

**WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THEORIES IN
INDIA – LITERATURE REVIEW****BABU RAM VERMA****DR. SATISH CHANDRA**

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ABSTRACT

The status of women in India is a contested terrain as there are protagonist and antagonists of the conditions of women. The women have a significant role in the society as in the contemporary world the women contributes considerably in the private and public sphere and also to the country's economy. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of the underlying trends in domestic violence in India, specifically wife-beating and wife-murder. The literature and existing field research on domestic violence is limited and has primarily focused on revealing specific determinants of domestic violence, within one region in India.

Keywords : Women, violence, economy

INTRODUCTION

Violence & crime against women has been a worldwide epidemic. Crime against women is a common evil in Indian society and has deeply rooted traditional in Indian Culture. Crimes have been classified under Indian Panel code as Rape, kidnapping and abduction, homicide for dowry and dowry deaths, torture, molestation, sexual harassment and importation of girls. Violence against women is a serious problem in India. Violence against women in particular hinders in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (WHO, 2005). The worst part of the problem is that women today are not feeling safe and secured even in the family. The concept of home, sweet home is no more, so far many women, who suffer violence against themselves by the members of the family. Cutting across the boundaries of caste, class, religion and region, domestic violence is the most common type of VAW prevalent in India (Ghosh, 2007). Violence is not committed by the external agencies but even by husbands against wives. Many dowry deaths have been reported due to harassment by husbands and other family members. According to several research reports, violence against women certainly rise significantly because women has become sex object and she found herself suppressed and subjugated in a patriarchal society.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THEORIES-

A comprehensive analysis of the causes and precipitators of domestic crimes across India can be gleamed by exploring the current prominent theories identified by researchers in developed countries. In the 1980s, Gelles (1985) identified six major theories of domestic violence in the literature; "exchange theory", "resource theory", "patriarchy", "general systems theory", "an economic model", and "a socio-cultural explanation". Kristin Anderson (1997) grouped these theories into three main approaches to domestic violence, and labelled them according to the associated research streams; "family violence", "resource

theory" and "feminist" approaches.

For theories of domestic violence specifically applicable to India, Anderson's main categories are helpful, with the addition of "exchange theory" as a separate stream. The question then becomes: Which of the theories, or combination of theories, best explains the prevalence of domestic violence in India? The applicability of these particular approaches is far from clear, as they are primarily based on research conducted in the United States. Let us attempt, then, to interpret and adapt the findings of existing Indian studies to these domestic violence theories.

EXCHANGE THEORY FOR INDIA

The Exchange Approach : The Exchange theory approach proposes that violence is used when the rewards are higher than the costs (Gelles 1985: 360). The rewards can include obedience and servitude of the wife, and are particularly relevant in a society that rewards masculine displays of violence.

Since domestic violence is generally perpetrated in the private sphere of the home, and is often considered a "taboo" subject, the risk of social condemnation for the husband is low. According to Gelles (1985: 360), "The private nature of the family, the reluctance of social institutions and agencies to intervene in violence, and the low risk of other interventions reduce the costs of violence." This is particularly true in India. As long as the beating is not too severe for social censure, domestic violence in India has low social consequences for the husband. In fact, ironically, a husband could be risking his reputation if he does not occasionally express his dominance. "Further, as one community health worker noted, 'Even educated men beat their wives; they might know that beating is wrong, but other men in the community question his manhood if he doesn't. So he beats her a little bit.'" (Krishnan 2005: 90).

As an extra dimension to Exchange theory, domestic violence in India can also provide tangible "rewards" for the husband in the form of dowry. "Dowry violence does not refer directly to marriage-related payments made at the time of the wedding, but to additional payments demanded after the marriage by the groom's family where the husband systematically abuses the wife in order to extract larger transfers." (Bloch and Rao 2002: 1029) Beating or harassing a young wife in order to extract more dowry payment from her family has been recognized as a significant issue. This is particularly relevant to recent trends in India, as the dowry prices are unabatedly increasing across the subcontinent and the consequences of this are only just beginning to be understood.

Field Research in support of Exchange Theory in India : A study of domestic violence, and the effect of dowry, was conducted by Vijayendra Rao (1997) in 1992 in rural Karnataka. Using in-depth interviews, focus-groups and surveys of three "potter" villages in rural Karnataka, Rao collated data on the prevalence of wife beating. Apart from the more general socio-economic factors of education, alcohol, wealth and (uniquely) wife's sterility, she also included year of marriage and dowry "shortfall", to regress against domestic violence."

