
Surviving An 18th Century Mindset: A Narrative Of The Patriarchal Society And The Distressed Mothers In India.

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Abstract

For those unfamiliar with the term, patriarchy is a societal structure in which men hold positions of authority and women are expected to submit to men in positions of power. They have authority within the context of their own family and its difficulties, in addition to the typical paternal authority they hold. When money and rank are passed down via male heirs, as is usual in nations with a patriarchal social structure, this is called a "patrilineal" inheritance. Feminists often advocate for a return to a matriarchal society as an alternative to the patriarchal system. There have been many distinct forms of patriarchy throughout human history, each reflecting a unique cultural context. Some believe that patriarchal culture is at the root of women's oppression. The impacts of patriarchy are a significant topic of study in the social sciences and humanities. The term "patriarchy" is becoming widely used. It is as at home in casual conversation or describing an object in English as it is in any of the languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent. When translated literally, the phrase means "the father or the eldest male member within the household has total power over all other guys." This is one possible structure for a whole phrase: Some sources [no reference provided] claim that Perspectives have shifted recently in India's discussions of patriarchy and socialism, making the discussion more difficult. Studies and analyses did not just concentrate on patriarchy's connections to capitalism. The new focus point of patriarchal analysis in India was production and reproduction. The activities of the Indian state were understood in the context of more fundamental social structures including the home, the family, kinship, caste, and religion. New directions in classic feminist philosophy were explored at extensively during the Indian conversation.

Keywords: Patriarchal Society, Distressed Mothers, Empowerment, Women Treated Unequally

Introduction:

Mothers in contemporary India are struggling in various measures irrespective of their caste, class, education, wealth or employment. Of all the factors affecting the status of women in India, the most consequential one is the mindset of son preference in India. The overwhelming prejudice against the girl child is causing unthinkable suffering for the mothers. While the birth of a son brings more respect or acceptance for the mother the birth of a girl child seemingly brings financial burden to the family. Patel T. asks, "How does one understand the political economy of emotions towards progeny and reproduction." (Patel T 887) Education is universally envisioned as the key to women's empowerment and emancipation in any development policy

targeted towards women. However, education and financial independence has not altered the status of women in Indian households.

Objectives:

1. Discuss about illusion of empowerment
2. Discuss about Legal Interventions to Save the Girl Child
3. Discuss about Education and Wealth Fails to Make an Impact
4. Discuss about Single women in India

Review of Literature

Married working women receive greater attention than single working women, according to the review of the literature (**Karl, 2009**). Additionally, it is clear that organised working women are receiving more attention than unorganised working women (**Shalz, 2011**). Increasing workplace accommodations for women, according to Eggins (1997), "is a critical part of development strategy as well as an act of social justice." Indian women account approximately one-third of the labour force, based on figures from the World Bank (1991). "Women's engagement in the labour force is vital for economic development and population planning," asserts Singhal (1995).

Wentling (2003) showed that The tension that arises from women's dual duties is caused by her society's framework, which is still more prevalent. She has shown through her research on Delhi's working women that the old authoritarian Hindu social structure is largely unchanged, and as a result, women still struggle with role conflict. Men and women's attitudes toward the situation can be changed to help them solve their problem.

Sophia J. Ali (2011) —examined the challenges women encounter when succeeding in their careers. She found that career development opportunities for women were discriminated against, and the majority of female employees were dissatisfied with career development initiatives. Businesses should make an effort to ensure that professional development programmes are created to assist female employees in advancing their careers, according to the survey. It is vital to address women's professional development, and top management should be dedicated to doing so. Affirmative action should be used by organisations.

