

**Introduction to Cultural Studies**  
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**Lecture - 40**  
**Bell Hooks Understanding Patriarchy - I**

So hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Introduction to Cultural Studies where we will begin with a new text today. So we just finished looking at a series of texts. Most recently we finished looking at Ian Hacking's Social Construction Of What where we saw the dangers of over reification, the dangers of over simplification that might come with the social constructionist theory if we just rely on that say key investigated mechanism.

So this particular text, the one which we will begin with today is entitled understanding patriarchy by Bell Hooks. This should be on your screen but before we dive into the text I just want to spend some time talking about the text in general, talking about Bell Hooks in general and talking about the significance of this particular text in the context of our course, Introduction To Cultural Studies.

One of the really sophisticated and complex things which this particular text does and this is an essay as you can see, is that it really looks at the combination between experientiality and discursivity. So again this is something that Hacking had talked extensively about that if you are looking at everything as a constructed discourse that often takes our attention away from the experientiality of the phenomenon, from the experientiality of the event right.

So the experientiality of the event should be considered as one of the key things, as one of the key components of any particular event, of any particular phenomenon rather than looking at it from a purely constructionist perspective where the argument is everything is a social construct, everything is constructed as a text etc. So Hacking had talked about a balance between discursivity and experientiality.

So the phenomenality of an experience, the experientiality of an event, so these things become very important in Hacking's analysis as we saw in the last text that we covered, The Social

Construction Of What. And Hacking had mentioned Judith Butler and a series of other writers and thinkers who he thinks move away from this purely constructionist perspective and offer a more complex, a more rich perspective on events, texts, and phenomena.

Now, in many sense this particular text, Understanding Patriarchy has a lot of similarity in terms of structure, in terms of sentiment, in terms of style with Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks. Again, I mean we saw when we read a particular text if you remember that Fanon talks about the real rage, the real resentment, the very visceral feeling of being marginalized, which comes out throughout this text.

And it is not just limited to a discursive understanding of you know the entire phenomenon as a construct, as a text etc. but it becomes more than that, it becomes an experiential understanding, it becomes a visceral understanding. So the experientiality, the viscosity, the embodied quality of the entire phenomena, about the entire experience becomes the key thing for Fanon in Black Skin White Mask.

And as a result of which we find that particular book really compelling in terms of looking at the fact of blackness, in terms of looking at the experience of blackness, not just as a construct but also a real lived and bodied experience that is suffered, that is you know gone through viscerally and at a very embodied level. Now, in many sense understanding patriarchy is a similar kind of a text. It talks about the real experience of suffering patriarchy.

And one of the really sophisticated things which this particular text does, it moves away from this very blunt binary between men and women. So it moves away from the binary which says that men are evil and men are the perpetrators of patriarchy and women are the just the innocent victims, sufferers of patriarchy. It moves away from the particular binary and it offers a more complex understanding of patriarchy.

Whereby we see how men and women can be both complicit and collusive with patriarchy and can suffer patriarchy at the same time. So she talks about quite interestingly how men can obviously perpetrate patriarchy and that is a more dominant understanding of patriarchy as being

controlled and coerced and perpetrated by men but at the same time men can also suffer patriarchy and conversely women suffer patriarchy more often than not.

They are the victims of patriarchy. They are the only receiving end of the horrors of patriarchy but at the same time there are also instances, many instances, several instances and as Hooks points out where women become the you know the complicit partners of patriarchy, the collusive partners of patriarchy and they enact patriarchy in a way which is sometimes worse than male controlled patriarchy. So patriarchy over here is a phenomenon.

Patriarchy over here is a discourse as well as an experience. It is a set of rules which have sometimes a textural quality to it but also an experiential quality to it. So there are rules which need to be followed, which need to be confirmed to at a very embodied level, at a very daily level, okay. So patriarchy becomes a very interesting phenomenon and this particular text is an excellent understanding of patriarchy as discursive as well as an experiential phenomenon, right.

So Understanding Patriarchy becomes a key text as you will see when we move on to our reading on the text in terms of looking at how cultures are constructed, how cultures are experienced, how cultures are you know suffered, you know obviously patriarchal cultures are mentioned over here through real experiences of suffering, through real experiences of resentment, through real experiences of you know victimization.

