

The Concept of Patriarchy in Taslima Nasrin's Novels

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Abstract

The idea of patriarchy is profoundly deep-rooted in all cultures. The organization of patriarchy requires the appropriation of identities at various levels. Its growth and long-term viability are determined by how widely these identities are manifested through various cultural platforms. Such platforms signify the gendered inequality upon which patriarchy is based upon. This paper presents the concept of patriarchy as articulated in Taslima Nasrin's novel 'Shodh'. This paper aims to focus on the idea of patriarchy as a potentially dangerous act. It also exposes patriarchy as an outlet of social constraints, traditions, and personal benefit, a major theme in Taslima Nasrin's Novel 'Shodh'. Also, it reveals the causes and effects of Patriarchy.

Keywords: patriarchy, oppression, Shodh, Taslima, Nasrin, woman

Patriarchy is frequently discussed in the literature as a major social issue, especially in nonfiction, plays, and novels. The idea isn't new; it's been around since early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Wolf, and the Fabian group of women. This subject has been addressed in works such as Jean Rhys' 'Wide Sargasso Sea', Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale', Sylvia Plath's 'The Bell Jar', Toni Morrison's 'The Bluest Eyes', and Doris Lessing's 'The Golden Notebook'. Furthermore, non-fictional works such as Virginia Wolf's 'A Room of One's Own', Simon de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex', and Sandra Gilbert's 'The Mad Woman in the Attic' deal with patriarchy.

Since it is primarily associated with cultural aspects, Patriarchy is a literary theme that derives its significance from sociological and anthropological perspectives. Patriarchy is a socially created system where men have a majority of power. It affects many aspects of life, including politics, business and management, religion, financial arrangements, and ownership of property, all the way down to the family home, where men are believed to be the family's leader. Thus, it is necessary to observe its definition as well as the historical and contemporary perspectives about it to comprehend the meaning of the word Patriarchy.

Patriarchy is called as social structure dominated by men, in which gender inequality is systemic, institutionalized, and widespread through society, state, and economy. In the most literal sense, patriarchy refers to the father's rule. A patriarchal family is thus dominated by the father, who passes power down the male line, while a patriarchal society is centred on male dominance. Wikipedia defines the term Patriarchy as,

"a social system in which the male acts as the primary authority figure central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property" (Wikipedia)

This conventional and short-range definition strains patriarchy as a social structure in which mature males are overwhelmingly in control. Patriarchy is also known as the system of "male rule and privilege, as well as female subordination," according to the definition. It also specifies that the majority of patriarchal cultures are patrilineal, which means that property and title are passed down by male ancestors to other male inheritors. Another description is critical to comprehend the true sense of patriarchy. Patriarchy, according to Gerda Lerner's book 'The Creation of Patriarchy', is

"a historic reaction formed by men and women in a process that took nearly 2500 years to complete." (Ganguli)

She also clarifies that patriarchy in the initial state seemed to be an ancient system in which the patriarchal family was the fundamental component of society, which both uttered and constantly developed its laws and values.

The above definition offers an extensive definition of patriarchy, but it is important to consider the concept from a feminist viewpoint, as women are always marginalized in patriarchy. Many feminist theories revolve around the concept of patriarchy. Kate Millet is one of the most important feminist writers who define the term in her book 'Sexual Politics'. Millet's goal was to research "patriarchy as a political institution." She believes that the term "politics" applies to all "power structured relationships," and that the one between the sexes is a "dominance and subordination relationship" that has gone largely

unstudied. The feminists are acutely aware of how patriarchy's various aspects negatively affect women. According to feminists, marriage benefits the husband because he receives a free servant to take care of both his nuptial needs and the household's maintenance. Women's abuse inside a marriage is a reflection of deep organizational sexism in a male-dominated society.

