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INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PATRIARCHY AND SEX/GENDER DIFFERENTIATION: THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS



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ABSTRACT :

The notion of domination is a product of history. The domination of either male or female takes the form of patriarchy or manliness. It is a symbolic manifestation of men / women sufferings throughout human civilization due to timely vulnerability, social taboos and bio-cultural confinements. The present paper aims at patriarchy as an ideology, a human masculine mindset up that is structured culturally in a male-dominated

society. Its unequal hierarchical monopoly is stereotypically power-orientated in the society and often demands the subversion of binary opposition and brings in equality for the institutionalization of patriarchy and sex/gender differentiation through a feminist lens.

KEYWORDS :

Patriarchy, sex, gender, feminism, difference, history

RESEARCH PAPER

Angela Saini opines :

“Men haven’t always ruled. The way we imagine gender in history is wrong.” (TOI)

Patriarchy is a social system in which positions of dominance and privilege are primarily held by men. It is used, both as a technical anthropological term for families or clans controlled by the father or eldest male or group of males and in feminist theory where it is used to describe broad social structures in which men dominate over women and children. In these theories it is often extended to a variety of manifestations in which men have social privileges over others causing exploitation or oppression, such as through male dominance of moral authority and control of property. (Wikipedia)

All women have the different experiences in patriarchy in a stereotypical social hierarchical structure. Every experience of women retells a story of her endless sufferings in a male-dominated society. The patriarchy is often rejected and feminism is typically embraced by researchers, scholars and critics. It is considered to be harmful that often inflict on women. Its impact on men thus needs to be taken into consideration. The feminism is awakened through understandings of sexes where the world of female and men is unified. Both needs to be independent, resourceful and reserved through social reaction. The cultural, political, economic, ecological trends in any society brings out radical feminist analyses. The sex/gender issues focus on unfair and unjustifiable treatment given in a socio-culturally imposed society by ruthless male on kind women. It redefines feminism in the context of patriarchy to be unmasked. Her harassment, plight and predicament and hopelessness echo in human history. But still. She finds herself directionless, helpless and loveless in a male-dominated society. A prehistoric man dragged her by her hair, rape her and dominate her at all the times. The physique of males is naturally larger than females. Men are thus physically stronger than women as per the biological human structure is taken into consideration. Since the

beginning of the human species females have been harassed. This male domination in the form of patriarchy hinder human progress on the earth.

Patriarchy, traditionally defined, refers to a system of social relations in which there is gender inequality between socially defined men and women. This system of inequitable social relations is embedded in the political, social, cultural, and economic institutions of a society as well as in, and through, private domestic relations. In these systems of gender inequality, women find themselves disadvantaged in various ways within social relations and organization. In patriarchal societies, women are collectively excluded from political, social, and economic positions of power; women find themselves paid less well for work of equal value; and women are more likely to experience poverty and unequal access to resources, goods, and services. While individual women may experience success in various spheres, women as a distinctive social group are generally disadvantaged in these ways. (*sciencedirect*)

Sex is biologically determined whereas gender is a social construct. o the silenced voice of women to the world. Grappling with sex/gender issues, the nature of society in which how both sexes grow up and gender discrimination becomes paramount needs to be understood. The word patriarchy comes from Greek, meaning “rule of the father”. It is the body of a human community. It gives a male ruler dominance over other men. It gives men control over women. Patriarchy is used to define various systems of institutionalized male dominance. Patriarchy is “father domination”. It is a definite inception of family power, one form of male dominance. The patriarchal systems had developed thousands of years ago. The present feminist critique of patriarchy study cultural, political, economic system that subordinates women emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Kate Millett, the first feminist writer used the term in her book *Sexual Politics* in 1970. It is socially analyzed as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.” The sociologist Sylvia Walby coins a key term “social structures” in this regard that “clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman

in a subordinate one.” Therefore, it is very crucial to study the notion of its hierarchical society and unending male dominance rooted in human societies.

The term ‘patriarchy’ first gained prominence in feminist scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s, when feminists developed the notion of gender roles and gender relations as categories of analysis. Gender as an analytic category is conceived of as distinct and separate from biological sex and as a concept that could undermine the claims of sexual differences between men and women in Western society. Gendered behaviors, expectations, practices, and roles are seen as reflective of social and cultural processes and are not biological ‘givens’. (*sciencedirect*)

Patriarchy is a form of hierarchy that is a reasonably recent development in Homo sapiens’ 200,000 years on the earth. It’s conspicuous to know more about the history of sex/gender and power studying patriarchy. In the words of Gerda Lerner, a historian, patriarchy is “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society in general.” Patriarchy also means, “that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources.” The interpretation of patriarchy goes on shading different shades of meaning depending on time and place. Patriarchy is stated as “some men that control property and hold power over other men and over most women; men or male-dominated institutions control the sexuality and reproduction of females; most of the powerful institutions in society are dominated by men.”

