



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Concept of Male Chauvinism in the Context of Indian Patriarchal Society

Gayatri Saini

Research Scholar, Department of English,
Career Point University, Kota, Rajasthan, India

Abstract: It is distressing to read this perennial enigma that most families in the world still adopt the principles of patriarchy. Indian society is largely patriarchal because men benefit from everything. Male perception governs the conditions at home as well as at work. The men are portrayed as active, intellectual, and heroic, while the women are introverted, timid, and sensitive. A woman is expected to be protected by a man, raised and sustained by males in a patriarchal society. That's how the idea of male chauvinism was born. For example, male chauvinism keeps women away from the power system for the fear of losing their authority. Patriarchal ideals limit women's mobility and deny them control over their own bodies and possessions. As a result, women are powerless to express their opinions and choose their destinies. The present paper is an attempt to study the concept of male chauvinism in encouraging gender discrimination and taboos that prevail in a patriarchal society. It will critically analyze many unethical practices performed by patriarchal society with regard to gender oppression. It will also throw light on the means to overcome this malicious circle of existence.

Keywords- patriarchy, male perception, the concept of male chauvinism, gender discrimination.

INTRODUCTION-

It is distressing to read this perennial enigma that most families in the world still adopt principles of patriarchy, where all the rules and regulations are set by the male for the female. All the branches of knowledge, such as philosophy, theology, law, and literature, have been taken over by men. The men are portrayed as active, intellectual, and heroic, while the women are introverted, timid, and sensitive. The subjection of women occurs not only in the crucial structure of society but in their homes also. Patriarchy oppresses women according to the norms of each caste, class, community, and religion. Shantha Krishnaswamy comments on the general lot of women in a patriarchal society:

She is a creature who, as a child, is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband's family; or who, as a widow, in a final act of obliteration, immolates herself on her dead husband's funeral pyre to be acclaimed as 'Sita-Savitri', as an immortal. (2)

Patriarchy is a system of society where men are the head of the household, carry the most power, and where the family lineage is possessed by men. The concept of patriarchy is defined by different thinkers in different ways. Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, uses the word "patriarchy" to refer to "kinship systems in which men exchange women" (24). According to Walby: "patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (20). Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick in Cultural Theory: The Key Concept define patriarchy as:

The way in which societies are structured through male domination over and oppression of women. Patriarchy, therefore, refers to the way in which material and symbolic resources (including income, wealth, and power) are unequally distributed between men and women, through such social institutions as the family, sexuality, the state, the economy, culture, and language. (269)

Indian society is largely patriarchal where women have generally been treated as subordinates, often ill-treated, abused, and brutalized. She is not expected to express any kind of dissatisfaction, and her thoughts and wishes are ignored. The main problem of today's women is that their marriages are based on money and assumptions about the bride's family, such as education, intelligence, family status, and other qualifications. The ancient Hindu lawgiver, Manu, whose philosophy and ideology occupy a significant place in Indian ideology, does express the inferiority of women to men and the traditional attitude of our society in Manusmriti:

pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane | rakṣanti sthavire putrā na strī svātantryamarhati || (9.3)

(The father guards her during virginity, the husband guards her in youth, the sons guard her in old age; the woman is never fit for independence).

Patriarchal concepts can be found not only in all nations' social, legal, political, and economic structures but also in literary works. There has already been a lot of research done on women's issues. In the light of patriarchy, Indian writing in English plays an important role. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Toru Dutt, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and many others are among the Indian authors who have written in English. A lot of research has previously been done on women's pitiable predicament. By going through the existing research papers, it has been found that there is a significant relationship between patriarchy, male chauvinism and discrimination against women in society.

OBJECTIVE

- To analyze the concept of male chauvinism in encouraging gender discrimination.
- To analyze taboos for genders that prevail in a patriarchal society.
- To critically examine many unethical practices carried by the patriarchal society in order to sustain male chauvinism.

The Concept of Male Chauvinism in the Context of Indian Patriarchal Society

The Male chauvinism is the root of gender inequality. Whereas, male chauvinism is the belief held or alleged to be held by certain men, that men are inherently superior to women. It was first recorded in Clifford Odets play *Till the Day I Die* in 1935 (Mansbridge, Jane; Katherine Flaster (2005)). The concept of male chauvinism that subsists in Indian patriarchal society are depicted in the following terms-

Low Nutrition:

In patriarchal families, it has always been a 'Men first' policy when it comes to food. Women get low-grade nurturing compared to men. The healthiest and most nutritious food is given to the male heir of the family, and what is left is given to the females. A low-nutrition diet is provided to the female child. Eating last and eating least are regarded as expressions of love and respect, and are still frequently practiced in all joint households, both rural and urban.

