This chapter scrutinizes the major insights of both Western feminist theory and Third-World/postcolonial feminism. It is with feminism that the focus on violence moves specifically to women. The first section of this chapter reviews the various strands of Western feminism and their attempts to address multiple forms of violence that target women. These strands of Western feminist theory can be viewed as a systematic protest against various forms of violence suffered by women under patriarchy. The focus is on how these schools of feminist thought emerged as a theoretical opposition of women’s sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and disenfranchisement. But they gradually turned to the exposition of women as the victim of symbolic violence in within patriarchy. The second section sheds light on the circumstances that have led to the formulation of Third-World/postcolonial feminism. It also concentrates on the various insights provides by Indian feminism. However, the study also highlights both Western feminism and Indian feminism’s inability to comprehensively articulate the diverse forms of violence.

3.1 Western Feminism’s Universalist Frameworks and their Interrogation

Feminism today is construed as a multidisciplinary system of critical interrogation, theory and social action in which issues dealing with the political, economic, social, cultural, spiritual, intellectual, artistic, racial,
sexual and institutionalized inequality of women in phallocentric societies are addressed. In other words, it is a systematic protest against various forms and manifestations of oppressions and inequalities experienced by women.

Feminism is also a broad-based philosophical perspective that comprises several approaches, such as liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existential, and postmodern. These strands of feminism address the oppressed status of women in society. Feminism mobilizes an amalgamation of socio-political movements that campaign on issues, such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, equal pay, sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination and sexual violence. It also constitutes a critical discourse that explores the arena of objectification, stereotyping, dehumanization and victimization of women which is normally shadowed by patriarchy under the mask of normalcy. It highlights that gender-based violence may not be primarily physical; it can have multiple incarnations, including discursive violence.

Hence, feminism is a cultivated sensibility towards the oppression of women.

Despite being centered on the issues of women, feminist theory has invited frequent critique by contemporary women writers and social activists. It is criticized for its inadequacy to highlight the multi-layered forms of violence that target women. By overlooking the specific differences in each woman, they are said to promote the socio-biological construct called ‘woman.’ Contemporary feminist theory is, to an extent, a reaction against the traditional and initial waves of feminism that propagated the idea that women of the world are linked through sisterhood because they all live in a patriarchal society. Many Third World writers and activists, including Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande, have openly rejected the label of ‘feminist’ in an attempt to
show their disagreement with the elitist Western feminist academia. In their view, traditional feminist thought restricts itself to Western bourgeois women’s concerns and issues, imposes these generalizations on every woman and, thus, fails to adequately articulate the suffering of woman in all corners of the world. The notion of a universal patriarchy is, according to contemporary feminist thought and Third-World feminism, responsible for Western feminism’s blatant disregard for a woman’s specific nationality, culture, religion, community and history.

Patriarchy refers to a society-wide structure of power-based relationships in which men exercise domination over women. It manifests itself through social institutions and wields its influence on individuals through the existing ideologies. Patriarchy, according to Western feminists, hands over the reigns of power to men who ensure that the relationship of domination and subordination between the two sexes is maintained. Here men are perceived to be the main culprits for the suffering experienced by women. Kate Millett observes that “the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands” (Sexual Politics 25). Despite the role played by feminism in the expansion of the awareness of various forms of oppressions suffered by women, feminism errs in its reduction of this oppression solely to the patriarchal category. Patriarchal violence is never pure, for patriarchy always intersects with an individual’s specific caste, class, race, religion and culture. Hence the perpetrators of violence against women may be individual men, patriarchy, the existing caste system, the predominant beliefs, customs and
traditions of the community, the class divisions in society, or even women. Western feminism, however, has generally associated power with phallocentrism by considering patriarchy to be the sole agency that causes the victimization of women.

