

MODULE-3
GENDER STUDIES IN INDIAN SCENARIO
TOPIC- BRAHMANICAL PATRIARCHY



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- Subordination of women is a common feature of all stages of history and it is prevalent in almost all parts of world.
- The form of that subordination is conditioned by the environment (social, cultural and economic) in which women have been placed.
- The subordination of Indian women seemed more severe by its legal sanction.
- Caste and gender, according to Uma chakravarti, are the organizing principles of the Brhamanical social order.
- The sexuality of women is the subject of social concern. Brhamanical social organization constructed a closed structure to preserve land, women and ritual quality (caste) within it.



- These three are linked and applied to organize and control female sexuality.
- The honour and respectability of men is protected and preserved through their women.
- The appearance of puberty thus marks a profoundly 'dangerous' situation and the ritual related to the onset of puberty indicates the important relationship between female purity and purity of castes.
- The anxiety about polluting the caste and the quality of the blood through women is best demonstrated in the horror of miscegeny (varnasamkara).



- Most polluting are those castes which are the product of reprehensible unions between women of a higher and men of a lower caste.
- The ideologues of the caste system had a particular horror of hypogamy (pratiloma) and reserved highest punishment for it.
- The safeguarding of the caste structure is achieved through female seclusion.
- Women are regarded as the entrance into the caste system.
- The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to upper caste purity is prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes so women must be carefully guarded.



- When the structure to prevent miscegeny breaks down the Brahmanical texts consider that the whole elaborate edifice of social order that they built up has collapsed.
- Brahmanical texts viewed all women have the power to non-conform, to break the entire structure of Brahmanical social order.
- For when women are corrupted all is lost.
- To prevent such a contingency women's sexual subordination was institutionalized in the Brahmanical law codes and enforced by the power of the State.
- Women's co-operation in the system was secured by various means- ideology, economic dependency on the male head of the family, class privileges and veneration bestowed upon conforming and dependent women of the upper classes and finally the use of force when required.



- The process of caste, class and gender stratifications is the three elements in the formation of Brhamanical patriarchy.
- Many of the myths of Rigveda reflect clear relationship of women with sexuality.
- Excluding the demoniac women and apsaras, the Aryan patriarchal families had established a certain degree of control over women.
- Their position in a pastoral economy with the household playing an important part in production requires them in the performance of rituals.
- But the custom of Niyoga which was the privilege of affinal male kinsmen indicates that control over female sexuality was firmly established



- Post Vedic period witnessed two developments. Aryan women's roles in the sacrifice as well as in production were marginalized.
- Their labour was restricted to household. The need for monitoring women's sexuality is viewed as a threat, particularly in relation to the sacrifice.
- The earliest references to the need to specially guard wives are also evident during this period.
- The Satapatha Brahmana expresses the fear that the wife might go to other men.
- It also states that Divine raja Varuna seizes the woman who has adulterous intercourse with men other than her husband. Women's 'essential nature' came to be identified with their sexuality in the post- Vedic period.



- The innate nature of women was represented as sinful. Satapatha Brhamana states that a woman, a sudra, a dog, and a crow are the embodiments of untruth, sin, and darkness.
- The sage Agastya states that it has been a woman's nature ever since creation began to cling to a man only when he prospers, and desert him in difficulty; their fickle natures are modeled on the flashes of lightning.
- Anasuya complains that normally women do not know right wrong, and even though they are dependent on their husbands for protection they wander about with their hearts subject only to their own desires.



- Tryambaka, the author of Stridharmapaddhati says that women are innately promiscuous, fickle minded, lacking in love, and unfaithful to their husbands even when closely guarded.
- It is difficult to deal with the innately overflowing and uncontrollable sexuality of women.
- Manu, the ancient lawgiver and the prominent ideologue of Brahmanical system dealt explicitly the notion of the essential nature of women that is sexuality.
- According to him women must be closely guarded day and night regardless of their age.



- By carefully guarding the wife a man preserves the purity of his offspring, his family, himself, and his means of acquiring merit.
- After conception by his wife, the husband becomes an embryo and is born again of her that is the wifeness of a wife.
- Husband should carefully guard his wife to keep his offspring pure and ensure his future.
- Women should be thoroughly restrained.
- The essential nature of women drives them into seeking satisfaction anywhere, anytime and with anyone



- In the opinion of Uma Chakravarti women's uncontrolled sexuality was perceived as posing a threat and the narrative and normative literature of ancient India is thus full of references to the wickedness of women and of their 'insatiable' lust.
- One of the devices by which the mechanism of controlling women is operated through the ideology called stridharma/pativratadharmā.
- It is the main instrument through which the patriarchal Brahmanical society subordinated women.



- They were given schooling in stridharma. This wifely codes/patnivratadharna were internalized by women.
- Therefore women attempted to live up to the idealized notions of pativrata.
- Chastity and widely fidelity are some of the constituents of patnivratadharna.
- They accepted stridharma and considered it as the highest expressions of their selfhood.



- In the opinion of Uma Chakravarti pativrathadharmā can be considered as the most successful ideologies constructed by any patriarchal system.
- Women themselves controlled their own sexuality and believed that they gained power and respect through the codes they adopted.
- Women as biological creatures are representatives of a wild or untamed nature.
- Through the Stridharma the biological woman can be tamed and converted into woman as a social entity.
- The wicked and untamed nature of woman can be subordinated and conquered by the virtue of the ideal wife.
- Once the tension between nature and culture is resolved women can emerge as paragons of virtue.
- Uma Chakravati opines ‘pativrata may be regarded as the ideological purdha of the Hindu woman.’



- There are many instances of pativrata ideals in Hindu mythologies.
- Ramayana created the role models for men and women.
- There are idealized brothers and sons; but the most powerful and long lasting of these deals is that of Sita, the long suffering, patient, loving and faithful wife of Rama.
- Arundhati could stay the motion of the Sun. Savitiri could win back her dead husband from Yama.
- Anasuya could transform evil men with lustful desires into babies.
- Force by knismen is prescribed to keep woman firmly within the stridharma.
- If they are not guarded, stated Manu, they bring sorrow to two families, the one into which a woman is born and the one into which she is given.



- Special responsibility in guarding women is laid upon the husband who is represented as most vulnerable to the loss of his progeny through the infidelity of women.
- Law and custom must ensure that women are kept under the control of patriarchy.
- The king was vested with the authority to punish errant wives.
- It shows that the scriptures advise the use of violence to punish women particularly wives, to make them conform to the requirements of wifely fidelity.