
UNIT 1 PATRIARCHY AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 Defining Patriarchy
 - 1.3.1 Liberals
 - 1.3.2 Socialist
 - 1.3.3 Marxist
 - 1.3.4 Radical
- 1.4 Relationship between Patriarchy and Violence
 - 1.4.1 Caste
 - 1.4.2 Religion
- 1.5 Changing Forms
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Unit End Questions
- 1.8 References
- 1.9 Suggested Readings

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The category of patriarchy is central to the perspectives and practices of the social and political struggles of women and marginalized sexual minorities. This unit attempts to explore the various dimensions of the category of patriarchy. It provides definitional understanding of the term, patriarchy. It also discusses about the liberal, socialist, Marxist and radical feminist understandings of patriarchy. Patriarchy and consequential violence are also discussed to demonstrate the specific nature of patriarchy. Caste and religion that reproduce patriarchy are also discussed to differentiate the ideological and practical ramifications of patriarchy. Transforming character of patriarchy is also reflected to show its variations. Contemporary online sphere is reproducing and mediating patriarchy in multiple ways. Those mediated constructions are also explored to mark the nature of current society.

1.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Know the definitional debates on patriarchy;
- Engage with the various forms of feminist interpretations of patriarchy;
- Learn the relations of societal reproduction of patriarchy and
- Reflect on the transformations of the ideology and various dimensions of

1.3 DEFINING PATRIARCHY

The term “patriarchy” has been undergoing multiple interpretations. Interdisciplinary approaches grounded in humanities and social sciences have widened the scope of such debates. It is the social organization that possesses predominant power. It also refers to the existence and operationalization of power via a community. The members of the families in that community have to live under the authority of the head of the family or patriarch. It is the rule of the father. This term was used initially to describe the societal systems with male heads. Feminists have used this term to refer to the male domination. There are ideological differences in the feminist ideologies related to the category of patriarchy. Therefore, they have diverse interpretations on the patriarchy. Patriarchal domination is central to all spheres of the society and polity. It has penetrated to the diverse realms of human life. It is also analyzed as the government, a family, church or society under the guidance of the fathers. The category of patriarchy is used to refer to the fathers of the tribes of Israel. Then, it was deployed to the honorific designation of the bishops of the church. It became the official designation of the heads of the eastern churches. Some feminist scholars have argued that patriarchy question the fixed nature of the sexual identity (Mitchell and Rose,1982). Rule of the father or patriarchy led to the subjugation of the women. Families and various forms of societies had to function according to the patriarchy. It is noted that the term patriarchy was applied to demonstrate the male domination till 1960s. Now the term patriarchy has the stigma attached to it (Steve and Steven,2006:227). The term, patriarchy has become antithetical to the spirit of the modern, civilized social and political realms. Patriarchy leads to the oppression of the women and children. Paradoxically, modern industrial societies were patriarchal in nature. In other words, patriarchy lurks in the backdrop to the (post)modern societies and its scientific-technological transformations. Debates based on race, class and caste have also challenged the universalist construction of the patriarchy. The following section discusses about liberal feminism and its understanding of patriarchy.

1.3.1 Liberal Feminist Understanding on Patriarchy

You have read the definitional understanding related to patriarchy in the above section. This section discusses about the liberal feminist perspectives on patriarchy. Liberal feminism departed from its predecessors of feminists through its distinct positions. It is analyzed that the liberal feminism came into picture with the development of capitalism. Alison Jaggar discusses about the ideological nature of the liberal feminism. Liberals argued for democracy and political liberties. Voices of liberal feminists are analyzed as “unheard throughout the 300-year history of liberal political theory (Jaggar,1983:27). There is an epistemological exclusion of such feminism in the context of the liberal political theory. Liberal feminists argued that principles of liberalism should be applied in the context of the women as well for the natural rights of men and women in the 18th century. They argued for

the utilitarian positions that support equal rights for women under the law. Liberal feminists asserted that state should introduce different social reforms for the equal treatment of women in the backdrop of the liberal theory of the welfare state. Liberal feminists questioned the dominant liberal premises and provided different understanding of the human nature. They argued that women should have the same political and legal rights due to their status as a rational being. Liberal feminists argued for the right to education, political participation, employment and complete equality before the law. Liberal feminism emphasizes on the rights in the public sphere. They do not examine the power equations that are central to the public life. Liberal feminists consider state/political institutions as neutral in its approaches. Conventional male world is positioned above the women in uncritical fashion (Bryson,1992). It is further argued that liberal feminism gains its strength through engaging with the plural strands within the field of liberalism. It is argued that the suppression of the women can be addressed through political landscape within the realm of democracy that both men and women can engage with the democracy. Thus, it challenged to the patriarchal, political perceptions related to women to an extent. It is critiques that such stream of feminism is not against the status-quo (Pilcher and Whelehan.,2004: 49). In other words, it is incapable to bring radical change related to the life worlds of women. Liberal understanding of the private and the public is also questioned by feminist scholars from other schools of thought like that of radical feminism. This unit also discusses about the radical feminist critique of patriarchy and its departure from the traditional-liberal feminist understandings. The next section examines the socialist feminist perspectives on patriarchy.