The Historical Perspective:

India being one of the oldest civilizations in the world has evolved a culture where women or the feminine aspect is worshipped as Goddess in temples. During the Vedic period, hymns were composed to glorify the goddess. Subsequently, the context of the Vedas filtered down to everyday life. Women owing to her naturally nurturing disposition and being the birth givers were assigned the primary role of caregiver for children and family. Men owing to their strong physiology were assigned the task of earning a living for the family and households. Malashri Lal says that „ The biological need of motherhood has contributed to the elevated status of that role for women. The 'natural' progression into both the wife and caretaker roles.“ (5)

These natural laws became redundant and regressive when the monetary economy took root into the civilization and men started to use their control over finances as instrument of power over women and began to suppress or even abuse women. Following the adage, that woman belongs in the kitchen/home while man

goes outside to claim his financial, socio-political power. They brought home the same sense of control and power and enforced it on women, who are supposed to be their equal. „Women in Vedic culture were held in high esteem because they were seen as capable of seeing the truth and making valuable contributions to human society, not only as mothers who brought out the next generation. There is much that modern society can learn from that period.“(Devi NJ, Subrahmanyam K 3) Subjected to oppression, women started to aspire for tools that would enable them to acquire the capacity to earn money which were primarily education and work opportunities.

Single women in India

There is no fixed, universal, or consistent definition of "single." It's permeable, extremely changeable, and spans a broad swath of possibilities. A woman who is not married is considered "single" in the traditional sense of the term. Nevertheless, the precise meaning of "single lady" is debatable, as it may evolve in several ways depending on the circumstances. However, the legal age of consent in a person's culture at the period in question may have a role in this. Women of marriageable age who are not in a committed relationship are categorised as "single women," regardless of whether or not they want to get married in the future. In contrast to the past, modern singles face less social consequences for their status. It first appeared in contemporary discussions on feminism. For convenience's sake, many different types of people who share the commonality of being unmarried are lumped together under the umbrella term "single." Traditional nuclear families continue to be valued in modern Indian culture, and single people are often looked down upon. The fact that she is unmarried is troublesome in the eyes of the government and the general public because of the importance placed on a woman's marital status and the number of children she has in Indian society. (2015 India Restrictions Report)

The social stigma of being unmarried is exacerbated by our patriarchal society and the contemporary cultural climate. It's fairly uncommon to use "single" as a synonym for "gender" when referring to individuals. The social, cultural, and, frequently, legal and administrative concepts of singleness put women at a disadvantage who choose to stay or become single for a variety of reasons. Since the start of mankind, people have pondered the subject of a woman's worth and the extent to which she is recognised in society. Once upon a time, women had the same rights as males in all institutional settings: the home, the neighbourhood, the church, the classroom, and the political arena. When compared to other civilizations, their level of education, understanding, wisdom, management, morality, and spiritual development was significantly superior. They had a major impact on many areas of daily life and the final result. However, things have gone from bad to worse for them over the years. When it comes to education, Rousseau believes that women should have the same rights as males. Women are our property because nature designed them to be subservient to males. Women should be educated from an early age that it is their responsibility to make the lives of men and women happy and fulfilling via a lifetime of service centred on pleasing and caring for them. Just like a gardener's fruit tree, they are our property. What a revolutionary idea, promoting gender parity! "(Neshla, 1994)

Categories of Single Women

According to the National Forum for Single Women's Rights, this concept applies to wives of deceased husbands and other women in the following groups. abandoned, fled, got a divorce, got a separation, or just walked out Women: This includes a substantial proportion of women who were previously involved in marriage-like relationships but are currently single. Although the bulk of the women in this group were abandoned or left by their husbands without going through the correct legal channels, some of the women in this group had lawfully divorced their husbands. Still others have been expelled from their homes, and more others have left abusive marriages. All of these women identify as "Single." women above the age of 30 who have never been married and do not plan on doing so anytime soon. Missing husbands refers to married women whose husbands have vanished. According to Krishnakumar (1987), who studied the problems faced by single, unmarried women, these women generally face a wide range of problems that call for in-depth analysis. They are dual and appear in both the home and the business. One is the product of internal struggles brought on by commitment and concern, and the other is a result of the real difficulty of balancing responsibilities to both their job at home and their employment.