And this obviously it includes violence, it includes domination, it includes control at a very coercive level and these become very important components of patriarchy in more sense than one. So this particular and like Fanon again like Fanon Bell Hooks often relies and draws on anecdotal analysis. So we saw in Fanon how he often draws on anecdotes about real incidence which really happen to him as a person, as a black person, as a black intellectual in France, in Algeria and in many other places around.

And he often draws on those experiences in terms of analyzing or examining the event, the fact of blackness and you know the anecdotal analysis often lends a very rich personal and direct quality in Fanon's writing. So likewise, when we see Bell Hooks we find that you know even

you know this particular book relies and draws an anecdotal evidence on several occasions. It talks about real life experiences.

It talks about what really happened to the writer, how she suffered, how she experienced certain phenomenons and events and how those experiences go on in terms of you know offering a really rich and complex and sometimes and certainly understanding how patriarchy as a real phenomenon, not just as a discursive text, not just as a textural strategy, not just as a discursive strategy but also as a real embodied, corporeal, visceral phenomenon.

And that is one of the key things that we will keep highlighting as we read this particular text. So in a nutshell this particular text looks at patriarchy as a grand narrative and you know if you look at grand narratives, if you look at almost any grand narrative, whether it is religion or you know nation or language or any of those you know related phenomenon, we find, it is hard to find a grand narrative which is not patriarchal in quality.

So patriarchy seems to be embedded in almost all grand narratives right. So we cannot think of a grand narrative which is not patriarchal in some sense or the other. So patriarchy becomes the default grand narrative in some sense, the covered grand narrative, inside other grand narratives and obviously it is a grand narrative in its own right. It is perhaps the most successful, the most sinister and the most you know daily grand narrative.

The grand narrative which is most daily consumed at a most direct level, at a most embodied level, you know at a more subconscious level. So patriarchy is at most sinister, subconscious and successful you know sinisterly successful grand narrative which we can think of. So in that sense understanding patriarchy becomes a really key text in terms of how this grand narrative is formed, how it is lift, how it is confirmed to in daily discourses of life.

So in that sense this particular essay, it becomes a very key essay not just for feminism, not just for gender studies but also for any discourse analysis you know we saw how Foucault's What is an Author was an excellent discourse analysis because it moves away from just looking at the

author and looking at a more complex mechanism of how a discourse is formed you know. In that sense it becomes a really matter text on discourse analysis.

So in a very similar way, Understanding Patriarchy too might be read as a discourse analysis but it is more than that because it talks about like I said it talks about real lift bodily experiences at a visceral embodied level and in that sense it becomes a very key text for an experiential understanding of patriarchy, okay.

So with that preamble let us dive into the text and see how Hooks talks about patriarchy from anecdotal perspective as well as from a more intellectual perspective and how she combines the two perspectives and reveals to us that these are not mutually contradictory but these inform each other. So anecdotal evidence and intellectual examination, they inform each other much like they do and Fanon in that particular book that we read Black Skin White Masks, okay. So this is Bells Hooks Understanding Patriarchy which should be on your screen at the moment.

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**Patriarchy is** the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. Yet most men do not use the word “patriarchy” in everyday life. Most men never think about patriarchy—what it means, how it is created and sustained. Many men in our nation would not be able to spell the word or pronounce it correctly. The word “patriarchy” just is not a part of their normal everyday thought or speech. Men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women’s liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences. I have been standing at podiums talking about patriarchy for more than thirty years. It is a word I use daily, and men who hear me use it often ask me what I mean by it.

Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social discursivity assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. So the very opening sentence is provocative you know, again this provocative quality is something which this particular essay has in you know commonality with Fanon’s Black Skin White Mask, I mean that too as you saw was a very provocative text. It really, it is a very angry text, it is a very angry writing.

And its rhetorical range is, not just rhetoric it is the real experience of rage and resentment that is born out of discrimination, that is born out of suffering and pain and humiliation. So you know likewise this particular text too, it carries that those sentiments, sentiments of resentment, rage etc. And if you look at the opening sentence, interestingly we find that you know Bell Hooks talks about patriarchy as a disease, a social disease.

