



E-ISSN: 2706-9117
P-ISSN: 2706-9109
www.historyjournal.net
IJH 2024; 6(1): 165-166
Received: 10-01-2024
Accepted: 15-02-2024

Firoz Alam
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of History,
University of Delhi, Delhi,
India

Representation of patriarchal culture in particular historical contexts

Firoz Alam

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2024.v6.i1c.276>

Abstract

This study examines the manifestations and implications of patriarchal norms and structures across various historical periods and societies. The study analyzes how patriarchal culture was reinforced and challenged through social, political, and legal institutions, focusing on specific historical contexts such as ancient civilizations, medieval societies, and colonial regimes. By exploring historical documents, literature, and legal codes, the paper reveals how patriarchal ideologies shaped gender roles, family structures, and power dynamics. Additionally, it highlights the resistance and contributions of women and marginalized groups in confronting and negotiating these patriarchal norms. This research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the historical continuity and transformation of patriarchal cultures and their enduring impact on contemporary gender relations.

Keywords: Patriarchal culture, historical contexts, gender roles, social structures, political institutions, legal systems, ancient civilizations

Introduction

The role in the production, conception, dissemination and subsequent internalisation of ideology of any kind is a pervasive one. This is particularly the case with messages of patriarchal culture which touches domains of sexuality, femininity, the body through mediums of performativity and the gaze. The crucial mediating factor however, is to locate these works in historical contexts. Not only does the context, through time and space give concrete context, but it also allows the development of the concept of change, wherein these notions were rooted in, and impacted on their social contexts. This assignment therefore, will focus on the messages of patriarchal culture in two definite historical contexts, the Renaissance (specifically the 16th Century) and 19th Century Europe. The idea to delineate these contexts is to trace how notions of the body as well as questions of space were mediated through art and literature.

An unorthodox perspective in this delineation is the one taken by Joan Kelly. Kelly's work, while touching upon domains of female sexuality and femininity, is more interested in questions about ideology about women. Using the domain of literature, Kelly's work challenges the traditional conception about the renaissance, and argues that the early modern period actually witnessed a contraction of options for women¹. Tracing ideas about love and chastity specifically through Castiglione's *The Courtier*, Kelly argues that one could link these questions to political and social developments in 16th Century Italy. Images, through literature therefore, for Kelly, especially the break from courtly love, had a dual purpose. While at the surface level, it could be linked to a mere transition to the idea of neo-platonic love, exemplified through Botticelli's *Venus*, Kelly's argument is that through the domain of chastity, there appeared a link between the aesthetisation of women as objects, which was linked to transitions in class relations in the nobility².

While Kelly's argument is persuasive, especially in viewing the conception of messages embedded in society through concrete historical contexts (proto-capitalism for her), it doesn't delve into questions of the body as much. Moroni's *Chastity* therefore is regarded to represent the ideal, virgin body, especially since the water remains despite the sieve³.

Corresponding Author:
Firoz Alam
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of History,
University of Delhi, Delhi,
India

1 Kelly, Joan. "Did Women have a Renaissance?" Houghton Mifflin: 1977.

2 Kelly, Joan. "Did Women have a Renaissance?" Houghton Mifflin: 1977, 183.

3 Nead, Linda, *The Female Nude: Art, obscenity and sexuality*. Routledge: 1992, 15-18.

The actualisation of the body therefore, in the renaissance in particular is done so through the idea of discipline. Interestingly, the idea of discipline is mediated through the church, and the state, but the concept of self-discipline emerges in these works. The question of the woman controlling herself, embodied in the question of representation, the nude and the body in the 16th century is definitely linked to power⁴.

The question of the nude and regulation is important for questions of representation, cultural mediation and the possibility of a domain outside. It also links with questions of space, which are fundamental to all art, but particularly the 19th Century, with the emergence of Modernity. The link emerges through conflicting analysis of Manet's work *Olympia*. T.J Clark suggests that her gaze, the maid, as well as the motifs which link her as a prostitute establish the concept of nakedness as a state of being, serving as a direct link to material reality as opposed to the constructed opposition of the nude. While there are important criticisms of this dichotomy, this article is more concerned with the link between 19th Century Europe and the question of space, reflected through gendered notions of femininity as well questions of the gaze.

Space, important even in the 16th Century, acquires a particular importance in the 19th century due to the break exemplified by modernity. This is accurately reflected in both Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life* as well as the *Arcades Project* by Walter Benjamin, especially the use of the *flaneur*. Pollock however argues that through the question of sexuality and space, one can reconstruct our understanding of modernism and the private-public divide, and through this, patriarchal ideas. This dichotomy emerges through a comparison of the spaces represented by female and male painters in the 19th century. Cassatt and Morisot represent ideas of the private, through the *Dining Room*, the *Terrace* as compared to the overt depictions of the bar, the street, the arcade in their contemporary artists. ⁴However, the analytical break in this period is not just the differential spaces represented by women, but how these spaces of representation embody the concept of the gaze. The construction of femininity and indeed female sexuality is from social constructions of space through access to bars, streets and salons in the 19th century, but also through the development of the normative gaze, wherein the woman is passive.

The overall question therefore in assessing the way in which messages of patriarchal culture were produced and conceived of in the 16th and the 19th Century, is to also ponder about the question of agency and ideas of representation. Is it possible, as historians, to locate questions of agency, and it is here where the collapse of history with social theory becomes important, as a possible avenue to reinterpret and indeed even recover histories, which are not necessarily isolated from the overall norm, but serve as entry points and sites of contestation.

References

1. Nead, Linda, *The Female Nude: Art, obscenity and sexuality*. Routledge; v1992
2. Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. Routledge; c1988.

3. Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press; c1982.
4. Kelly, Joan. *Did Women have a Renaissance?* Houghton Mifflin; c1977.
5. Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin; c1977.

⁴ Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. Routledge: 1988,