Single unmarried women face multiple problems. They are as follows:

a) **Stress:** Single women's lives are significantly impacted by stress. According to (Cooper & Davidson, 1983), one of the major sources of stress for women who live alone is typically a lack of domestic and emotional assistance. The five main problems and stressors that single women experience most commonly are financial, occupational, familial, neighbourhood, and feelings of anxiety for the future, according to Jethani (1994).

b) **Stigma:** Women's "success" in modern culture is measured by whether or not they marry. The stigma of being a "single woman" endures in contemporary society, despite the fact that societal views toward single males are frequently more welcoming than those toward single women. Society has a hard time seeing beyond the limitations of a single woman's age and her lack of a partner. Women who do not get married are often looked down upon by society. Many people believe that marriage is a woman's only path to equality in society. According to (DeBeauvoir, 1997)

c) **Social Problems :**Men, for whatever reason, adjust to singlehood more easily than women do. A single man has little time for loneliness due to the pressures of society. Most of the time he has enough money to maintain a routine that brings him happiness (Ratra 2006). He claims that women have cultural obstacles that men do not. It's possible that she would rather not go out on her own. Furthermore, there are various challenges that emerge in old age, such as financial and social isolation, both of which may endure for a very long time. To be single and not married is no longer acceptable in today's society. Common belief is that encountering one is bad luck, hence most people try to avoid them. Without a spouse, "she will face the rubbish insults from society," wrote Blumberg and Dwaraki (1980). In spite of the fact that social pressures on women to find love and settle down may seem to be lessening, many still struggle with issues such as finding affordable accommodation, reliable transportation, and trustworthy friends. As the world is now dominated by males, it is difficult for lone women to succeed. Without a husband, a woman's social standing may be shaky, and she may even be harassed by members of her own family or by the community at large.

Unmarried women's low social status is due, in large part, to the prejudice and discrimination they face because of their status as single people, as well as the restrictions and limitations society imposes on them (Krishnikumary, 1987). Under such circumstances, it seems to reason that people would experience a broad spectrum of mental health problems. These days, the experience of being a single woman varies widely depending on a woman's socioeconomic status and the region in which she resides. Those who have been left behind in rural India, such as widows and abandoned spouses, may be considered Dayan's victims (witches). It's possible that unmarried women in major Indian cities have a negative reputation. It's more common for people to be isolated.

d) **Psychological Problems:** Because of the antagonism they encounter in society, single women often struggle with mental health concerns including emotional instability, loneliness, and inferiority complexes. Based on the research of Krishnakumary (1987), these individuals suffer from profound feelings of psychological insecurity, a variety of inner conflicts, and the searing anguish of permanent solitude. Living in a patriarchal society is a continual uphill battle for them. Many people who are dedicated to their careers choose to remain single, but this does not prevent them from experiencing loneliness and relationship insecurity. Loneliness is the unpleasant feeling of isolation, shown as a lack of desire for companionship or the absence of meaningful social ties.

e) **Economic and Employment:** Problems Single women who rely on their own income are in a far more precarious situation. These ladies are tormented by their own family and relatives since they are unable to work and support themselves financially. This inescapable sense of helplessness is a major contributor to their wretched quality of life (Krishnakumary 1987). There seems to be a greater variety of difficulties experienced by non-working singles than by working single women. They have little financial stability, prefer to spend most of their time at home, and, as a result of their family's reliance on them for support, must perform menial tasks around the house from morning until night, even though their family members do not appreciate or compensate them for their efforts.

f) **Accommodation Problems:** Beyond these issues, there are tangible barriers that single working women must overcome. The lack of sufficient working women's hostels and apartments is a big issue since most of these women work in large cities. The lack of affordable accommodation in close proximity to key employment centres discourages people from making a life-changing move in quest of better opportunities. An increasing share of metropolitan women are choosing to remain alone and work outside the home. However, there is a severe shortage of affordable, secure housing options. When screening potential tenants, club and apartment complex owners routinely reject applications from single women on the grounds that they are of dubious character and would "lure" males. To my surprise (Bhandare, 2017).

