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## Research Paper

# Hiccups in Patriarchal Structures

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

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### ABSTRACT

Change is a natural part of life, and just as every night is followed by a day, transformation is inevitable. This article highlights the growing awareness among women. With increased access to education, women have discovered their true identities, begun to challenge the constraints of patriarchy, and awakened from a prolonged state of passivity.

India has small pockets where matriliney exists, but there is no evidence of matriarchy being prevalent. In matrilineal societies, lineage is traced through women, yet political power typically resides with men. While land and property are inherited through the female line, their management is usually handled by men. The matrilineal system does grant women a certain level of dignity and status, though the division of male and female roles remains distinct. A Khasi proverb reflects this division: "War and politics are for men, while property and children are for women." Among the Khasi, men hold positions of power as rulers, chiefs, and elders, but women play significant economic roles, such as running small businesses and engaging in local trade.

Similarly, among the Nayars of Kerala, who belong to the Hindu landlord class or non-cultivating tenants, property was owned and inherited by women but managed by the male karnavar (household manager), usually a maternal uncle or elder brother. This pattern is also seen among the matrilineal Muslims of the Lakshadweep Islands. However, in some matrilineages in Kerala and Karnataka, women were entitled to head the domestic group.

Matriliney is facing challenges in the modern social environment. Factors such as the market economy, modern education, geographical mobility, and new employment opportunities are driving changes. In nuclear family settings, especially in non-traditional contexts, matriliney cannot operate as it once did. The disintegration of Nayar tarawads is a result of new legislation altering marriage principles and granting individuals rights to ancestral property. Similarly, the Khasis are beginning to revise their inheritance laws to accommodate self-earned property. Despite these changes, matrilineal ideology is unlikely to vanish entirely, as women will continue to uphold lineage, retain shares in ancestral property, and demand respect and status rooted in traditional norms.

In terms of role allocation, there remains a clear distinction between "men's work" and "women's work." Women are expected to manage household responsibilities, including tasks such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and caring for children. Men are generally ridiculed if they engage in domestic chores unless their wives are absent or unwell. This traditional mindset is so entrenched that even women in full-time professions are expected to handle household duties, often feeling inadequate or guilty when unable to do so. Meanwhile, men are expected to focus on external affairs, further reinforcing gender roles.

Men are traditionally expected to provide for their families and act as mediators in resolving disputes and conflicts. While men hold dominant roles, women often find subtle ways to achieve their desires and influence outcomes. Among lower castes and classes, women play significant roles in the household economy, contributing to agriculture and assisting in traditional crafts, even if they do not perform tasks like plowing. Their contributions are integral to the domestic group's

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sustenance. In higher social groups, men were once the sole providers, but this is rapidly changing as women enter public services, professions, and earn independent incomes. This shift is partly driven by rising living costs and the pursuit of higher standards of living. However, many men struggle with the idea of being financially supported by their wives, especially when women earn more, reflecting a persistent ego clash. While patriarchal norms are evolving, remnants of traditional values remain deeply ingrained, and societal adaptation has been slow.

In patrilineal Hindu society, certain virtues are expected of women. Chastity is paramount, with women expected to remain pure before marriage and loyal to their husbands after marriage. Devotion to one's husband is another ideal, reflected in the concept of Pati Parmeshwar (husband as supreme deity), which encourages women to observe fasts and rituals for their husbands' well-being and long lives. The now-outlawed practice of sati—a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre—once symbolized ultimate devotion. While rare today, the concept still holds sway in cultural memory, with sati sites often becoming pilgrimage spots. Additionally, a woman is expected to adapt fully to her husband's family, merging her identity with his and supporting him through life's challenges. These ideals, however, were aspirational, and many communities, especially in lower castes and tribal or matrilineal groups, permitted divorce and widow remarriage. Regardless of societal norms, virtues like thrift, hard work, and family care are universally expected.

Infertility, particularly the inability to bear sons in patrilineal communities, has been historically stigmatized, as producing a male heir is essential to continue the lineage. In matrilineal societies, this pressure is less intense, though procreation remains a social necessity. The enforcement of these norms has relied on community-based mechanisms like village or caste councils to mediate disputes and ensure adherence. In higher castes, notions of honor and shame discourage public exposure of family issues, with conflict resolution often handled discreetly by family elders. In lower classes, where such discretion may not be possible, interventions by kin groups or local authorities are more common. Violence, including wife-beating and other forms of abuse, has been used to enforce conformity, and despite progress, practices like dowry-related violence and bride-burning persist. These issues affect women across social strata, including educated and professionally successful individuals.

The persistent gender inequalities and injustices have prompted attention from social reformers over time. Medieval saint-poets advocated for humane treatment of women, while 19th and early 20th-century reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, and various Muslim reform initiatives sought to improve women's rights. These movements addressed issues such as child marriage, widow mistreatment, denial of property rights, and lack of access to education for women.

## Conclusion

Although legal reforms, education, and economic opportunities have brought some changes, progress has been slow. The cautious approach of the State, perhaps influenced by cultural sensitivities in a tradition-bound society, has often delayed more transformative action.

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