Walby's Theory of Patriarchy: A Critical Review in the Context of Pakistan

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Abstract

Sylvia Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchy has attracted considerable attention in the recent years, especially in the western countries. This paper presents a critical review of 'patriarchy' as a theoretical concept and suggests that while Walby's theory is considerable improvement over previous theories of patriarchy, it is not without limitation when applied to explain gender relations in countries like Pakistan. The paper further propose that in order to better theorize gender relations in South Asian context, Walby's theory of patriarchy need to be combined with concepts like "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti, 1988) and "patriarchal gender contract" (Mughadam, 1992). Moreover, owing to the fact that patriarchy governs the lives of men as well as women, and that one's gender is interconnected with other features including one's age, class, race, and ethnicity, a holistic theoretical approach is required for understanding gender relations. For this purpose, the theory of patriarchy needs insight from such concepts as 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995) and 'intersectionality' (Collin, 1990). A synthesis of these different concepts would better provide the required theoretical lenses to understand gender relations in countries like Pakistan.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender Relations, Power, Masculinity, Intersectionality

Introduction

The term patriarchy has been traditionally used to mean autocracy of the father who controls affairs in the family. Today, however, patriarchy is generally understood as the social structure in which power is largely exercised by men over women (Meagher, 2011). Feminist sociologists have used the term patriarchy in a more general sense to explain the processes and practices which produce and sustain the asymmetrical gender relations in society. The American feminist Kate Millett in her celebrated book - Sexual Politics (1969) systemically discussed patriarchy for the first time. According to Millett, the power relationship between men and women is the core concept underlying patriarchy in all hitherto known societies and the centrality of power makes patriarchy an essentially political in nature. Millett argued that patriarchal power remained largely invisible from the sociological literature until feminists named and contested it. It begins in the family through the process of socialization and is further strengthened by institutions such as schools and media. It is also based on economic exploitation of women by men, state laws which legitimise men superiority, and physical force including sexual violence. Bryson (1999) argues that patriarchy was found useful by many feminist as a powerful theoretical tool through which they could make sense of their own experiences and to theorise gender-based power politics. Since the first publication of Millett's Sexual Politics (1969), feminist have described, analysed and criticised patriarchy in a number of ways depending on which variety of feminism they identify with. Liberal feminists, for example, believe that the socialization process which prepares men and women for different roles based on discrimination

and inequality is primarily responsible for the unequal status of women. Feminists who identify themselves as radical (e.g., Firestone, 1974; Brownmiller, 1976; Rich, 1980) trace the cause of women's subordination to the system of sexual relations within the family. Marxist feminists, such as (Barrett, 1980) believe that women's lower status in society is chiefly caused by the economic system in which men control women's (unpaid) labour and systemically exclude women from public sphere and formal economy. Multicultural/global or post-colonial feminists (e.g., Mohanty, 1988) look at comparative differences between the relative privileged status of white women in developed nations and conditions of women in developing countries. In short, these different strands of feminism look at patriarchy from different dimensions and angles, but all share a common aim of showing the reason of women's long-standing marginalization in various domains of life.

Although the different analysis of patriarchy looks in opposition to each other, nevertheless, there seems to be consensus among feminists that the subjugation of women is universally based on greater power and privilege of men. The obviously competing theories of patriarchy can be viewed as complementing where feminist of various theoretical orientations can learn from each other. However, some commentators have argued that feminist that term patriarchy and its conflicting understanding as created a problem for feminist politics. As pointed out by Beechey (1979) and Connel, (1990), the major problem with patriarchy is its false universalism and essentialism due to which some theorists have dismissed the usefulness of patriarchy (Beechey, 1979; Connell, 1990). Critics argue that the concept of patriarchy suggests a static and endless structure that overlooked differences in various contexts. It gives the impression men's power over women in working in a similar fashion across time and space. In other words, the concept of patriarchy could not account for cross cultural variation and changes over time in gender relations over time (Hunnicutt, 2009). In other words, patriarchy has been accused of being ahistorical; it does not account for historical and cultural variations. The advent of post-modernism and post-structuralism have facilitated us in seeing the fluid and ever changing nature of society in which gender relations, social structures, traditions, and power are melting and recurrently changing shapes (Carrington, 1994; Bauman, 2000).

