



Patriarchal System And The Condition of Women

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Abstract

The word patriarchy means the dominance of males. Patriarchal society distributes the power unevenly between men and women in which men have the advantage of being superior to women. In society the power of decision making and to dominate is given to the males of the society. In Indian society the women have been trapped in the boundaries set by the patriarchal system. The condition of women in India is majorly affected by the patriarchal system. This paper observes the meaning of patriarchy and its effect on the conditions of women. This paper also observes the women characters from Indian mythology who have been the victims of male dominance. The women writers in Indian English Literature have also shown the patriarchal system in Indian society through their writings. This paper also throws a light on the female characters as the victim of male dominance from selected novels.

Key words: Patriarchal System, Suppression, Inferiority Complex, Customs, Epic

From the very beginning the social structure has been shaped according to the male philosophy and this patriarchal system in the society separated the values of men and women in the society. Traditionalists believe that males in the society are born to dominate women and they believe that male hierarchy in the society has been continued since old times and it will continue for years. Women have been suppressed because of the valuable position of males in the society in their comparison. In patriarchal system the male dominance of men over women occurs due to the typecast and fixed viewpoints about women's inferiority to men. Men have an advantageous place in society so they allot women a trivial place. The patriarchal society has empowered men and it has lowered the status of women in the eyes of men which leads men to behave partially with women. They treat women as an object to release their frustration. Patriarchy is imposed on women by violence. It can be said that the reason behind women's subordinate position is patriarchy it forces women to follow the footsteps of men. In Indian

patriarchal system the life and the identity of a woman is decided by the society before she takes birth. The social structure in India has confined the identity of women by giving them the secondary position and this restricts her to play a major role in the society. It is compulsory for a woman to serve her best in her duty of being a loyal wife and a dedicated mother. Without being loyal and obedient in the eyes of the males of the society, woman is unable to earn respect. In patriarchal system the efforts of women are always undervalued.

Men have always shown their supremacy over women due to the patriarchal system in India. This system projects male dominance in the Indian society and doesn't allow women to take the decision on their own. The patriarchy leads towards the women feel inferior to men. Women is expected to sacrifice her wishes for the happiness of the family and expected to be loyal wife, a dedicated mother and a well behaved daughter. An Indian woman is supposed to live under male dominance and not to break the rules of society. The joy of women moves around their values and their loyalty as individual, mother, wives and daughters. The female in the family are considered as possession. Women are the victim of the deeds of men. They are suppressed and depressed and exploited at the hands of men. Women are treated like an object for pleasure.

In India women have always been oppressed under the male dominance In Indian society it is the women who perform many rituals for the wellness of the family. She keeps fast for the long life and safety of their husband and she performs many religious tasks for the prosperity of her family. Though husband and wife have been given the same authority in the household but in reality the men have taken the authority. The females suffer and their pain is sanctifying by the rule of Indian traditions and mainly that of a patriarchal society. All of them have confined themselves to the traditional role assigned to them. As a result, they become agents of patriarchal values. They surrender self-righteously; ignore their psychological pain and suffering. These women stick to the Indian customs and they never try to free themselves from the clutches of patriarchal system.

The patriarchal system suppresses women in various ways like physically, sexually socially and psychologically. In India, women are mostly maltreated by the males in the society especially by husbands. The husband who are annoyed, grumpy, short tempered and aggressive abuses their wives physically and psychologically. The males in patriarchal society are well behaved in public but at home they become very dominating. The patriarchal society sets some strict rules for women who don't allow her to perform some particular actions and activities. Male dominance in the society was expressed through showing women inferior to men and suppressing them in the name of tradition and culture. Women in our society have been victimized from the ages. Women have been given an example of the legends who sacrificed their happiness in front of patriarchy.

In our society the words control and strength are associated with the males. Males controls and overpower and have been given the superiority and the females carries out her duties without any appreciation. In patriarchal society men are the main source of income of the family and have been given the dominating positions and women have been enslaved in the family. The males in the family near women seem to be supportive but dominant at the same time. The

thought of woman as submissive to man, and as man's property, is deep deep-rooted in Indian society. In all these situations the patriarchy can be divided in two streams internal and external.

Internal dominance is associated with the deep-rooted customs. The victims living under such kind of dominance cannot react against it because somewhere the victim is also linked with these customs and values. The second type of dominance is external which can be seen through physical abuse and psychological torture which easy to deal with. The victims of such dominance generally become rebel against it. In patriarchal society, a woman is expected to be a mother, perfect wife, and a brilliant homemaker in the family. Sacrifice, humbleness and acceptance are the traits which are expected from a woman in our society. The women are only aware of their responsibilities and they struggle to meet the expectations of their men as this loyalty could indicate their inner strength.

