

men to subordinate them. Thus, Engels's view was that subordination of women took place when private property emerged. However this has been critiqued by more recent studies which talk of the existence of patriarchy in pre-private property societies. Women may not have been systematically subjugated however women were not entirely equal to men as mentioned earlier. The studies also mentioned that there were assumptions in Engels theory like the desire for men to leave property to his heirs; an original and natural division of labour between the sexes. The theory that men created the first wealth was also challenged as they pointed out that women were the first cultivators who both provided subsistence and produced the first surplus.⁵¹ Engels was also criticized on his theory of sexual division of the family. It was stated that "the naturalistic account of the division of labour i.e. men doing social production and women doing the household work is contradicted by ethnographic and socio-logical data showing that women regularly contribute to subsistence activity and thereby to social production."⁵² But these critiques of Engels have not shown very clearly why and how male supremacy had been asserted.

However, through all the anthropological and historical debates on patriarchy one common feature that has emerged is that patriarchal domination is more a socio-historical construct than a biological construct. Thus it is not to be wondered that patriarchy was also present in the tribal societies of the North East. Prior to the British administration, many of the tribes in North East India including the Mizo engaged themselves in Inter - tribal and inter-village wars. Hence to protect

⁵¹ Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory* (New York, 1992) pp.73-75

⁵² Meena A.Kelkar, *Subordination of Woman* (New Delhi, 1995) p.17

themselves from invasion they used to raid other villages or ambush their enemies. After killing their enemies they used to cut the head and take it to their village to show that they have really killed the enemy. This practice is often referred to as head hunting. The head of the slain enemy was taken not only to prove their word but also as a symbol of their bravery. It was also believed that the slain enemy would serve the slayer in the next world provided the slayer organised a ritual or ceremony called *ral aih*.⁵³ In many of the tribes in Southeast Asia who practiced head hunting, the slayer was considered to be a brave warrior and enabled them to boldly ask a woman to marry them.⁵⁴ So, head hunting was also used for attracting girls. The warriors who used to take home the heads were all men and since they were regarded to be protecting the village including women and children, they gained the respect of the elders and other people in the village.⁵⁵ By achieving prominence they also had a strong influence in the affairs of the society and they were given leadership roles. Women also had to obey their authority since men were the ones to protect them from being killed or from being taken as a slave. Hence in the tribal societies of North East India, head hunting is seen as one of the factors that contribute to subordination of women and their exclusion in leadership roles.⁵⁶ As mentioned, since women looked up to the men for their survival, women therefore had to bow down under the authority of the men folk. So almost all the tribes of the Northeast except the Khasis, Garos and Rabhas are patriarchal society where man is the head

⁵³ B.Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, (Aizawl, 2001) p.330

⁵⁴ Dr. Susan Russell, "Headhunting in Southeast Asia" in www.seasite.niu.edu/crossroads/russell/headhunting

⁵⁵ *ibid*; B.Lalthangliana, *op. cit.*, p.330

⁵⁶ A.Wati Longchar, 'Issues in Feminist Theology', in R.L.Hnuni (ed) *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women* (Jorhat, 1999) p.20

of the family and also possess all the leadership roles in the society. It would therefore be important to analyse whether the migration process which took place among people as in the case of the Mizo, can also be attributed to the enforcement of patriarchy and this will be studied in the later chapters.

Migration of people had occurred from prehistoric times and has continued till now. Migration is ordinarily referred to as a relatively permanent movement of persons over a significant distance⁵⁷. Migration is also known as the movement of people from one permanent residence to another permanent or temporary residence for substantial period of time.⁵⁸ There are various causes for people to migrate such as natural disaster, calamities, scarcity of food and invasion. It is also said that wider economic, political and cultural conditions are potent causes of migration.⁵⁹ The most common theory of migration which is being pointed out is the ‘push and pull’ theory advocated by Bogue.⁶⁰ For the push factor the various causes enumerated are invasion, scarcity of food and being made outcaste by other members of the society. On the other hand, the pull factors could be availability of food, better ecological environment and attraction of labour or jobs. The availability of unused land and freedom from interference are important variables for people to migrate.⁶¹ When people migrate to other region, they try to find a place which is similar to the place they left. If that is not possible, they had to adapt to their new surroundings. In these circumstances, their culture and their socio-economic system would undergo a

⁵⁷ William Peterson, “Migration: Social Aspects” in David L.Sills (ed) *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 10 (U.S., 1968) p.286

⁵⁸ R.B.Mandal (ed), *Frontiers in Migration Analysis* (New Delhi, 1981) p,1

⁵⁹ Ram Nath Singh, *Impact of Out Migration on Socio-Economic Conditions*, (Delhi, 1990) p.10

