

Patriarchy Re-Evaluated

Invisible Men in Tehmina Durrani's Blasphemy and my Feudal Lord

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Abstract - Women have always been held as the most brutalized by patriarchy. We need to look beyond and accept that patriarchy holds a sway over not only women about also men. We as a society are not ready to get over the accepted norms of masculinity. We need to abandon the rut and a stereotyped thought process being passed on from generation to generation. While deriding men we should also count the privileges of concessions and reservations that women have and men do not have just because they are men. There are also men who do not perpetuate patriarchy and there are also women who are rigid followers of patriarchy. Men are not always powerful but also vulnerable to patriarchy. We need to accept it as a society and eradicate it.

Index Terms - Patriarchy, Non-conformist men, Dominating women, Vulnerable and invisible men.

Patriarchy is one of the most essential aspects, which should be studied at length, to be able to lucidly comprehend gender studies in its entirety. Discourses on patriarchy delineate patriarchy to be fundamentally the power of male head over the family, which constitutes his sons and wife. According to Oxford English Dictionary Patriarchy is a “form of social organization in which the father or the oldest male is the head of the family and descent, and relationships are reckoned through the male line; Government or rule by man or men”. This concept persistently registers its presence in the scholarly contributions due to the conspicuous absence of an egalitarian arrangement in man-woman relationship. Patriarchy as a matter of fact holds the potential to dehumanize the other half of history. Also patriarchy is no more only the rule of the father it has acquired new connotations and dimensions over the decades. The general meaning of the male head has long been defunct now. Patriarchy is operating not only at personal level but also at political levels; there is a

serious interaction between the private matters and different power structures that co-exist in the society. Personal has now transmuted into political”. Therefore, this state of affairs is entitled to a constant renewed and vigorous analysis at regular intervals; and the notion of patriarchy being a redundant theory can safely be put to rest.

Varied views about the concept of patriarchy are expressed by traditionalists, radical feminists, Marxist feminists and in Sylvia walby's Dual System Theory. There is no uniform consensus as to what is patriarchy? Prior to scrutinizing gender portrayal in the selected novels for this paper it becomes essential to analyze the concept of patriarchy through the above-mentioned approaches.

Traditionalists and renowned scholars like Aristotle believe that a woman is nothing but a ‘mutilated’ male. Radical feminists believe family to be the site of male domination. According to them the body of a female is the pivot which provides a stronghold to the concept of patriarchy.

Radical feminists have been criticized for their approach which revolves around male domination over females. They are also sometimes termed as ‘man haters’.

But this theory also exudes the idea of males as the enemies of women and also the absence of universality is noticeably visible in this concept. Sylvia walby's critical theory of Dual System contends the misappropriation of the bodies and labor of women precipitates the suppressed status of women and powerful status of males. Sylvia Walby believed patriarchy to be interlocked with feminism. Marxist feminists on the other hand focused on the labor power of women as to how and where it was employed; what impact it had on the status of women as individuals.

Modern thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Firestone and Sylvia Walby conformed to the above stated views whereas postmodern thinkers like Carole Pateman are of the view that gender discrimination has been checked at the political level but it continues to thrive at the domestic level.

At various levels these theories have been criticized for their ahistoric analysis, biologism, and universalism and they also face the stance of being essentialist. Radical feminism explores the gender relationships at the level of men and women, where as dual system theory and Marxists explore the possibility of exploitations through class and capitalism.

The assumptions that underlie the structure of human society are so ancient and buried that our way of life appears to be 'natural', crucial and as inevitable as wind or gravity.

In order to gain a complete insight into impact of patriarchy on gender relations this paper endeavors to study different set of patriarchal relations not from man and women perspective but the impact that patriarchy causes on men. A complete focus only on the suppression of women will render a sexist approach to this paper and also to the society. In this case the entire rationale of writing this paper would be defeated. Many consider patriarchy to be an outdated concept but observation and continuous contributions by scholars confirm that it is acquiring new dimensions at an immensely rapid speed. Studying patriarchy from the angle of gender aspect expands the arena under which this concept can be seen. It brings to light the other agencies concerned in perpetuating patriarchy. The writer has precisely brought to the fore the multi layers of power structures that are embedded within the patriarchal structures.

