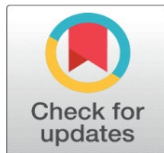
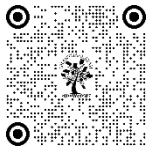


PATRIARCHY AND WOMEN SUBORDINATION IN ASSAMESE SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Women are an integral part of society. A society is not complete without women. But women are always neglected and marginalised mainly under the system of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a social system where men occupy the pivotal position, political leadership, moral authority, special privilege and control of the property. Assam is not immune from this inhuman practice of the society. The patriarchy undermines the role of women in the society as well as the status of women. In view of this, the paper tries to highlight the following objectives (i) to understand the theoretical concept of patriarchy (ii) to examine the role of patriarchy in Assamese society. (iii) to explore the process institutionalization of patriarchy in Assam.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender, Women, Status

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are the indispensable part of a society. It is because women constitute almost half of the population in every society. All of we know that the development of a society is notably depending on the status of women. The Assamese society is also not exception of it. The status of women in society is a critical factor in judging the success of any civilization. In Indian Culture, Manu, the great law giver said 'where women are honoured; there reside the Gods'. In Hinduism, a man without the participation of his wife cannot take part in any religious rituals with perfection. The wives are called 'Ardhangani'. Hence, they share equal positions with men. But in reality, it has never seen anywhere. Many factors are responsible for the unequal status of women in the society i.e. uneven access to education, lack of employment equality, job segregation, lack of legal protections, lack of bodily autonomy, poor medical care, lack of religious freedom, lack of political representation, Societal mindsets. All these factors are controlled by the patriarchy which has been prevailing in our society.

1.1. OBJECTIVES

The present study is based on the following objectives:

- To understand the theoretical concept of Patriarchy
- To examine the role of Patriarchy in Assamese society
- To explore the process institutionalization of patriarchy in Assam.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on historical and analytical method with the application of the secondary sources. The relevant Books, Journals, Articles, Periodicals are used as secondary sources to uphold the findings of the study.

3. CONCEPT OF PATRIARCHY

The word 'patriarchy' literally means the rule of the father or the 'patriarch', and originally it was used to describe a specific type of male dominated family. Now, it is used more generally 'to refer to male domination, to the power relationship by which men dominate women and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways.

Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres. Feminists mainly use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women. Thus, patriarchy is more than just a term; feminists use it like a concept, and like all other concepts it is a tool to help us understand

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" (Mitchell 1971:24). Walby defines "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 1990:20).

Thus, patriarchy describes the institutionalized system of male dominance. So, we can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men and women, which have a material base and which though hierarchical, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women (Jagger and Rosenberg 1984).

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a patriarchy is a system of society or government in which the father or oldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line. However, the father or the eldest male holds complete authority over the lives of every other family member, including the women, children and young males. Patriarchal society also often give all property rights to the males of a family, meaning a woman is excluded from all rights regardless of her position in the family whether wife or daughter.

Patriarchy is a social system wherein males are the supreme authority and hold primary and maximum power. In literary sense, patriarchy means the rule of the father. In a patriarchal society, it is the father who controls every economic, social and moral decision regarding everyone else in the family.

Patriarchy is pervasive in India as well as Assam but varies in degree depending on region, community, class, caste and religious or social group. Therefore, in this regard it would not be possible to generalise. All of we know that family is the first and foremost institution where patriarchy has been developed. A patriarchal society believes that it is only the men who are capable of running social, moral, political and economic life. Women are believed to be weaker both physically and mentally and thus incapable of making important decisions on behalf of others.

4. STATUS OF WOMEN IN ASSAM

Women of Assam enjoyed constitutional status after India got independence within the year 1947. Gradually, various steps were taken to eradicate certain social evils like superstition, sati pratha, child marriage, pardah pratha etc. which has contributed tons towards formation of a hope for creating an egalitarian society. Different commissions, committees including National Education Policy of 1986, Durgabhai Deshmukh Commission (1956), Hansa Mehta Committee (1961) and Bhakta Vatsalam Committee (1965) recommended valuable suggestion for improving the status of girls through education. The Indian constitution gives equal political rights to both men and women but, the representation of women in parliament and state legislatures is extremely less. The 81st constitutional amendment bill to supply for one third reservation for women in parliament was tabled for the primary time in 1996. But it had been soon engulfed within the conflicts over the demand of special quota for women of other backward castes and minorities. Till today, there's no sincere effort on the area of national and regional political parties towards the passing of the bill.