Also, Western feminists attempt to understand the issues concerning women by forming their theories around those of male thinkers for other purposes. For instance, Simone De Beauvoir’s entire work is inconceivable outside Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential philosophy as well his views on socialism. Another problem with the Western feminist thought, at least until the arrival of French feminist theory, is its refusal to view the subjection and victimization of women as an act of violence. They insist on using the term ‘oppression’ which seems to be too mild in the face of the dehumanization of women that sometimes even exceeds physical violence. The feminist endeavour to address the subjection of woman at the social, political, intellectual and existential levels is commendable but it falls short of adequately articulating the violence that erupts from the intersection of axes like caste, class, race and ethnicity that are predominant in the formation of every individual’s identity. This section shall explore the various strands of Western feminism, the manner in which they approach the problems that target women and the subsequent strengths and limitations of their analyses particularly with respect to violence.

Liberal feminism has evolved out of the school of political thought known as liberalism which holds reason-based rationality to be the key to self-fulfillment and asserts that society will develop only when individuals are provided with the right to act freely and rationally. Liberal feminists campaign
for women’s civil rights like the right to vote, freedom of speech and expression, equal rights to inherit property, freedom to practice one’s own religion, etc. as well as the provision of basic amenities for every person, such as legal aid, school loans, ration, medical care, social security and so on. Some feminists are quite liberal in their outlook, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor, and Betty Friedan. These feminists view the liberal school of thought as a human paradigm rather than a male paradigm.

Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* lays bare the stark reality of the barren life led by almost all the eighteenth century affluenty married, bourgeois women. Women, according to her, strike the low end of the bargain by choosing to accept their husband’s offer of power, prestige and pleasure over their own right to liberty, health, and virtue. She states that such women forced by social circumstances to just sit there passively, beautify themselves and engage in meaningless pursuits. Wollstonecraft’s feminist ideas are a reaction against Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* where he promoted sexual dimorphism, that is, the idea that emotion is more necessary than rationality in women for it perfectly complements the intelligence of a man. Wollstonecraft disagrees with Rousseau’s perspective that every girl needs to indulge in such delicate pursuits as music, art, poetry and fiction in order to be the perfect role-model as a wife (91). She believes that only proper education can develop a woman’s rationality and moral capability, thereby enabling her to perform her duties to her husband and children in a perfect manner. She insists that there is a connection between education and virtue. Hence women need to be educated in order to lead a virtuous life and faithfully perform their duties as a wife and mother.
Wollstonecraft’s intention is to champion for the rights of women to receive education but she ends up burdening women with the same old notions of virtue that have forced them to forego their rights earlier.

As liberal feminists, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill want women to exercise their right for education (Tong 17). They also state that women should receive those civil liberties and economic opportunities that are readily available to men. Harriet Mill says that an educated and working woman is truly on the path of her own liberation. However, she believes that a woman can successfully manage her career along with the maintenance of her home only if her career is somehow related to her domestic life. She suggests that a woman needs to remain unmarried or she should marry but remain childless because only then she will be able to achieve her goals. Like Wollstonecraft, Harriet Mill’s views are restricted to elite married women who are able to hire domestic help, providing her the opportunity to work and be economically independent from her husband (Enfranchisement of women 21).

John Stuart Mill, on the other hand, does not favour the idea of a working woman (The Subjection of Women 49). He views woman’s financial equality to have an adverse effect on the economy as it lowers the wages of both men and women. He is persistent in his viewpoint that if the marriage laws are redefined in favour of women even the most liberated woman will choose the right course, that is, marriage over her career (105). The elitist and chauvinistic views held by Taylor and Mill respectively, pinpoints their failure in focussing on the bias that women faced in those times.