Pollert (1996) has criticised patriarchy for its tendency to confuse 'description' and 'explanation'. She argues that rather than explaining the relationship between genders, the concept merely provides a description of women subordination and the domination of men. In other words, Pollert rejects the capacity of patriarchy as a theory. Pollert also believes that by focussing heavily on the structure, patriarchy ignore the continuous interplay between structure and agency in influence gender relations. Pollert further criticises those theories of patriarchy which focuses on gender alone. She believes that theories and research guided by such theory of patriarchy often ignore class.

Another critique against patriarchy as a theory is that it conceptualizes power as a top-down phenomenon. In fact, power is a complex and its exertion can take a variety of forms in patriarchy across cultures. As argued by Flax (1993), Patriarchy should be comprehended as "terrains of power" where various genders occupy varying amounts and types of power, depending on a variety of factors. In a patriarchal order, both men and women enjoy certain privileges and costs. Patriarchy is a continuous struggle in which men and women occupying different social positions receive different resources and resistance.

> "A woman's 'value' is determined by her 'race', class, age, appearance, and reproductive status. Hence, a woman is afforded differing amounts of power depending on her social location in this "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990). Furthermore, individuals do not acquire a set amount of power and privilege 'once and for all'. As women move through the life course, they may acquire more or less power through age, marital status, and/or

education. Paradoxically, some of women's power may come from their associations with men" (Hunnicutt, 2009: 563).

Despite being critical of the concept, many feminists are uneasy about abandoning the concept all together (e.g., Beechey, 1987; Acker, 1989; Cockburn, 1991; Gottfried, 1998; Bryson, 1999). Some feminists even attempted to resurrect patriarchy and emphasised it usefulness for explaining gender relations. Sylvia Walby (1990) is the most prominent theorist who defended the concept and developed a more comprehensive theory of patriarchy. In the following section, we will first outline her theory, identify its strengths, and then discuss some of its limitations in explaining gender relations in the context of Pakistan. In addition, we will also briefly touch upon Kandiyoti (1988), Moghadam (1992, 1998, 2004) and Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) whose ideas about patriarchy and gender relations are not only relevant to the current social structure of Pakistan, but these concepts will further supplement the theory of patriarchy presented by Sylvia Walby (1990).

Sylvia Walby's 'Six Structures of Patriarchy'

While post-modern theorists are right in claiming that gender relations may take a countless number of shapes, there exists some broadly recurring structures and substantial temporal continuity in gender relations within and across cultures, which means that it is still useful to talk of 'patriarchy' as explanation for the unequal relations between genders. Based on this assumption, the British sociologist Sylvia Walby (1990; 1997) developed a more inclusive theory of patriarchy which allows for the analysis of patriarchy across cultures and times. Walby (1990: 1) argues that "[t]he concept of patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality as it captures the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination within the household, family and society". Although her analysis of patriarchy is primarily located in modern Europe, her theory has the potential to explain gender relations in Pakistan as well. Walby defined 'patriarchy' as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" based in "six interrelated structures" (Walby, 1990, 1997). These six structures are:

(1) Paid Work: Local traditions, states laws, and market policies either limit access of women to paid work or discriminate them in the form of unequal pay, hostile workplace environment of the nature of jobs etc. An important contention of Wably theory is that in modern Europe, women's choices of taking up paid jobs are influenced more by labour market that family. The realization of the exploitative nature of paid work outside compels women to stay at home in order to avoid being taken advantage of in labour market.

(2) Household Production: Walby argues that household involve distinctive patriarchal relations of production in which the unpaid domestic and care work is unequally shared between men and women. As such, men directly exploit benefits from women unpaid domestic labour. Women continue to be exploited by their husband because the exploitation and miseries outside the marriage are also unpleasant. This short-term benefit of marriage to some women undermines the long-term interest of women in the eradicating the suppression which continue to exists inside the family.

(3) Culture: Walby points out that western culture has clearly differentiated femininity from masculinity. In recent years, some important changes have occurred in Europe in what is viewed as feminine. For example, in 19th century, women were considered as more feminine if they were limited to the household activities, while today the key sign of women's femininity is their sexuality and physical attractiveness to men. Media and popular culture misrepresent women, especially their bodies. The current culture of pornography increases men freedom while threatening women's freedom. "The male gaze, not that of women, is the viewpoint of pornography" (Walby, 1990:107). Language and literature are mostly in the control of men and these cultural resources play important role in sustaining patriarchy.