India is known for its culture, familial relations, strong roots and social structure which give people to live in an atmosphere where they can grow as a person. In India family structures and the responsibilities of family members are based on the laws of *Manusmiriti* the laws of *Manusmiriti* prefers the patriarchal family structure. The patriarchal values have spread the male hierarchy in the society. In India human beings are considered created to be by God itself. The morals and values of people are generally affected by the epics and it shapes the mentality of even today. The epical attitude is not a thing of the past, but similar attitude continues to shape our behavior even today. In the old Indian epics the male dominance over women has been shown through various stories. The status of women in India has always been very complicated because of their different projection in religious epics. In some epics women have been preached like goddesses and in the same they were ill treated by the male counterparts.

The character of Sita in Ramayana and the character of Draupadi is the best example of the contradictory statements and about the status of women. The characters from Indian mythology like Sita and Draupadi have been presented as monuments of sacrifice in front of male dominance in the society. According to Hindu mythology woman is a source of prosperity and on the other hand woman is also a source of destruction. Goddess Lakshmi and Saraswati are considered as the goddess of intelligences and prosperity and goddess Durga and Kali are considered to be aggressive and destructive in nature and they are considered as the powerful women from Indian mythology who dominated men with their unbounded power.

This contradiction in this concept is vague so it needs more deep observation. The deep study of this concept helps to understand the reason behind the substandard position of women in Indian society. These contradictions for the place of women in Indian mythology have deeply affected the minds of Indians. The women in the society are expected to behave in a certain way and there are some rules which are written in the book named "*Manusamirti*" says that a woman should respect her husband and worship him like almighty. Women have been considered as unfaithful and passionate in "*Manusamirti*" so men are advised to keep women in their control. Those women are considered to be great who don't break the rules of the society and live under the male dominance. In Indian patriarchal society a woman gets her identity from his father and after marriage she is known by the name of her husband and between this she doesn't have her own identity. So it has been very difficult to correctly judge the condition of women from ancient times to modern times.

The epic Mahabharata presents the ethics and ethos of the society and the status of women. During the time of Mahabharata women played important roles of mother, wife, and warrior. Some of the major women characters from Mahabharata became the victim of patriarchal society and some of them being a rebel raised their voice against the exploitation of women. It can be said that Gandhari became the victim of patriarchal system and she got married to Dhritrashtra against her wish. Her father fixed her marriage with Dhritrashtra who was blind but a wealthy king. She also blind-folded herself to be equal to her husband, it can be because of the self-sacrifice and her devotion for her husband or she was forced to blind fold herself. Apart from this she was women of strong will and her husband took her advice. Draupadi was the victim of male dominance; her father took her as a burden on him. She was married to five Pandvas at the same time and she was loyal to all of them. The incident of loosing Draupadi in the game of dice is the best example of woman as the victim of male dominated society.

The women of the Ramayana, especially Sita, have become standard for Indian women over time. In the epic Ramayana the character of Sita was strong, dedicated and loyal towards her husband and family but despite of all these qualities she became the victim of the male dominance. Sita left her luxurious life and accompanied Rama to exile, for next fourteen years. The incident of being kidnapped by Ravana is also an example of women's helplessness in front of male dominance and violence on women. After her rescue from the clutches of Ravana, Sita was asked to perform the fire ordeal to prove her chastity and loyalty towards Rama and even after proving her chastity she was discarded by Rama. Such incidents explain the humiliation of women by males. Men expect women to follow the ideals of Sita without trying to shape themselves as Rama.

Other woman character in Ramayana like Surpankha was humiliated by her chopped nose only because of her fascination towards Rama and Lakshmana. It can be said that the women in our society have been facing humiliation and violence from the time of Ramayana and Mahabharata. It can be said that patriarchal society has been the reason behind violence on women and it has been continuing from the age of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Today also the situation remains the same as the legacy of past being transferred to future. The condition of women day by day is getting worse as they are ill-treated deprived of their right to life, personal liberty and self-identity. The women in Indian society are supposed to follow the values of the mythological female characters. From the birth of a girl child in Indian household she has been given examples of ideal female protagonists from Indian mythology like Sita. The dedication, the sacrifice and tolerating the persecution are the virtues and values of their characters and the same is expected from Indian women. Women are becoming the victim of violence and it is a threat for the culture of India.