The Illusion of Empowerment:

Working mothers in India, irrespective of the challenging roles they are handling at workplace, are tacitly obligated to play a certain role in the family. For example, ensuring that family members have their proper meals on time or medicines/groceries are well stocked. Any shortcoming or deflection from this routine implies that she is unable to fulfill her role of a mother and a wife because she is prioritizing her work. Hence independence becomes a double-edged sword because the cultural and societal pressure ensures that the

women remains tied to the traditional role of a wife, mother and daughter in law even with education and empowerment. It is ensured that they remain guilt ridden for prioritizing their work over their children, husband or in-laws. Working mothers are in a default state of begging for leave from work if a child gets sick or if there is a crisis at home. She stays awake in the night, looking after the sick child and she is required to handle office work the next morning. Even weekend plans are largely determined through a tunneled vision of what is preferred by the husband, in-laws or children.

The media portrayal of successful Indian mothers is almost a cliché that is exemplified by a recent advertisement of one of the leading telecom provider raising eyebrows through its portrayal of empowered women. „There has been significant discussion over the appropriate roles for women and men in today's society in light of the new Airtel commercial touting the superiority of their smart phone network.“ (Das B., The Economic Times) Renowned media advocacy activist, Sharada A.L. observes the stereotyping of women's role in the Indian household as she comments on the same Airtel advertisement that „ shows the women as being the boss of her husband in the office, she is also shown as a woman who cooks a lavish meal for her husband once she returns home after a hard day at work, thus glorifying the double burden of working women.“

In other words, the façade of liberated, financially independent and empowered working moms is a painful one to carry. Indian working mothers willingly go through the toil because the idea of losing their financial independence or the inability to utilize their education that they worked hard to attain is even more painful to bear. Indra Nooyi, CEO of Pepsico India, affirms it saying “you cant have it all” then she goes about narrating how one evening at 10 pm, she headed home to tell her mom that she has been nominated to be the President and the Board of directors of the company and was promptly asked to fetch milk for the morning. Even though her husband who was home early, was not asked to bring milk because he was tired and asleep. (McGregor J, Washington Post)

In India even today, the inequality remains stark as working mothers are encouraged to bring the money home but are not separated from their cumbersome household responsibilities. Working mothers are inadvertently living a life of tremendous stress of managing the role of a mom, wife, employee/boss, daughter-in-laws, etc.

Why Are Women Treated Unequally?

Over centuries the gender roles in their execution have changed drastically but the belief system still remains unfavorable for women in a male dominated society. In the Indian society the preference for sons and a declining sex ratio is beginning to create a demographically alarming trend. Some scholars have even termed it as a “silent emergency”. (Rasheed A.R. 2) The patrilineal context of Indian society puts an enormous significance on having a son as a security for their old age and nurturing one's daughters is similar to “watering neighbor's garden”. (The Washington Times - Monday, February 26, 2007)

Vanneman, Desai and Vikram K. observe „the subordinate status of women in the family symbolizes the primacy of the parent-son relationship. Son preference becomes natural under these circumstances.“(6) The gender roles are deeply etched on Indian psyche, Rameeza Rasheed explains why preference are given to the sons in the Indian milieu „soOnly ns are obligated to care for their elderly parents, pay for their siblings'

college and weddings, take on the family's debt, attend their parents' funerals, offer a dowry, recoup the cost of their parents' schooling, run the family company, and guard the family estate..“(2)

Recent precedent-setting ruling by the Indian Supreme Court held that daughters share equal duty in caring for their parents in old age. According to Chawla B., "the High Court rejected the claim that a married daughter has responsibilities exclusively towards her husband's family and not to her own parents" in the case of Vasant vs. GovindraoUpasrao Naik (Criminal Revision Application No. 172/2014). The Supreme Court held in the 1973 case of V.M. Arbat v. K.R. Sawai that it is also the responsibility of daughters to care for their ageing parents. The judgement was hailed by advocates for women's rights as a positive one. It was seen as „strengthening women's cause for equal rights (especially inheritance rights).“(Dhanda A. pg. 116) However, judicial decisions continue to exist more in the realm of legal precedent than in everyday application.

