

Ideology and Stigma of Patriarchy in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyse the norms of patriarchy due to which the female is victimised more in comparison to the male. It explores male domination over the society, which always places men in the center and springs opportunities for them to make their identity. Men have control over decision making, women's productive and reproductive ability as well as their sexuality. It also demonstrates how patriarchy affects the family, relation of men and women, and economic condition of women. It also analyses how female participates in this system by accepting the norms of patriarchy because they are taught to be dominated by male.

Keywords: Patriarchy, male domination, male centered, male identified, control and fear.

INTRODUCTION

In our society, many reasons exist behind the women's suppression but in this research paper, which uses empirical research methodology, the focus is on hierarchic system of patriarchy, and its ideology. This structure of patriarchy damages the gender equality, by giving priorities to the male, and placing the female as secondary. Patriarchy is a social system in which the authority is given to the eldest male of the family i.e. the family is directed according to the rules of the father over his children and wife. In this hierarchic system of patriarchy, the

power always remains in the hands of the male, and the female remains deprived from it because after the death of the eldest male, the power shifts to his son or other male members of the family. Patriarchy exists from thousands of years although its structure has been changed from the rule of father to male dominance by the passing of the time. Everyone participates in this system right from the day of the birth of a child. The society has given a tag of male or female, and in this way the journey starts for an individual to become the part of this system. Male child is taught to dominate, identified as aggressive, and to be the center of the family.

It has been shown that under patriarchy, male dominance exists in every part of the society such as politics, judiciary, economy, military, religion, and family. Patriarchy encourages men to dominate and women to accept to be dominated. Men show their masculinity and dominance, having aim to get command over power. This paper explores male domination along with male centeredness in the society, and how men achieve their identity easily but women remain deprived from it. Society as Allan G. Johnson (2014) points “a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered” (p. 5).

In patriarchal society, male identity is always considered as active, aggressive, primary, competitive, positive, tough. This is male centered, as attention is always given to man or boys; put them foreground, and women are considered as man's companion, helper, and background.

In order to make it clear, Allan G. Johnson describes patriarchy in her work *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* as follows:

Like all social systems, patriarchy is difficult to change because it is complex and its roots run deep. It is like a tree rooted in core principles of masculine control, male dominance, male identification, and male centeredness. Its trunk is the major

institutional patterns of social life as shaped by the roots – family, economy, politics, religion, education, music, and the arts. The branches – first the larger, then the progressively smaller – are the actual communities, organisations, groups, and other systems in which we live our lives, from cities and towns to corporations, parishes, marriages, and families. And in all of this, individuals are the leaves who both make possible the life of the tree and draw their form and life from it (p. 17).

Family is primary school of patriarchy. Male child is taught about his role, as central, by his parents. Having support from family and social norms, men become controller of all resources, and start dominating women whom they consider as passive, or secondary. Patriarchy depends on the upbringing of the male and the female child. The male is treated as prior, taught to be dominating, and female to accept the domination. The defining emblem of patriarchy is inherent in the process of control and fear. Men control the women as they are afraid of other men, and participate in competition with the other male. Patriarchy suppresses women as well as uses women to suppress, and oppress other women.

Kamla Bhasin (2016) presented her views on patriarchy in her lecture where she says male has more control over all kinds of resources like economic, social, political, and that is why they can make decisions on their own. Male has control over decision making, ideology as well as over women's productive, reproductive power, and sexuality. Men make religious, economic ideology and constitution. Women also accept patriarchy, and promote it more than men because women are compelled to learn during the childhood about patriarchal aspects.

According to Kate Millett (2000), "If one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be twofold: male

shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger” (p. 25).

This structure of patriarchy is demonstrated in the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, by the character of Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, the judge. When he was young, his family wanted to send him to England for ICS, but they could not afford the expenses for their dream, so they started searching for a perfect bride. According to them, the bride should be the daughter of a rich man instead of being a human being:

Jemu would be the first boy of their community to go to an English university. The dowry bids poured in and his father began an exhilarated weighing and tallying: ugly face – a little more gold, a pale skin – a little less. A dark and ugly daughter of a rich man seemed their best bet. (Desai, 2006, p. 89)

In this structure of patriarchy, Jemubhai’s family members are active participant as they consider the bride as the stairs for attaining the heights of their son’s successful future. On the other side, Bomanbhai Patel, father of Bela, who was eminent figure of the clan, had flourishing business, kept his wife and daughters in confinement in the mansion with typical strictness of male dominance:

Here they lived an idle existence inside the women’s quarters, the strictness of this purdah enforcement increasing Bomanbhai’s honor in the community, and he began to acquire little fancies and foibles, to cultivate certain eccentricities that, just as he plotted, reiterated the security of his wealth and reinforced his honor all over again (p. 90).

