UNIT 2 PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINANCE

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Learning Objectives

After having read this unit, you should be able to:

- define and understand patriarchy and male dominance;
- understand the origin of patriarchy;
- understand that how control over women's sexuality is a reflection of patriarchy;
- understand the dynamics and linkages between production, reproduction and patriarchy;
- locate patriarchy in an anthropological, historical and archaeological perspective;
- understand the institutionalisation of patriarchy and male dominance through kinship, family and marriage patterns; and
- understand how caste and patriarchy are interlinked and how caste becomes an instrument of male dominance and patriarchy.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We are living in the so called modern or by some standards post-modern world, which is based upon the ideology of egalitarianism and universality but try and look around and you will find lots of examples that are contrary to the general conception about this 21st century. We are still carrying the burden of traditional divided society which was based primarily on ascribed statuses that ensured the place of a person in a particular community, caste or group by virtue of her birth in that particular group. Prejudice and discriminatory attitude is something that has not changed much over a period of time. This is true even in the case of

gender discrimination which is a manifestation of patriarchal mindset and ideology that stops short of calling this century a truly modern one. While penning down this unit, there is a debate going on in electronic and print media about the issue of male dominance and patriarchy. Cases in point are the recent molestation of a girl by a mob in Gwahati, Assam and pronouncement of patriarchal diktats by *khap or* caste *panchayats* in Uttar Pradesh. In Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh, a caste panchayat announced that the women of the village will not carry mobile phones with them and their movement in and around the village will be monitored and restricted. Similarly in Assam a girl was molested by a mob publically and in full view of the media. These incidents also highlighted the insensitivity and callous attitude of some agencies that were supposed to be the custodians of women rights. This brings us to the point where we should understand and rethink about how our society is structured in a manner that is biased towards the male members and overlook the rights and privileges of women (Rajalakshami, 2012).

Sometimes the state apparatus also behaves and is structured in such a way as to promote male dominance. One can look at the example of Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which was amended in 2005 but still contains provisions that are in favour of women's husband's family. This act relates with the succession of property. It is stated in the act that the self-acquired property of a women who dies without writing her will and in the absence of her husband and children will belong to her husband's family and not to her parents. This is a clear reflection of the societal and traditional norm where a woman after marriage is considered to be a member of her in-laws family and not to her natal family. Similarly in a marriage alliance a woman is not considered as an equal partner in marital property or husband's property acquired after marriage. This inequality devalues her contribution towards the marital property in terms of her labour that she provides under the rubrics of house-keeping and as a primary care giver to her children and husband (Singh, 2012; Rao 2008; Pal 2004). Beside these examples there are other more visible instances like sex-selective abortions that indicate towards a generalised discriminatory attitude towards women. These examples also reflect a patriarchal mind-set and male dominance. The next section will deal with the definition and theoretical perspectives on patriarchy and male dominance.

Activity

Make an inventory of similar issues that depict male dominance. Look around for such examples, read newspaper and magazines for such news that depict a power relation between male and female.

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORIGIN OF PATRIARCHY

Now one may wonder, how can we define patriarchy. It is a rather tricky question, as with other kinds of definitions related with social phenomenon and concepts, defining patriarchy in its entirety is not always possible. It is therefore better to understand the concept rather than getting into some watertight definition. However, patriarchy can be defined as "*a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women*" (Walby, 1990). This definition clearly outlines the nature of patriarchy which is engrained in our social structure that gives it a very fundamental character. Based on this social

structure, men dominate and exploit women and their action gets legitimised by the existing structure through institutions like family, kinship, marriage, religion, class, caste, race, etc. Patriarchy envisages within itself a form of power relation between men and women. In this relationship a hierarchy exists that places men in an advantageous position and this makes a complete recipe for female exploitation. In a more literal sense patriarchy (*pitrasatta* in Hindi) denotes rule of father in a male-dominated family. This rule emerges from an unequal resource distribution like land which is invariably inherited by the male line of descent. This control over the resources later gets translated into control over the production and reproduction of women. However later in this unit we will also see that how matrilineal and bilateral kinship structures alter this power relation in family and outside.

