

Feminist Writings
Prof. Avishek Parui
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Management, Madras
Understanding Patriarchy – Part 5

So hello and welcome to this NPTEL course on Feminist Writing, so we are looking at Bell Hook's essay on Understanding Patriarchy, which I am hoping we hopefully begin to wind up and we will hope to end the essay today. In the last section we talked about how Hook's offers some very interesting and complex anecdotal evidence about her own life in terms of being a child and growing up in a very patriarchal family, a female child growing up in a very patriarchal family, and also the example that she gave of the partner, the friend of her who had a very interesting transaction from being a sensitive, meek person to being a patriarchal "macho" person, and how that shift into machoness got him more visibility and agency in a comparative office space.

So these things become very interesting examples, and those also simplify how patriarchy reward you, like any grand narrative would reward you for confirming to it. So if you confirm to patriarchy, or if you confirm to any grand narrative and in this case grand narrative being patriarchy, we find that you get reward such as visibility, agency, respect, respectability, etc. so obviously that becomes an incentive for people to drop the guard, to drop that subversive persona and then become just plain and passive conformist to that titular grand narrative.

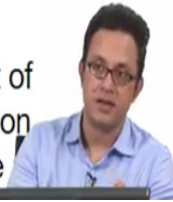
Now one of the interesting thing which this essay has done already is that it looks at patriarchy almost as a medical condition, as a condition which affects us medically, which affects as a disease, and she says quite clearly that unless we can address the problem at its core level by acknowledging and articulating it, this (1:53) chance that we get, that we have in terms of moving away from it and deconstructing it.

Because she says quite clearly that there is a degree of reticence, a degree of reluctance, to actually name the word, patriarchy. Let alone discuss it or address it or unpack it. So unless you can name the word patriarchy, unless you can name the problem as patriarchy at core level, then obviously it becomes almost next to impossible to move on and then dissect and deconstruct it.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:24)

Until we can collectively acknowledge the damage patriarchy causes and the suffering it creates, we cannot address male pain. We cannot demand for men the right to be whole, to be givers and sustainers of life. Obviously some patriarchal men are reliable and even benevolent caretakers and providers, but still they are imprisoned by a system that undermines their mental health.

Patriarchy promotes insanity. It is at the root of the psychological ills troubling men in our nation. Nevertheless there is no mass concern for the



And this is what she says in deconstruction which should be on your screen. Where she says quite clearly, that until we can collectively acknowledge the damage that patriarchy causes and the suffering it creates, we cannot address male pain. Now interestingly as I may have mentioned already, one of the interesting and refreshingly radical things which this essay does, is that it completely problematizes the ontology and exponentiality of victimhood. I will say it again it problematizes the ontology and exponentiality of the victimhood in a sense that it looks at how first victim of patriarchy are the men who, you know inherit patriarchy unquestionably and then become perpetrators of patriarchy.

And obviously this inheritance and subsequent perpetration uh make then move away from there true agency and there true argentic selves, and they become like you know confirming machines, confirming codes in the grand narrative of patriarchy. So the main pain is the lack of agency, so the male pain over here is the effect patriarchy has as a condition as a discursive cultural almost medical condition as Hook's sees it.

We cannot demand from men the right to be whole, to be givers and sustainers of life. So unless we can address the problem of patriarchy, unless we can collectively acknowledge the problem of patriarchy we cannot expect men, you know to become whole.

So the idea of fragmentation becomes quite important in this particular essay and Hook's is quite clear uh in saying that the people who perpetrate patriarchy, men who perpetrate patriarchy, they become fragmented themselves as they move away from there holistic and whole understanding of their own argentic self and then they become passive perpetrators of a particular patriarchal code, of a particular patriarchal narrative, uh a particular patriarchal performance.

So we cannot expect them to be whole, we cannot expect them to be holistic or sensitive, or givers and sustainers of life unless we collectively address the problem of patriarchy, we collectively acknowledge and articulate the problem of patriarchy.

Now obviously some patriarchal men are reliable, and even benevolent care takers and providers, but still they are imprisoned by a system that undermines their mental health. So again this becomes almost a mental health problem, uh as examined by Hook's and she says that you know, patriarchy affects through psychologically, patriarchy is a form of psychological violence, psychological terrorism and it can create traumatic experiences, it can generate traumatic experiences, so unless we look at patriarchy as a problem, as almost a medical problem we can never be free from it.

