

# The Patriarchs

*author: Angela Saini*

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## Synopsis

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| author     | Angela Saini     |
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| readBy     | Sohm Sohm Kapila |
| inLanguage | english          |

For fans of *Sapiens* and *The Dawn of Everything*, a groundbreaking exploration of gendered oppression—its origins, its histories, our attempts to understand it, and our efforts to combat it—

For centuries, societies have treated male domination as natural to the human species. But how would our understanding of gender inequality—our imagined past and contested present—look if we didn’t assume that men have always ruled over women? If we saw inequality as something more fragile that has had to be constantly remade and reasserted?

In this bold and radical book, award-winning science journalist Angela Saini explores the roots of what we call patriarchy, uncovering a complex history of how it first became embedded in societies and spread across the globe from prehistory into the present. She travels to the world’s earliest known human settlements, analyzes the latest research findings in science and archaeology, and traces cultural and political histories from the Americas to Asia, finding that:

- From around 7,000 years ago there are signs that a small number of powerful men were having more children than other men
- From 5,000 years ago, as the earliest states began to expand, gendered codes appeared in parts of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East to serve the interests of powerful elites—but in slow, piecemeal ways, and always resisted
- In societies where women left their own families to live with their husbands, marriage customs came to be informed by the widespread practice of captive-taking and slavery, eventually shaping laws that alienated women from systems of support and denied them equal rights
- There was enormous variation in gender and power in many societies for thousands of years, but colonialism and empire dramatically changed ways of life across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, spreading rigidly patriarchal customs and undermining how people organized their families and work.

In the 19th century and 20th centuries, philosophers, historians, anthropologists, and feminists began to actively question what

patriarchy meant as part of the attempt to understand the origins of inequality. In our own time, despite the pushback against sexism, abuse, and discrimination, even revolutionary efforts to bring about equality have often ended in failure and backlash. But *The Patriarchs* is a profoundly hopeful book—one that reveals a multiplicity to human arrangements that undercuts the old grand narratives and exposes male supremacy as no more (and no less) than an ever-shifting element in systems of control.

# Reader's comments

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