In The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan criticizes the white, suburban, middle-class, heterosexual married women for adopting the role of a
wife and mother as a full-time career (30). In her view, professional experts like doctors, gynecologists, obstetricians, counselors, psychiatrists, pediatricians, etc. convince women to attain self-fulfillment by acquiring competent homemaking skills (132-59). But this false sense of contentment in domesticity eventually dissipates leaving women bored, frustrated, and stressed out. This ennui forces her to find some excitement and meaning in acts of vanity and sex. Moreover, Friedan believes that the housewife’s obsessive love for her children is harmful and thus detrimental in their growth as an active, mature and independent adult (250). Friedan, however, considers marriage and motherhood to be of utmost importance in every woman’s life. The role of ‘wife’ and ‘mother,’ she argues, is a sign of woman’s normalcy, and signifies the fulfillment of her moral obligations (297). Yet the development of a woman’s self is contingent on the use of her creativity and mental faculties (300). This can be achieved only if woman has a career outside her home. In The Second Stage, Friedan states that women can juggle marriage, motherhood, and career only if both the sexes demand a change in the public values and institutional structures. Freidan demands equal job opportunities for every woman, equal wages but more flexible work schedule as she needs to fulfill her domestic obligations (69). She feels that the government should advocate more gender-specific laws (296). In fact, the needs of her husband and children are, in her view, equal to woman’s want for a career. Here Friedan reinforces the patriarchal belief that a woman is solely responsible for the private lives of her family members, thereby placing her firmly in the role of “nurturer” and “homemaker.” In fact, the major charge leveled against liberal feminists is their demand for the liberation of women
while trying to trap them in a nature-nurture binary. Hence liberal feminism assumes to be the voice of all women and upholds masculine values as the key to achievement of a happy medium, and the realization of the complete self.

Radical feminism focusses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into complex relationships causing domination and oppression of women by men. Radical feminists’ aim is to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles, and call for a radical reformulation of society (Tong 95-96). The traditional radical feminist perspective views patriarchy as a “transhistorical phenomenon” that is not only the oldest and most universal form of domination but the primary form of oppression that is manifest everywhere (Willis 118). The views of contemporary radical feminists are, however, rooted in a more syncretic politics that considers issues of class, economics, etc. to be on a par with patriarchy oppression. They claim that men manipulate social systems to bring about the suppression of both men and women. According to radical feminists, the elimination of patriarchy shall accomplish the removal of other systems of control which perpetuate the domination of one group over another. Radical feminists, in fact, claim to be the torch-bearers of feminism. They claim to have brought the issue of sexual politics to the fore. They attribute the legalization of abortion to their advertising of pregnancy as a form of violence inflicted upon women. A leading figure in radical feminism, Shulamith Firestone says that the cause of women’s victimization is situated in the biological inequality of the sexes, and the differing reproductive roles carried out by them (The Dialectic of Sex 37). She considers biological motherhood to be the root of all evil for it promotes feelings of jealousy, possessiveness, and
hatred among individuals. She demands the woman to seize control over the means of reproduction as it will, in her view eliminate the sexual class system. Radical feminism thus proclaims to liberate women from the domination of men in their lives as well as men who hold power in society. This school of feminism has often been termed as militant feminism due to its forceful attack on patriarchy, and an almost fanatical belief that men are the enemies of women (Tong 137).

Marxist feminists state that a comprehensive understanding of the oppression of women requires an analysis of the links between a woman’s self-image and her work-status. Marxists view capitalism as a system of exploitative power relationships as well as exchange relations where workers are coerced into submission both by force used by the employer or due to their own need for survival. Marxist feminists raise the question whether woman belongs to any class as her domestic work/responsibility is never viewed as labour. Maria Dalla Costa, for instance, attempts to locate and analyze the “Woman question” in the “female role” created by capitalist division of labour (21). In her view, the role played by woman in both the public and private sphere determines her awareness of one’s self. Her passivity in the family is, in fact, “productive” for her abuse is primarily an outlet for the oppressions that man suffers within the capitalist organizations. In short, Costa views domestic work as productive work and want it to be considered as “waged housework.” Barbara Bergmann, however, disagrees with this perspective. She feels that waged housework would isolate woman in her own home (212).

The primary after-effect of capitalism and class consciousness is alienation because power promotes competition. Here the workers become
detached from others as well as themselves to survive and maintain their status in the capitalistic economy. For women, this alienation takes a more bleak form for unlike men she never gets a second chance, and remains trapped in her domesticity. Marxist feminism seeks to understand the operation of gender, and its association with the processes of production and reproduction (Tong 51). In fact, Marxist feminists liken gender oppression to class oppression. They view the subordination of woman as a form of class oppression which serves the interests of ruling capitalist class.