The writers in Indian Literature in English have represented male dominance over women through their works. The fixed role of women in society has been extended to literary representation and finally to real life participation as well. A study of women's status during the colonial power and post colonial in India as depicted in the novel of main stream women writers like Amrita Pritam, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapoor clearly reflects the isolation of women from the main stream of society. Though there is a major difference in the images of women of colonial and postcolonial fiction. With the beginning of the contemporary era, women began to grab spaces for themselves and started to struggle for their

rights. This was visible even in the literature also. In the postcolonial fiction the female characters are presented as self-awakened who do not surrender themselves submissively to the patriarchal society, the reverse is a harsh reality so far as the expression of this aspect in literature during the colonial rule in India is concerned.

The writers have highlighted the pitiful condition of women, who are victims of the patriarchal system ages after ages. Through the female protagonist of one of the novels *Where Shall We Go This Summer* written by Anita Desai has shown the struggle of a house wife for her identity in male dominated society and how Sita surrenders to the injustice and submit herself before her husband. The story imparts a strong message to the readers that a woman should have her own identity in the patriarchal; society and she should have given their own space and lifestyle so that they can take their own decision to live their life. A critical study of the text reveals the fact that the female members of a family are victims of male-dominated society in one way or the other. The relationship between men and women has been maintained as that of manipulation of power rather than of equality. In the selected novels the writers have described some ideal example of patriarchal dominance. Women characters represented in Indian English Literature are traditionalists. *Sarita* in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *Ammu* in *The God of Small Things*, *Sita* in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, *Puro* in *Pinjar*, *Bibiji*, *Nimmo* in *Can You Hear the Night Bird's Call?* are all sufferers of male dominance and they respectively follow a set pattern of life in the male dominated society. Though these women are not happy with their image but they rely on the decisions of their husbands in any and every matter. These characters are struggling for their self identity but at the end they somewhere get manipulated by their own thoughts of impossibility to live without the help of men in the society.

Anita Desai's main female character “*Sita*” of “*Where Shall We Go This Summer*” is a rebel, radical woman, disgusted by and struggling against the patriarchal norms of the society. She is annoyed with the norms of society for women and fed up of being trapped within the “four walls”. She is expected to behave as a dedicated “wife” and an ideal “mother”. As a result of this she escapes from her place to Manori an island in search of her own identity but the novel ends with Sita’s realization that living on Manori Island alone without her children and husband is not possible. So she agrees to go back with her husband without her wish.

The female protagonist *Sarita* in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* by *Shashi Deshpandey* also struggles for her identity in patriarchal family. She faced the partial behaviour of mother and father since her childhood. *Shashi Deshpandey* has presented male dominance through various incidents in her novel as the way *Sarita* felt inferior inequality to her brother and later to her husband. She longs for somebody who would care for her. In this novel *Shashi Deshpandey* brings out the struggle of women in a male dominated society. Though the character of *Sarita* is very strong, she has prestigious job of a doctor but still she is dominated by her husband in different ways. Her husband *Manohar* tries to abuse her physically and mentally. Being a rebel she escapes from him but at the end she surrenders herself in front of the patriarchal society because she knows the bitter reality that it’s very difficult to survive in a patriarchal society without the support of her husband. *Shashi Deshpandey* has also presented psychological problem of woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. *Shashi Deshpandey's* success lies in her representation of real life experience. She realistically depicts the inner conflict of *Sarita* and her quest for the self identity.

Pinjar by Amrita Pritam is considered as a saga of a women's narrative. Amrita in her novel highlights patriarchal hypocrisy and the supersession of women in the name of religion and gender. The female protagonist in *Pinjar* struggles for her rights and feels helpless. The novel tells of women's seizure, quest for identity and pain. The unforgettable character of Puro in the novel *Pinjar* represents the pain of women during partition. A Hindu girl Puro is kidnapped just prior to her wedding by a Muslim boy Rashid. Somehow she escapes from the clutches of Rashid who really loves her but she is rejected by her family since she is now considered impure. There was no mercy in the ossified social system, no hope for rehabilitation. Puro exemplifies the discrimination, the disappointment. The female characters in the novel were treated as a body not as a human being.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that the male supremacy over women is deeply rooted in the Indian customs. Somewhere women are also responsible for their suppression in the society. Our society is practicing patriarchy from the era of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The study of selected characters from these two epics has shown that women being victims of male dominance didn't raise their voice against it. By not raising their voice against such kind of dominance they also become the agents of it. The study of female characters of selected novels shows that how patriarchal system affects the personality and psyche of women. The patriarchal society has set the male hierarchy in this Indian society. Even the condition of women is the same; they are being suppressed by male domination. The works of Indian writers in English have projected the male dominance in their novels and most of them have written about it after observing the Indian patriarchal system. Through their works these women writers have tried to project the real condition of women in society.

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