

Patriarchy across Time: Gendered Bodies and Misogyny

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Abstract— This research paper elucidates persistent practices of patriarchy that impose specific social, cultural, economic, and moral roles on both males and females, primarily by subjugating women to the role of objects for men. Historically, the critique of the female body was perplexed by fields like psychoanalysis, which often ignores freedom and choice to women. The female body becomes a constrained and colonized territory through disciplined practices that symbolically reinforce her as an ideal woman. The aim of this research assignment is to analyze the reflection of patriarchy in the historical and contemporary times through various books, articles on patriarchy, analyses of quotations, and media.

Index Terms— *Alpha Male, Feminism, Matriarchy, Intersectionality, Ideal Woman, Normative Conformity, Normative Male Alexithymia, Patriarchy, Social Conditioning, Socialisation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Greek thinkers proclaimed that there was a good principle that created order, light, and men, and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and women. This philosophical duality showed man as positive and woman as negative or the other. Athenian citizen-wives were confined to their quarters, that is, the gynaeceum, living perpetually as minors under the control of a guardian. Aristotle claimed the female was female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities and suffered from natural defectiveness. Wives were primarily valued for producing sons, while concubines (*pallakes*) were kept for sensual pleasure, and *hetaeras* (courtesans) for spiritual pleasures. The purpose of the female heir (*epikleros*) was merely to procreate a male heir to keep the estate within the family genos. Women were considered part of a man's property, first her father and then her husband, in a strictly patriarchal regime.

The Laws of Manu undertake attempts to dictate women's right to education, marriage, reproduction divorce and sexual life. Manusmriti systematically objectifies women and restricts their bodily

autonomy through quoting lines such as compulsory marriage as only path to salvation and women are created to bear children asserting motherhood as a religious act rather than a choice. They are portrayed as inherently lustful, fickle and dangerous, imposed strict male guardianship from birth until death. One of the verses prescribe cruel punishments for homosexual acts, such as shaving a woman's head or cutting off her fingers if she engages in sexual activity with a virgin.

The opening line in feminist thought is that "one is not born, rather becomes woman". This means that woman is not a fixed biological outcome but a historical reality and a product of civilization and culture. Traditionally, the prevailing cultural idea is that gender is a binary system consisting of two and only two genders. This framework is built on the belief that these two categories are natural, unchanging and fixed at birth. Within this patriarchal order, humanity is traditionally split into two classes where man represents the absolute Subject and women are defined as the inessential other. From infancy, girls are taught that to be feminine, they must renounce their autonomy and become a passive object. While boys are encouraged to use their bodies as tools for action and violence, girls are treated like "living dolls" and encouraged to alienate themselves in their image.

This research paper tries to illustrate examples of patriarchy as a norm that is harmful to all sections of society. It further delves into how feminism is popularized or patriarchy is ingrained through contemporary media.

II. SOCIAL CONDITIONING AND PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is often reinforced through various tactics of social conditioning for both girls and boys. In the infancy stage, baby girls behave very similarly to baby boys and they are not expected to exhibit different behaviors. However, as early socialization

begins, they are socialized in stereotypically different ways by being provided with different toys, dresses, colors, and by being classified into different cartoons and play spaces. By the time, women have been taught to be passive, caring, concerned with their appearance, and sometimes inferior to men. On the other hand, men have been presented as a tool of violence, strength and should reject traits representing femaleness. Furthermore, the system normalizes violence as a natural part of growing up, labeling men as "cowards" if they choose to ignore insults rather than engage in physical aggression, which ultimately dehumanizes them and destroys their mental peace. Women are often culturally confined to the kitchen and kid, where their existence is limited to domestic chores and the repetition of life which leads to alienation. This sexual division of labor casts the woman as receptacle for the male's productivity rather than an active subject.

Patriarchy is likewise detrimental to males because it enforces a system of Normative Male Alexithymia, depriving them of emotional intelligence by teaching them that boys don't cry or show fear and mocking those who express grief or stress as being emotionally pathetic. This social conditioning forces men to hide struggles like depression and maintain superficial friendships, contributing to higher rates of suicide rate in Indian men than that of women. Economically, patriarchy places an immense burden on men to be the primary breadwinner, leading to intense pressure regarding employment and social stigma if they earn less than their female partners.

III. IDEAL WOMAN

The conception of an ideal woman is defined by Sati Savitri in Indian context of middle class families. She is expected to be chaste, virtuous, modest, silent, marriageable and self sacrificing wife. She is domesticated, prioritizing her husband, children and household chores over her own ambitions. She is often expected to be less than her husband that is less educated, less ambitious, and even physically shorter so that traditional power dynamics can be maintained. An ideal woman must be "covered up" in traditional clothing to protect her family's honor, or izzat. She is expected to walk with her eyes downcast, comes straight home after work and avoid

behaviors that might be seen as "too Western" or "glamorous".

Married women should also have a natural desire to procreate and carry the tradition of patrilineal lineage. If she fails in this duty, she will be considered ashubh for the house. It is not expected that a married Indian woman pursue higher career advancement. For women, the profession of teachers is seen as suitable and the embodiment of decency and respectability. The profession is also considered safe for women as it does not make them too determined and allows them to prioritize their families. One of the other basic requirements for a woman to be married is that she has to have lower status than her potential husband that is she must be less educated.