Marxists have not sufficiently dwelt on the subjection of women in a capitalistic, class-driven society. Friedrich Engels’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* sheds light on the effect of material conditions on the family life to which every woman is confined. Engels believes that when a man forcibly marries a woman from a wealthy tribe it represents woman’s economic power for she is the resource that can help in the survival of her husband’s tribe. In his view, a married woman does not remain the primitive center of production (Engels 151). In fact, Engels states that the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is that between the bourgeois and the proletariat respectively (80). Moreover, he explains that monogamy and fidelity are compulsory for women because they are required to provide their husbands with heirs. Hence Engels views the institution of marriage and a monogamous family to be related in a fundamental way to private property (26). He says that the relationship between husband and wife in a bourgeois family always deteriorates into prostitution where the woman sells her body permanently in lieu of the man’s name, wealth, and protection (78). The proletarian home has, on the other hand, wiped out all the traces of
male dominance because here the woman like her husband goes out to earn a living (78-79). Marxist feminism considers Engels analysis of the economic situation of women in society to be flawed. Feminist theorists say that Engels has neatly sidestepped the denial of a woman’s right to private property by explaining it to be a necessary action required for economic revolution. In their view, Engels completely overlooks the fact that even if woman goes outside her home to labour, the sexual division of labour always ensures that her work remains trivial as compared to a man’s profession (Tong 51-53).

Marxist feminism also addresses the issue of the trivialization of a woman’s domestic work (Tong 53). Some feminists belonging to this school of thought stress the fact that women themselves constitute a class where they cultivate the basic values that are responsible for the smooth running of family life. They demand the socialization of domestic labour where women may step outside their homes to earn wages for domestic duties like cooking, cleaning and child-rearing (54). They also believe that economic revolution will ensue only if every woman demands paid wages for her domestic work. Traditional feminists consider the act of women divorcing their husbands or refusing to give birth to more children as wives going on strike. Contemporary Marxist feminists, on the other hand, consider the idea of paying wages to housewives for housework to be unfeasible, and a detriment to their efforts of working alongside men (55). Marxist feminist Nancy Holmstrom says that it is wrong to constitute women into a specific class as some of them may not be as oppressed as others (“Women’s Work, the Family and Capitalism,” 208). They want women’s work to be valued in the same capacity as that of men and adequate wages should be paid to everyone without considering their gender,
sex, race, class, ethnicity, etc. Marxist feminism falls short in its analysis of the economic oppression of women in society because it references woman in relation to her housework. It never considers the fact that she is competent enough to perform duties outside the realm of domesticity.

Socialist feminism is, to an extent, a reaction against the Marxist tendency viewing woman’s oppression as being less important than workers’ oppression (Tong 173). Feminists belonging to this school of thought consider all capitalist societies as patriarchal. Their elimination is possible only through a change in the mode of production. But a complete erasure of patriarchy can, in their view, occur only when the existent ideology is altered. Hence social feminists call for a connection between Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis claiming that it will help in woman’s search for liberation (174-76). Socialist feminists refer to the work of Juliet Mitchell who considers a woman’s status and function in society to be determined by her sexuality, and her role in production and reproduction. She insists that the position and role of woman is same in every society regardless of her race, class, and ethnicity (Psychoanalysis and Feminism 408). The position of woman as victim can not be completely erased or transformed by any study, suffrage movement or policy as the oppression is embedded in an individual’s psyche.

A scholar of feminist social theory, Iris Young disagrees with Juliet Mitchell’s ideological accounts of patriarchy. She considers it incorrect to assume patriarchy without the racial, cultural, and class biases because the women living in different societies can not share similar experience. Young also dwells on the issue of gender discrimination with reference to the division-of-labour. In her view, capitalism has always been and will remain
fundamentally a patriarchy (“Beyond the Unhappy Marriage” 58). The basic character of this patriarchy-driven capitalism is that men are considered to be the primary work-force whereas women are marginalized. Another Socialist feminist named Alison Jagger focusses on the alienation experienced by a woman in her quest for achieving wholeness as a person. Similar to the Marxist belief of a worker’s alienation from modes of production in a capitalistic society, Jagger also insists that woman is also alienated from her body which she shapes and adorns to gain social acceptance. Woman’s body is never under her control once it becomes an object of the male gaze and is used for sexual fulfillment or child-birth. The wife, Jaggar argues, differs from a courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage-worker…but sells it into slavery once and for all” (221). Hence Jaggar considers marriage and motherhood to be an alienating experience. It is evident that Socialist feminism encompasses an analysis of the different forms of oppressive treatments meted out to women to explain the gendered division-of-labour. But the implementation of this theory requires a complete transformation of the existing social structures and ideologues which requires individual and collective initiative.