There is almost a medical quality, a medical rim that she has given to patriarchy. It is almost like a pathology, right. So this pathological quality about patriarchy is something that she is highlighting at the very outset of this work. Yet most men do not use the word patriarchy in everyday life. Most men never think about patriarchy and what it means, how it is created and sustained. And this is true in many ways for any grand narrative, for any complete grand narrative because you do not realize that it is a construct.

You do not realize that it is something which has been formulated. You just live it, you just follow it without, you just obey it, just conform to it without really thinking about it. So there is a subconscious quality about a subscription. It is a subconscious subscription and that is what makes the grand narrative successful in the first place. That is you strap to it subconsciously, you conform to it without questioning. So most men do not use the term patriarchy.

Most men are not even aware of the fact that they are patriarchal while actually being so. So they never think about how it is created and sustained. Many men in our nation would not be able to spell the word or pronounce it correctly. The word patriarchy just is not part of the normal everyday thought of speech. Men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women's liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences.

So again she is looking at the way how the word patriarchy is used in everyday parlance, and how people associate with it and how there is a degree of resentment because it is looked at as some kind of a flippant feminism thing you know this is not for men, men should not be interested in patriarchy, it is something that feminist use as a strategy to bash men. So that is the

kind of very blunt and (()) (12:08) understanding of patriarchy that Hooks is highlighting over here.

And she says that is one of the reasons why most men choose not to even think about it while actually being supremely patriarchal in their everyday behavior and quality and thought. Men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women's liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences. So again this lack of relevance of feminism appears to have with men's experiences or something that Hooks is critical of.

So she is critical of that kind of feminism which you know disregards men and men's experiences and that kind of feminism which is restricted only to women and she says that is the feminism which is which actually does this service to a real and more complex understanding of gender rules and gender behavior you know in a sense this particular text is also a critique not just of patriarchy but also of feminism, of that kind of feminism which is exclusive in quality, which is exclusionary in quality and not inclusive.

It does not take into account, does not incorporate into its analysis men's experiences and men's suffering and you know the entire of women being complicit to patriarchy and that is something that she is constantly highlighting throughout this particular text. Okay, I have been standing at podiums talking about patriarchy for more than thirty years. It is a word I use daily and men who hear me use it often ask me what I mean by it, okay.

So again look at the personal quality this particular essay has. So you know she is obviously offering a very sophisticated and a complex and robust analysis of patriarchy but she is using a language which is intensely indirect, directs away, direct and personal and almost anecdotal in quality and it sort of addresses the reader directly and it gives the sense of immediacy to this particular text and this immediacy, this immediate direct quality is what makes this text so engaging for us readers. It does not rely on rhetoric.

It does not rely on any empty intellectual jargon but it rather it once address directly with enormous informal kind of an equation. So she says quite clearly that you know she has been

talking about patriarchy for the last three decades across different situations and different seminars and conferences and she often gets asked what does she mean by patriarchy. What is the meaning, what is the significance, what is her working definition of patriarchy and this particular text, this particular essay you know is an attempt to address the question in some sense.

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Nothing discounts the old antifeminist projection of men as all-powerful more than their basic ignorance of a major facet of the political system that shapes and informs male identity and sense of self from birth until death. I often use the phrase “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics. Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy, even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles.

Nothing discounts the old antifeminist projection of men as all-powerful more than their basic ignorance of a major facet of the political system that shapes and informs male identity and sense of self from birth until death. So this idea of, this information, this discourse, this experience, this lesson, this education which shapes and informs male identity from the moment of birth till the moment of death is something that you know Hooks would define as patriarchy.

But it is something that most men never even realize, not even you know cognizant of in the daily lives. I often use the phrase imperialist white-supremacist you know capitalist patriarchy to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics. If you look at the adjectives, imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy, so there are different kinds of you know adjectives coming together.

It is racist, it is imperialist, it is capitalist, it is supremacist, it is majoritarian and it is expansionist and that obviously comes under the (( )) (15:43) of patriarchy and that makes it even



more unsettling and violent and this is more I think like all great texts this particular text too is quite prophetic because that is perhaps more true in the times that we live in today and you may say that we experience, we see today in our daily lives, in the news, in the media than what it was when Bell Hooks was actually writing.