The most significant determinant in Rao's logistic regression against wife-beating was dowry shortfall. The more a wife's dowry was beneath the average, the more likely she was to be beaten. This suggests that either the husband expressed his frustration of a small dowry by beating his wife, or more likely, that the husband beat the wife as a deliberate means to extract more dowry from her family. This supports Rao's initial hypothesis that dowry is one of the primary motivators of domestic violence. The results can also support an Exchange theory of domestic violence for India.

The "reward" of further dowry from the wife's family by beating her is an economic motivator for domestic violence. Furthermore, during her field research Rao (1997: 1172) found that up to 88% of women in these villages would "accept it quietly" if beaten by their husbands. Thus the social "risk" of violence is low in the potters' village. However, an explained variance (adjusted R²) of only 22% indicates that there are other important variables missing from Rao's regression equation. Dowry demands may cause wife-beating, as explained by Exchange Theory, but there are other factors contributing also. Regardless, the effects of dowry appear to be significant to the propensity for domestic violence, at least in the potter villages. And as such, trends in dowry are important to monitor."

RESOURCE THEORY FOR INDIA

The Resource Approach : The Resource theorists contest that it is the power differences between marriage partners, rather than individual socio-demographic factors, that influence the level of domestic violence (Goode, 1971). Physical abuse of a wife, for example, is used as a tool via which a husband may compensate for lack of power in the relationship.

In India, industrialisation and economic development/liberalisation has led to many women beginning employment outside the family home for the first time, especially in the cities. A study by Conklin (1988) compared the power balance between husband and wife in India and the United States and found that the control of resources, both tangible (eg. money) and intangible (eg. education level), was a primary measure of the level of power imbalance (eg. decision making) in conjugal relationships. However, he also found that there were other, unaccounted for, contributing factors to the conjugal power imbalance in India; the dominant influence of tradition in Indian society. It appears that the importance of resources such as income and education in India needs to be moderated in domestic violence theories, due to the concurrent importance of traditional norms.

If this "family power norm" could be considered a "resource" of the husband's, then a Resource theory could possibly illuminate the underlying causes of domestic violence in India. For example, if a wife was to simultaneously begin paid-work (ie. gain an income resource) and do less household chores (ie. challenge the family power norm), this could be perceived as the threat to the husband's power in the marriage, and lead to physical violence. Thus, in a gendered Resource theory paradigm, it can be hypothesized that threat to "resources", including the traditional family power norm, enhances the potential for domestic violence.

Field Research in support of resource theory in India : Krishnan (2005) was conducted in one of the relatively more prosperous taluks (subdistricts) of the central plateau region of Karnataka, using a cross-sectional survey of married women. The logistic regression of individual-level and household-level factors against physical violence experienced by married women revealed that the influences of caste and poverty were superseded by gendered financial responsibilities. Women who controlled their own income experienced significantly more violence than those who had no income or handed their income over to their spouse.

The finding that women's financial autonomy relates positively with marital violence indicates a connection between gender role transitions and violence. If marital violence is considered an expression of power of husband over wife, then the loss of power over monetary resources could be compensated by an increased show of physical power. A gendered Resource theory would support this conclusion. Additionally, greater violence by the husband may be the result of increased (resource) stress produced by confusion over gender roles in the home. This is particularly applicable to India, as the traditional "family

power norm" could be threatened when a wife remains in control of her income."

Further manipulation of the data from the study of Rao in Karnataka (Bloch and Rao 2002), investigated the connection between dowry and violence with a more complex mathematical model. Bloch and Rao concluded that dowry violence was most likely to be experienced by brides with wealthy parents, who generally give smaller dowries initially. They interpreted this result similarly to the Exchange theory analysis, by proposing that violence is used by the husband as a means to force further dowry from the girl's wealthy parents (Bloch and Rao 2002: 1040). Another interpretation, however, can be gleaned by examining the relationship in terms of Resource theory.

Hornung et al. (1981) found that in the United States wives who married a partner of lower 'status' were more likely to receive violence. Hornung et al. described the heightened violence as an attempt by the husband to balance against the wife's superior social "resource".

Similarly, it is possible that the relationship between the Indian bride's family wealth, smaller dowry size and greater domestic violence might not be as simple as wife-beating in order to extract greater dowry. We could suggest that there is a complex interaction of economic, resource power and individual traits that predict a husband's propensity to domestic violence. This depends, though, on whether the bride's family wealth is considered a "threat" to the power of the husband. Further studies are needed to examine this.

