

# Cultural And Superstitious Marginalization In Mitra Phukan's "The Collector's Wife"

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## Abstract

Mitra Phukan's "The Collector's Wife" (2000) examines themes of cultural and superstitious marginalization in Assamese society, particularly concerning gender and identity. The novel explores how cultural traditions and superstitions serve as a monitoring system, limiting personal agency and propping up societal abuse. Through the protagonist Kamala's emotional and psychological struggles, Phukan critiques the confining norms that restrain women within predefined roles. This paper discusses the interplay of cultural expectations, superstition, and marginalization in the novel, highlighting the psychological impact on the protagonist and her ultimate resistance against societal restrictions. By exploring how cultural beliefs and gender roles intersect, this study provides a broader understanding of how social norms can serve as tools of abuse while also exploring possibilities for resistance and self-exploration.

**Keywords:** Mitra Phukan, Gender, Superstition, Marginalization, Identity, Patriarchy, Cultural Norms

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## I. Introduction

Mitra Phukan, one of Assam's contemporary authors, has contributed to Indian literature in English by depicting the complications of human relationships, gender dynamics, and societal dynamics. "The Collector's Wife" (2000) is a convincing narrative that explores the intricate interplay between personal turmoil, cultural constraints, and superstition. The novel leads Kamala, a woman navigating the prohibitive boundaries of Assamese society, where cultural norms and gender roles shape her existence. While her struggles become visibly personal, they reflect broader issues of male dominance, social norms, and the power of superstition in dictating individual behavior. The novel critiques these elements, urging a review of traditional beliefs that marginalize individuals, particularly women. This paper explores how Phukan uses Kamala's journey to spotlight the effect of cultural and superstitious marginalization, illustrating these conditions' psychological and social aftermath.

## II. Cultural Marginalization And Gender

At the heart of "The Collector's Wife" lies the theme of gender-based marginalization, deeply embedded within Assamese society. Kamala, as the wife of a distinguished government officer, is expected to follow the traditional gender roles that prioritize her husband's career and public image over her aspirations. She is confined within an emotional and intellectual vacuum, where societal expectations demand her role as a submissive, supportive wife. This form of marginalization is comprehensive, ensuring that women like Kamala remain based on their husbands, with limited scope for personal growth or professional development. Phukan presents Kamala as a symbol of many women in patriarchal societies who are valued primarily for their ability to uphold familial and social structures rather than for their individuality or desires. Kamala's internal rivalry between duty and desire reflects the struggles faced by women trapped in traditional roles that deny them freedom.

## III. Superstition As A Mechanism Of Control

Superstition plays a vital role in reinforcing Kamala's marginalization. Like many other traditional cultures, Assamese society has deeply ingrained superstitious beliefs that often govern daily life and individual choices. Kamala surrounds herself with notions of fate, destiny, and ritualistic practices that dictate her path. The belief in fate, in particular, serves as a means of control, discouraging individuals from challenging their societal positions. Kamala's dissatisfaction with her life is not merely a personal struggle but a confrontation with the cultural weight of destiny. Her longing for personal agency clashes with the deeply held belief that her role as a wife is preordained. Furthermore, omens, taboos, and religious rituals create additional barriers, preventing her from seeking alternatives to her circumstances. The novel critiques these superstitious

frameworks by illustrating how they sustain social inequalities, especially in reinforcing gender norms and limiting the autonomy of marginalized individuals.

#### **IV. Psychological Effects Of Marginalization**

The impact of cultural and superstitious marginalization extends beyond Kamala's social role, profoundly affecting her mental and emotional well-being. Phukan presents a poignant portrayal of psychological isolation, illustrating how Kamala's suppressed desires and societal restrictions manifest as anxiety, depression, and emotional detachment. Her marriage, rather than serving as a source of comfort, exacerbates her isolation, as her husband remains emotionally distant and uninterested in her personal struggles. Kamala's awareness of powerlessness intensifies as she discovers herself unable to articulate her needs or escape the societal structures confining her. The novel highlights how such psychological distress is not merely an individual affliction but a systemic issue affecting countless women who are denied agency over their own lives.

#### **V. Resistance And The Struggle For Identity**

Despite being marginalized, Kamala experiences moments of resistance and self-awareness that highlight her struggle for identity. Phukan does not depict Kamala as completely passive; instead, she engages in an internal rebellion against the forces that have influenced her life. Kamala's increasing awareness that she is not solely an extension of her husband or society's expectations signals the start of her resistance. This rebellion, however, is not overt or radical; it emerges as a gentle defiance and an awakening to the possibility of self-definition outside of imposed roles. Phukan presents Kamala's subtle rebellion as evidence that, although challenging, change is achievable when individuals start to question and resist the norms that restrict them.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

"The Collector's Wife" is an intense commentary on the intersection of culture, superstition, and gendered injustice in Assamese society. Through Kamala's journey, Phukan critiques the systems that protraction marginalization, illustrating the deep-rooted nature of patriarchal control and traditional beliefs. The novel underscores the psychological and emotional consequences of these societal structures, highlighting the need for greater personal agency and social transformation. By focusing attention on how superstitions and cultural norms serve as tools of oppression, Phukan's work challenges readers to review inherited beliefs and advocate for a more fair and all-inclusive society. Ultimately, Kamala's struggle is not just her own. It is representative of the silent battles fought by many women whose voices remain inaudible in societies governed by rigid traditions and superstitions.

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