So it has actually become more true you know the current situation, the present is actually more true to this particular description than what may have been when Hooks originally wrote this particular essay. So imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. So look at the conjoining of different kinds of adjectives coming together. To describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation's politics.

Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy. Even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles. So this is something which is a form of indoctrination. It happens in very early age. Children are taught patriarchy, children are sort of indoctrinated into patriarchy.

And they consume patriarchy, they conform to patriarchy and they follow they enact patriarchal principles sometimes without even being aware of it because it something which is naturalized and ritualized through different kinds of practices inside the domestic space. So patriarchy informs dominant gender roles in daily discourses of life. Patriarchy informs the more hegemonic, the more current, the more prevalent you know gender performance that happens inside domestic situations.

So patriarchy in that sense becomes again a very sinister subconscious subscription to a particular kind of ideology, to a particular kind of grand narrative which obviously does not appear to be a grand narrative in the first place. It appears to be a given. It appears to be perfect and naturalized and normalized. So it is normativized as well as naturalized and that is the whole, that is the best way in which any particular discourse can become a grand narrative and patriarchy is no exception to that.

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Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. When my older brother and I were born with a year separating us in age, patriarchy determined how we would each be regarded by our parents. Both our parents believed in patriarchy; they had been taught patriarchal thinking through religion.

So patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that men, males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. So in a way it is a complete legitimization of male violence. It is a complete legitimization of male domination of women or other weaker sections of society including children sometimes, animals sometimes.

So patriarchy becomes this very male centric kind of dominance and it upholds the notion that men are inherently superior, men are inherently stronger, men are inherently more rational, more intellectual, more intelligent and hence are more qualified to rule. They are more qualified to reign, they are more qualified to dominate and they become the national, it is a very selectionist kind of a system, a very selectionist kind of a structure. It is the survival of the fittest.

So men are the fittest by default according to this particular principle and hence they are most qualified and most eligible to carry out these functions which sometimes include, often include violence and domination and terrorism. So this particular phrase over here is very interesting, psychological terrorism and violence. So it is not just terrorism, it is not just violence at a visceral level but also at a very subterranean psychological level where women and children are taught to obey their fathers and the grand patriarch of the family.

Because that is what is you know virtuous to do. So patriarchy often masquerades as a virtue. Patriarchy often disguises, often passes off as a virtue, as something which is a good thing to abide by, a good norm to abide by and like all sub strategies it normalizes, it normativizes itself through naturalization. So it naturalizes itself as a given discourse, as a given situation that we do not even question, we do not even need to question because it is just laid out before us, before we are born.

So that becomes by default a default grand narrative that people abide by, people confirm to, okay. When my older brother and this is anecdotal evidence that Hooks keeps supplying throughout this particular essay in terms of in order to corroborate her arguments, in order to corroborate her contention. When my elder brother, older brother and I were born with a year separating us in age, patriarchy determined how we would each be regarded by our parents.

Both our parents believed in patriarchy. They had been taught patriarchal thinking through religion. So again look at the constant collusion that patriarchy has with other grand narratives, religion, nationalism, nation, language, culture, so all kinds of grand narratives that we can think of, sexuality, heteronormativity. So they are all patriarchal in principle, capitalism, imperialism. So all the grand narratives which are obviously very sinister, obviously violent and you know hegemonizing and territorializing.

So all these grand narratives with all the territorial quality, territorializing quality, with all the violent quality, with all their megalomaniacal quality they are inherently patriarchal in their ontology. So patriarchy becomes the by default mechanism for any grand narrative and religion obviously is one of the supreme grand narratives which is completely patriarchal in quality.

It is a rule, it is a book of rules and more often than not which are written by men, which are followed by men and even obviously the more powerful men. They wield most power inside religion. They wield and most privileged, the most agency inside religion and obviously every, almost every religion you can think of all the major religions that we can think of, the Christian religions, the Hindu religions, there are different kinds of religions that we are aware of, knows

them that we are aware of, they have their founding fathers, obviously men and the founding fathers or the prophets or the messiahs or you know anyone really they are more often than not males and they are ones who set out the rules.