And then interestingly she says that it is possible perhaps at some level to be very benevolent and generous and kind patriarchal men but then those men are still imprisoned by the narratives of patriarchy. So despite there kindness, despite there benevolence, despite their generosity spiritual, emotional, financial, material whatever form the generosity might take, it will still be refracted to the lens of patriarchy, it would still be mediated by the mirrors of patriarchy and unless we can free ourself from that then there is very little chance you have got to emerge as feminist or people who want an equality of gender relations.

So patriarchy promotes insanity, so you know this is quite refreshing, just like (())(5:40) Bell Hook's over here, she has a degree of directness about her essays, there is not a lot of discursive jargon dropping that we see over here, instead what we see is a freshness and directness that she uses and appropriates in terms of the what she wants to convey over here. Where she is saying

quite clearly that patriarchy promotes insanity, it is the root of the psychological ills troubling men in our nation, never the less there is no mass concern for the plight of men.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:14)

Nevertheless there is no mass concern for the plight of men. In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, Susan Faludi includes very little discussion of patriarchy:

Ask feminists to diagnose men's problems and you will often get a very clear explanation: men are in crisis because women are properly challenging male dominance. Women are asking men to share the public reins and men can't bear it. Ask antifeminists and you will get a diagnosis that is, in one respect, similar. Men are



And then there is reference to a book called *Stiffed*, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, by someone called Susan Faludi and then while Hook's appreciates the book, appreciates the content of the book, but she is a bit unhappy uh of the fact that although this particular book takes up the problem of men, the *Betrayal of American Man*, it doesn't spend sufficient time in talking about patriarchy, it doesn't spend sufficient time in terms of how patriarchy promotes insanity, how patriarchy promotes abrasion behavior, violent behavior.

How those become psychological conditions which people suffer due to patriarchy. Now uh then she goes on to, she critiques Faludi to a certain extent and then she says quite clearly as you can see on your screen at the moment.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:07)

Faludi never interrogates the notion of control. She never considers that the notion that men were somehow in control, in power, and satisfied with their lives before contemporary feminist movement is false.

Patriarchy as a system has denied males access to full emotional well-being, which is not the same as feeling rewarded, successful, or powerful because of one's capacity to assert control over others. To truly address male pain and male crisis we must as a nation be willing to expose the harsh reality that patriarchy has damaged men in the past and continues to



Where she is saying that Faludi never interrogates the notion of control. She never considers that the notion that men were somehow in control, in power, and satisfied with their lives before contemporary feminist movement is false. So the entire idea that feminism disempowered men is an erroneous argument, which is something not picked up sufficiently by Faludi's book.

So the way Hook's look at it is in terms of a very interesting perspective, she says that feminism is supposed to empower women as well as men, because the whole point of feminism is to defeat patriarchy, is to situate itself in resistance, to patriarchy, and if you can do that then obviously you make men less patriarchal in quality and that obviously makes them more holistic, more of a whole person.

So in that sense when the patriarchy is supposed to design to empower women as well as men, so again we are looking away, we are looking beyond the binary of men being the problem and women being the rescue mission, so unless we can move beyond that binary, according to Hook's we don't have much of a chance in terms of really gender equal world. So patriarchy can be seen as a system which appraises men as well as women, feminism should be seen as a system which empowers men as well as women.

Right so unless we have this intrusive holistic approach to gender equality to gender relationships, there is very little chance according to Hook's in terms of really empowering men and women. So patriarchy as a system has denied men access to full emotional well being, which

is not the same as feeling rewarded, successful or powerful because of one's capacity to assert control over others.

So the question of agency becomes quite problematic, the question of agency according to Hook's is to have absolute access to your emotional well being, is to have absolute access to your emotional core and that kind of agency, that order of agency should not be equated with the agency which comes out of being successful, which comes from being dominant self in a particular setting, so that sense of agency cannot be equated with the sense of agency which comes or which is acquired by having a full access to what you really are as a feeling emotional person.

Obviously patriarchy denies men access to that kind of person hood and in denying men access to that kind of personhood makes men victims of patriarchy, victim of certain kind of delusion, and that delusion then quickly macerates as power, quickly macerates as domination etc. which then creates or generates a pseudo sense of agency, and that pseudo sense of agency which comes as a domination must be contrasted as a real agency which can come only through full access or absolute access to your core emotional self.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:46)

has damaged men in the past and continues to damage them in the present. If patriarchy were truly rewarding to men, the violence and addiction in family life that is so all-pervasive would not exist. This violence was not created by feminism. If patriarchy were rewarding, the overwhelming dissatisfaction most men feel in their work lives—a dissatisfaction extensively documented in the work of Studs Terkel and echoed in Faludi's treatise—would not exist.