⁶⁰ Clifford J.Jansen (ed), *Readings in the Sociology of Migration* (London, 1970) p,12

⁶¹ Paul White & Robert Woods(ed), *The Geographical Impact of Migration*, (London, 1980) p,10

change.⁶² Hence they may have to grow different kind of crops and the houses which they built may have to be different also. They could also be influenced by the people who had migrated earlier. It is most probable that they would learn new values and also try to adjust their living conditions according to the environment. So it can be said that migration helps in the diffusion of ideas and information. This brings about social and economic change, and can be regarded as a human adjustment to economic, environmental and social problems. Moreover when people migrate, they may have to fight other people who were already in the region. Hence men who are physically stronger and have traditionally been the warriors were usually looked up to for support and protection. There are various theories and works propounded by anthropologists, sociologists and geographers regarding migration. However the theories and their works did not include how migration process affected gender relations. In earlier times migration was based on assumptions and was done on a trial and error basis. It can be noted that when people shift from place to place which can cover long distances, their food habits, dress and their way of life could undergo a change. As time passed the people also make invent new things and so technology would advance. Moreover if the society is passing through a change in social, economic and technological conditions, gender relations would also be effected. So in a transitory society patriarchy could be reinforced or it may also happen that patriarchy could be weakened. Hence the level of patriarchy would be different according to the periods of time and as a result the level of women's subordination could also vary.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.55

Supporters of patriarchy, like the traditionalists, however often argued that patriarchy is a given constant as they regard it to be biologically determined. Gerda Lerner commented, 'traditionalists, whether working within a religious or a scientific framework, have regarded women's subordination as universal, God-given, or natural, hence immutable.'⁶³ They put forward the belief that since men are stronger physically, they become hunters and providers and also defend their women against enemies while women being weaker physically stay at home and look after the family. These biological differences assigned them different social roles and tasks. So they propounded that women should be subordinated to men as they were created to have different roles and position. They also argued that because women produce children, their main purpose in life is to become mothers, and so their primary role is to be child-bearers and child-rearers.⁶⁴ In reality, it can be noted that child bearing is sex attributed and cannot be changed. However child rearing is socially constructed. The various duties and functions to be done by men and women are culturally or socially constructed. This division of labour is more a matter of culture and is clearly seen from anthropological and historical studies. Activities which are generally accepted as masculine in male centred societies are also performed by women in some other societies. Margaret Mead wrote that among the Arapesh tribe in New Guinea both the sexes have feminine trait and among the Mundugumor both the sexes have masculine characters.⁶⁵ It was also noted that among the tribes of Nambikwatra tribe and Encounter Bay in South Australia, it was the father who took care of the children while women do the housework but prefer hunting and war

⁶³ Gerda Lerner, *The ...of Patriarchy, op.cit.*, p.16

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.17

⁶⁵ Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, (New York, 1935)

expeditions.⁶⁶ From such researches it has been possible to establish that the roles played by male and female is not because of biology but due to social conditioning.

The cause of women's subordination has also been studied by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.⁶⁷ He points out that just as there is an exchange of other objects, there was also an exchange of women. Women are thought of more as commodities than as human beings and were so exchanged and this led to the subordination of women. The idea put forward by this theory that exchange of women took place was that as the people thought endogamy as a taboo, and so they followed exogamy. The exchange of women was established between two groups of men while women were just objects in the process of exchange. The establishment of these extra-familial ties produces social relations which enabled people to extend the field of their activities and even their authorities beyond their own families. It also guaranteed "peaceful co-existence by creating extended family structures among strangers".⁶⁸ Gerda Lerner had postulated as to why women were exchanged and not the men. According to her assumptions the people knew that if they captured women they could reproduce and population would be added to their group which would mean more labour force. She also added that if men were captured, they could not be trusted as they would always wait for a chance to get revenge or go back to their tribe. But if women were taken and given off in marriages and have children, they would be loyal to the tribe.⁶⁹ So women were taken as captives to reproduce children

⁶⁶ Barbara Sinclair Deckard, *The Women's Movement; Political, Socio-economic and Psychological Issues* (New York, 1983) p,188

⁶⁷ Claude Levi Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston, 1969) p.115

⁶⁸ Luce Irigaray "Women in the Market" in Julie Rivkin, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (U.K.,2004) p.799

⁶⁹ Gerda Lerner, *The ...of Patriarchy, op.cit.*, p.48-49

and hence viewed women as a reproductive object. Moreover exchange of women could also mean not only women taken as captives, but also of bride stealing, rape or negotiated marriages. In this process Levi-Strauss said that women are reified, become dehumanized and are thought of more as things than as human.⁷⁰ According to him, this exchange of women marks the beginning of women's subordination. This exchange reinforces a sexual division of labour which institutes male dominance.⁷¹ However one can wonder why it was only the women who were captured or given in exchange and not the men. It can be assumed that this may be because women were weaker and so could not desist the things imposed on them. It should also be noted that in foraging groups women play a major role in procuring food and other requirements for the family but men occupy a higher position and that the groups were patriarchal.⁷² If this was so it can be said that it was because of their subordination that women were exchanged.

