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## Research Article

## Patriarchy vs. Matrilini: A Study of Indian English Fiction

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## ARTICLE INFORMATION

## ABSTRACT

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*Change is the law of nature and everynight is followed by a day. This article focuses on the women awareness with the rise of education the women found their identity and they also started crossing the walls of patriarchy and they started awakening from their long slumber.*

India has small pockets of matriliney, but as we have already observed there is no evidence of the prevalence of matriarchy. In matrilineal communities descent is traced through women, but political power generally rests with the men. Land and other property is inherited in the female line; but its management is done by men. The matrilineal system does confer some special dignity and status on women, though male and female spheres of activity and control continue to be marked. There is a Khasi saying: "War and politics are for men while property and children are for women". Among them, the rulers, the chiefs, and power-wielding "elders" are all male, but women have important economic roles. Khasi women, for example, run small shops and engage in local trade. The Nayars, who form part of the Hindu society of Kerala land lords or non-cultivating tenants; their women were home bound and men took up military service. In their Tarawad (Matrilineal joint household among Nayars of Kerala), property was owned and inherited by women, but it was evoked after by the Karnavar-manager-who was always a male. This function, both among the Nayar and the Khasi, is generally performed by the maternal uncle or elder brother. The pattern is much the same among the matrilineal Muslims of the Lakshadweep Islands. Only in some matrilineages in Kerala and Karnataka were women entitled to headship of the domestic group.

Matriliny is under stress; the contemporary social environment is compelling some changes in its functioning. The market economy, modern education, increased geographical mobility and new employment opportunities are

major factors for change. In husband, wife and children units, especially in alien settings, matriliney cannot work in quite the same way as it did in a traditional setting. The Nayar Tarawads are disintegrating because new legislation has altered the underlying principle of marriage and has conferred on individuals the right to a share in ancestral property. Taking into account self-earned property, the Khasis are also initiating changes in their law. However, matrilineal ideology is not likely to be totally eroded because women will continue to perpetuate the line, will have a share in ancestral property, and will demand the status and respect that was conferred on them by their traditional norms and values.

In respect of role allocation, distinction is made between "men's work" and "women's work". The management of the household is invariably in the women's sphere. If they cannot hire domestic help- only a few can afford it-women must handle all the domestic chores like drawing water, cooking, cleaning the house, washing the clothes of men and children as well as their own, and looking after the children. Men are usually ridiculed if found undertaking any of these functions. A man may do so only when the wife is away or ill and there is no other woman to take charge. This notion is so deeply ingrained that even women in professions and full-time jobs are expected additionally to continue looking after household affairs; many women have a sense of inadequacy, if not of guilt, when they cannot attend to their domestic responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to look after the affairs of the world

outside the home. They are expected to provide for the family and to function as arbiters of its discontents and conflicts.

Men dominate, but women also have ways of getting things done according to their desires and wishes. And in lower so called castes and classes they have a substantial share in the economic pursuits of the domestic group. They may not wield the plough, but they contribute in diverse ways to agriculture. Women in the families of artisans have well-defined roles in carrying out the traditional craft. Their contribution to the household economy thus, cannot be ignored. In the higher social groups, men used to be the providers, but even this is changing fast. Women are entering the public services and professions and earning regular services. The trend has to be accepted; partly because of increasing costs and the demands of higher-standard of living. But men do not relish being maintained by their wives, and their ego is hurt when their wives earn more. The emerging ethos does not favour patriarchy, but the hangover of the past is often unrelenting. Society is adapting itself to the altered scenario, though the pace of adaptation is very slow.

The patrilineal part of Hindu society expects several 'virtues' in a woman. The first among them is Chastity. Before marriage, a woman should not think of any man in sexual terms; after marriage, of no man other than her husband. The second virtue is devotion to her husband. The notion of 'Pati Parmeshwar' – the husband as the supreme God – is widely referred to and women observe several fasts to ensure that they get the same husband life after life. Such fasts also include prayers for the long life of the husband, so that the wife does not have to undergo the sufferings of widowhood. The much discussed idea of sati involves a woman in immolating herself on the pyre of her husband. Of course, there is a legal ban on the practice and cases of sati are indeed rare in contemporary India. What is important in this context is the powerful hold that the ideal has on the Hindu mind. Sati sites are often developed into shrines and fairs held there attract huge crowds. The third virtue is that, a wife is expected to mould herself in the pattern of the family into which she is married and merge her individual identity into that of her husband. She was after all, meant to be her husband's "shadow" and had to follow him through the course of life. In the hour of need, she must stand by him, adding her strength to his.

These, it should be added were meant to be ideal values and it was recognized that not many could live upto them. Thus, several castes and communities – in fact, a substantial majority in the population – permit divorce and widow re-marriage. In the culture of poverty, adherence to such norms is not possible. The norms in tribal groups and in matrilineal groups are different. But some domestic virtues like thrift, hard work, and consideration for other members of the family are expected in all communities and at all levels of society. The infertility of a woman was considered a curse; in patrilineal groups she is expected to produce a son to continue the line. In matrilineal societies this was not considered a necessity, though it was desirable. But even among them, as in patrilineal societies, procreation is a social necessity and a value.

The implementation of norms and values depends to a great extent on the strength and weakness of control mechanisms. Articulation of values and the prescription of norms in socio-religious texts do not apply their automatic observance; even when tradition was strong, mediatory efforts

and intervention by elders and social institutions like the Jati Panchayat or village Panchayat were necessary to resolve conflicts and to force recalcitrant members to comply with the normative structure. Notions of honour and shame are strong in the higher castes and upper classes. They make special efforts not to let family affairs come out into the open and meditation is done by elders of the concerned household as well as the women's parents and important members of her kin group. In the lower castes and classes generally secrets cannot be kept and intervention becomes necessary. They are also sensitive about shame, but they cannot afford to be very particular about it. Family honour is protected by wife-beating and violence to the offending parties. The extent of intra-family violence cannot be measured. It is all too visible in the lower classes, but it also persists in the upper strata. Even after six decades of Independence one frequently reads of bride burning and dowry deaths. Other forms of lesser violence are: heaping indignities on the wife and her relations on the paternal side, making the wife do too much work with little rest, failing to provide her adequate nutrition, and even torturing her mentally on several scores. Even highly educated and well-placed women are not immune to such maltreatment.

Unequal gender relations and injustices perpetuated on women have attracted the attention of social reformers, many of whom have come out in support of their cause. Some of the medieval saint-poets preached the gospel of extending more humane and just treatment to women. Social and Religious Reform Movements the Brahmo Samaj, Prathana Samaj, Arya Samaj and some Muslim Reform Movements – had the component of improving the rights and status of women on their agenda. They were generally against social and legal inequalities and gave special attention to the problems of child marriage, the treatment of widows, denial of property rights to women, and women's education.

Law, education, and now economic and political opportunities, could have altered the situation rapidly, but the State moved cautiously, perhaps because it did not want to tread on the cultural sensitivities of communities in a tradition-bound-society.

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