In Indian society, a tall woman is often perceived as having an overpowering presence in a man's life. Traditional families and husbands may find this presence difficult to accept because it challenges the idea of the husband being the superior figure. The silence is regarded as a virtue when it comes to women and a sign of submission to patriarchal authority. Furthermore, a polite girl is often described as one who talks less and does not raise questions.

IV. FEMINISM

Feminism is an ideology that advocates for equal rights and opportunities for men and women in all spheres of society, including social, economic, and political. In early times, there were very few organized protests by Christine de Pisan, Laura Cereta, Moderata Fonte, Mary Astell, and Olympe de Gouges, who challenged the belief that women were inferior. Furthermore, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" and argued that the neglected education of women is the grand source of misery. She added that socialization allows women to sacrifice their strength to become alluring mistresses. John Stuart Mill wrote the famous text "The Subjection of Women" and campaigned successfully for woman's suffrage rights. The major achievement of the first wave of feminism is the victory in the political sphere, which is the right to vote granted to women in many nations.

In the 1960s-70s, the Second Wave of Feminism focuses more on the role of woman in family and society. The famous slogan "Personal is Political" became clarion call to express women's personal experiences reflect rigid power structures, therefore, personal is actually political. Famous feminist figures such as Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone, and Germaine Greer wrote well-known writings Sexual Politics, The Dialectic of Sex, and The Female Eunuch respectively. The mainstream demands are sexual liberation, right to have abortions and equal pay.

In the decade of 1990s, the third wave of feminism emerges to continue with the demands of second wave of feminism and challenges the concept of fixed gender. It inculcates the concept of intersectionality and diversity that focuses the differences across race, class, caste, sexual orientation and other social identities. Prominent feminists work for these causes are Bell Hooks, Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Baumgardner, and Amy Richards. In the 21st Century, there begins the fourth wave of feminism in 2012. It is highly characterized by the use of social media to raise concern of females. It brings spotlight on body shaming, rape culture, sexual harassment and many other concerns. Major movements of this era are #MeToo movement, #TimesUp, Women's March, SlutWalk, Black Lives Matter, Women in Cinema Collective and many more. Nevertheless the feminism does not argue for patriarchy that is, women are considered superior to men; yet it seeks a society with no discrimination and equal rights.

V. ROLE OF CONTEMPORARY FILMS

Contemporary cinema functions as a critical space where narratives either challenge patriarchal structure or reinforce traditional gender hierarchy. The film "Pink" (2016) challenges patriarchy and prejudiced assumptions regarding women's lifestyles and choices. Women are often assigned good or bad character based on her clothing, drinking, social independence, or other social habits as happened during legal proceedings. It also shows how women's character unfairly judged on her acts. Ultimately, the repeated assertion of "No means No" regardless of woman's background or prior acquaintance with a man directly challenges the patriarchal mindset. This powerful narrative builds foundation to challenge the misogynistic attitude that women's freedom invites violence.

Next, "The Girlfriend"(2025) a Telugu film where the director, Rahul Ravindran deconstructs traditional masculinity in the last 30 minutes of plot. Initially, the protagonist, Bhooma, is shown as submissive and silent. On the other hand, Vikram, her boyfriend is defined by traits like machismo, possessiveness and callousness. He focused specifically on her appearance during a sword-fighting scene, noting that she wore a "tight top". He shamed her by claiming that when she fell and turned toward the audience, her "cleavage" was visible, and he crudely suggested that the boys in the crowd would have climbed onto the stage to kiss her if they had the chance. Interestingly, in the end there occurs a transformation when she writes her story by herself and rejects the script written by her father and boyfriend.

On the other hand, Kabir Singh (2019) glorifies toxic masculinity, violence, stalking, short temperance and abuse. He is demonstrated a rebel without any cause. Orthodox mindset is shown when he said Preethi to cover her chest properly and to skip her medical lectures. Furthermore, scenes like pulling a knife on a woman who refuses to sleep with him and chasing her helper with the intent to hurt her promote rape threats, domestic abuse and violence. Here, the relationship is exposed as toxic love where physical and verbal abuses are accepted without any question.

Another Indian film "Animal" (2023) romanticizes a narrow and harmful idea of Alpha Male rhetoric of Andrew Tate. The male character, Ranvijay, reduces women to their reproductive utility, at one point in the movie, praising his wife's big pelvis as a sign of her ability to produce healthy children. He is shown as twisting her arm, pointing a gun at her and snapping her bra strip to cause pain. He demands woman to lick her shoe to prove her love. Moreover, in one of the interviews, the director of the same movie said that the genuine love includes the liberty of slapping one's partner. Such kind of toxic film contributes in glorifying masculinity and treats women as inferior, object and submissive.

VI. CONCLUSION

Patriarchy is always promoted by a mindset based on binary, hierarchical and sexualized thinking. There are also various instances where women move into non-traditional roles and as a consequence they

face hostile sexism. At the same time, when men express the traits of fear, weakness and vulnerability are often viewed as having lost their manhood. The concept of ideal women is frequently promoted by movies and serials where woman is reduced to a sacrificed being and be useful to man. Feminism has been playing an important role in dismantling misogyny. The intersectional feminist movement acts as a movement for women who experience overlapping and interdependent systems of oppression. Films serve as a critical arena for addressing institutionalized silence regarding sexual violence and misogyny. However, some movies are anti-feminist at a very high level by glorifying domestic violence as men's rights. Feminism never encourages normative conformity where women feel pressurized to embrace domestic violence. The wave of feminism is necessary for humanity and to dismantle rigid gender roles harmful to everybody.

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