The radical feminists on the other hand believed that women are a class by themselves, a class whose membership is defined by sex.⁷³ As such they are subordinated in all societies because of biological differences, hierarchical division of labour and sex roles. The radical feminists insisted that male power is not only confined to the public worlds of political and paid employment, but that it extends into private life as in the family and in sexuality.⁷⁴ The radicals also stressed that as men owned and controlled women's reproductive capacities, women have become dependent on men. Radical feminism also view patriarchy as an autonomous, social,

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.47

⁷¹ Meena A.Kelkar, *op. cit.*, p.13

⁷² Michael C.Howard, *Contemporary Cultural Anthropology* (1989) pp.104-105

⁷³ Alison Jagger, *op.cit.*, p.102

⁷⁴ Valerie Bryson, *op. cit.*, p.181

historical and political force.⁷⁵ The radical feminists have shown the ‘male bias’ in the society and how the various disciplines of study have reinforced patriarchy.⁷⁶ Susan Brownmiller, for instance, argues that women’s subordination is due to men’s ability to rape them.⁷⁷ Radical feminists like Brownmiller explained that men use their ability to rape, to intimidate and control women and this led to male dominance over women. The Radical Feminists have tended to generalise women of different societies and at different points of time into one homogenous unit. But it should be noted that though women were subordinated, the methods and level of subordination of women of different societies and at different time can vary. As noted by anthropologists, there are some societies in which women share power with their men. So the level of subordination might not be the same and their experiences could differ. Radical Feminists nevertheless have brought valuable insights to feminist theorizing. It identified the ways and means in which male values constructed women to be subordinated and enabled women to find out how to free themselves from it. Alison Jagger has rightly said, ‘Radical Feminism has begun to create a “counter-reality” to show us the world not just as it appears to women who are confused by patriarchal ideology but as it appears to those who have a consciousness of their own oppression, who are aware that they inhabit a patriarchy. It has drawn on the experience of feminist women to show us, often, through poetry and literature, that prevailing world views are male-biased and descriptively inadequate.’⁷⁸ The Radical Feminists tries to erode the barrier which separates the

⁷⁵ Nancy Mandell (ed), *Feminist Issues*, (Ontario, 1995) p.14

⁷⁶ Alison M.Jagger, *op.cit.*, p.12

⁷⁷ Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York, 1976)

⁷⁸ Alison M.Jagger, *op.cit.*, p.381

public and private sphere which was earlier demarcated by patriarchy. The Radicals emphasised that there is no distinction between the public and private realm and that both the realms are interconnected. They therefore started the slogan 'the personal is political'.⁷⁹ So every area of life is also the sphere of sexual politics Thus Radical Feminism provides the conceptual foundation for bringing sexuality, childbearing and childrearing into the domain of politics.⁸⁰

Marxist Feminists on the other hand see women's subordination as originating with the introduction of private property. As Marx was primarily concerned with class antagonism, he concentrated on the exploitation of the workers who sold their labour to the owners of capital and how they got their part back in the form of wages.⁸¹ This could therefore include women who are working outside but did not include their work in the household. Though Marxists were correct in seeing women's relation to production but the crucial ways in which women's subordination is maintained within the family is ignored. According to Rowbotham, Marx takes for 'granted the necessity of women's labour in maintaining and reproducing wage earners, but he does not examine this in any detail or discuss its implications for women's consciousness.'⁸² As a result questions of sex, gender and procreation are not examined by them whereas when the sexual division of labour is examined, it is mainly in connection with economic production.

A very orthodox Marxist theory therefore may not adequately capture the very subtle workings of patriarchy in a society. It was in this context that Socialist

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.101

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.106

⁸¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *op.cit.*, p.vvii

⁸² *ibid.*

Feminism was born in the 1970s. It is the development of a political theory and practice that synthesize the best insights of radical feminism and of the Marxist tradition. Socialist feminism tries to evolve a better theory and makes an attempt to evade the problems that have confronted the earlier feminist theories.⁸³ Socialist feminism also believed that women's inferior status is rooted in private property and class divided society. They also believed that sexual activity, childbearing, and childrearing are social practices that show power relations and are therefore appropriate subjects for political analysis. Moreover, they do not view 'humans as abstract genderless individuals, with women essentially indistinguishable from men. It views women as constituted essentially by the social relations they inhabit. The social relations of society define the particular activity a woman engages in at a given moment.'⁸⁴

