, Old and New Testaments affirm that God exists. This claim is established by empirical proof of God's self-revelation. Scripture reveals that God is a self-existent and personal being who transcends the entire universe (Hodge, 2005). His being is accepted by faith which is informed by reliable evidence found in Scripture and nature (Berkhof, 1941). The opening page of the book of Genesis assumes the existence of God who made the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1,2). Again, Scripture informs that the creation declares the glory and handiwork of God (Psalms 19:1) which reveals His majesty and goodness because He upholds and sustains all creatures.

Viewing the nature of God, Scripture unveils His essence through communicable and incommunicable attributes. Communicable attributes refer to transitive qualities that are shared with humans. Explaining these qualities, Norman Gulley (2011) brings in the idea of God's self-impartation. He means that, though God is transcendent He is also immanent for He comes closer to humans and imparts His communicable qualities which are summarized in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Incommunicable attributes refer to the intransitive qualities which describe God's self-existence. These qualities describe the being and majesty of God which include Independence (Joh 5:26; Rev 4:11), Omniscience (Psalm 147:5; Hebrews 4:13), Omnipresence (De 4:39; Psalm 139:7–10 Pro 15:3), Eternity (Psalm 90:2; Isa 40: 28; Revelation 1:8), and Omnipotence (Gen 17:1; 18:14; Job 42:2; Isa 43:13). They also distinguish the nature of God as a self-existent being from the nature of other creatures as created beings.

In addition to God's attributes, the names of God as used in Scripture reveal His immanence and love towards humanity. Wayne Grudem (1994) comments that the names of God are not mere titles but they give descriptions of His character. Scripture informs that the names of God were directly associated with His actions as the creator and sustainer of all created beings. Proverbs 18:10 states that "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." This text notifies that the names of God reveal his love and protection whereby those who make Him a refuge get a source of strength and protection (Psalm 46:1-2).

Major names that come out vividly in the Old Testament are Yahweh and Elohim. However, from these two, other names are introduced. These include *Adonai* (Lord, Master, or Owner, Psalm 8:1), *Jehovah Nissi* (the Lord is my banner, Isaiah 40:31), *Jehovah Rapha* (the Lord who heals, James 5:14–15), *Jehovah Shamma* (the Lord is there, Matthew 18:20; 28:20), *Jehovah Roi* (the Lord is my shepherd, Psalm 23; John 10:11), *Jehovah Tsidkenu* (The Lord our righteousness, Psalm 23:3), *Jehovah Shalom* (the Lord is peace, Romans 5:1), and *Jehovah Sabaoth* (The Lord of Hosts, Psalm 46:7). Others include *El Elyon* (most high God, Gen 14:20), *El Roi* (the God who sees, Gen 16:9-11), and *Emmanuel* (God with us, Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23; Heb 4:15-16). The meaning of these names in the mind of the Hebrews enhanced their discipleship because they were drawn to worship and to depend on Him. The Psalmist categorically said "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). The Psalmist supplies an idea that, knowing the majestic nature of God influenced the Hebrews to depend on Him in matters that required supernatural intervention. In addition to this, God's direct interventions to individuals enhanced their dependence on Him and were confident to face challenges for they believed in Him. Some of God's interventions that enhanced individuals' dependence on God include God self-disclosure to Moses in the burning bush (Exo 3), to Gideon at the oak which was in Ophrah (Judges 6:11-24), to Hanna who was barren (1 Samuel 1), to David when he was keeping his father's flock (1 Samuel 17:34-37), and to Isaiah in the sanctuary scene (Isaiah 6:1-8). These incidents led these individual to revere God and were in constant worship of God who revealed His majesty in their life experience.

In connection to Old Testament' names of God, the New Testament also has names that reveal the nature of God who deserves worship. These include *kris* (Lord, Romans 10:9), *Despots* (Master, Ruler, 2 Pet 2:1), and *Abba* (Dearest Father, Romans 8:15). These names are linked to the Old Testament names and are applied to the members of the Godhead in the New Testament (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Scripture informs that God exists as a relational Trinity which means that God consists of three eternal, divine, equally self-existence Persons as one God (Gulley, 2011). The evidence of the existence of God in three persons implicitly emerges in Old Testament and explicitly revealed in New Testament. The Old Testament shows plurality using the plural phrase "let us" Gen 1:26; 11:7; Isa 6:8). In the same connection, the New Testament explicitly

unveils the members of the Godhead as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This information is categorically revealed in the events such as the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:18-23; Luke 2:26-35), Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22), and Jesus' great commission statement (Mat 28:19-20). Moreover, the epistles inform that the members of the Godhead are involved in the work of redemption (John 3:16; Roman 5:5; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 6:23; and Jude 1:21).