1.3.2 Socialist Feminist Perspectives on Patriarchy

Socialism is much discussed in the history of the global political thought. According to Valerie Bryson, socialism addressed the issues related to the mitigation of poverty. It also addressed about the different issues faced by working classes. It believed in the piecemeal reform than the Marxian ideal of revolution. It shared affinities with the feminism that explored social justice. It provided more focus to social justice than patriarchy. However, a working class-socialist and suffrage campaigner, Hannah Mitchell exposed the patriarchy of socialist men-activists as equal to that of their patriarchal political opponent-conservatives. There were conflicts related to the voting rights of the women and political parties. Socialist feminism in its early days in America was based on abolitionist tendencies. It initiated anti-prostitution campaign that was influenced by Edward Bellamy's book, *Looking Backward* (Bellamy,1888). Some among the socialist feminists emphasized on the idea of the moral superiority of woman. They also found women as the regenerator and reformer of the corrupt society (Bryson,109-111). In other words, those women who are part of such morally corrupted societal order should be reformed and so on. It is observed that some scholars used the term socialist feminist to denote those feminists who do not completely depend on the Marxist theories. For example, utopian socialist-staunch supporter of women's suffrage Charlotte Perkins Gilman belongs to that stream of feminism (Bryson,1992:234). Gilman argued that socialist feminism has

created its own path in the history of feminism. She emphasized that economic dependence and scientific care for the young children as important than the ballot (Gilman,1898:131). According to Bryson, Gilman introduced a perspective that centered around the women and connected female values with that of human progress and socialism. She believed in the gradual /evolutionary changes rather than the Marxian restructuring of the political institutions/revolutions. Gilman critiqued the oppressive nature of marriage and its impact on women. She criticized the degrading and exploitative nature of family and consequential psychological derangement of women. Socialist feminism is criticized for its focus on advanced industrial societies and its inherent racism that avoids the questions of racial discrimination and family of Afro-Americans (Barrett and McIntosh,1985). The following section engages with the Marxist feminist engagements with the category of patriarchy.

1.3.3 Marxist Feminist Engagements on Patriarchy.

The earlier section discussed the nature of the socialist feminist approach towards the term patriarchy. This section explores the Marxist feminist understanding of patriarchy. According to Valerie Bryson, Marxist feminism is grounded on the premise that looks at the oppression of women and its relation in the socio-economic context. Marxism emphasized on the historical role of the collective class struggle. At the same time, there are criticism to Marxism that argue that Marxism reduced everything to the class. Therefore, the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, August Bebel, Clara Zetkin etc are criticized for their economic reductionism. In other words, such perspectives sought economic basis of all social phenomena. Feminist scholars analyses the contribution of Alexandra Kollontai for her rigorous understanding of the Marxism. It is observed that communist societies after 1920s could not look beyond the traditional Russian official Marxist position that relates woman question to the capitalism. At the same time, communist and post-communist Russia witnessed various problems related to the lives of the women. It is observed that classic Marxist position emphasized on the economic autonomy and complete participation of women as essential for the liberation of the women. Marxists faced the radical feminists' criticism about the sexist and patriarchal approaches of Marxism. On the other hand, Marxists explained that such foregrounding of women's oppression as a divisive, bourgeois deviation that distracts the solidarity and class struggle of the working classes. (Bryson,1992:232-233). Scholars such as Catherine Mackinnon demonstrated the contradiction between the feminist framework that analyses the sexual exploitation with that of the Marxist framework on power. She also linked it with the feminism's emphasis on lived experiences and Marx's emphasis on concrete practices. However, Nancy Hartsock argued that feminists have re-interpreted the Marxist approach through integrating theory based on experience, personal and political changes (Bryson,1992:235-236). In response to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's argument that positions production and reproduction as the part of the material basis of the society, Bryson explores the theoretical possibilities related to the confrontation between men, women and economic relations. Debates extended to the domestic labour or the notion of women as the