Everyone thought if this marriage happened, Bela would become ‘the wife of one of the most powerful men in India’ (p. 91). This shows about the people’s perception of woman’s identity, that it is dependent on man’s identity. After the marriage her name was changed from Bela to Nimi by Jemubhai’s family. With the help of money and ornaments taken as a dowry, her husband went to England for studies. After their marriage, he was affectionate towards his wife, but when he

came back from England, all affection and love turned into hatred and frustration because Nimi could not understand the Occidental's language, and seemed unsuitable to his newly acquired social status. She was nothing more than a sexual object for him because when he found that his powder puff was used by his wife, brought from England, he decided to give her brutal punishment. This manifestation of anger through punishment affirmed his control over her sexuality. As Mary Becker (1999) has suggested,

In patriarchy, men are sexual subjects and women objects: women's sexuality exists to please men. Whether a woman desires sex is often irrelevant to whether she has sex. Because patriarchal heterosexuality is "male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered," it illustrates and teaches general patriarchal principles: it is men's needs and experiences that are important, that count, just as "having sex" is defined by male pleasure and orgasm (p. 28).

After tattering her sense of existence, he felt proud on his achievement for having an upper hand by gaining power over her sexuality, apart from this he never looked at her in public as he did not accept her as an equal. He did not go on tour with his wife, and she stayed in a rented bungalow in Bonda:

She had spent nineteen years within the confines of her father's compound and she was still unable to contemplate the idea of walking through the gate. The way it stood open for her to come and go – the sight filled her with loneliness. She was uncared for, her freedom useless, her husband disregarded his duty (Desai, 2006, p. 171).

Even servants did not give her attention, served her their leftovers, and avoided to clean the bungalow until the judge came back from his tour. All her expectations from him were shattered, and she complied in subordination whenever he gave vent to his anger:

One day he found footprints on the toilet seat... he could barely contain his outrage, took her head and pushed it into the toilet

bowl, and after a point, Nimi, made invalid by her misery grew very dull, began to fall asleep in heliographic sunshine and wake in the middle of the night...she couldn't bear to spend a moment in dressing and combing, activities that were only for the happy and the loved (p. 173).

After the infection from the dirty water, Nimi suffered from the skin disease, so Jemubhai ordered his servants to clean everything with antiseptics in order to protect himself from infection. He told her: "Don't show your face outside. People might run from you screaming" (p. 173). Jemubhai is the true representative of patriarchy with his manifestation of patriarchal dominance from his youth to the old age, he showed his dominance over his wife, grand-daughter, and their lives, and hated their existence. He abhorred his grand-daughter, for she belonged to his daughter, who eloped with a Russian and broke the norms of patriarchy and wanted to live freely.

Dominance is possible only when there is control over another, and at one point this dominance turns into violence because the structure of patriarchy cannot become strong without violence. Jemubhai accepted that norm of patriarchy in which wife's action must be in accordance to her husband's wishes, and he found his violent judgment appropriate for his wife because she had no right to live according to her will. He sent his wife to her father's home because she went to railway station with a committee for welcoming Pt. Nehru without his consent, he could not control his anger which tortured her. This act of defiance had hurt his sense of manhood and he was unable to digest the fact that his wife could go against his will. "It couldn't be true, sir. My wife is a very traditional lady. She is too reserved, as you know, to attend the club. In fact, she never leaves the house" (p. 303).

After reaching home his behavior towards his wife was that of a master to his servant, he abused her 'Stupid bitch, dirty bitch' (p. 305) showing his dominance over her through violence because he found her weak:

For the first time he hit her, although he had wanted to before and fought the urge for some time. He emptied his glass on her head, sent a jug of water swinging into the face he no longer found beautiful, filled her ears with leaping soda water. Then, when this was not enough to assuage his rage, he hammered down with his fists, raising his arms to bring them down on her again and again, rhythmically, until his own hands were exhausted and his shoulders next day strained sore as if from chopping wood. He even limped a bit, his leg hurting from kicking her (p. 304).