This aspect deserves notice, wherein we can perceive how women act as an agency in perpetuating patriarchy. Women also assist men in carrying out their whims and fancies against other women in order to evict themselves from the vicious influences of patriarchy and have access to the power and control which men possess. This is due to the lack of confidence to raise voices against men and be independent. Also this power structure and construct called patriarchy has sturdily percolated into the belief system of women and controls their minds. On the other hand there are many women who teach their daughters norms of patriarchy. We are very much

aware of the marginalizing of women by men in every way. They execute it on social, economic, physical, mental, emotional and even reproduction level. Elements like culture are held as pivots which decide the seemingly tangible stance of gender relations. Westwood and Bhachu are of the opinion that:

Patriarchal relations are neither monolithic or static, but contexted by cultural elements in which they interact.

Not only women but also younger or non dominating men are subjected to subordination by the patriarch or the head of the family. In this situation we see that males in their early age learn to be patriarchs through a regime which is internalized by them over a long period. We can also see that males have equally less probability to formulate a mindset of their individual preference; since they are taught at a young age about what is 'natural' to a man, we scarcely realize that in bringing up boys 'naturally' a disastrous mass production of patriarchs is on the way. Phrases like 'men do not cry', 'men do not play with dolls or teddy bears' or 'this is not manly' are nothing but undetectable pressures of patriarchy on men as well. Amusingly these clichés have translated into norms and rules of different societies to an extent and continue to thrive in the society as 'natural'. In the process the point is missed that males are also gendered through systems like performative theory. Men also perform their genders just as women do. Susan Kingsley in one of her paper Gender: what is it? Who has it? Very aptly remarks that:

We tend not to see men as 'gendered' creatures but as the standard against which the inadequacies or insufficiencies of women are displayed. (Pg3)

Minute observation substantiate that relationship between genders is that of power, inequality, subordination, oppression, and difference. Gender relations should be studied distinct of liberal, radical, Marxist or dual system theory. They should be studied from the angle of power which seeks to subordinate and suppress. The power to be able to suppress and control women grants the male 'his superiority' and his masculinity. That is why Women act an agency for patriarchy since it grants them an egalitarian status with men, which is power in other terms. Connell in his book says that 'Power operating through institutions, power in the form of oppression of one group by another is an important part of the structure of gender'.

The above mentioned thought provoking concerns are ingrained in the novels of Tehmina Durrani. She has expertly focused on varied discrepancies in patriarchal order which jeopardize and victimize the lives of not only women but also men. She expands on feudalism in her novel *My Feudal Lord* and creation of a religious shrine and misinterpretation of Quran for convenience in her novel *Blasphemy*.

These two of her novels are thriving with the instances where we see gender oppression and patriarchy being the agency of suppression of either of the sex.

Interestingly patriarchy can be studied not only from the totally other angle which can be evaluation of the effects of patriarchy on men. If aptly appropriated most likely all men live under the invisible shadow of patriarchy.

Unequal gender relations are no more a woman and man only issues. There are men who think from the women perspective also. Society has not only set up a how to be a woman manual but also a manual which instructs on how to be a man. There are ample examples in the chosen novels which shows how men who have the power to take decisions dominate the younger men who are dependent on them financially or of a softer frame of mind. If Simone de Beauvoir says "women are not born, they are made"; analogous to this statement it can also be said patriarchs are not born they are made. Connell in his book *Question of Gender* opines that:

Being a man or a woman is not a fixed state. It is a becoming, a condition actively under construction. The pioneering French feminist Simone de Beauvoir put this in a classic phrase: 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. Though the positions of women and men are not simply parallel, the principle is also true for men. One is not born masculine, but acquires and enacts masculinity and so becomes a man. (pg 4)