In many ways *Stiffed* was yet another betrayal of American men because Faludi spends so much time trying not to challenge patriarchy



So to truly address male pain and male crisis we must as a national be willing to expose the harsh reality that patriarchy has damaged men in the past and continues to damage them in the present. So that idea of bruise the wound caused by patriarchy is not just psychological it's cultural, it's

biological in quality as well, that wound, that damage can extent over all kids of domain, where people are trained or you know per.. predisposed to speak, uh in the way people are hardwired to speak, people are designed or trained, or you know accorded to behave in a certain settings.

So patriarchy becomes create a generation of bruised men and women, wounded men and women because they are wounded psychologically, because they are tricked into behaving by patriarchy that domination is agency, that control is agency, coition is agency, command is agency, being in power is you know being argentic.

So these false equation between agency and power between agency and domination must be done away with, and they can only be done away with and it can only be done away with only if you can question the very ontology, the very core of patriarchy which is the problem that affects men and women over here.

So okay if patriarchy were truly rewarding to men, suppose for the sake of argument say that patriarchy were truly rewarding to men then the violence and addiction in family like that is so all pervasive would not exist.

So if patriarchy were really rewarding, its essentially, emotionally, at core human level then what you would wouldn't be having so much of abusive behavior, so much of alcoholism, so much of violence which affects men and women in domestic and comparative settings in war places as well.

So patriarchy cannot be benevolent construct, patriarchy cannot really be given of agency, patriarchy cannot be benefitting condition at all, because the (())(11:29) suggest otherwise, spectacularly suggest otherwise.

Okay, so the violence was not created by feminism. This is again a very important and interesting uh distinction that she is making that she is saying it is extremely erroneous, and extremely dangerous to talk about and to look at feminism as something which damaged men. Right because that something men and sometimes feminist would like to believe that feminism is disempowering men and empowering women.

Now obviously if you use it as a construct, if you use that as a category then you are again falling back in this very normative understanding of power, dualism, gender binary, etc which the whole purpose of feminism should be to do away with completely.

Right so feminism should be seen as a construct as a knowledge which is seen, which aspires to empower men and women and that empowerment can only happen if the patriarchy is done away with, right so the entire dissolution of patriarchy should be aspiration of feminism not just partial empowerment of women and uh partial disempowerment of men, because the whole point is that if we dissolve patriarchy, if we attack patriarchy, if we resist patriarchy you are emancipating not just women but also men, and that's a very important point which Hook's is making over here.

Okay, so violence of men is not created by feminism but is actually created by patriarchy, because of constant compulsion to conform to certain codes of conduct, the constant compulsion to conform to certain codes of behavior certain codes of appropriation, consumption, identity formation etc. so that generates violence, that necessitates violence sometimes.

And of course as we have already seen in this essay, the section where Hook's offer example from her own childhood, a very patriarchal setting which actually teach a young boy, a young male child that violence is good, violence is something which is part of the masculinity package. If you are not violent enough, if you are not problematic enough, so again there is a very problematic equation between violence, aggression and masculinity, it is something that patriarchy produces and promotes quite consistently.

So the violence is not created by feminism. If patriarchy were rewarding, the overwhelming dissatisfaction most men feel in their work lives – a dissatisfaction extensively documented in the work of Stud Terkel and echoed in Faludi's treatise – would not exist.

So if patriarchy were holistically rewarding, if patriarchy were existentially rewarding to men, then we would not have so much dissatisfaction which is documented in so many works, so that documented dissatisfaction is something that men suffer all the time, in work place, in family, in other counter settings as well.

And that dissatisfaction stems from patriarchy not despite patriarchy but because of patriarchy and that is a very important point that uh Hook's is making over here. And so then the essay ends

very interestingly by looking at men not as a threat but as a collaborator, as a comrade to the entire uh gender struggle, to the entire gender politics, to the entire revolutions.