reserve army of labour. According to Lise Vogel, work of the women in the home was assessed to achieve the socialist change. House work and the labour outside the home in the backdrop of the capitalism and the resistance against capitalism are part of the domestic labour debate. In addition to the work and patriarchy at home, women are also part of a larger exploitative-economic order. As mentioned earlier, debates on Marxist feminism also discuss about Marx's idea of reserve army of labor that is essential for the operation of capitalist economy. The stigma related to labour and skill of women and patriarchal positioning of the men in the context of the work and labour are contested in the debates on Marxism and feminism. Michelle Barret, a scholar who is influenced by the writings of French Marxist scholar, Louis Althusser, discussed about the role of pre-existing gender ideology and capitalism in case of the oppression of women. Heidi Hartmann argued that capitalism and patriarchy as central to the modern society. Ann Ferguson observed that semi-autonomous system of patriarchy persists, and patriarchy has a history that cannot be reduced by the economic change. Iris Young analyzed that patriarchy is grounded on the women's labour and; is very much part of the production process. On the other hand, Alison Jaggar also discusses about the inter-linkages between patriarchy and capitalism. Lise Vogel analyses that the women from the working classes have to endure sex-related oppression and it can be understood through the Marxist understanding. Vogel observes that working class women are thus oppressed by the capitalism. Bryson also discusses about some Marxist feminists who also engaged with the questions of the "private" and "non-political in addition to economic understanding. For example, Juliet Mitchell argued that feminists should analyses the family-grounded structures of reproduction, sexuality and socialization of the children in addition to the conventional Marxist understanding of structure of production. Barrett and McIntosh analyzed the ideological nature of the family in the modern capitalist society than its economic character. Foreman and Jaggar noted that historical specificity of the alienation of women than that of unaltered nature of gender questions (Bryson, 1992:232-260).

The terms such as Marxist feminism and socialist feminism are interchangeably used across disciplines. Socialist feminists addressed the issue of sexism in leftwing parties and trade unions, class, race, community, environmental questions etc. (Wainright, Rowbotham and Lynn,1979). While discussing the role of Marxist feminists, one has to return to their critical readings on the category of division of labour. It is observed that the category of the division of labour made an important entry in the academic circles in 1970s. Feminist deployed Marxist perspectives to expand their understanding on the nuances of labour. It is analyzed that the work of women in the home is never acknowledged as unpaid work or labour. It is not considered as productive in nature. On the other hand, labour of the waged men is considered as productive for the family and community. It is observed that domestic labour contributes to capitalism (Costa, Delphi and Leonard, cited in Pilcher and Whelehan,2004:31). Thus, class-based approaches have not addressed the question of gender (Walby,1990). Marxist feminists analyzed the lack of historicity in radical feminists' reading of the relations between

power and patriarchy (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004:116). Patriarchal mode of production categories-women as class and men as husband as another class (Delphy, cited in Walby, 1990). Firestone categorized men and woman as “sex-classes” on the basis of their relations to means of production (Firestone, cited in Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004:14). However, postmodernists have questioned the validity of the societal analysis based on class (Bradley, 1996). Barrett argued that postmodernism can eschew the racism in feminism’s homogenization of the background of all women (Barrett, 1988). Neoliberal phase of capitalism and its impact on the changing nature of patriarchy raise significant challenge for the Marxist feminists. Radical feminist inquiry of patriarchy is discussed in the following section.

1.3.4 Radical Feminist Enquiry of Patriarchy.

Radical feminism departed from other feminist approaches due to its distinct theoretical prepositions and strategies. According to Valerie Bryson, there are diverse arguments exist in the rubric of radical feminism. Radical feminist theory is based on the experiences of women and perceptions and argues that it is not necessary to comply with dominant political frameworks and interests. Radical feminists consider the oppression of women as rudimentary and universal in nature. It further notes that the interests of women are opposed to that of men. These interests link them to sisterhood that is beyond class, race etc. They argue for the collective struggle of women to end their oppression under patriarchal order. One of the central features of radical feminism is that it has demonstrated how male power is able to impact the public realm of politics as well as the private arena of paid employment. These intrusions of both natures are mediating patriarchal feminism. Radical feminists were able to forge solidarities with marginalized groups including the Afro-Americans. The political nature of the ‘personal’ became central to their struggles through the much-celebrated motto, “personal is political”. Scholars such as Kate Millet explained the nature of conditioning inherent in patriarchy. It led to the internal colonization of women. Patriarchy is also studied as one that thrives on the economic exploitation and coercive force. Radical feminists also condemned patriarchy that induces sexual violence and rape.