Patriarchy tends to be of specific concern to Taslima Nasrin. This is a theme that she portrays in virtually all of her novels. She concentrates on a woman's plight and degradation in a male-dominated society. Nasrin discusses patriarchy as a social problem in which women are oppressed, especially in abusive marriages as she describes in her novels 'Shodh'.

Nasrin writes with a purpose to oppose and fight against injustice and oppression generally done by patriarchal society or by male characters of family and society. The theme of her one of the novels 'Shodh' is based on gender inequality which ultimately results in seeking revenge, also we can easily see suppression of the female characters in this novel. Nasrin herself had an experience of being a victim of Patriarchal structures. She has encountered everything very closely therefore in almost every novel of her she has taken the same theme. Patriarchy gives power to man to oppress woman, to subjugate woman and also to violate them, therefore, a woman becomes a victim of violence. Patriarchy resists the growth of woman.

'Shodh' is dealing with a young woman Jhumur who is educated and gets married to whom she loves. The very first incident of Haroon's humiliation towards Jhumur comes up when Jhumur becomes pregnant within few days of marriage. He accuses her of cheating on him saying it is merely impossible to conceive in just six weeks. Also Haroon puts allegations, that, because she was bearing someone else's child in her womb thus she wanted to marry Haroon quickly. Haroon with his pre-notion and oppressive mind asks Jhumur to abort this child which gave Jhumur a deep psychological shock. Besides, being an educated girl with an open-minded family Jhumur's voice was always suppressed. Jhumur who was independent in her thoughts had dreams of a happy marriage with her beloved Haroon and to bear his child, all were shattered when her husband accused her of not being a pious wife. This incident left a dark impact on her psyche, which was impossible to heal. Usually, in the patriarchal society, it has been seen that women are threatened and even killed for being unable to produce a male child. Forceful preference for son gives rise to female feticide. But in Jhumur's case she was accused of carrying some other man's child in her womb. Which smashes her

entire life. Through the character of Jhumur, Nasrin tried to expose the dark side of sophisticated elites of society, who under the cover of material well-being rob their women's mental peace and happiness. After this cruel incident, Jhumur cannot support a sense of belonging to Haroon's House. Because there is a lack of education, love and mutual understanding.

Through this story of Jhumur and Haroon, Nasrin puts stress on the need for harmony, understanding, little freedom and above all love in a relationship. Before marriage, Jhumur and Haroon were seen to be perfect together. However, their relationship loses its charm once the egocentric, suspicious male overpowers the lover in Haroon. Nasrin studies the bad impact of such disharmonies a married relationship creates on the mind of a woman. Eventually, to seek revenge Jhumur gets intimate with Afjal, a paying guest in her house, and finally gives birth to a son, telling everyone as Haroon's son. Haroon thinking of baby to be his son is highly ironic and fulfils Nasrin's intention of crushing blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set-up where a woman's morality and chastity is continuously under the shadow of suspicion and doubt and therefore making her victim of mental and physical trauma. After having a son from Afzal, Jhumur feels happy and she harbors no guilt in her mind bringing Ananda, her son. She sticks to her action and says,

"I took recourse to that to avenge the indignity I suffered. I'm not so insignificant, or of no account, that I'll swallow my utter humiliation in the hands of my husband and remain forever beholden to him. My heart swells with happiness when Haroon cuddles Ananda and calls him 'Baba'. I have doused the fire of suspicion that had raged ferociously in Haroon's heart and left mine charred, with waters from the fountain of joy that has bedewed me from within" (Nasrin)

Thus, to conclude it will be apt to say that patriarchal society is a root of male hierarchal order where power is enjoyed by the male by suppressing women by controlling women accompanied with violence. In Jhumur's case, it has been seen that a relationship based on patriarchal overpowering action results in devastating exploit. It has been said that, "Male violence exceeds female violence and exploiters; oppressors give way to the exploited and oppressed to counter violence." (Shah)

The suppression of Jhumur's voice and her wishes made her act in a form that in the end gave her the courage to establish her self-respect and individuality besides just being a wife and daughter-in-law.

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