FAMILY VIOLENCE THEORY FOR INDIA

Family Violence Approaches : The two Family Violence approaches that are most applicable to India are the "social structure model" and the "socio-cultural explanation", as defined by Gelles (1985: 361). The socio-cultural explanation of domestic violence directly impugns attitudes and norms concerning violent behaviour. "Societies, cultures, and subcultures that approve of the use of violence are thought to have the highest rates of domestic violence." (Gelles 1985: 361) The regions in India that have higher rates of violence in general, for example higher rates of homicides, may indicate a greater inclination in that region to use violence in domestic disputes. And thus we might expect to see higher levels of domestic violence that leads to death (Dowry Deaths) in such areas, according to the socio-cultural model.

The social-structure (economic) model, alternatively, firstly identifies the uneven distribution of stress in societies; primarily from low income, unemployment, illness etc.. When violence is the "accepted response or adaptation to stress" by the individual or community involved, then this "socially structured stress" can lead to greater incidences of domestic violence (Gelles 1985: 361). In India, the most likely demographics to endure socially structured stress are the lower castes, the marginalised and those financially struggling. Thus a social-structure model in India would expect us to find greater levels of domestic violence among the Scheduled castes and tribes, those in rural poverty, urban slums and those who are socially outcast.

Field Research in support of Family Violence Theories in India

In support of the Family violence theory, Martin et al. (1999) found that men reported stress related factors as the most significant precipitators of violence, in his multivariate analysis in UT of Delhi. In particular, the stress factors were household poverty and a husband's low education. Similarly, a study over three Indian States by Duvury et al (2002) found that physical violence decreased as household socioeconomic status increased, although sexual violence increased. Direct evidence of caste influence in the propensity for domestic violence was found in a study by Visaria (1999) in Gujarat. This research indicated that

economic stress precipitated marital violence and this was experienced more by lower, scheduled caste women.

The previous study by Krishnan (2005) originally described caste as the most influential factor in the rates of domestic violence. "The odds of reported violence were nearly six times greater among women belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes compared with Brahmin women." (Krishnan 2005: 94). The reasons that Krishnan attributed this higher level of domestic violence were indeed stress related, as expected in Family violence theory. "In our initial ethnographic research we found that marital violence was linked to the stresses experienced by men by virtue of their caste and economic position." (Krishnan 2005: 96) However, this finding was not upheld when individual-level factors, such as wife's economic autonomy and a husband's alcohol consumption, were included. Thus the Family Violence social-structure theory is not upheld in this study. Indeed, it is difficult to determine exact causes of domestic violence, even using multivariate analysis, due to the multitude of potential variables and the methodology of the study.

The studies by Krishnan (2005) and Rao (1997) in Karnataka both also found alcohol expenditure or consumption to be a significant regression factor for domestic violence. It is difficult to draw a clear relationship between alcohol expenditure, intoxication and alcohol induced violence. The positive relationship found in these studies could suggest that domestic violence is catalyzed by the loss of self control caused by alcohol intoxication; that alcohol consumption is triggered by stress, which also leads to violence; and/or that alcohol purchase is more socially expected in communities that also socially legitimize violence. All of these reasons could potentially support a theory of Family Violence.

That is, the correlation of alcohol and domestic violence could suggest a relationship between alcohol, stress and domestic violence, in a community that may not socially condemn either alcohol consumption or wife-beating. Any conclusions, however, would need further empirical evidence.

PATRIARCHAL THEORY FOR INDIA

Patriarchal Approach : Traditionally, women have had inferior status in Indian society. The birth of a son is celebrated and given congratulations, whereas the birth of a daughter is celebrated but accorded consolations." Perplexingly, advances in living standards, industry and technology have not lead to a greater valuing of women. "India's persistently low female-male ratio suggests some considerable anti-female discrimination which- in contrast with many other countries- has not gone away with the decline in mortality." (Dreze and Sen 2002: 238) In fact, current trends show that contemporary wealthier Indian women are choosing to abort their pregnancies rather than give birth to a girl.

The ultimate cause of domestic violence, according to a Patriarchal theory of domestic violence, is viewed as part of this wider gender discrimination, supported by the patriarchal system and the gendered power relations therein. Dowry is considered one the patriarchal practices that contributes to the inferior position of women in Indian society. "For years. now, we have participated in the common refrain that dowry is a social evil."