In the same note, the New Testament reveals God as the master and dearest father who wishes to redeem his children from the shackles of the devil (John 3:16; Luke 4:18,19). He is also a God who hears and sees the pain and troubles of His children who are suffering from distress and diseases and deliver them because He is Almighty, and nothing is impossible for Him. This work was revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ which in turn became the driving influence for discipleship. Ellen G. White (1988) affirms that:

Christ's method ALONE will give true success in reaching people. The Savior mingled with [people] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'follow Me (p.143).

The statement clarifies that the nature of God which is manifested in His works towards humanity through the ministry of the Son has great impact on discipleship. It unveils that the application of God's majesty, immanence, and loving character influences people to follow Him.

Athenians' View of God and Its Consequences to Discipleship

Athens was the capital city of Greece in Paul's time. In biblical times, the city was the center for philosophical discussions of which most of its ontological views followed the Greek philosophical views (Gulley, 2003). These views did not allude to the concept of revelation of divine attributes from Jewish monotheistic view (Soskice, 2006), but employed classical philosophy to explain the nature of God. Some Greek philosophers who come to the forefront are Parmenides (c.540-470 BC) who recognized a being that is timeless and immovable; he also mentioned other beings who reside in time (Gulley, 2011). Plato (c. 427-347 BC) suggested the *Timaeus* theory of creation which describes the timeless God who created the universe in the immovable time, therefore, the immovable and eternal God created movable and temporal things (Plato, 1981). Aristotle (c. 384-322 BC) who viewed God as eternal and immovable who is separate from sensible creatures (Gulley, 2003).

Consequently, God's nature was characterized by impassible, immovable, self-sufficient, and eternal attributes (Gulley, 2003). Some of the issues that resulted from this conclusion include the view that denies God's creation from nothing "*Creatio Ex Nihilo*," denial of God's supernatural acts, and a view of a transcendent and immovable God who has nothing to do with human life (Canale, 2000). As a result, these views ended in the belief in polytheism, pantheism, and nihilism (Lam, 2015).

Bible informs that when Paul went to Athens, he encountered Greek philosophers, Epicureans, and Stoics (Acts 17:18). On one hand, the Stoics approach to ontology was not based on the faith found in Scripture but deduced its logic from observations and impressions of the cosmos which led to belief in pantheism (Odor, 2016). On the other hand, Epicureans were the followers of Epicurus (c. 342-270 BC) who founded a philosophical school in Athens. Out of this

school, Epicureanism introduced a philosophy that pronounced that knowledge is closely linked to power and claimed to offer true knowledge of the way things are (Tomlin, 1997). Based on knowledge, whoever came with different views was received with suspicion (Acts 17:18,19). This philosophy believed on the existence of gods and taught that the human mind is disturbed by the fears of gods and death which may be overcome by exercising happiness (Tomlin, 1997).

Therefore, the Athenian's view of God hangs on the philosophical background of the time whereby God was approached in the polytheistic and pantheistic manner which led to the belief in gods who resided in houses and presented by graven images. This belief is evident in Pauline statement:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands... we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill (Acts 17: 24, 29).

The philosophical view of God in the city led the Athenians to develop the worship of gods (Acts 17:16), a belief which also anticipated to discover more gods as their search would permit (v.19). In this case, their allegiance resided on divinities which also pulled them to the expectation that there should be a god which they have not discovered yet, as a result of this, they put an inscription “to the unknown god. “Moreover, the pantheistic and polytheistic approach of God as viewed by the Athenians discarded their dependence on God of the Bible, instead, they focused their attention on images.