(4) Sexuality: Walby argues that there is a sexual double standard in which the sexuality of women is treated undesirably. Practices such as compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory marriage, reduction of women's sexuality to procreation of children, and admiration of men's sexual conquests are all meant to strengthen men's control on women's sexuality.

(5) Violence: Like other feminists, Walby believe that gender based violence is a form and expression of men's power over women. According to her, gender-based violence in its various forms such sexual assault, rape, and sexual harassment at workplace, are expressions of men's attempt to control women by using physical force. The imagined threat or the actual instances of violence discourage women from fighting against patriarchy and helps in keeping women in 'their place'.

(6) The State: Walby is critical of the state and maintains that the state is patriarchal in nature. The state, through legislation and public policy, blatantly promotes patriarchy and in some cases, ignore on-going gender discrimination. In Europe, state policies, although do not restricts women to the public sphere; have taken little serous attempts for improving the position of women in the public sphere. Moreover, women are grossly under representations in important state institutions such as parliament and bureaucracy.

These six interrelated structures together works to create a system of social relations between men and women which is based on inequality and prejudices. These inequality and biases are also replicated in social norms and traditions, literature and media. Limited economic opportunities for women outside the home, male violence against women, and discriminatory laws are basically designed to control sexuality and labour of women.

Walby further maintains that both patriarchy and the status of women changes in response to each other over time. In Europe, for example, Walby maintains that changes in the status of women over time with the increased access of women to public domain have resulted in a change from "private patriarchy" to "public patriarchy". In 'public patriarchy', women enjoy access to both public and private spheres. Though women are not openly barred from public arenas, they are, nevertheless, subordinate within them. Women are segregated into certain low status jobs, receive fewer wage than men. While other structures of patriarchy listed above still remain important, the labour market and the state become the main structures of public patriarchy. In private patriarchy, women were controlled by individual patriarch (e.g. husband, father); while in public patriarchy, "women are exploited collectively by men in general through subordination in the public arenas….Women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited" (Walby, 1990: 201).

By specifying several rather than simply one base of patriarchy, Walby has successfully avoided the problem of reductionism. Earlier theoiries of patriarchy have reduced the oppression of women to only one base due to which it was difficult for these theories to deal with cultural variations and historical changes. For example, Firestone (1974) and Brownmiller (1976) based their theories in reproduction and rape respectively, ignoring other important aspects of gender relations that exist in various cultures. With her concept of public and private patriarchy, Walby recognised the changing nature of patriarchy across time and culture, thereby, successfully avoiding the problem essentialist and rigid style of explaining patriarchy.

As mentioned before, Walby's theory primarily explains gender relations in modern Europe. In societies like Pakistan, parts of Walby's may be usefully applied to explain gender relations. For example, there is a gendered division of productive and reproductive work, men largely control women's sexuality, cultural discourses shape ideas and attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, and discriminatory state laws and policies disadvantage Pakistani women. However, owing to the fundamental differences in the social structures of Europe and Pakistan, we point out some mismatches between Walby's theory and the current social structure of Pakistani society.

The most important difference between Europe and Pakistan, in terms of Walby's theory, is that the shift "from private patriarchy to public patriarchy" is not yet fully visible in Pakistan. Pakistani society is still organized around family and the kinship system is still very strong due to which the 'private patriarch' (i.e., father, brother, husband) exercise more control on women as compared to the 'public patriarch' (i.e., state and public institutions).The assertion that "[w]omen are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth" (Walby1990: 201) is not true in Pakistani context, as most Pakistani women are still restricted to home and hearth. Due to this, some of Walby's six structure of patriarchy may be more relevant to the discussion of gender relations in Pakistan than others. For example, Walby maintains that in today's Europe, 'paid work' is more important than family and household, which is decreasing its importance in determining the lives of women. In Pakistan, the case is almost the opposite: the family, household and kinship still play more important role in gender relations than paid work (Khattak, 2001; Bari, 2000; Hakim, 1998; Kazi, 1999). In addition, religious teachings and customary laws such as the informal Pashtun code of conduct (Pashtunwali) occupy a more important place than state laws in some cases and areas in Pakistan. For example, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, states laws are not applicable.

While Walby's theory of patriarchy is a clear improvement over previous conceptualizations of the concept, she is unable to overcome all the difficulties with the concept. As outlined above, the structural social differences between modern Europe and Pakistani society makes Walby's theory partially applicable to explain gender relations in Pakistan. In order to accurately explain the system of patriarchy as it operates in societies like Pakistan, we draw on Kandiyoti's (1988) and Moghadam's (1992) theoretical insights to supplement Walby's theory.