Feminism as an ideology has always tried to deal with the question and conception of patriarchy. There are different philosophical traditions in feminism that conceptualise patriarchy differently. Prominent among them are: Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism and Radical Feminism. Liberal Feminism is based on the philosophy of individual rights. The birth of Liberal Feminism dates back to the 18th century when it was realised that women should no longer be subjugated to the authority of males. It was in this context that liberal feminists challenged the customary and legal framework that reflected a biased understanding of women based on their inferior physical and intellectual capabilities which were used as instruments to subjugate and subordinate women. It is with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft that one traces the birth of Liberal Feminism as a separate feminist movement. In her magna carta- "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", Wollstonecraft advocates for equal opportunity for both men and women. She emphasises that it is imperative that women are educated and made aware of their political and social rights in order to claim equal status at par with men. In the 19th century John Stuart Mill emerged as the leading scholar of Liberal Feminism and advocated that women are required to participate equally and pro-actively in various societal affairs and hence strive for equality (Mill, 1869; Eisenstein, 1981). Liberal feminists advocated that women should not only be confined to the domestic domain and there should be equal opportunity for them to participate in the public and political spheres of life. According to them patriarchy has confined women to the four walls of the house and therefore they need to get liberated in order to come out of the clutches of patriarchy. Liberals attacked the myth that women, because of their feminine behaviour are not suited for outside world and therefore they seek refuge and security within the domestic sphere of life. However, Liberal Feminism is being criticised on the issue of being very individualistic and therefore totally overlooking the structural, societal and familial basis for male dominance and patriarchy. Liberal feminists do not take a critical view of family and are focused solely on capturing space and rights for individual women in the public domain. They are also being criticised for being elitists since most of the rights gathered in this manner will be availed by the so-called upper class/caste women. Therefore this stream of feminism did not voice the concern of other differentially suppressed women on the basis either of class, caste, race etc. Again, on the issue of origin of male dominance and patriarchy liberal feminists are found wanting. They do not provide with a theory that can explain the circumstances that led to patriarchal set-up and male dominance in society.

This gap was however filled by Marxist Feminism that deals with the issue of origin of patriarchy and male dominance. Marxist feminists are of the view that patriarchy originated with the origin of private property (Engels, 1948). It is with the emergence of private ownership of property and its transfer through the male line of descent that patriarchy as a social structure was born. They also relate the concept of patriarchy with the capitalist mode of production. However they have been criticised for just adding the issue of gender to their already existing framework of class oppression. They are also silent on the issue of women oppression before the advent of private property. There are empirical evidences that point to the fact that women oppression and male dominance was present even before the advent of private property. Claude Levi-Strauss observed that the exchange of women is the basic form of exchange and it took place because of some taboo on incestuous relationships (sexual relations between close relatives like father and daughter, brother and sister, mother and son etc.) in each and every society. This kind of taboo required that women be acquired from a group outside one's own and thus clan, lineage, village exogamy originated. This gave rise to the manipulation of female sexuality and hence the emergence of male dominance.

Another group of feminist scholars known as radical and revolutionary feminists tried to understand and explain the origin of patriarchy and male dominance through the notion of female sexuality and its manipulation by the male. They are of the view that biologically women are different from men. This is the basic fact recognised by this brand of feminism. This biological difference defines the role of women as child bearers. This biological role is however translated and interpreted as related to the notion of "motherhood" which defines the role of mother in terms of both child bearing and child rearing. They are of the view that biology alone is not responsible for such skewed power relations between male and female but their cultural interpretation is responsible for the same. 'Gendering of sex' takes place in the socio-cultural context. In other words the control of male over the reproductive capacity of female is the root cause of patriarchy. Sheila Jeffrey, one of the revolutionary feminist puts her point on the origin of patriarchy by saying that there are basically two systems of class that operate in a society- i) the class based on and originating from the relations of production and ii) the class that is based on and originates from the relation of reproduction. It is the second system of class that is responsible for women subordination and patriarchy. Similarly, Finella McKenzie argued that the first kind of division of labour was between men and women and it originated from women's reproductive capacity and men's greater strength. This made women dependent on men and thus gave rise to unequal power distribution. However she also writes that it is not only because of this differential reproductive capacity that subordinates women but this biological differentiation is turned into psychological dependency by men and the social structure as a whole. This stream of feminism is however criticised for being biological determinist and reductionist. It also does not provide any alternative to end patriarchy or improve the condition of women. They advocate that women should be made aware of this kind of subordination which in turn can help in improving their condition (Beechey 1979; Lewin 2006; James 2010; Ranade 2007).