African View of God and Its Effects on Dependence on God of the Bible

African religious worldview is rooted in fundamental beliefs which include the Supreme Being, spirit beings, impersonal powers, divinities, and hierarchy of spiritual beings and powers (Turaki, 2006). This worldview centers its allegiance to these fundamental beliefs for it is believed that good life is connected to harmonious relations with these powers (Mathema, 2011). According to Hubert Bucher, these powers are arranged in a hierarchy of which God stands as the highest being who is followed by other divinities, ancestors 'spirits, and mystical powers (Bucher, 1980). Other respected entities include sacred days, right of passages, religious specialists, and traditional taboos (Nkuba, 1988).

Though the African context recognizes God as the creator of the universe (Mbiti, 2002), the worship practices are directed to mediums because God is assumed to be too far from everyday life (Mbiti, 2002). The view makes God to be an immovable being who works through lesser divinities. Mbiti observes that some magic specialists claim that the power which they possess comes from God (Mbiti, 2002). In this case, Africans believe that lesser entities are God mediators and are quick to respond to people's needs because they are closer to humans (Turaki, 2006). Consequently, African needs such as healing, business success, struggle for power, marriage, childlessness, peace, and fear for misfortune are directly referred to lesser entities (Amanze and Makinde, 2011). This tendency reduces their total dependence on God of the Bible, thus, justifies dual allegiance among Africans.

God in African view is rarely consulted on normal occasions (Gehman, 2002); instead, everyday life depends on lesser divinities that have been accepted as God associates in whom He

manifests himself (Mbiti, 2002). Therefore, it is agreed that Africans are free to find blessings and solutions to their problems by practicing dual allegiance. This conclusion accommodates pantheistic, polytheistic, and animistic approaches to discipleship (Mbiti, 2002) whereby people are at liberty to rely on gods.

Pauline's Application of Doctrine of God to the Athenians

Most of Pauline's missions were centered in major cities where he met masses in marketplaces (Onongha, 2015). This strategy opened opportunities for reaching more people with the gospel. Athens was among the major cities where Paul had the opportunity for gospel proclamation. His style of discipleship in the city of Athens was positive in nature. He started with commendation by recognizing the worship desire of the Athenians (Act 17:22). This approach removes prejudices and creates room for acceptance. Commenting on this approach, Barnes (2000) says that Paul used respectful language for he did not want to begin his address in a manner that would provoke prejudice and opposition. On the same note, Ellen White (1988) comments that Jesus' approach for mission was colored with respect and concerns of His hearers. She says that the Savior mingled with people, showed His sympathy and won their confidence. She also commented that gospel workers should not rush on accusing those who are in errors for that will create resistance (White, 1974). In Athens' scenario, Paul did not focus on accusing the Athenians but put his emphasis on the gap that he could use to impart the truth (v.23).

Since the Athenian problem was rooted in the doctrine of God, their search for God was enthusiastic which ended in the wrong conclusion. Paul entered into their inner need for worship by explaining to them the God of heaven who deserves worship. He categorically said "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23, NIV). This approach did not deny their need for worship but was a process of correcting the object of their worship.

Paul's explanation to the Athenians introduced the God of heaven who was powerful over all other idols in the city. He explained the attributes of God. First, God is eternal; He does not dwell in temples made by hands, but He is different from creation for He is non-historical while creation is temporal and historical (Canale, 2000). Second, God is self-sufficient; He has everlasting life in himself and He is the source of all lives (Gulley, 2011). Moreover, Paul explains God's divine activities which include creation and providence. God as creator is justified in v.26 whereby Paul narrates that God made all people and enabled them to dwell on earth. God as sustainer is justified in v.28 where Paul explains that "in Him, we live and have our being. Finally, Paul cemented his argument by quoting Athenian's poet *"as some of your own poets have said we are his offspring"* (v. 28 NIV) in support of his explanation.

In conclusion, Paul declared that the greatness of God is above all graven idols. This God will judge all according to their rejection or acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul's introduction of God of the Bible led to the conversion of some Athenians, among them were Dionysius and Damaris. Despite the criticism of this strategy as Sampson M. Nwaomah (2016) reports, the Pauline mission in Athens should be measured by discipleship lens which does not focus on an overnight event but by a long process of conceptualizing a message by the indigenous. Since religion is an innate phenomenon, many converts may not be the

immediate results but the response of accepting the message is gradual and should be a continual discipling of the indigenous within their context.