Deniz Kandiyoti's 'Patriarchal Bargain'

Kandiyoti (1988) familiarized the term "the patriarchal bargain" in which she explained the dynamics of how women in patriarchal societies like Pakistan constantly make strategies to augment their security and expand their power vis-à-vis men. Citing a number of ethnographic accounts, she demonstrated that responses of women to male dominance are not static but vary widely as per the available circumstances and opportunities in the particular form of patriarchy under which they are living.

> "Such responses range from eager collaboration, whereby women act as devout guardians of patriarchal mores and values, to skilful manoeuvrings to make gains while avoiding overt conflict, to different levels of passive and active resistance" Kandiyoti (1988:278).

He used the term 'classic patriarchy' which according to her is a characteristic feature of societies in East and South Asia as well as in the Middle East. The foundation of 'classic patriarchy' is the "patrilocally extended household" where a senior man usually has power over all other members, the key source to control women's social, economic, and political participation and ensuring their continuous subordination and dependence. She aptly identifies that "[t]he cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourage a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves" (1988:279). She argues that in a system which as a whole works in favour of men, some women (e.g., mothers, mother-in-laws) manage to curve out a place for themselves and start benefitting for the otherwise hostile gender arrangements. The bargaining skill and opportunities for women depends on variety of factors, such as their family background and age. Rather than resisting the patriarchal system, some women who foresee a potential benefit for themselves within patriarchy are more likely "strike a bargain with patriarchy" (i.e., collude with men). Kandiyoti identified this bargain as a major reason of women's accommodation to the classic patriarchy existing in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, among other.

Valentine Moghadam's 'Patriarchal Gender Contract'

Moghadam (1992, 1998, 2004) also focused on the 'belt of classic patriarchy' which includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and northern India, among others. She describes the transformation of patriarchy and the family due to changing social structures such as economic development, demographic changes, legal reforms, increasing female education and employment in these countries. She also considered the patriarchal, patrilineal, extended, endogamous, patrilocal, and sometimes polygynous family as the most important unit of patriarchy in this region. In such as family, men have authority to control the movement of women in public sphere, while women's primary role is maintenance of the home and taking care of young. Moghadam (2004:145) called this familial arrangement the patriarchal "gender contract" that "is realized within the family and codified by the state in the form of Muslim Family Law or the Personal Status Code". Moghadam argues that the last few decades have witnessed rapid changes through industrialization and modernizing state systems in this region, in which legal reforms, mass education, demographic changes, and female employment has led to a shift from 'classic patriarchy' to 'neo-patriarchy' in these societies. However, despite these social transformations, she argues that the original patriarchal "gender contract" is still intact, leading to a continuation of women's disadvantaged status in all walks of life (Moghadam, 2004:157).

It can be noted that Kandiyoti and Mughadam's conceptualization supplement, rather than contradict, Walby's theory. For example, both Walby and Moghadam argues that due to changing sociical, cultural, economic, and political structures, patriarchy changes its forms from 'private to public patriarchy' and from 'traditional to neo-patriarchy'). However, despite this change in the form of patriarchy, the domination of male is still guaranteed. In other words, despite social transformations, the shift has merely occurred from the control of women by an individual husband and father in the private sphere to "collective appropriations" in the public arena in which the original "gender contract" is still intake.

A weakness common to most theories of patriarchy, including Walby's (1990), is the conceptualization of men in contrast to women, ignoring the power politics among men and among women. Patriarchy does not automatically allocate greater power to men; instead, men have to struggle to maintain their power in comparison to other men as well as women. While there is no doubt that majority of a men benefit from patriarchy; some marginalized men are victims of patriarchy. Connell's (1995) theory of "hegemonic masculinity" fills this gap in previous literature which is discussed in the following section.