The premise of psychoanalytic feminism lies in the challenge issued by feminists against the innovative as well as oppressive ideas of Freud on female sexuality. Feminists like Shulamith Firestone think that Freud’s ideas on female sexuality leave a lot to be desired. Freud’s theory of penis envy, rejection of “mother” as a prerequisite for normal behaviour among women, and the notion that lack of penis is responsible for women’s moral inferiority has raised the ire of many feminists. They believe that Freud’s ideas have been
fashioned keeping in mind the ideology of Victorian patriarchal culture where lack of penis in women was seen as a defection that was only somewhat overcome if woman accepted femininity as her destiny. Feminists state that Freud misconstrued the penis as an the object of every woman’s, and overlooked the mechanism of power is characterized by the “phallic.” In fact, Kate Millett terms the relationship between the two sexes as sexual politics where “politics” refers to the power-structured arrangements where an individual is controlled by another (Sexual Politics 23). She criticizes Freud’s emphasis on the concept of biological determinism of both sexes. Millet states that Freud’s perspective on female sexuality is merely an extension of male egocentricism to undermine the act of childbirth. Feminists have been largely influenced by the ideas of psychologists like Alfred Adler, Karen Horney and Clara Thompson whose works posed a challenge to Freud’s biological determinism of sexuality. These psychoanalysts say that women desire to become like men not because they are captivated by the penis. Instead they want to attain the same power and privileges enjoyed by them. Moreover, neuroticism in women is an act of protest against patriarchy oppression manifest in all social institutions, customs, ideologies, and moral values (Tong 147-48).

Psychoanalytical feminism also concentrates on the reproductive role of women and the prejudiced view of moral development in women. A leading feminist academician and activist, Dorothy Dinnerstein says that men use sexism and aggressiveness to prevail over their childhood memory of utter dependency on their mothers and satisfy their need for control in their existing relationships with women (The Mermaid and the Minotaur 182). Feminist
sociologist and psychoanalyst named Nancy Chodorow opposes the patriarchal perspective of the innateness of motherhood in every woman’s psyche. In her view, motherhood is not a conscious choice for a woman. In fact, motherhood is an outcome of woman’s becoming engendered with the socially constructed and validated femininity. She also says that a woman’s unfulfilled desire to be loved by her parents and her husband forces her to become an obsessive and indulgent mother (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 89-90). Dinnerstein and Chodorow emphasize that the rejection of the maternal influence in one’s life that enables individuals to make autonomous decisions. In Juliet Mitchell’s view, the removal of patriarchy requires a revolution against the entire oedipal process involving a complete change in the child-rearing process where parenting is not viewed as a mother’s domain (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* 378). Psychoanalytic feminism does provide an insight into the ideology that determines the sexuality and gender of a person but it completely overlooks the manner in which social institutions shape the psyche of every individual and make phallus the symbol of power. Hence the psychoanalytical feminist perspective remains incomplete in its analysis of the victimization of women.

Existential feminism has probably been the most talked about feminist perspective. The basis of existential feminism is Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophical magnum opus *The Second Sex*. It speaks of the existential violence that plagues women because of their situation. According to de Beauvoir, patriarchy deflects woman from her existential destiny, immures her in “otherness,” and convinces her that her proclivity ought to be towards a certain notion of femininity and its pursuits (*The Second Sex* 17).
Man, in de Beauvoir’s view, assumes the role of the self in society and relegates woman to position of the other. She gives a biological, psychological and ontological explanation for woman’s existence as the other in every relationship. Biologically, its limitations of a woman’s body are accounted as an explanation of her inferior status. Psychologically, man attains self because he possesses the phallus which ensures that he has the right to enjoy all the privileges accorded to him by the society. Here woman becomes the other because she lacks the power that is associated with the phallus. Ontologically, power is always related with the right to kill which men have time and again exercised in combat. Women, on the other hand, are capable of giving life. But they are not proficient in shaping the future thus they remain confined to the realm of immanence (55-90).