Household Burden:

Women work longer hours than men, but their work is undervalued and unrecognized. They have to perform their duty 24 hours a day, while the work of males is associated with their workplace only. Social institutions influence gender roles: in most societies, working for a living is perceived as a masculine activity in most civilizations, whereas unpaid care work is recognised as a woman's realm.

Educational Opportunity:

The Male Chauvinists believed that investing money in their daughters' education would be futile because they would not benefit directly from the education investment. They are considered a 'paraya dhan', and after their marriage they have to cook, clean, and raise children. On the other hand, because boys are considered the family's legal heirs, investing in their best education will benefit them in the future. Ramandeep Kaur states-

In most families, boys at home are given priority in terms of education but girls are not treated in the same way. Right from the beginning, parents do not consider girls as earning members of their family, as after marriage they have to leave their parents' home. So their education is just considered a wastage of money as well as time. For this reason, parents prefer to send boys to school but not girls. (Low Female Literacy Rate and Its Impact on Our Society).

Freedom:

Lack of freedom and mobility for girls is another main feature of male chauvinism in a patriarchal society. Men are given overwhelming primacy, which inhibits women's human rights to some extent. It is the male chauvinists that don't allow them to go out to work, meet with their friends, or come back at any time, they have to return home before dusk. Patriarchal ideals limit women's mobility and deny them control over their own bodies and possessions. For example, male chauvinism keeps women away from the power system for the fear of losing their authority. As a result, their self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem are all destroyed. They become powerless to express their opinions and choose their destiny.

Property Rights:

In this social structure of the patriarchal family, women are deprived of their legitimate rights. Indian women still continue to get fewer rights to property than men, both in terms of quality and quantity, because discriminatory social norms are one of the most critical barriers to women's access to land and property.

Economic Inequalities:

Gender inequality and male chauvinism subsist in the Indian economy also. Women are paid less than men for doing the same job. The wage gap in India is higher among women than among men. In terms of credit lending and property ownership, women are also discriminated against. They have always been excluded from property ownership because it is believed that men are the ones who carry their generation forward and earn bread and butter for the family.

Health:

After the rest of the household, mostly men, have eaten, a lady is expected to eat the leftovers. This food is frequently devoid of essential nutrients such as iron, calcium, and iodine. Ill-treatment and neglect of women lead to poor health and a shorter life span. They have little control over their fertility and reproductive health. The immunization rates for boys are higher than for girls.

Sons Preference:

The other main concept of male chauvinism is the preference for sons, for reasons related to kinship, inheritance, identity, status and economic security. The expensive dowry of daughters and losing them in the husband's family are also the main reasons that sons are more desirable. They are often considered to perform funeral rites by male chauvinists.

Dowry:

The dowry system in India has become a major issue that contributes to gender disparity. Women became a commodity as consumerism increased. Dowry is encouraged due to women's disempowerment, male domination, and financial dependency on males.

Difficulties faced by Working Women:

The plight of working women is still worsened due to occupational stress. Working women in a patriarchal society face a lack of adequate support. The majority of husbands want their wives to work mainly for financial gain, but they do not share in the household liabilities and upbringing of their children. At work, women are taunted and treated as inferior by male chauvinists. They are regarded as second-class workers, with uneven pay for the same job.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY-

To analyse the problem of the study, psychoanalytic feminist criticism is applied, which will answer the research question dealing with many unethical practices prevalent in Indian society with regard to gender oppression.

The proposed research will be pursued by using the basic methods of literary research, such as close reading, interpretation, explication, analysis, and evolution. A thorough analysis will also be made of the bibliographical and electronic resources needed for literary research, including reference works, specific glossaries, consultation of catalogs from research libraries, use of databases of literary texts corresponding to different aspects of the research, and periodicals relevant to different areas of this proposed study.

CONCLUSION-

In the Indian patriarchal society, girls are not given the right to choose their life partners, they have to marry according to the choice of their fathers. And after marriage, they have to leave not only their home and parents but also their surname. They have to adorn themselves with saris, bangles, payal, bindi, sindoor etc. They must fast frequently for their husband's long and healthy life. On the other hand, there is no change in men's lives after marriage. If a woman becomes a widow, she has to become totally detached from the happiness and leisure of the materialistic world. While a widower has no norms to be followed, he remarries after his wife's death. Hence, male chauvinism keeps women away from the power system for the fear of losing their authority.

It is difficult to eliminate the system because it has been deeply rooted in human culture but blaming patriarchy alone would serve no good until women themselves stop being oppressed by it. Violence against women will end only when instead of burden, they are considered as the axis of family and society. Perhaps things will be better for all of us if all the women of our country will come together and bring about a feminist revolution.

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