2.3 SEXUALITY OF WOMEN AND MALE DOMINANCE

The male control over the sexuality of women is considered to be a manifestation of patriarchy. This control is exercised by the male within the structure of marriage, family and kinship. Especially in the patrilineal societies like ours in India the institutions of marriage, family and kinship becomes a site for reproducing the patriarchal structures. In a marital alliance a virgin bride is always desirable. Pre-marital sex is seen in terms of moral pollution which is more severe for the women than for the men. It is considered that through the sexual intercourse a woman gets internally polluted whereas a male only gets external pollution. Internal pollution is related to the pollution of the substance. The concept of substance holds a great importance in maintaining caste distances (Beteille, 1991; Dube, 2009). The caste hierarchies and distances are maintained through the concept of selective exchange of women to a certain caste or castes. In this way the sexuality of women gets connected with the larger social structure based on caste. Again the concept of hyper-gamy and hypo-gamy demonstrates a strict control over the female sexuality. Hyper-gamy to some extent is permitted where a man of higher caste can have union with a woman of lower caste but hypo-gamous unions are strictly prohibited. Even if a woman of higher caste gets entangled with a lower caste male, it can bring serious consequences to both the families. There are numerous such examples where honour killings took place in the name of such unaccepted marital or love unions. This exemplifies that the control over the sexuality of women becomes an instrument of reproducing caste hierarchies. This also exemplifies a kind of corporate control over the sexuality of women. In this kind of control female sexuality gets attached with the honour of an entire village, caste, community or family and any infringement over the same can bring a lot of dishonor to the entire group. This kind of corporate control over the sexuality of women is also demonstrated by anthropologists like D.N. Majumdar who in his monograph named 'The Himalyan Polyandry' on the people of Jaunsar Bawar region of Dehradun documented fraternal polyandrous marriage alliance between a bride and all the brothers of a particular household where the marriage gets solemnised. Here the main issue is related with the right of access to the female sexuality which by such alliances gets restricted to the family or household as a unit. There are other such studies that have documented the marriage alliance of a bride with several brothers. Other studies have also documented that there is an unwritten rule or an accepted practice where after the death of the husband, the widow has to marry her husband's brother. This can be analysed in the light of retaining the women and her children, if any, within the family or lineage so that the right over the father's property remains within the household or family. This indicates a strong feeling of ownership of women, her labour and reproductive power. The patriarchal mind-set is quite well observable in Hindu marriage rituals and relations between the bride and grooms family. A kind of power relations exist between the families of bride and groom. The exchange of gifts and dowry indicate this kind of unequal relationship. A bride is considered to be a financial liability and burden over the groom's family which must be compensated adequately in order to solemnise the marriage. This undermines the productive work which women generally perform within the household. Household chores are considered to be non consequential as their labour is considered to be non-productive and taken for

granted. Therefore women are rendered powerless both at the level of production and reproduction.