Radical feminism is criticized on different grounds. The theoretical nature of the radical feminism is descriptive and not analytical. Therefore, it is not able to analyze the origin of male power. Thus, it fails to end the oppression of women based on patriarchy. It creates some false impression about man as an enemy and suggests counter-heterosexual practices. Radical feminist theory is also criticized as historical and one that creates false universalism to neutralize the conflicts and differences within the life worlds of the diverse sections of women. It also reproduces the image of the women as victim and thus denies their agency. In other words, it is not able to see the women as change makers. Radical feminists emphasize on the specificity of patriarchy and argue that it should not be reduced to economic power. They also exhort women to fight against the power of men that suppresses the interests of women. It is further argued that male power is constructed and it is central to

biological males. Radical feminists also read the state/political institutions as an oppressive manifestation of patriarchal power. Their understanding of state is different than that of the liberal feminists who read state as neutral institution that excludes women. Liberal feminists also think state can be positive in the case of the social and political mobility of women. State, for radical feminists, excludes women through their patriarchal institutions. State power is the patriarchal power for the radical feminists. Some of the strands in radical feminism like that of Christine Delphy analysed unpaid house work of women. Radical feminists consider exploitation of women more sexual than that of the domestic exploitation that happens inside the family. They argue that patriarchy is based on male violence. They assert that patriarchy is also based on the control of the sexuality of women. There are radical feminist critiques to reproduction. Shulamith Firestone argued that role of the women as a reproducer that has subjected them to patriarchal power. Therefore, she speaks against the child-bearing and child rearing role of women. Radical feminists condemned heterosexual conjugality as a form of rape. Radical feminist such as Andrea Dworkin also fought against the sexist and violent culture of pornography. Pornography is analyzed as a patriarchal form of power that distorts the sexuality (Bryson,1992). Radical feminists critiqued the socialist and Marxist feminists' approaches to women question as sexist and patriarchal in nature (Bryson,1992:233). Radical feminist argued that all political institutions are articulations of patriarchy and phallocracy. Silvia Federici discusses how inferiority of women, housework and patriarchy function in the backdrop of capitalism (Federici,2014). Radical feminists analyzed the power inherent in patriarchy. (Bryson,1992:181-231). Inter-linkages that exist between patriarchy and violence are discussed in the following section.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) *What do you mean by patriarchy.*
- 2) *Write your understanding on socialist feminist perspectives on patriarchy*

1.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PATRIARCHY AND VIOLENCE

Fear was central to Victorian attitudes related to morality. It was linked to the fear associated with the male violence towards women, child prostitution and related sexually oriented diseases (Levine,1987). Some of the earlier writings that discuss the issues of women discussed about the prevalence of male violence and its impact on working class women (Mill,1983). Feminist scholars across the globe have discussed about the legal solutions to women who undergo marital violence. Radical feminists analyzed the patriarchy inherent in the violence of men and their regulation of the sexuality of women. The question of marital rape is contested across the globe. Violence

against women starts from the hatred for women. Rape and various forms of violence against women demonstrate the disastrous growth of patriarchy. Capitalism reproduces various forms of violence that also intersect with the violence against women. Scholars have analyzed the connections between patriarchy, sexuality and violence. There are different interpretations related to sexuality. Sexuality is analyzed as oppressive in nature. Sexuality is also read in relation to male violence. Valerie Bryson also analyzed how violence is integral to the institution of the marriage irrespective of the class location of the couples (Bryson,1992:75). Social stratification and its ideology also determine the patriarchy. The following section analyses the relations of caste and patriarchy.

1.4.1 Caste and Patriarchy

Caste operates through endogamy and patriarchy (Ambedkar). Marriage, outside the caste is controlled by the patriarchal power inherent in the ideology and practice of caste in India. Caste based patriarchy thus unleashes violence over those women who are at the lower strata of caste system. For instance, violence against the dalit women is rampant across the different states in India. Caste, customs and modern law conflict in strange ways. It further accelerates the violence against women. Honor killing also signify the violence determined by the caste and patriarchy. Lawyers have deplored that honor killing has not stopped even after the annihilation of caste after 75 years of independence (The Hindu,2021). Dalit women are oppressed by the patriarchy inside the community and outside, non-dalit communities-castes. Dalit women have challenged the external, outside community and internal patriarchy, within the community as well (Guru,1995). Atrocities against dalit women also show the various dimensions of caste and patriarchy. Caste, gender, and patriarchy affect the women's representation in the labor force (Bhattacharya,2021). In addition to caste, other religions also perpetuate patriarchy in different ways. The following section reflects on the complex relations of religion and patriarchy.