R. W. Connell's 'Hegemonic Masculinity'

R. W. Connell (1987, 1995, 1997) popularized the notion of "hegemonic masculinity" to explain the social processes and practices that helps in promoting and perpetuating men's dominant status women's subordinate status of women. The theory of hegemonic masculinity offers a conceptual tool which can help in providing explanation to the question of how and why men uphold dominant social roles over women and other subordinated men in a given society. The primary task of 'being a man', according to Connell, is struggling for upholding hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity "is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture" (Connell, 1995: 71). Men's resistance or complicit stand to the culturally prescribed dominant style of masculinity determines their identity. Explaining the power play involved in negotiating masculinity, Wetherell and Edley (1999) states that:

> "Hegemony is not automatic, however, but involves contest and constant struggle. Hegemonic masculinity … is centrally connected to the subordination of women. It is a way of being masculine which marginalizes and subordinates not only women's activities but also alternative forms of masculinity such as 'camp' or effeminate masculinity" (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 336)

It is pertinent to clarify that hegemonic masculinity is not essentially a real male character. Rather, it is a set of ideal characteristics and routine practices which men struggle to achieve and practice in their pursuit to become hegemonic. This means that quite a small number of men might be able to actually possess and practice these ideal features. However, hegemonic masculinity provides substantial power to all men whether hegemonically masculine or not, while at the same time working as a measuring rod for the gender performance of various men. Connell's formulation of hegemonic masculinity is currently "central to how we theorize, recognize and understand power in a complex yet thoroughly gendered world" (Elias, 2008:386) for its many advantages over previous theories of gender relations, such as 'patriarchy'. First, Connell's analysis of masculinity and gender relations is an anti-essentialist one. Connell's theory is cognizant of the cultural specificity of masculinities. Gender regimes in different cultures and historical periods give rise to a wide range of possible styles. Some of these possible styles being masculine, Connell argues, become 'winning styles' which become ideal for men to engage with. In other words, Connell's theory has the capacity to account for diversity of masculinity cross cultures and time. Secondly, Connell's theory recognized that formation of gendered identities is the results of relationship between men along with relations between men and women. Third, Connell's theory also takes account of 'intersectionality' by emphasizing the interconnection of gender with other identifies including class, religion, race, and ethnicity. To be a man, a person needs not only to have a male sex but also the culturally approved and idealized age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other culturally agreed upon aspects of being an ideal man. Finally, the concept of 'hegemony' in Connell's theory helps in explaining the broader ideological roots of gender relations and power dynamics.

A Synthesis of Theories

The discussion so far in this paper reveals that Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchy alone is not sufficient to explain gender relations in societies like Pakistan. While her theory of six structures of patriarchy – paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state – is a considerable improvement over previous conceptualizations of patriarchy, it is not without limitations. In particular, Walby's theory is primarily about Europe, we have discussed Kandiyoti's (1988) concept 'patriarchal bargain' and Moghadam's (1992) concept of 'patriarchal gender contract' to supplement Walby's theory and to make it more relevant the Muslim South Asian context of Pakistan. In addition, Walby has not much to say about the power politics among men and among women. Given that gender relation is as much a relation among men as it is among men and women, Connell's (1995) theory of 'hegemonic masculinity' if combined with theory of patriarchy will help in filling this gape in Walby's theory.

Last, but not the least, it has become absolutely necessary to taking into account the increasingly important concept of intersectionality (McCall, 2005; Collins, 2000) without which a discussion of inequality looks incomplete. The concept of intersectionality has helped us recognize the mutual interconnectedness of the various social, cultural, and biological categories (gender, race, ethnicity, class, religious, age, caste, and other identities) in contributing to social inequality. As such, gender alone cannot explain provide a complete picture of social disparities (Collins, 2000; Brah & Phoenixp, 2004; McCall, 2005). As argued by McCall (2005), before the introduction of intersectionality theory, there was little sociological research that accounted for multiple forms of subordination within society. Studying the intersection of class and ethnicity with gender allows for a more dynamic and complex understanding of gender relations.

Conclusion

This paper critically reviewed theories of patriarchy and reproduction of gender relations (and transformation of these over time). Walby's (1990) theory was discussed in detail which argues that patriarchy operates under six different but inter-related structures in society. It was argued that because the social structure of Pakistan is different than Europe, Walby's theory has

limitations in explaining gender relations in Pakistan. In order to overcome these limitations, the article suggested that the concepts of 'patriarchal gender contact' in Muslim societies (Moghadam, 1992) and the 'patriarchal bargain' by women in societies characterised by 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) need to be taken into account when studying gender relations in societies like Pakistan. Furthermore, this paper suggest that no study of gender relations is complete without engaging with Connell's (1995) theory of 'hegemonic masculinity' and the concept of 'intersectionality' (Collins, 2000; Brah & Phoenixp, 2004; McCall, 2005). A synthesis of these concepts and theories would better explain the gender based power politics in societies like Pakistan.

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