At the level of family, the sexuality of women is under the control of her brothers and father. Leela Dubey (2009) explains this with the help of a very general yet powerful observation that brothers in the context of South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are provided with the task of keeping an eye on the movement of their sisters. They have the responsibility of protecting their sisters. This kind of responsibility gives them the right to exercise power over the female and dictate their behaviors according to their own whims and fancies. There have been several incidents reported where the brothers killed their sisters who were found guilty of illicit love or wanting to marry against the wishes of their parents. Exemplifying cases from Andhra Pradesh, Dube states that brothers often scold their sisters if they found them standing at the doorstep during the evening as they consider it to be gesture adopted by the prostitutes in order to invite their customers. However Dube further compares the situation of control over female sexuality in patrilineal South Asia with that of matrilineal and bilateral South-East Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. She argues that the kinship system based on matrilineality and bilateral concept has greater tolerance and less control over the female sexuality. She argues that in countries like Malaysia where Islamic influence is seen, there are restrictions on sexual behaviour placed on women before marriage but such restrictions are also placed equally on the men. It is quite common in Indonesia for women to migrate for work to urban centers and leave their husband's behind to look after their land and children. In Thailand women take to the profession of prostitution to support their families but they do return to the 'mainstream' and get married after sometime. This cannot even be imagined in the context of South Asia. The basic idea that underlines this behavioral attitude pertains to the fact that men are not the users of women's sexuality (Dube, 1988; 2000; 2009).

Activity

Discuss on the issue of sexuality of women depicted in Indian Cinema and its impact on the larger society.

2.4 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE ROLES

The relation of production and reproduction needs to be analysed historically in order to understand the consolidation of patriarchy. Uma Chakraborty in her essay on Brahminical patriarchy in early India tries to understand this relation of production and reproduction during historical periods. She has based her analysis largely on pre-historical, proto-historical and historical accounts and evidences that throw some light on the dimension of women's role both in production and reproduction. Her argument starts with the contention that in the hunting and food gathering stages women's role was not restricted only in terms of reproduction but they also played active role in food gathering and also sometimes in hunting which she argues is evident in cave paintings of Bhimbetka and other archaeological sites in central India. In many such paintings women are depicted wearing some sort of head gear (depicting power and authority) and are shown taking part during hunting activities. The reproductive role of women was also

considered important since they were considered as 'life givers' and thus having close association with the events of life and death. This belief places women in some sort of mystical and supernatural space which is in sync with the evidence found related with the cult of mother goddess. During the Indus Valley Civilisation the position of women and the emergence of patriarchy cannot be established based on the evidence since the in-situ evidence is not supported by written documents as they are not yet decisively deciphered. However, there are evidences of class formation which are depicted and present in the form of rural and urban centers, citadel, surplus grain stocks etc. Presence of female figurines, mother goddess icons and dancing girl statues can be seen as pointing towards the important role of women in relation to reproduction. But nothing can be said with conviction regarding the gender relations.

It was with the coming of the Aryans that the real consolidation of patriarchy and male dominance took place. It is intended in early Vedic literature that the Aryans had to fight with the indigenous people of the land and in this fight they conquered their cattle, land and women. This is the first ever historical evidence of women taken as captives by the Aryans. These women then were assigned different roles that related with serving the Aryan race and were also used as gift items thus depicting a control over their sexuality. Later-on various texts including the *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti* outlines the behaviour of women and laid down rules for controlling their productive and reproductive capacities. There are written evidences that are sufficient to show that the state also had some control over the reproductive powers and sexuality of women. In this context it was laid down that the king can punish a woman for her adulterous behavior. This state control was guided by the principal that the sexuality of women needs to be controlled and this controlling power lies mainly with the husband after the women is married and if the husband is not able to control her then the state can take action against such 'culprit'. This also had some effect on the role of production of women. With such strict control over her sexuality, she was now mainly confined to the domestic sphere of life. Here also the kind of importance that must be accorded to a women's productive role was absent (Chakravarti 1993).