Plight of Mothers Giving Birth to Daughters:

For a mother all her children are the same whether girls or boys but the cultural nuances create an environment of willful neglect in terms of nutrition, health and educational opportunities for girls. The son preference is so deeply rooted that the trails of sex selective abortions are clearly being observed even within the immigrant populations of UK and Canada that are originating from the India. “After finding out the gender of their pregnant child, many British women of subcontinental ancestry are taken aback by the encouragement of their in-laws to have an abortion.(Baez G A.)

After Chamberlain G.'s Rekha failed to give birth to a son, her mother-in-law poured paraffin (wax) on her to burn her alive as punishment. Thankfully, her neighbours came to her rescue and spared her life. Rekha said it best when she said, "For any mother a daughter is not a burden, but for a family it is." Chamberlain cites an article by a senior researcher at The Center for Social Research who states, "In India today, if you are blessed with a boy you are nearly worshipped, and if you are the mother of females you are made to feel guilty, and your place within your own family goes own."(Chamberlain 1,3)

As India wakes up to the impending demographic crises with a sex ratio of 914 girls for every 1000 boys according to Census of India 2011 report. The government has floated schemes such as “save the girl child” scheme to correct this imbalance by offering monetary benefits for parents with daughters. However, the folly lies in assuming this daughter aversion is existent only amongst the uneducated, poor rural masses. The educated elites are equally submissive and participant to a culture of son preference in a predominantly patrilineal and patrilocal society. (Vanneman R, Desai S, Vikram K, 6). „Independent of a desire for sons, dislike of daughters as both a feeling and a habit has become the norm.“(John Mary, Kaur R., Palriwala R. and Raju S. 18)

Legal Interventions to Save the Girl Child:

As a means of preventing female foeticide, the Indian government passed the Prenatal Diagnostics Technique Act (PNDTA) on September 20, 1994.(Bhakwani A 133) It was amended in 2003 to include pre conception sex selection within its regulation; it then became the PCPNDTA (Pre Conception-Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques Act.) In spite of these laws being in place India is reported to have the highest rate of second trimester abortion, which indicates that they are predominantly sex selective in nature. The second semester

abortion have an adverse impact on mother's health and well-being and in many cases it poses a threat to their lives.

In states like Punjab and Haryana with predominantly agrarian society, high value is placed on sons as inheritors of the agricultural land and daughters are viewed as a heavy expense that has to be paid in dowry. A few decades back, mobile ultrasound clinics cropped up which are not easy to track or monitor legally. They even advertised that couples could save money on dowry by getting an ultrasound to get rid of a possible girl fetus. During the 1980s posters could be seen at public places saying „better invest 500 now rather than Rs.50,000 later.“ After another ten years these posters read „better invest 5000 now rather than Rs.500,000 later.“ (Kaur M. 90)

Many pregnant women comply from the fear of facing harassment from the in-laws if it's a girl child. „Female feticide was seen as a means of eliminating surplus females, with the rationale that it was preferable to sin once and eliminate the foetus than to force the woman to suffer unjustly for the rest of her life.“. (Kaur M. 95)

The government is unsuccessful in trying to address the issue of maternal mortality rate resulting from medical termination of pregnancy. There are other unspoken and unaddressed issues of the affect of these forced or voluntary abortions on the emotional and mental health of these mothers-to be. Addressing it with effective policies and support is a distant goal. Even full recognition or acknowledgement of the issue of mother's mental health remains to be addressed. In many situations religious sanctions and family pressure do not allow women to use contraceptives. In such a situation mothers are subjected to abortions as the only alternative in case of unwanted pregnancy or after the determination of sex of the fetus. In many incidences women let the husband or the in-laws make the choices of her reproductive health because of her financial dependency.