It is the source of wife-abuse, views of daughters as burdens, and can lead to Dowry Deaths. According to Kishwar (1998), one of the primary obstacles in motivating women themselves to renounce dowry is the fact that inheritance laws are matrilineal. "Most women see their dowry as the only share they will get in their parental' property." (Kishwar 1998: 269) The Patriarchal approach to domestic violence sees a connection between gender-discriminating laws, dowry and wife-beating- all are the manifestations of the

underlying gender inequality in India- perpetuated by the traditional patriarchal social system. That a woman is beaten to extract more dowry is an indication of the male belief in his right of ownership over the woman, and his right to extract more resources from her family.

The inferiority of women is historically common to all Indian communities.' However, there is still great variation in the family structure across the subcontinent. In the more northern States, exogamous kinship patterns see the newly wed bride leaving her home village to join the village of her husband, without further access to her relatives and social support network. Contrastingly, in the more southern States, endogamous kinship patterns ensure that more closely aligned families share marriage connections, which enables greater access to family support for the daughter."

Additionally, matriarchal lineage is present in some areas of southern India, including Kerala." According to a Patriarchal theory of domestic violence, therefore, women are most likely to be more valued in the southern States of India, and thus less domestic violence should be observed there.

Field Research in support of Patriarchal Theory in India : One of the criticisms of the Patriarchal theory of domestic violence is that it is difficult to empirically prove (Gelles 1985: 361). Whilst a single "patriarchal" variable might be too complex to define, many social indicators of gender inequality or male preference can be used as surrogate variables in a regression analysis of domestic violence.

The study by Rao (1997), previously described, also found that women with less living sons were significantly more likely to be beaten. This can be explained as higher valuing of male children than female, and encourages a feminist approach to domestic violence. That wife beating is considered a solution or suitable "punishment" for birthing girls is another indicator of the entrenched female inferiority in Indian society, and possibly, a need for better education in reproductive health.

With equally significant probability in the regression equation, a sterilized wife was more likely to be beaten than a non sterilized one. Rao (1997: 1177) explained her findings, through in-depth interviews, that men used sterilisation as a reason to doubt their wife's fidelity- as the women could have extra-marital intercourse without the "evidence" of pregnancy.

This finding is curious, and raises doubts about a socio-biological (evolutionary) approach to "jealous husbands." Simply, since the sterilised wife is physically unable to bear the children of another man, this suggests that the husband beats his wife in a display of possessiveness, rather than due to evolutionary instincts. This then leads us to propose that a Patriarchal theory of domestic violence is more applicable, as beating of the sterilised wife is motivated by an underlying belief of ownership of the wife by the husband.

The primary finding of the study by Rao, however, was that dowry extraction is a principal motivation for domestic violence. This was previously explained via the Exchange theory of "reward" for the husband by beating his wife. Alternatively, a feminist approach to this finding would be to enquire as to why marriage is so essential to women as to require exorbitant dowries; why violence is the chosen method of dowry extraction by the husbands; and why all of this is socially acceptable. Feminists would argue that whilst other theories of domestic violence may help explain the contributing factors, for example economic motivation, it is the underlying patriarchal system that allows the circumstances to arise at all.

"Dowry is only one among many pretexts used by in-laws to legitimize abuse." Similarly, the result of

Krishnan (2005) suggested that female financial autonomy was the most significant factor in domestic violence regression. This was previously explained via the Resource theory: Husbands beat their wives in response to a loss of monetary control in the household, in order to regain the balance of "resources". According to the Patriarchal approach to domestic violence, patriarchy is the sole cause of domestic violence, and thus also the only factor in the variations across the Indian States. As the two examples above show, a "single variable" theory of domestic violence is unlikely to be comprehensive. Concurrently, however, it also appears that a theory of domestic violence in India which does not have a gendered component, would be unable to explain the underlying causes involved.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult in rural areas to approach the court thus to reduce prevalence of domestic violence there should be formation of Women's group to minimize seclusion. There must be strict enforcement of existing laws relating to the age of marriage. Social reforms must be encouraged and awareness at all socio-economic levels in society must be spread in order to provide holistic solution to the problem. The political and economic initiatives should be gender sensitive and the networks among organizations, activists, and state officers need to be strengthened. Gender sensitivity training through workshops and seminars must be conducted for all professionals, organizations, and agencies serving women and children. Community participation, its development schemes, and women's self-help collectives are very important in this regard. Therefore, a combination of social and legal reforms would be the ideal solution for eradication of the evil of domestic violence from our society.

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