2.5 PATRILOCALITY, MATRILATERAL KINSHIP AND PATRIARCHY

Kinship structures form an important part of social organisation. Kinship structure of a society decides and ensures the membership of people into various groups. Like in a patrilineal kinship structure a son remains a member of the family of orientation whereas the daughter has to leave her natal house and move to the family of her affinal kins after marriage. She becomes a member of her husband's patriliny. It is through these membership rules that the society perpetuates itself within a definite structure. These kinship structures have special bearing on the perpetuation of patriarchal social structures. The rule of residence after marriage is an important reflection of the principles of kinship. Leela Dube has rightly underscored the relation between rules of residence and kinship principles when she says- "*Residence is a material as well as an ideological expression of principles of kinship*" (pp.- 93). In the patrilocal form of residence, a couple after marriage resides with the family of the groom. This kind of residential arrangement is found in large parts of India. It is based on the basic premise that the daughter is not a permanent member of her natal house and she has to move

out after marriage. This really has an important bearing on her productive and reproductive capacities and autonomy. It also influences the rules of inheritance and daughter's share in parental property. It is generally argued against the daughter's claim over her parental property that if she gets a share of the property then it will eventually belong to her husband and her in-laws. Also the notion of payment of dowry dilutes her claim over the property since it is believed that the dowry is in lieu of her share in the property. The idea of partilocality entails that a daughter has to sever all ties with her natal house upon marriage. Her in-laws house is generally a new place where she has limited access and control over productive resources. Her sexuality is also controlled by her husband and in-laws in the form of demands placed on her to give birth to a male child (Dube, 2009).

As in the case with patrilocality, Karin Kapadia in her study among the Brahmins and Non-Brahmins of Aruloor village in Tamil Nadu points towards the institution of matrilateral kinship and argues that with the changing socio-economic context matrilateral kinship is falling into disrepute and is replaced by patrilineal kinship and prevalence of dowry during marriage. This in turn perhaps leads to male dominance and lower status of women in the society. Kapadia explains that among the non-Brahmin caste of Aruloor village the matrilateral kin in the form of Mother's Brother (MB) and Mother's Brother's Son (MBS) holds immense importance in the life of women and her children. MyB (Mother's younger Brother) and MBS are considered as prospective grooms for a woman's daughter. MB is also obliged to give expensive gifts during the life cycle rituals of his sister's children. This ceremonial gift is known as '*sir'* which is considered to be a replacement for a woman's share in her parental property. Thus it is both obligatory and woman's share in true sense in contrast with the institution of dowry and *stridhan* practiced among the patrilineal groups. Among the Brahmins of Aruloor the patrilineal kins hold more importance since matrilateral kins do not provide prospective grooms for marriage. Women are married to complete strangers as compared to the MBS or MyB in case of non-Brahmins. This accounts for forming new relations among the in-laws as compared to more familiar relations in the latter case. However with the passage of time even among the non-Brahmins matrilateral kins are losing their importance and dowry is gaining grounds since a dowry marriage is considered as "*high-status marriage*" and thus people are *keen to make it a part of their symbolic capital* (pp-861). This has far-reaching implications for women subordination and male dominance in the society as the negotiation and practice of dowry makes bride's family subordinate to the groom's family (Kapadia, 1990;1993;1994). This metamorphosis from bride-price to dowry in marital alliances is also evident among the *Gonds* of Vidarbha in Maharashtra. The reason for such a transformation can be located in increased interaction of this tribal group with the larger society where dowry is the norm. It is a result of peer pressure and a fear of ridicule that is generated if things are not according to the wishes of dominant social groups in an area. This again bears certain consequences for female subjugation and subordination (Khattri et al., 2012).

2.6 MARRIAGE PATTERN AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINANCE

Patriarchy and male dominance as related twin concepts are reflected in the institution of marriage. Marriages in India are mostly solemnised in the form of some kind of arrangement between the bride givers and bride takers. In such arranged marriages the consent of the boy and girl are not that important as that of their household heads or patriarchs. This is also a reflection of patriarchal mind-set. Kate Millet in her work on *Sexual Politics* has tried to define patriarchy in two ways- i) male dominating female and ii) older males dominating younger male and female. Therefore the notion of arranged marriage is a conceptual outcome of the older males dominating younger male and females on the question of choosing their prospective brides and grooms. Dipankar Gupta while analysing the Hindu marriage pattern states that the notion of arranged marriage is still the norm in modern India whether in rural or urban settings. We are all aware of the consequences in the form of *khap* and caste *panchayat* diktats that a young couple has to face in the event of marrying by his or her own choice. Gupta further argues that such arranged marriages are based on the notion of inequality between the bride givers and bride takers. A kind of hierarchy is set based on the notion of male dominance which is evident in the form of bride takers having a superior status than the bride givers. This male dominance and inequality gets reflected in certain marriage ceremonies like *pao pooja* (worshipping the feet) of the groom which the father of the bride giver has to perform. This reflects a kind of ritual hierarchy.