Sandra Bem, a psychologist used the term “androcentrism” to describe “privileging of males, male experience, and the male perspective” that leads to men defining women as the other. He focuses on gender difference, inferiority to men, domestic and reproductive purpose within the family, domination of men, a natural heading in the family, her skill to excite and satisfy his sexual appetite that is found to be rousing and menacing to him. Judith Bennett, a historian points out,

“woman”, as “almost every girl born today will face more constraints and restrictions than will be encountered by a boy who is born today into the same social circumstances as that girl.”

The binary categories of man/woman; masculinity/femininity; and male/female are seen as key factors in the organization of social life. These categories are ordered hierarchically with women constructed as inferior to men, and with those attributes seen as ‘feminine’ undervalued. These constructed, binary differences that are embedded in Western systems of thought and practice, as well as our social structures and institutions and social relations, provide powerful explanatory tools for analyzing women’s inequality across distinctive historical and cultural eras. (*sciencedirect*)

History is a perpetual presence for women discrimination in a male-dominated society. Many debates over such discriminations end in vain. The frequent debates over prehistory that is the period of human existence before written records demand for women emancipation. She needs to be empowered, self-reliant and independent in a non-patriarchal society far away from biased and prejudiced minds. Since the beginning of human history, women have been suffering in silence and her tears of agony have never brought her pleasure of her own. Scanning the earlier pages of history i. e. right from the beginning of human civilization, women need to be egalitarian with no institutionalized dominance of male over female, or vice versa. The duties which had been assigned to females by males demonstrate their socio-economic and cultural inferiority. Hunting animals, wrestling and adventures were so natural to men than women whereas females were confined within four walls to cook and produce children. She was to cook food and look after children as if she was destined to do so. Men have a greater value and status in comparison with women. However, women are the key providers and primary caretakers for the children. The social systems around the world may vary, but most of the social systems are neither hierarchical nor male-dominated in nature. Based on the study of Judy Foster and Marlene Derlet, the authors of Invisible Women of Prehistory : Three Millions Years of Peace put forth the rise of patriarchy in the last six thousand years. Marija Gimbutas, a late archaeologist, focuses on the increase of patriarchy among people. Foster and Derlet elucidate that pre-patriarchal societies were considered

to be often matriarchal, but not in the sense of women dominating men. The “matriarchy” to which Gimbutas called “matristic” societies needs to be detailed in this regard. Marilyn French called “matricentry”- “small simple societies centered about mothers,” should be understood as more egalitarian societies that characteristically were matrilineal but with few restrictions on men or women based on sex differences.

In Bangladesh, it has been a common scenario that men dominate, oppress, and exploit women, and it is accepted by the social institutions because of their patriarchal structure. In the family, women are considered as passive dependents and property of their husbands. Women are also excluded from economic and political power through patriarchy. (Hossen, Md. Sohrab, Patriarchy Practice and Women’s Subordination in the Society of Bangladesh, P. 51-60)

In the study of Lerner who details the emergence of patriarchy in the ancient Near East around 3000 BCE. He seeks to show how the subordination of women and male control of their reproductive role preceded the development of private property. He goes on to state how it served as a model for the consequent subordination of other humans by dominant ruling classes. Women were considered to be a source for economic resource. Economic oppression and exploitation are mainly based on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men of women’s labor power and the reproductive power. Commodification is nothing but transformation of the resource into a product for commercial purposes. Women were treated as an item to be bought and sold in the market. It means that she is objectified and commercialized. She has been considered as a direct economic acquisition of resources. The increase of patriarchy is a product of the agricultural revolution. In agricultural societies, the notion of private ownership and patrimony basically came into focus and consideration. It led to men controlling women’s reproduction and claiming ownership of women. Lerner points out the destructive consequences : Women themselves became a resource, acquired by men, much as the land was acquired by men. With the rise of agriculture, females were captured and enslaved. In pre-patriarchal societies, male and female humans had unlike roles that grew out of the realities of sex differences. The sex-role

disparity that was an aftermath of biology. The females bear children and breastfeed was a root cause for gender-role differentiation.

Following independence, the identity of Indian women underwent radical transformations. Women's exploitation is much reduced as a result of cultural and structural changes, and women have equal opportunity in numerous sectors. The women have left the safe haven of their homes and are now fully armoured with their abilities on the battlefield of life. There is now no arena that Indian women have not conquered. (SAPNA SAH, Amity University, Noida.)

According to Lerner, the differentiation did not automatically effect in hierarchy and inequality. The biological difference between men and women became major as a symbolic manifestation of subordination. The cultural elaboration of difference later mark degradation. In pre-state societies, before institutionalization of patriarchy men and women's biological difference found expression in a sexually based division of labor. The pregnant women or with infants have different economic activities mark as inferior or neglected. It is thus the cultural expansion of "difference" into a marker of subordination, a social construction which is socio-historically determined, which creates gender and structures societies into hierarchies.

The agricultural revolution created opportunities for individuals to acquire power through control of resource. It was a power claimed by men raises the inevitable questions of why it was men who seized the control. Allan Johnson, a sociologist suggests that in patriarchy, gender is a class that established and reinforces inequality. The patriarchal societies develop various justifications for inequality. The patriarchy's history points out the fact that male dominance has its roots in biological differences between male and female humans, gender inequality is a product of history and politics, not merely biology.

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