There are numerous issues which remains tied round the neck of an Indian woman, blocking her progress within the new century, destroying all her efforts to know a lifetime of dignity and self-respect. Sort of the issues Indian women face for the last 50 years are- the unwanted daughter, high rate of illiteracy among women, health abuse and mal-nutrition, unwilling child women, dowry death, harassment and at atrocities within the working place, torture at adulthood. Regarding the status of girls as an entire, it has been found that girls represent 50% of the entire population; 30% are engaged in labour force which they perform quite 60% of all working hours, but they receive only 10% of the world's income and own even but 1% of the world's property (ILO). As per population census 2011, the entire literacy rate of India is 74.4 percent, where the percentages of male and female literacy rates are 82.14 and 65.46 respectively and the gap is only 16.68 percent. The north eastern states of India which is additionally mentioned because the land of eight sisters, collectively account for about V-E Day of the country's geographic area and roughly 4 you're taking care of its population. As per the last 2001 census, the entire population of the region was 38,495,089 with 19,874,535 male and 18,620,554 female. The women population is around 50 considered the sex ratio is 940 females per 1000 male within the region as compared to 933 females per 1000 male within the country. Consistent with third small industry census (2001- 02), 20.03 % micro-enterprises within the region are owned and managed by women entrepreneurs as against 10.11 % within the country. This is often mainly because of the rationale that the tribal women are mostly dominating the markets in most of the hilly areas of the region. The region is additionally characterized by the relatively high women literacy rate 63.4 resistant to all India female literacy of 54.2 %, (Women literacy rate of Mizoram is as high as 95.8 %), high decimal growth of population, low urbanization (except Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram) and contrasting population density (13 persons per sq. km in Arunachal Pradesh where as in Assam and Tripura it's as high as 340 and 304 respectively). Economically, the plain areas of the region are more active than the hilly areas. However, within the hilly areas, the women are more enterprising than the male counterparts. In Assam, the status of women is high as compared to the women of other states of India. One salient feature within the Assamese society was the absence of the dowry system. The Assamese society (except people that came from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and other places) didn't have dowry as a neighbourhood of marriage as is that the custom found in other states. Aside from the general national picture, in Assam also if we focus our attention on this scenario or status of girls then the image is additionally not within the smallest amount rosy. Women have usually got lower wage than the lads for an equivalent work; they need comparatively poor health status, low educational status, and lower skill than the lads. They're generalized as a gaggle of vulnerable and marginalized section altogether spheres viz. in educational field, in social situation, in economic activities and political field then on. In fact, during a patriarchal society, women activities are considered as belonging to non-public domain whereas men's activities are considered as belonging to ownership. The population of the state is 26.66 million of which 12.85 million are female. As regards sex ratio, it's 932 females per 1000 males (Census of India 2001) and it's increased to 954 females per 1000 males within the census of 2011. There's a worth loaded concept that girls in Assam are more liberal, they're free from the various social constraints, social evils like dowry, purdah system etc than the states like Bihar, Rajasthan or the Northern and Southern belt of India. However, this doesn't mean that girls in Assam are on an equal footing with men. Still in Assam, the capacity building among the women could even be a way bigger challenge before us and also there's a rampant gender disparity altogether human development sector. Out of the entire literacy rate in Assam i.e. 64.3 percent, the male literacy percentage is 71.9 percent whereas the feminine literacy is 56 percent, with the gap of 15.9 percent (Census of India 2001) although during 1991-2001, annual average rate of growth of female literacy (1.3 per cent) was quite that of male literacy rate (0.99 per cent). Consistent with the Census of 2011, from the entire literacy (73.18%) men literacy percentage is 78.81 whereas female occupies 67.27 percent with the gap of 11.54 percent.

The status of women in different societies has often been reflected their role in various respective fields and their socio-economic background where they are belonging. Status refers position of a particular individual or group in terms of their enjoyment of their rights and obligation of their own society. The status of woman is also measured compare with men in that particular society (Mazumdar, 1978). Various factors such as family, kinship system, participation in social and cultural institutions etc. reflect women position in that particular society. To explain about women, position in the social sphere then it includes women role in the family, their role in the different social group activities, kinship systems, societal customs and norms related participation and so on. But in reality, the women are always referred as second sex which have not an equal space along with men in the society.

Assam is one of the states where the female population is less than the proportion of the male population. Women form about half of the population of the society but their situation has been grim. For centuries, they have been deliberately denied the opportunities for the growth in the name of religion and socio-cultural practices. At the socio-

political plain, women suffered from the denial of freedom even in their homes, repression and unnatural indoctrination, an unequal and inferior status, rigid caste hierarchy and even untouchability. Religious tradition and social institutions have a deep bearing on the role and status of women. Protest movements within the Hindu fold, like Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Veera Shaivism and Sikhism contributed to some improvement in the status of women. However, they continued to regard women primarily as mothers and wives, inferior to the men in the society. From the middle of 19th century, reform movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission etc. championed the cause of women, but nothing concrete could be achieved. In a patriarchal society like Assamese society, women are exploited, dominated, discriminated and become marginalised in every sphere of life. That is why, the status of women somehow determines by the norms of the patriarchal society. The status of women is directly or indirectly related to the following conditions of women which are the ingredients of a patriarchal society.

Exploitation of Women:

A woman in any society like Assamese society has been a victim of humiliation, torture and exploitation. There are many episodes of rape, murder, dowry, burning, wife beating and discrimination in society. Women are a victim of male dominated patriarchal society in every sphere of their life.