The notion of male dominance also gets reflected through the *kanyadaan* (giving away the virgin girl to the groom's family in the form of a gift) complex. This is considered to be the gift of the highest order that cannot be matched by any other kind. This sets a hierarchical relationship between bride giver and bride taker. The two categories of bride givers and bride takers as outlined by Dipankar Gupta can also be understood in the form of institutionalisation of patriarchy and male dominance where not only the male that is dominating and having a superior status but the female of the bride takers side (especially the mother-in-law of the bride) becomes an agency of negotiating power in a household. This is an excellent example of how patriarchy and male dominance is so engrained in the social structure that it takes different forms to get manifested through power sharing on the issues of production and reproduction. The very process of giving birth to a male child places the woman on the bride takers side. This is also the reason that even women long for a male child. The control of mother-in-law over the bride's household activities is a clear manifestation of her acquired status of a bride taker (Gupta 2001).

2.7 SUMMARY

It is now important to have a panoramic view of the twin concepts of patriarchy and male dominance. To start with, this unit dealt with the present issue of the kind of treatment that is given to women in our society. The unit opens with a debate on the position of women in terms of their rights and privileges. Recent examples of molestation and property inheritance rules became the backdrop

through which patriarchal structure can be understood. We also discussed that how state acts as an extension of the general patriarchal mind-set in the form of property inheritance rules and acts that are to some extent skewed towards to male members of the society.

The next section of this unit tried to explain how patriarchy as a social organisation principle emerged at the first place. This question has been answered by different schools of feminist thought. Liberal feminists focused more on the issue of individual rights of female and are of the view that women can only be liberated from the clutches of patriarchy through the process of individual participation in the public and political domain. However this view has been criticised on the grounds that it does not explain the origin of patriarchy and is individual centric thus neglecting the structural design of patriarchy. The shortcomings of Liberal Feminism are taken care of by the Marxist feminist thought. According to the Marxist Feminism the world historic defeat of women began with the advent of private property. Marxists focused more on the issue of relations of production and how women are placed within this structure. However they are criticised for just adding women to their already existing theory of class struggle and have nothing new to offer in terms of the establishment of patriarchy. They are also criticised on the ground that patriarchy and male dominance was present even before the advent of private property and it is the basic nature of women being considered as a basic form of exchange that gave birth to the control of their productive and reproductive capacities. The control over the sexuality of women formed the basis for the radical and revolutionary feminist scholars. They are of the view that it is the psychological and social meaning that is accorded to the notion of motherhood that brought about the control over the female sexuality. It is the social extension of the role of motherhood to child rearing the brought about their confinement to the four walls of the house and thus control over their productive and reproductive capacities.

Then we moved on to understand that how in the context of India, patriarchy became established. In this section we started with the example and evidence from the hunting-gathering stage and moved on to the Vedic and post-Vedic period where state also became an instrument for upholding patriarchy and male dominance. Further we understood that how kinship structures in the form of patrilocality and the Hindu marriage patterns have in-built patriarchal structures. This has been explained with the help of certain examples. In a nut-shell it can said that one has to be very observant in order to decipher more such models based on patriarchy and male dominance.

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Sample Questions

1) What do you understand by the term patriarchy?

2) What are the various theories of the origin of patriarchy?

3) How are women's productive and reproductive roles and capacities linked to the notion of male dominance and patriarchy?

4) How in Indian context is patriarchy consolidated historically?

5) How are kinship and marriage patterns linked with the notion of patriarchy and male dominance?