According to de Beauvoir, men have succeeded in confining women to the sphere of otherness by constructing myths about her. Myth is, in her opinion, a prison that dehumanizes a person. De Beauvoir states that the myth of the eternal feminine has become a yardstick that measures the femininity of a woman. Woman’s vocation as a housewife, the image of the Great Mother, the notion that she is an enigma, are all myths constructed by patriarchy. In her view, woman falls prey to bad faith by passively accepting the femininity assigned to her by the patriarchal society (284-85). She states that matrimony and motherhood are major impediments in woman’s search for freedom. For her, marriage is an instrument of control over female sexuality for the purpose of controlled reproduction. She also says that woman’s immanance is the result of the absence of economic freedom, and woman’s minimal interaction with the outer world (469-75). Woman, de Beauvoir argues, needs to choose
to be free by her own actions. She should seek her own self, be the “subject” of her actions, and not mold herself according to the needs and want of others (689). This battle against immanence and bad faith calls for individual as well as collective struggle by women in pursuit of the socialist setup in society where every person, irrespective of one’s gender, race, class and culture, will attain the right to equality and freedom (734). De Beauvoir has been criticized by some communists for her distrust of the female body. They somehow translate her complaints about woman’s body and character into the glorification of a man’s body and character. In their view, de Beauvoir’s horror with the body is an exercise in self-destruction and meant to alienate women from activities associated with life, such as pregnancy, child-birth and breastfeeding and choose death in their negation of consciousness, freedom and subjectivity (Tong 211-13). Although de Beauvoir’s ideas about femininity are profound, nonetheless, they impose their own brand of violence because she herself unwittingly treats woman as the ‘other’ in her analysis. By criticizing woman’s willingness to remain trapped in immanence brought about by her domesticity, de Beauvoir unknowingly ends up valorizing the patriarchal masculine transcendence of males.

French feminism, sometimes also referred to as postmodern or poststructuralist feminism, seeks to understand the concept of “otherness to highlight its positive aspect with reference to women. French feminists have been greatly influenced by Jacques Derrida’s concept of deconstruction. Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva are feminist deconstructionists who have deviated from the traditional feminist thought regarding the marginalization of women. Their aim is to show the manner in
which woman’s relegation to the periphery of the cultural order works. These feminist philosophers are joined by their intellectual project of cultural and ideological emancipation from all kinds of oppressive structures. In their view, the position of the other provides women with the opportunity to stand back, analyze, and challenge the patriarchal norms, values, and practices.

Postmodern feminist theory is built on Jacques Lacan’s concept of the “symbolic order” and Jacques Derrida’s theory of différance. The symbolic order, according to Lacan, comprises those interrelated signs, roles and rituals that are necessary for the functioning of every society. A person can only enter the symbolic order through language which Derrida has termed as “phallogocentric” (Acts of Literature 57). The aforesaid term is a combination of the words “phallus” (which is the primary signifier of power) and logos (which refers to the authority of the father). Every child, according to Lacan, goes through three orders, namely real, imaginary and symbolic. The first phase involves a child being completely unaware of the boundaries that separate it from the “(m)other.” In the imaginary phase, the child is able to recognize itself as a self by making the other to be its own reflection. A child enters the symbolic order only through an estrangement from the mother and submission to the “Name-of-the-Father” (Écrits 67). Derrida’s concept of différance emphasizes that there is no permanent transcendental reality, that is, a single truth or essence. In his view, the deconstruction of the “symbolic order” is possible only if one seeks to find an alternative meaning of the common interpretations of any given “word” (Writing and Difference 112). Derrida also attacks the creation of binaries, saying that it is equivalent to committing violence on reality. The binary opposition always places the first
term as superior to the second term such as speech is considered superior to writing, or man is stated to be superior to woman. It is a myth, in Derrida’s view, to perceive the first term as self-evident, but this error has not been remedied because language is trapped and in ideology (360). He states that one needs to challenge language that privileges meaning and presumes the superiority of the spoken word.