1.4.2 Religion and Patriarchy

Religions are considered as essential in the social bonding. At the same time, religion is also criticized on the basis of its vicious ideology and practices. It also leads to politicization of religion. Thus, it leads to the ideology and hate ridden practices of communalism. Religion also deploys women as a trope to circulate its patriarchal ideology. Women are conditioned by the religion. Therefore, they are also victim of the religion-based patriarchy and consequential communal violence. Various dimensions of religion are contested in such conflictual social spaces. Customs and personal laws that are part of the religions also affect the social and political mobility of the women. Thus, they are forced to live according to the religious patriarchy. Women from the dominant religions and marginalized religions equally have to bear the brunt of the religion. All regions therefore are patriarchal in multiple ways. Right to enter the religious institutions of women is also part of the debates on the religion and gender relations (Raj,2017). Therefore, the aspirations of women from those religions are curtailed through the

authoritarian structure of the religion. The next section discusses about the changing nature of patriarchy.

1.5 CHANGING NATURE OF PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy acquires diverse shapes and practices according to the global social/political/economic contexts. According to John Lie, there is a shift from the agrarian capitalism to that of the patriarchal capitalism. Patriarchal based oppression coexists within the division of labour within household and also within the industrialized spaces (Lie,1996). The term “patriarchal belt” refers to the regions with common societal characteristics. Kandiyoti deploys the term classic patriarchy to show the existence of patriarchy in such areas. It is observed that patriarchal societies possess same patterns of gender status of women. North African and subcultures in the Turkey belong to such gendered regions (Littrell and Andy,2013). It is analyzed that classic patriarchy exists across religions like Confucianism, and Islam (Kandiyotti,1988). Women’s status is marginalized in the patriarchal belt (Moghadam,2005). However, the tendency to connect patriarchal belt with underdevelopment is paradoxical in the case of the persistence of patriarchy in the industrialized areas. Neo-liberalism is shaping the gender relations through neo-patriarchy and the fight of women should be against the neoliberal neo-patriarchy (Campbell,2014). Patriarchy is regaining its new avatars according to the changing political scenarios and economic ideologies. Changing conceptualizations of gender and masculinity are skeptical of the use of the category of patriarchy. Judith Butler observed the theoretical imperialism in universalizing the patriarchy in the writings of Catherine Mackinnon (Butler,1991). However, patriarchy is being challenged through the entry of women and other genders in the different sectors of societal and political orders. People are also conditioned through the patriarchal ideology that is percolated through media and information and communication technologies. The following section deals with the contemporary social media and its constructions of patriarchy.

Social media

Social media is also becoming the agents of patriarchy. The wide range of internet is manipulated by the misogynist and patriarchal male users to spread their malice against women through diverse online platforms. Communicative capitalism is thriving in the age of capitalism and information and communication technologies (Dean,2009). The free and democratic space of social media is being challenged through the development of patriarchy within the social media platform. Tweets have reinforced the patriarchy and gender relations in the context of social media platforms such as Twitter (Demirhan and Derya,2015). In addition to these surveillance on the women in the social media, censorship and surveillance of the conservative opposite gender/men often contribute to the various forms of patriarchy. Online and offline lives of women are being perturbed by the conservative, misogynist, online-offline patriarchies. Women across the globe are mistreated for their freedom of expression in the social media. Online hate becomes the mediator of patriarchy as well. Feminism is being

reread in the context of the diverse social media platforms. Women across different platforms are deploying the social media to assert their political interests and aspirations. Question of gender justice is being shown in the time of the various forms of gendered discrimination and sexual harassment (Powell, 2018). One of the important contradictions that have raised in the context of the online feminist assertions is that the feminist articulations in the social media lack critical reflection due to its spontaneous and larger space of the social media (Kamei, 2022). Political assertions of women are gaining its momentum irrespective of the patriarchal nature of the online sphere.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit engages with the various debates on the category of patriarchy. It analyses the term patriarchy through theoretical and empirical insights based on women's-gender studies and related social science streams. It provides nuanced understanding of the term patriarchy in the backdrop of the liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical feminist movements and their ideologies. It also probes the changing nature of patriarchy and its persistence through caste and religion. This unit also revisits the debates on the patriarchy in the context of social media.

1.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Critically evaluate the concept of patriarchy.
- 2) Discuss the liberal and radical feminist perspectives on patriarchy.
- 3) Discuss the relationship between patriarchy and violence.

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