They are the ones who set out the testaments. They are the ones who set out the principles which are then followed by the other sections of society including women. So religion and patriarchy go hand in hand. They are completely collusive with each other. They are completely complicit with each other in their structural as well as sentimental qualities okay.

So Bell Hooks over here she talks about how, you know how her particular family, how her particular parents they were patriarchal in their quality and they learned patriarchy through religion as a result of which the moment that when she was born and her brother was born, her brother was just an year older than her, they were given very different treatments. They were given very different kinds of upbringings based on the patriarchal principles which their parents inherited and which their parents consolidated through their engagement with religion.

So how was the engagement? So in what sense was religion patriarchal in quality and how did religion become complicit, how did religion consolidate the constructed patriarchy and made it into a given which could not be questioned. This is how.

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At church they had learned that God created man to rule the world and everything in it and that it was the work of women to help men perform these tasks, to obey, and to always assume a subordinate role in relation to a powerful man. They were taught that God was male. These teachings were reinforced in every institution they encountered-- schools, courthouses, clubs, sports arenas, as well as churches. Embracing patriarchal thinking, like everyone else around them, they taught it to their children because it seemed like a "natural" way to organize life.

Our church they had learned that God created man to rule the world and everything in it and that it was the work of women to help men perform these tasks, to obey, and to always assume a subordinate role in relation to a powerful man. So you know this is a genesis story for almost any religion where you know God created, creates man, man becomes the first choice and then man is the one who carries out all kinds of functions.

Man is the one who carries out all kinds of significant functions but you know it is the function of the woman to support the man, to be the passive supporter, to you know stay behind the man and you know support him, comfort him and give him all kinds of solace etc. But the point is the real responsibilities, the real functions are to be carried out by men and this is the doctrine, this is the principle which is followed by almost every religion and this is something which Bell Hooks says that their parents also learned from the church.

So they were taught that God was male. So God was always the male. The prophets of Gods were always males and the woman occupied, the woman inhabited a very marginalized peripheral you know position in the entire landscape, in the entire genealogy, in the entire structure of religion especially the pseudo-Christian religion that has been mentioned and alluded to over here.

These teachings were reinforced in courthouses sorry in every institutions they encountered; schools, courthouses, clubs, sports arenas as well as the churches. So you know look at all these institutions and this is in keeping with what we have studied, what we did study at the very beginning of this course if you remember through this understanding of ISA and RSA, ideological state apparatus and repressive state apparatus.

So you know all the institutions mentioned over here, schools, courthouses, clubs, sports arenas, churches each of these institutions belongs to either of these two categories, ISA or RSA and obviously these become a very instrumental sites, very instrumental spaces where patriarchy, the principles of patriarchy are promoted, perpetrated and produced in some sense and then obviously consolidated through different kinds of rituals, different kinds of enactments very coded enactments which you know confirm and consolidate the patriarchal principles.

So embracing patriarchal thinking like everyone else around them, they taught it to their children because it seemed like a natural way to organize life. So again the naturalness of it is something that is interesting and that is something that we keep coming back to. The increase in naturalization of patriarchy. How patriarchy is naturalized. Again like all grand narratives, like any grand narrative it has to be naturalized. It cannot be relieved.

So the key thing over here is naturalization. So how the entire discourse of patriarchy is naturalized to religion and how Hooks mentions quite clearly over here her parents subscribed to that kind of a discourse. They consumed it without questioning it and in the process naturalized it and this naturalization, this naturalized indoctrination is something which is passed off to the subsequent generation Hooks being the part of that generation.

And hence this very clear demarcation between the female child and the male child keeps coming up throughout this discourse. So embracing patriarchal thinking you know this is an indoctrination and that kind of indoctrination inform the way they treated the children, they you know brought up the children and how they differentiated between the male child and the female child.

And how the female child was taught certain doctrines just because she happens to be a woman as some doctrines which needs to be followed, needs to be confirmed to and this is embracing patriarchy and this is embracing the patriarchal principles that Hooks mentions and this embracing is obviously a form of naturalizing. So we will conclude the first lecture with this and we will move on with this text in the subsequent lecture. Thank you for your attention.