Poverty:

As we know that 70% of our people are living in the rural area and most of them are living below poverty line and just surviving with their day-to-day earnings. The girl child is treated as a 'silent lamb' born to suffer all evils in male dominated societies.

Violence:

Culture and tradition have bound the Assamese society since the ancient times. The patriarchal society and the gender stereotypes in the family and society have always shown a preference for the male child. Sons are regarded as a means of social security and women remained under male domination. Due to her subordinated position, she has suffered fears of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. She became the victim of several social evils like child marriage, sati, polygamy, purdah Pratha, female infanticide, forced pregnancy, rape etc. In such incidents, many times, the mother-in-law of the woman also has a role to play. This discrimination and violence against women affect the sex ratio in the society. The main cause of violence are unequal power relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy and economic dependence of women, no participation in the decision-making process etc.

Economic Exploitation:

In every society, women do two types of work i.e. paid and unpaid work. The paid works have been done by work in the public sphere but the unpaid works have been done by women 12 hours in a day without any pay within the private sphere. No one recognise them for their unpaid work rather than all of think that these are their permanent work.

5. EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION

In a patriarchal society, we know that literacy rate of women is much less than men because boys receive more schooling facility than girls. Educational deprivation is intimately associated with poverty. 'Beti Bachao Beti Pado' is also remarkable step by the Government of India to fulfilment the need and aspiration of the girl child. Many laws have also been passed regarding this. A National Commission for Women was set up to act as a watchdog on the women issues in 1992. Many programmes in the areas of education, health and employment have been initiated for development of women, rural as well as urban.

From the above discussion, it is clear that, Patriarchy, which pre-supposes the natural superiority of male over female, shamelessly upholds women's dependence on, and subordination to, man in all spheres of life. Consequently, all the power and authority within the family, the society and the state remain entirely in the hands of men. So, due to patriarchy, women were deprived of their legal rights and opportunities patriarchal values restrict women's mobility, reject their freedom over themselves as well as their property. Subordination means, "Something else is less important than the other thing" (Cobuild 2010:1559). According to Advanced Learners Dictionary, "subordination means having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or an organization" (Hornby 2003:1296). The term 'women's subordination' refers to the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making etc. and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most societies. So, women's subordination means the inferior position of women to men. The feeling of powerlessness, discrimination and experience of limited self-esteem and self-

confidence jointly contribute to the subordination of women. Thus, women's subordination is a situation, where a power relationship exists and men dominate women. The subordination of women is a central feature of all structures of interpersonal domination, but feminists choose different locations and causes of subordination. Contemporary feminist theory begins with Simone de Beauvoir's argument that because men view women as fundamentally different from themselves, women are reduced to the status of the second sex and hence subordinate (Beauvior 1974).

Women's subordination in a society is not only a single field but it occupies every field of their day-to-day life. Religion, tradition, culture and some other societal norms contribute a lot to make women's subordination in Assamese society. The followings are the some of the societal norms which determines the women's position in a patriarchal society like Assamese society.

A Patriarchal society believes that it is only the men who are capable of running social, moral, political and economic life. Women are believed to be weaker both physically and mentally and thus incapable of making important decision on behalf of others.

Obedience is one of the key essentials in a patriarchal society. Every wish and other of the husband or the men of the house is to be strictly adhered to and humility, restraint, respect and obedience must be directly towards the man at all times. Women and Children are not expected to go against anything the patriarch says or does.

In a patriarchal society, every decision of the family such as marriage of the children, education of the children, buying or selling any property are decided by the man alone. There is no any active role or decision-making power of the female counterpart.

In a patriarchal society, a social norm is that all kind of compromise and adjustment should be done by the women counterpart. Women are expected to move from their home to their husband's home after marriage. All are new for the women in this new environment and she has only the way to adjust everything without any objections or complaints from her side.

In a patriarchal society, all kind of domestic violence are allowed i.e. physical and mental but not very openly. Women are expected to be meek and submissive at all times, which may lead to horrifying physical abuse such as rape.

In a patriarchal society, all kind of property rights of the family are in the hand of the male. There is no property right of women.

In some cases, it is also seen that women have no right to go outside of home without husband's permission.

Some of the family not allowed women to job outside after marriage. It is only because of the traditional mindset of the people.

Women have no reproduction rights, right to abortion etc. (x) Some of the family not prefer the girl child and they always prefer the boy child. They always blame the women for the birth of girl child.

All the financial powers are vested in the hand of the men. The so-called thinking is that the men can only do the outside work.

6. CONCLUSION

In a traditional society like Assam, women are always treated as inferior to men in every sphere of life. The male counterpart always uses some proverbs to prove it that women are the subordinate section of the society. But, due to modernisation, increase of working women in different fields, spread of education, role of different women's organisations, role of government played a pivotal role for the raising the status of women in a society. The constitution of India also makes certain provisions of equality in the society. But still, there are many miles to go to reach out the goal of gender equality.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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