The ways of becoming a man coincides with R.W Connell's theory of Male hegemony which concentrates on the socially most acceptable male personality. The theory brings to the fore the culturally and socially most idealized ways of being a man. The theory of patriarchy propagates the masculinity which glorifies and deglorifies hegemonic male. Tehmina Durrani's chosen novels deals with the hegemonic male who confuses rudeness with strength and violence with power. One gap that appears is the issue is that these males are themselves tortured and are framed the way they are in the image of the hegemonic

male. In Tehmina's novel *Blasphemy* Heer's mother treats her son in a very despicable manner. She expects him to bring home money, take the responsibility of his sisters, study and earn a high office. Worth noting is that she does not expect anything of her daughters, she expects them to get good matches and marry off in well off households. After their marriages in the so-called well off households she taunts her son that she bore three sons and one daughter. She maims her son a daughter and vice versa because the daughters are not financially dependent on her but the son is not earning much. A son gains acceptance when he earns and takes responsibility of the finances of the family. Why this expectation is not made of girls and women?

Pir Sain excessively and lovingly involves with street dogs. His father locks him up with the many puppies for several days without food. Such cruel behaviors from men in power crushes even the slightest flicker for emotion and affection in younger men. The passion of subduing any soft emotion continues in the lineage and Pir Sain kills his own younger son because he finds his son unable to connect with him. After Pir Sain's death his elder son mistreats his mother but when she leaves the house on death bed he bids farewell to her with tears in his eyes. He knows that he has been unjust to his mother although she was not wrong he half knows that his mother is alive but allows her body to be taken because he knows that he had to identify with his cruel uncles other he will be treated as an outcast may be killed like his brothers.

Heer's brother cries for her, remains sad and understands her pain and wants to set her free from the vicious circle but is unaware of the vicious circle of his own life where he is unacceptable to his own mother. On the other hand in Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* Mustafa khar's behavior towards his servant is ridiculous. He beats him for every small thing like not setting the breakfast table on time; men also visibly reel under the pressures of patriarchy.

Tehmina cheats her first husband Anees cruelly although it was a love marriage. A mere confession can not absolve her of the deed. Not only men divorce women there are also women who cheat and leave their husbands without any reason. Also Mustafa cheats Anees and marries his wife Tehmina. In his capacity as a Governor he sends him on various fictitiously confidential missions. He does all this in order to be able to enjoy with his wife Tehmina and consequently marry her. Tehmina's father comes

across as a very silent and docile person whereas her mother comes forth as a strong headed and strong-willed woman. Her father visibly does not take any important decisions in the family. In the end he takes one final decision and marries another woman.

Tehmina's mother on the other hand denies any emotional support to Tehmina during her abusive marriage to Mustafa Khar. After Tehmina's strong headed mother and docile father and her soft-hearted brother is seen who supports her in every situation of her life. Therefore, to uphold the notion of only the males as abusive and heartless would be a sexist approach. Now the approach should be all inclusive not only from the angle of men or women. Although gender is an umbrella term but mostly women get priority in the critical analysis.

The above illustrations point out that not only women, but men also suffer in the patriarchal setups. Not only men expect a particular standard to be met by a male but also women expect a man to be 'manly' and specifically the 'hegemonic male'. Gendered relation equation is unequal not only between man and woman but also between a man and man. This new and added dimension requires a thoroughly minute observation which will help in bringing out the mores of patriarchal and gender relations.

This paper does not deny the sufferings of the women in the novels of Tehmina Durrani but also tries to enlighten on the condition of men in these novels. Their position is almost lurking, invisible and unaddressed. On the other hand, it is visible in many literary works that women are abused and live a maltreated life but the cause of why men treat women in such a way is still left unaddressed. The above discussed causes bring about the brutally mutilated personalities of males. Male chauvinism is not only a burden for the society but also for the male carrying it. Since we as a society have not left any option open for men. There is a totally new discourse which is under way and yet to be acknowledged. This new discourse needs to be addressed and made defunct by probing patriarchy from all angles.

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