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Q1(c)

Is patriarchy a key to understanding different forms of inequalities in Indian society? Elaborate.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Define patriarchy as a structured gender order, not only male prejudice
- Show how it organises caste, class, labour, kinship and the state
- Use Uma Chakravarti, Walby, **Ambedkar**, and Indian law and cases
- **Answer yes, with limits:** patriarchy is a key, not the only key

Revision summary

Patriarchy is a structure of control over labour, sexuality and status, not only prejudice.

Uma Chakravarti's **Brahmanical patriarchy** links caste honour to the regulation of women.

Ambedkar's endogamy thesis makes gender central to caste reproduction.

Class inequalities run through unpaid care and segmented female work.

The state both reforms and reproduces gender through personal law and welfare.

Introduction

Patriarchy is a **durable arrangement** that places men, as a category, in control of women's labour, sexuality, mobility and representation, and that ranks masculinities among men. In India it is not a separate room next to caste and class. **Uma Chakravarti**'s **Brahmanical patriarchy** shows how caste honour is stored in the control of women. That is why patriarchy is a key to several inequalities, not only to 'women's issues'.

Body

Gender as the hinge of caste and kinship

Ambedkar argued that caste reproduces through **endogamy**. Endogamy is a patriarchal rule about whose body may bear the next generation. Honour killings, khap diktats, and the policing of elopement are caste inequality enacted as gender control. **Leela Dube** showed how kinship and food rules socialise girls into caste. If one studies inequality without patriarchy, one misses how jati closes.

Class inequality also runs through gender. Unpaid care and field work subsidise male wages. Female labour-force participation remains low and U-shaped in many datasets; the 'housewife' is an economic institution. Domestic workers, mostly women from poorer castes, transfer care from one class to another. **Sylvia Walby**'s public and private patriarchy is useful: the household and the labour market both extract.

State, law and other patriarchies

The Hindu Code Bills, **Article 15**, Panchayati Raj reservations, **POSH**, and the Protection of Women from **Domestic Violence Act** show the state both challenging and using gender. Personal laws still fragment rights across religious communities. Muslim, Christian and customary systems are not copies of **Brahmanical patriarchy**, but they too organise property and marriage through male lines in many regions. Adivasi customary authority can be relatively more open in some groups and still exclude women from land.

- **Patriarchy also ranks men:** junior males, Dalit men, and sexual minorities face violence from dominant masculinities. That is why the key opens more than one lock-caste atrocity, communal targeting of women, and workplace harassment are different forms that share a gender grammar.

Limits matter. Land, capital and the colonial-modern state have logics that are not reducible to gender alone. **A. R. Desai's** political economy still explains agrarian class. Patriarchy is a **necessary** analytic for Indian inequalities; it is not a **sufficient** total theory.

Flow diagram

Patriarchy -> Kinship and endogamy
Patriarchy -> Caste honour
Patriarchy -> Unpaid and paid labour
Patriarchy -> Law and personal status

Conclusion

- **Yes:** patriarchy is a key to caste, class, kinship and state inequalities in India because those systems store honour, labour and property in gendered control. **Brahmanical patriarchy** is the densest form, not the only form. The key must be used with class and community, not instead of them.

Facts & figures

Brahmanical patriarchy

Chakravarti's term for the caste-gender order that controls women's sexuality to protect rank.

Hindu Code 1955-56

Recast marriage, succession and adoption; a state intervention in patriarchal personal law.

POSH Act 2013

Workplace sexual harassment law following Vishaka; public-patriarchy reform with uneven enforcement.