He was not happy at the birth of his first child, even denied to have his wife back in the household. After Nimi's death he never tried to investigate the mystery behind, but accepted it as an accident easily because she was just a necessary piece of furniture for him. Patriarchy in the relationship of husband and wife is represented in the novel, *Mother of 1084* by Mahasweta Devi. In the novel, Dibyanath, who never respects his wife's feeling, is the epitome of patriarchy. For him, Sujata was a sexual object, and he was the subject, apart from that, he had an illicit relationship with his typist at his office. He used the other woman as a tool to show his control over the sexuality of the women who were in his life. He did not have any affection for his wife, yet he decided to have more children because it promulgates his power to have a right over his wife's reproductive capability:

Dibyanath never cared to probe into these wounds. He was neither very attached, nor indifferent to his wife. The way he saw it, a wife had to love, respect and obey her husband. A husband was not required to do anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty... He had built a house of his own, he kept servants, and that was enough he thought. He never tried to make a secret of his affairs with young girls outside the house. He felt it was within his rights. (Bandyopadhyay, 1997, p. 45)

He truly represented the patriarchal mind set up that as long as a female would be busy in nurturing her children, she would be unable to achieve anything in her life, so it would be

easier for a male to exert more power by being the bread earner of the family. The following lines show his self-centeredness:

He slept in a room on the second floor lest the cries of the newborn disturbed his sleep. He would never come down to ask about the children when they were ill. But he noticed things, he noticed Sujata, he had to be sure that Sujata was fit enough to bear a child again (p. 3).

He allowed her to do job in bank only because of the financial crisis in the family, but later, when conditions improved, he wanted her to leave the job as he expected her to spend life on his whims and desires, and nurture children. He had always given respect to his mother because she appreciated his ideology:

Dibyanath had not allowed Sujata the most common rights that a mother has. His mother held the reins. Dibyanath never knew that one could honour one's mother without humiliating one's wife. His wife under his feet, his mother held aloft. That was his ethos (p. 45).

Even Dibyanath's mother promoted the norms of patriarchy, giving the credit to his son's generosity when there was none: "You should have begun earlier. It was Dibu's generosity that he did not send you to work earlier" (p. 9). There was nobody in the family, who understood Sujata's desire to work, everyone followed the rules and regulations applied by the head of the family, which affirmed to the structure of patriarchy. Dibyanath's mother showered attention to her son and his ideology, so "Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction in the home. Sujata had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own" (p. 9).

Patriarchy shows male dominance not only over female, but also over other male, and it can be better understood by Dibyanath's centeredness, which was accepted by every child in the house except his younger son, Brati, whom Sujata always protected from the dominance of her husband and mother in

law. It was Dibyanath's dominance over Brati the desire to run his life in accordance to his will which made him blame his wife for making Brati defy his dominance. 'Dibyanath called him a milksop. Mother's boy.' (p. 47)

The trauma of Sujata is similar to that of Nimi in the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, where she lived in her father's home which was like a prison for her, and after marriage she was in custody of her husband. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) states in her work, *The Second Sex*: "She will free herself from her parents' home, from her mother's hold; she will open up her future not by an active conquest, but by passively and docilely delivering herself into the hands of a new master" (p. 396). She tolerated all the sufferings and violence quietly, perpetuated by her husband, and cared about family's honour and never created trouble by bringing anything to the forefront, even before servants, and denied to go back to her home although she was suffering physical abuse at the hands of her husband: "The bruises didn't fade for weeks. Ten blue and black fingerprints clamped on her arm, a thunder-dark cloud loomed up on her side where he had pushed her into the wall – a surprisingly diffuse cloud for that one hard precise push" (Desai, 2006, p. 305).