The conversion of some Athenians in Paul's mission was within their context. John A. Gration (1983) describes that conversion is contextual by nature, for it embraces cultural settings including the religious domain in which a person is living at the time of conversion. He categorically commented that "God does deeply respect persons as individuals and meets them in their context" (p. 157). Therefore, Pauline's mission in Athens was not out of this principle. He found Athenians within their established beliefs which required critical contextualization. In this process, Paul had to respect the Athenian need for worship, but he was also obliged to evaluate their practices and gave them the challenge to examine the object of their worship. In so doing, he quoted their source in support of the worship of God the creator and sustainer of all (v.28).

Commenting on critical contextualization, Hiebert Paul concludes that unbiblical religious practices of the society should be replaced by biblical alternatives (Hiebert, 1984). Pauline's strategy in Athens was grounded in this standard by giving the alternative to the Athenians concerning the object of worship. He specifically changed the object from worshipping idols to the worship of God the creator (v. 27).

Applying Pauline's Application of Doctrine of God in African Context

The doctrine of God heralds religious practices of societies. The doctrine of God determines how people formulate their religious beliefs and practices (Canale, 2000). In the case of Africans, their polytheistic view of God leads them to have lesser divinities. They have also formulated the practice that rejects the immanence of God in their daily lives. For them, God is rarely consulted because he is too transcended therefore, his power can be accessed through intermediaries which include divinities, ancestors, and spirits (Mathema, 2013). This situation resembles the Pauline scenario in Athens. The Athenians had a polytheistic view of God; therefore, they ended in worshipping graven images. In this case, the strategy that Paul used to introduce God may apply to Africans who experience a similar situation. The following strategy may be followed.

Respect the Local Religious Practices

When Paul entered Athens, He observed that the city was full of idolatry, but he did not despise the practice at the first glance, but he focused on the positive act of their worship zeal. Since religion is an innate lifestyle, lack of respect to someone's religious practice may end up in prejudice and opposition. Discipleship in the African context may adapt this manner of approach purposely to trigger acceptance.

Identify the Point of Entry

Paul did not introduce God anyhow, but he identified the gap which he could use to introduce God in a better way. This point is categorical. Verse 23 states, "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you" (NIV). Since the Athenians had no idea on the inscription "to the Unknown God" their philosophical setting of looking for new ideas triggered a need which mandated them to listen to Paul's preaching. In the same manner, identification of a gap can be an appropriate point of entry in discipleship in the African context. Though Nwaomah warns that presenting God of the

Bible as superior to African gods may not be the effective way (Nwaomah, 2016), the emphasis of this approach is to look for a gap that may be used as a way of providing solutions for the needs of Africans.

Integrate the Local People in Evaluating their Religious Practices

In the process of introducing God as the creator and sustainer of all, Paul integrated the Athenians by quoting their poet to strengthen his point and to introduce the greatness of God above the graven images which in turn challenged their idol worship. Following this trajectory, discipleship in the African context may apply this method by incorporating African belief in the Supreme Being in challenging their dual allegiance. Since African societies believe that the Supreme Being (God) stands on the top of the hierarchical order (Turaki, 2006), they may be challenged by introducing this God who requires allegiance to himself and who is willing to bless those who approach Him.

Apply Critical Contextualization

Paul's method replaced the unknown god with God the creator. He removed the old practice of worshiping the unknown god and replaced the vacuum by introducing God the creator. In the same vein, discipleship in the African context should be contextualized whereby thenon-biblical religious practices may be replaced by biblical religious practices.

Conclusion

The leading questions in this study show that the God of the Bible is different from Athenian and African views of God. While the Bible reveals God as the creator and sustainer, who is both transcendent and imminent, Athenians and African hold on to a transcendent being who has little concern for humanity, and who can be accessed through lesser divinities. These views led to different impacts on discipleship. While biblical view of God led to the worship of God of the Bible, African and Athenian view of God led them into idolatry because of their polytheistic and pantheistic approach. The Pauline mission in Athens presented the nature of God as the sovereign creator, self-sufficient, sustainer, who is both transcendent and immanent. He did this after he recognized a gap which he used to introduce God of the Bible over Athenian gods. This paper has shown that Pauline's application of the doctrine of God can be applied in Africa. Like Paul who introduced God to the Athenians at their point of need, discipleship in the African context may use the gap of African need for peace, fear of misfortunes, diseases, destroying mystical powers, infertility, and curses by presenting God of the Bible who is able to settle their problems.

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