Education and Wealth Fails to Make an Impact:

There are several cases in courts where women were harassed by the husband or the in-laws for giving birth to girls or were forced to abort girl fetus and domestic violence arising as a result of that. The case of Pooja Chautala Mann made national headlines when her High Court Advocate husband Mohit Maan was captured on video mercilessly beating up his daughter, who wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to protect her mother, sister and herself from being harassed and beaten up by the father and his family. The abuse indicates that the malaise is not confined to illiterate or the poor population alone but educated elite is treating women the same way. „The sources quote his wife as saying that over their 15 years of marriage, he was abusive toward her since she failed to produce a son..'(Dainik Bhaskar)

Medical professionals have devised creative ways to circumvent the laws, for example, to clandestinely reveal the gender of the fetus the ultrasound reports are signed in specific colors indicating the sex of the fetus. It is rampantly being practiced and couples seeking to have son arrange for abortions, which is legally allowed. The laws by themselves are created quasi-efficient or malleable enough to easily subject women to coerced abortions in order to eliminate the possibility of a girl child.

Dr Mitu Khurana's case is an outstanding example of the laxity of law regarding the prenatal determination of sex of the baby. Dr. Khurana a qualified pediatrician was tricked into getting an ultrasound during the 16th week of her pregnancy and was pressurized by the in-laws to go through abortion when they found out she was pregnant with twin girls. She fled her in-laws house to save her twin daughters, but lost her 11 yearlong legal battle against her husband and his family. „Neither doctors nor patients in the nation see gender testing as a violation of the law, therefore this reflects reality. Indeed, that's a terrible idea to contemplate. Approximately half a million young women lose their lives each year, and I fear that figure might climb to a million. To quote BBC News' George S. Dr. Khurana lamented, "Even as an educated woman I am pushed about." She felt the system was indifferent to her suffering. (Chamberlain G 5)

The quest for a son is evident amongst the educated elites, an article from Times News Network quoted doctor Abha Majumdar Head of Center for Reproductive Technology at a leading hospital in New Delhi “ since sex selection in any method is illegal in India, a PGD (Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis) from Thailand or Jordan is turning out to be a perfect way around the law.” (The Times of India Oct 22 2011) A trip to Thailand and an IVF treatment there costs around \$8500-\$9000, which affluent class is happy to spend for a baby boy.

Richard Burton Sanchez, a consultant at Gender Selection Bangkok says, “We have had many frantic emails from Indian women asking, can you please tell me what's going to happen? It's the men who want an heir and are being proactive, while the women are not so keen on IVF and are happier to have a girl”. Mother's opinion is clearly undermined before the husband and his families desire to have a male heir to inherit their wealth and business. (Straus R)

The feminist perspective on abortions in India is multi-faceted and complex. On one hand women right movements advocate for the legal right of a woman to abort an unwanted pregnancy on the other hand they acknowledge the same legal provisions are being misused to get rid of the girl foetus. In any situation women end up losing their right over their own bodies.

Conclusion:

The natural laws that were molded into societal rules that emerged from a deep reverence and respect for the feminine got corrupted and today mothers bear the brunt of those rigid rules set up to control and subordinate women. Education in such a scenario is seen as a wasted investment on girls, families would rather save money on their dowry. Even educated and employed women wade through a culture of violence against women, where they are harassed, even teased and raped when they step outside the security of their home to attain financial security. „The tendency to withdraw women from external employment is also influenced by the safety perception about the workplace and the road leading to it“ (Agnihotri S 4359)

Sticking to the old mindset out of social compulsion and habit is no justification for continued harassment of women in the modern Indian milieu. Faris Nada puts forward a sound argument „For thousands of years, nothing needs to change. Not that things can't change; rather, we're just stuck in our ways because we refuse to choose anything better. “real”.“ (Nada F 134) In spite of all barriers and hardships Indian mothers are silently keeping the torch of change alight through education, media advocacy, judicial activism, social

support, social intervention and most importantly through pure grit of a mother to keep her children safe and to keep herself moving forward against all odds.

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