Nimi's father did not have a son that is why after his death complete power was seized by her uncle which created havoc for her father. Her uncle denied entry to Nimi because she was female and did not have any right to claim on property. He also advised her to ask forgiveness from her husband in spite of the abuses she suffered. He told her rudely: "You are your husband's responsibility. Go back. Your father gave a dowry when you married – you got your share and it is not for daughters to come claiming anything thereafter. If you have made your husband angry, go ask for forgiveness" (p. 306)

She never fought back for her rights, but she made up her mind that she has to suffer at the hands of her husband because she was part and had to adhere to the norms of patriarchy. The

same thing happened in the novel, *Mother of 1084*, by Mahasweta Devi, in which the mother, Sujata always tolerated the wrongs done to her by her husband and never argued with him because female was to be dominated: "She had been taught by life to take things as they came. She had never thought of asking questions" (Bandyopadhyay, 1997, p. 31). She went to meet Nandini secretly without telling her husband because she knew that he would never allow her to do so. She decided to postpone her operation of appendix because she realised that her husband was negligent towards her disease and cared only about his desires and needs. He showed his concern for her health only when he aimed to satisfy his physical urges.

The female is considered as other in the patriarchal set up. In Gorkhaland Movement, men were marching on the road throughout the town and hilly areas for their demand of Gorkhaland. They were showing their power of aggression and rebelling for attainment of their aim. They were shouting, "Victory to the Gorkha Liberation Army" (Desai, 2006, p. 156). Being influenced after seeing this procession, Gyan, who is in love with Jemubhai's grand-daughter Sai, felt embarrassed for spending his valuable time with her. He was thinking: "It was a masculine atmosphere and Gyan felt a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda, the cheese toast, queen cakes from the baker, and even worse, the small warm space they inhabited together, the nursery talk..." (p. 161).

Same act of showing masculinity is shown in *Mother of 1084*, in which Brati, who was rebellious and comrade of Naxalite Movement, got aim to change the social inequality, and spent his time to plan the strategies for the welfare with his friends. Brati never followed his father's ideology, never remained in favor of his father, but of mother, and wanted to do something revolutionary having aim to change social inequality. At one hand he showed his masculinity in being rebellious, which is the patriarchal norm, but on the other side he was against her

father's rules, which is against patriarchy, that is why his father denied getting involved in the encounter case. Brati was rebellious, active, aggressive, and comrade of the movement which reveals masculinity in his character. As Mary Becker (1999) has suggested that:

Patriarchy is not primarily organised around the interactions of women and men. The core of patriarchy is a battle between men who fear each other for power and control over each other. Because this is its core, patriarchy values power, control, autonomy, independence, toughness, strength, aggressiveness, invulnerability, rationality, detachment (being non-emotional), and other traditionally masculine attributes that have proven effective in the battle against other men (p. 38).

In the insurgent group, Gyan showed his masculinity pretending about his superiority over his beloved whom he left later. He was embarrassed of his humble belongings. He decided to join the Gorkhaland Movement, and part ways from Sai.

She would be humiliated. He had hit on the age-old trick that remade him into a hero, 'the desired male'...The more he insulted her behind her back – 'Oh, that crazy girl is following me...' – the more the men would cheer, the more his status would grow at Thapa's Canteen, the more Sai would be remade behind her back into a lunatic female, the more Gyan would fatten with pride... (Desai, 2006, p. 262).

Lola and Noni, the sisters, lived in their house in Mon Ami, their economic source was the pension of Lola's dead husband, and they spent their lives with many hardships due the death of Lola's husband. Lola faced insult; first by the insurgent boys when they entered in their house silently, and told her that "Don't worry. You are too old for us, you know" (p. 239). This shows that the woman, who is young and has reproductive ability, is useful for man. Second, when she went to Pradhan of town to complain of GNLFF boys for taking their piece of land forcefully, Pradhan also showed his masculinity and power while saying these words: "I am the raja of Kalimpong. A raja

must have many queens... I have four, but would you... dear Aunty, would you like to be the fifth?" (p. 244) The excitement of male for doing something worthwhile works in suppressing and in the subjugation of female. In the novel, *Mother of 1084*, Somu's mother was totally dependent on her only son, who was another comrade and friend of Brati, studied in a good college having hope for bright future, but unfortunately, he died in an encounter with Brati. Soon after his death, his father too died. Somu's sister gave tuitions for running the household. If Somu's mother would have been educated like Sujata, they might have protected themselves from economic crisis. In this the female is butchered for saving the male.

It is clear that many laws have been made for the rights of women, feminist movement has been working for many decades, but social awareness is the prime necessity for getting equality because patriarchy is socially accepted system. It is not possible to eliminate it completely from the society because it has its roots in the human civilisation that is why its roots has become stronger.

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