So if you are really looking to have an revolution in gender in terms of bringing in equality of gender relationships it is absolutely imperative to look at men and women as comrades in struggle. And this is already a book, a work which Hook's had produced at some point of time which has been referred to in this essay as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:54)

men will continue to fear that any critique of patriarchy represents a threat. Distinguishing political patriarchy, which he sees as largely committed to ending sexism, therapist Terrence Real makes clear that the patriarchy damaging us all is embedded in our psyches:

Psychological patriarchy is the dynamic between those qualities deemed "masculine" and "feminine" in which half of our human traits are exalted while the other half is devalued. Both men and women participate in this tortured value system.



So the point is, the point that she is making over here is that otherwise, unless we can do that men will continue to fear that any critique of patriarchy represents a threat. Right so any critique of patriarchy should be seen as not a critique of men but actually as a mode which can be used potentially to emancipate men, emancipate men from the clutches of patriarchy, from the prison house of patriarchy.

That can only be done by making is more intrusive in quality, the entire idea of patriarchy should be made more inclusive in quality. Distinguishing political patriarchy and which he sees and this is obviously reference to the psychologist over here, which he sees as you know largely committed to ending sexism a therapist Terrance Real, who's book was referred to already, makes clear that patriarchy damaging us is always embedded in our psyche.

So this is a very crucial point because what Hook's has already said and what Terrance Real's book the Therapist, uh Terrance Real book demonstrates quite clearly is that patriarchy operates

at a very sub-terrain and psychological level, and that sub-terrain psychological level must be seen as a construct of different kinds of indoctrination, of different kinds of forceful and violent appropriation that men have to do early on in their lives as infants, boys, children's, teenagers, as adolescents, as men etc. different phases of life.

So what is this damage, what is the psychological damage which Terrance Real talks about. Psychological patriarchy is dynamic between those quality deemed "masculine" and "feminine" in which half of our human traits are exalted while the other half is devalued.

Now obviously if you looking at a very binaristic and blunt understanding and masculinity and femininity then that kind of understanding comes with the degree of valuation. So stereotypically patriarchal masculinist value are heralded are exalted as positive values, things which are ought to be celebrated where as the "feminine" values again this is very stereotypical are devalued. Uh as things which are weak, as things which are markers of weakness, things which are marker of lack of strength, lack of confidence, lack of authority. S

So obviously the desirable coveted codes belong to the patriarchal codes because that's whole point of patriarchy, that's the whole point of producing the fantasy of patriarchy, that we creates this codes which you make desirable to circulation and consumption. Where in that desirability quotient is very very important in patriarchy, because if we take away that desirability that coveted quotient then the entire aspiration to be patriarchal, the entire reward to be patriarch would be done away with and that would be death nail for patriarchy and that's exactly what Hook's advocates.

That if we are do deal a death nail, a death blow to patriarchy then we must take away the coveted quality from of patriarchy, we must take away the desirability quotient of patriarchy, its only if you can do that than men and women both become more sensitive and more resistant to patriarchy as a strategy.

So both men and women participated in this tortured value system. So this is a very very lopsided you know value system which is tortured, which is quite perverse actually. And then obviously it naturalized and romanticizes as perversity and then it produces the grand narrative of patriarchy as production system.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:54)

other half is devalued. Both men and women participate in this tortured value system. Psychological patriarchy is a “dance of contempt,” a perverse form of connection that replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion and manipulation. It is the unacknowledged paradigm of relationships that has suffused Western civilization generation after generation, deforming both sexes, and destroying the passionate bond between them.



Psychological patriarchy is a dance of contempt, a perverse form of connection that replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion and manipulation. So this are very very important verbs which are used by Hook's over here, so she says that Patriarchy does away with true intimacy, a true affective and what it does instead of affective, existential, emotional kinship or intimacy what it promotes is submission, manipulation, dominance, and collusion.

So all these uh categories become quite problematic, because all these category rely on power struggle, all these category rely on power dynamics, power inequality, etc, manipulation, collusion, uh submission, dominance and they are all, uh if you look at even these terms then they are all embedded in power and inequality and that is something which patriarchy would want to promote and perpetrate, the inequality of power, this fantasy of inequality of power.

It is the unacknowledged paradigm of relationships that has suffused Western Civilization generation after generation. So it is like a sub-terrain layer which has formed western civilization through generations and through history of time.

Deforming both sexist and destroying both passionate bond between them, so destroying true intimacy, destroying true emotional relationship we have instead a manipulative relationship of dominance, and submission, and manipulation and collusion which patriarchy promotes, and protects and perpetrates through different forms covertly and overtly.