Julia Kristeva, who is more often considered to be an avant-garde philosopher rather than a feminist, derives her entire theory from Lacan’s concept of the three orders. In her view, language comprises the semiotic and the symbolic where the former is a non-linguistic force that has the power to transform the landscape of language and culture but that also remains repressed by the symbolic. Language, in Kristeva’s view, is a system of differences and discriminations (The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt 42). Moreover, she states that language and the entire cultural order are built on the foundation of the rejected body of the mother (79). In other words, the entire patriarchal project of intellectual and rational work is a flight from the body. She goes on to say that all literary texts in the existing cultural order are phallogocentric which means primacy of a single theme and also privileging of the phallic signifier as well as the “meaning” of the word (73). Kristeva says that the best form of feminist work is always transgressive and non-phallogocentric which poses a challenge to primacy of a single theme or meaning or a linear narrative. Hence fragmentation, repetition, and circularity are essential features of a feminist work (The Revolution of Poetic Language 96). Kristeva, however, doubts that women will ever be able to revolutionize language because men are the sole subjects of the symbolic order, thus making
them the sole agents of revolutionary transformation. Woman, on the other hand, is the derelict of the symbolic order who can only gesture in the wilderness while men bring about changes that only benefit them.

Hélène Cixous uses Derrida’s concept of deconstruction to demonstrate how all Western “metaphysics” – the order of thinking which underlies the perception of reality – is organized in binary pairs (*The Newly Born Woman* 168). Here the relationship between the two terms of the binary is always unequal, thus constituting also the basis of patriarchy. The first term in a binary is always privileged in the sense of being self-evident and self-sufficient; however, the second term is considered to be inferior and derivative. Man and woman are situated in a binary where the former assumes the position of the “subject” which needs no qualifications from the other. Cixous, however, says that patriarchy is never uniform and pure; it is always contaminated by the other and without it the privileged logos will surely crumble. The other which is the backbone of the self is, however, always hidden as its presence shall disrupt the symbolic order. Woman as the repressed other can only be articulated in language, according to Cixous, by disturbing the binary organization which forms the linchpin of patriarchal civilization (*Coming to Writing* 23). Hence a feminist needs to bite the tongue that speaks in order to haemorrhage and rupture the patriarchal language so that a new language may emerge (*The Newly Born Woman* 95-6).

Both Cixous and Irigaray claim that a woman writes her body and sexuality into her feminist work. Cixous views the body as a Lacanian idea of the “real” where the self is identified with the repressed body of the mother (83). However, Irigaray tries to liberate the feminine from the male
philosophical thought including that of Lacan and Derrida. She concentrates on the contrasts between the “imaginary” phase and the “symbolic” phase (The Sex which is Not One 69). According to Lacan, girls are always trapped in the ‘imaginary’ phase where the reflection of the other is perceived as one’s own image. Irigaray, however, sees this entrapment in a positive light. She believes that woman can divest herself of the “masculine feminine” image by making patriarchal discourse her mirror for it will reflect what is hidden (159). Irigaray says that literature, theory, and philosophy show women to be the reflection or the mirror image of man. She cites the example of Sigmund Freud’s reference to girls as ‘little men’ without penises. She also shuns the idea of the creation of a gender-neutral voice to liberate women as she views it as an excuse for the acceptance of passivity. She also insists that female sexuality is plural and that it is wrong to consider a heterosexual woman as the epitome of normality (28). In her view, woman’s exploration of the lesbian and autoerotic practices will prove to be a huge blow to the primacy of the phallus.

Postmodern feminism has been criticized for confining itself to theory and to ideas that are impracticable in reality. To many of their critics, the French feminists appear to be merely elitist academicians who have no idea of reality. They either practice biological essentialism, or in Kristeva’s case, refuse to acknowledge woman as a biological category and view her as a political term. In fact, conflicting feminist perspectives on the issue of woman’s gender and sexuality have created dissensions among the feminists (Tong 231-32).

