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CONCEPT OF PATRIARCHY AND MATRIARCHY

Societies wherein generations of families are linked through the father's line are said to be patriarchal in nature. Such societies are also termed as patrilineal societies. On the other hand, generations connected through the mother's line are said to be matriarchal in nature and termed as matrilineal societies. The line of descent in a society delineates the succession of names, property, titles and other valuables in a family. They can either be passed on through a female line or through a male line in different societies. With majority of the world's societies being patrilineal, patriarchal societies dominate in the world's cultures whereas matrilineal societies tend to be primal societies.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a term very commonly used by feminist scholars and practiced by a clear majority of the population in their everyday lives. But what does patriarchy really mean? A patriarchy, from the ancient Greek word patriarches, is a society where power is held by and passed down through the elder males. Another rather easy to understand definition of patriarchy is given in the Oxford Dictionary, as a system of society or government in which the father or the eldest male is the head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line. Patriarchy is the term used to describe the society in which we live today, characterised by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed. This takes place across almost every sphere of life in the form of under-representation in the work force, in decision-making positions and in government institutions. Male violence against women is also a key feature of patriarchy. Women in minority groups face multiple oppressions in this society, as race, class and sexuality intersect with sexism for example. Women's bodies have been at stake in times of war and conflict, wherein such patriarchal oppressive ideologies are practiced such as mass rapes. The concept of patriarchy which has been developed within feminist writings is not a single or simple concept but has a whole variety of different meanings. At the most general level patriarchy has

been used to refer to male domination and to the power relationships by which men dominate women (Millet, 1970).

Matriarchy

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), matriarchy is a “form of social organization in which the mother or oldest female is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the female line; government or rule by a woman or women.” Matriarchy fundamentally means a society wherein the power is held by and passed on to the female members of the family, at an individual as well as the societal level. In a matriarchal society, women primarily hold power; predominate in the realms of employment, in the decision-making process and control over property. Within the academic discipline of cultural anthropology, according to the OED, matriarchy is a “culture or community in which such a system prevails” or a “family, society, organization, etc., dominated by a woman or women.” There are many studies that show that even in societies with matrilineal descent, the power structure is either egalitarian or dominated formally by the father or some other male figure. For a social system to be considered a matriarchy, it would require following a culture that defined a woman or women in an authoritative stance, and their dominance being considered essential and legitimate. Broadly speaking, patriarchy as a way of life has affected men as much as it has affected women, across the world. With most of the nation’s being patriarchal in nature, men are forced to be the breadwinners of the family, while women are to be its caregivers. Issues of gendered roles have been researched and discussed through the times by scholars. If gender roles are to be reversed, it would mean to interchange these traditional roles, making men the caregivers of the family and women the breadwinners. But the important question that arises here is whether this is sufficient to challenge the norms of patriarchy and sufficient to achieve gender equality? Couples whose gender roles have been reversed have to try and balance their intimacy and sense of identity in order to achieve equality. Workplace cultures are still embedded with traditional gendered stereotypes. The character and ‘masculinity’ of men is often questioned and they are looked down upon when they become the care givers of their family. Women’s role as care givers is also questioned when they hold positions of leaderships and are divided between their roles at the workplace and that at the home. Ambitious women, at the higher levels of leadership in organizations are often said to be ‘bad mothers’ and their maternal instincts are questioned. In a modernizing society, the performances of stereotypical roles tend to be compromising, even if such roles remain natural and innovative because of the lack of earning and outside impact. Therefore, gender role

reversal is not the solution to address patriarchy, but what is required is liberation from gendered roles and stereotypes to empower men and women to pursue the vocations they like and retain basic values and virtues.