By highlighting psychological patriarchy we see that everyone is implicated and we are freed from the misperception that men are the enemy, so again the whole idea of problematizing that men mean the enemy and perpetrator and women mean the sufferers and victims of patriarchy should be questions, should be deconstructed and instead the shift, and focus should shift to patriarchy.

The ontology of patriarchy, the evolution of patriarchy, the functionality of patriarchy, which makes men as well as women suffers in this clutches. To end patriarchy we must challenge both psychological and concrete manifestations in daily lives.

So the psychological quality and material quality of patriarchy must be identified and questioned, must be done away with, must be deconstructed. There are folks who are able to critique patriarchy but are unable to act in an anti-patriarchal manner. So this is a very important collaboration that Hook's is suggesting.

And this is something which I mentioned in the very beginning of this course, that when you look at a course of Feminist Writings, it's a big problematic and bit reductionist, to look at everything as a text that can be discussed and dissected and unpacked. So the textually quotient and the exponentially quotient must be combined together, specially when you look at something like patriarchy, because patriarchy is uh not just a text which is created, but is also an experience which is embodied.

An experience which is lived in daily life, so we should be able to critique patriarchy as a textual strategy, as well as an act of critique in the way we live our daily lives. To end male pain we need to respond effectively to the male crises, we have to name the problem and we have to identify the problem, name the problem as patriarchy and then began to attack and unpack it.

We have to both acknowledge that the problem is patriarchy and work to end patriarchy as collaborators men and women coming together.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:42)

patriarchy and work to end patriarchy. Terrence Real offers this valuable insight: “The reclamation of wholeness is a process even more fraught for men than it has been for women, more difficult and more profoundly threatening to the culture at large.” If men are to reclaim the essential goodness of male being, if they are to regain the space of openheartedness and emotional expressiveness that is the foundation of well-being, we must envision alternatives to patriarchal masculinity. We must all change.



Terrance Real offers this valuable insight: “The reclamation of wholeness, again the question of wholeness becomes very important because what Hook’s is suggesting and obviously she is drawing on the therapist Terrance Real as well, that if you become victims of patriarchy we begin to live partial lives, we begin to live fragmented lives, because then we being to confirm to the codes of patriarchy and move away from a true holistic argentic self, or true holistic existential self, and while though we start living as patriarchal performers, or performers of patriarchy.

So reclamation of wholeness is a process which is very more flawed for men as for women. More difficult and profoundly threatening to the culture at large. If men are to reclaim the essential goodness of male being, if they are to regain the space of open heartedness, and emotional expressiveness, there is a foundation of wellbeing, we must envision alternatives to patriarchal masculinity, we must all change.

So this is the very revolutionary, almost revolutionary quality with which the essay ends, and is quite again is very direct and fresh in its address which it is making over here. So she is saying quite clearly that we must find alternative masculinity, we must find sufficient, robust alternatives to patriarchal masculinity, and in finding in our search for robust and uh livable and viable alternatives to patriarchal alternatives we must all change as men and women.

We must take into account the struggle of men and struggle of women, the sufferings of men and sufferings of women, and we must move away from any kind of a binaristic understanding of the

sufferer and perpetrator. We all must come together as collaborators to address and unpack and articulate the problem of patriarchy, and unless we can do that then patriarchy will keep producing and protecting its own you know its own codes of behavior. So the way to contest patriarchy, the way to combat patriarchy, the way to do away with patriarchy is to all change together collectively, uh as men and women, uh as comrades in the struggle against patriarchy.

So with that the essay ends, but uh just to summarize quickly what this essay does very interestingly and radically think is it completely problematizes the ontology of victimhood, the ontology of suffering, and the ontology of this dualism of this male perpetrator and the women sufferer, it questions, uh it opens up the question of agency, it looks at how the question of pseudo agency comes from domination, you know manipulation, uh then power struggle which patriarchy promotes, how this pseudo agency should be contrasted with the holistic and existential sense of agency that patriarchy takes you away from.

So obviously the question of agency becomes very important as well, but this is a very potent, very powerful, very provocative piece of feminist writing so that's the reason why we began our course with this. Hopefully you got something out of it, and obviously we will come back to it and keep referring to this essay, as we move on in other takes to come and disclose.

To thank you for your attention and I will see you in the next lecture with a different text. Thank you.