The three main trends of feminist thoughts discussed above, i.e, Radical Feminists, Marxist Feminist and Socialist Feminist all tried to understand how women are subordinated and to find a way to end that subordination. Each feminist theory believed that women are subordinated but they perceive that subordination in a different way and the means for ending the subordination is also prescribed differently. Marxists see the existence and origins of patriarchy as bound up with class society and that patriarchy emerged after private property had developed. On the other hand, Radical Feminists see patriarchy as either autonomous or itself the cause of other forms of oppression. They also theorized that patriarchy did not evolve after capitalism but that it occurred in pre - capitalist society. Marxism

⁸³ Alison M.Jagger, *op.cit.*, p,123

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p.130

believed that male dominance is an 'ideology by which capital divides and rules; it must be overcome by a "cultural revolution" based on a socialist transformation of the "economy".'⁸⁵ For radical feminism, male dominance is grounded in men's universal control over women's bodies, meaning their sexual and procreative capacities; it must be overcome by women's achieving sexual and procreative self-determination. The political theory of socialist feminism tries to incorporate the essence of both the above views by conceiving of contemporary male dominance as part of the economic foundation of society. The economics of domination was being understood to include childbearing and sexual activities as well. In the socialist feminist view, therefore, the abolition of male dominance requires a transformation of the economic foundation of society as a whole.'⁸⁶

Though different theories may be presented for the origin of the subordination of women, it can be safely said that various aspects of patriarchy are the main reasons for the women's subordination. It is patriarchal thought that allots a different status, position and function for men and women. Such thought prescribes that men and women are biologically different, their physique and appearances are different and so their body functioning would be different. Therefore the roles they were supposed to play is also different. Men are supposed to be the breadwinner and often go out of the house to earn a living. On the other hand women are supposed to stay in the house and look after the household. Even if they happen to have employment somewhere else, looking after the household is still their responsibility. They are also the ones who have to look after the children, in short the care-givers.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p.147

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

Men are also taught to be aggressive and domineering while women are told to act submissive and gentle. Girls are scolded if they happen to roam around while boys are hardly admonished for it. The roles and implications of such roles based on differences of sex is due to gender which is culturally constructed due to the influence of patriarchy. The word gender seems to have first appeared among American feminists who wanted to insist on the social quality of distinctions based on sex.⁸⁷ Gender is also used as a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the two sexes. Gerda Lerner explained gender as the ‘cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time.’⁸⁸ So it can be said that sex is biologically given while gender is culturally created. So sex is unchangeable whereas gender can and does undergo changes over time and is accordance to various social norms.

Thus, gender relations and gendered roles which has influenced the society for a long time had its effect on the writings of history too. Gerda Lerner has written that there is a difference between the unrecorded past and History which is the recorded and interpreted past. Women were always present in the unrecorded past, have participated in all events and have shared the world with men. They were instrumental in creating society. So, in the unrecorded past the contributions and works of women and men were preserved in folklore, art and ritual.⁸⁹ However a glaring feature of the recorded History and in its interpretation is the marginalisation and complete wiping out of the women. Moreover the language which was used in

⁸⁷ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988) p.29

⁸⁸ Gerda Lerner, *The ...of Patriarchy, op.cit.*, p.238

⁸⁹ *ibid*

the recorded history was also masculine as if history was a masculine phenomenon.⁹⁰ There were of course some women who were seen in the records, but they are there due to their connection with males and were qualified by male standards. The main reason for women to be obliterated in history is because almost all historians have been male and were influenced by patriarchal thoughts. They have recorded and interpreted only what they have assumed to be important. The importance which they therefore gave was only to the lives and activities of men. Hence the “subject matter of history is always men in the midst of other men – men in collectives and groups”.⁹¹ The contributions of women were not important for them and hence women were rarely given a space in the recordings. It may be argued that there were some men too whose lives and activities were not recognized but here also it can be said that this was because of class and not sex. In a society the dominant groups were also given significance and thereby the minorities were not given importance. Moreover since the early writers were mostly the educated ones from the upper classes so the lives of the people of the lower classes were hardly recognized. However, the lives of these hidden men was because of class whereas women’s contribution was obliterated because of gender,⁹² and this was altogether a different concept. So it can be said that men were not hidden because of sex while women were hidden because of their sex. Thus texts on religion, law, politics, education etc carried different pronouncement for men depending on caste, class, age and religious

⁹⁰ Judith P. Zinsler, *op. cit.*, p,22ff

⁹¹ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, 1970), p.217

⁹² Sheila Rowbotham, *op .cit.*,p,xxxi