Postmodern feminism addresses the issue of gender by rejecting the notion of a fixed female identity. It criticizes the various schools of feminist
thought for their refusal to accept the patriarchal definitions of femininity and masculinity but simultaneously constructing and imposing their own fixed meaning of woman. A leading American post-structuralist feminist philosopher, Judith Butler lays bare the manner in which the approach to different possibilities for a gendered life is foreclosed by certain “habitual and violent presumptions” (*Gender Trouble* viii). In her view, the policing of gender into masculine and feminine identities takes place mainly to secure heterosexuality among individuals. Gender is conjured in anticipation of the revelation of meaning of the authority that is meant to be installed. Butler states that there is no gender identity behind gender. In fact, identity is “performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results” (34). In other words, Butler understands gender to be an identity that takes shape through a regulated process of stylized repetition of acts. She also distinguishes between sex and gender by stating that gender is always culturally constructed and that it is an interpretation of sex. In her view, the sexed nature is a neutral surface on which culture acts and produces gender. Gender is, according to Butler, a violent circumscription of reality. Gender norms include heterosexuality complementary to the bodies, ideals, and rules. These rules differentiate between proper and improper masculinity and femininity, and racial codes of purity. Also, the taboos established against interbreeding between different races define the legitimacy of an identity. This is precisely why feminists stress that gender needs to be overthrown or eliminated because it is the primary cause of subjection of women.

Theorists like Kristeva demand that woman should be viewed as a political category. In other words, she needs to be seen as a subject for whom
political representation is a goal to be pursued. Judith Butler challenges this link between feminist theory and politics by stating that a “subject” itself is moulded, defined and reproduced according to the power-invested structures of society. By referring to woman as the “subject” of feminism thus Western feminists trap her in the same, political, judicial and discursive power play from which she has to escape, and achieve emancipation. Also, feminism’s universalization of the hegemonic structure of patriarchy to strengthen its claim of being the sole representative of woman’s common experience of oppression has imposed its own brand of violence on women. This supposedly collective outcry against victimization of women has been quite demoralizing because it has willingly suppressed the female voices that do not fit into Western feminism’s idea of “woman,” that is, a white middle-class woman. Butler criticizes Western feminists for indulging in identity politics which is evident in their refusal to view gender in the light of racial, class, cultural, sexual and regional attributes of an identity as constituted in discourse.

Analysis of Western feminism by Judith Butler reveals the various discrepancies and limitations that render feminist theory incomplete in its analysis of the marginalization and victimization of woman. The first misconception of Western feminism is its assumption that patriarchal violence is a pure and sole universal factor that targets women. Patriarchy never operates in a vacuum. It always intersects with other factors like an individual’s specific, race, class, caste, and religion, etc. and perpetrates multi-dimensional violence on people. Furthermore, a good deal of Western feminism has a tendency to demonize men and show them to be woman’s main enemy and a major impediment to her emancipation. Feminists have a
distorted view of men as the main perpetrators of violence against them. Both men and women are, in fact, victims of patriarchal violence because even men are forced to conform to the established image of masculinity. They too face the risk of ostracism if they do not meet the patriarchal expectations of masculinity. Women, on the other hand, can also be the tallest flag-bearers of patriarchy with all its oppressive notions. Furthermore, an elitist and classist attitude seems to prevail in the Western feminist theory. Feminists protest against creation of binaries that promote the sense of inferiority in women; however, they frequently indulge in fashioning their theories according to the prevailing class divisions and suggesting solutions to overcome patriarchal oppression only in so far as it affects upper class women. There is also a sense of Eurocentrism in their attitudes towards women from Third World countries. In their analysis of the situation of women in society, Western feminism completely overlooks the fact that women belonging to nations having a history of colonialism may have different experiences of violence. Their dismissal of another woman’s experience, and the refusal to analyze it from a new perspective exposes the oppressive and fixed meaning Western feminists have assigned to woman. In other words, Western feminism not only lacks in a comprehensive articulation of the multi-faceted violence experienced by women but it also traps women in its own contradictory notions and makes their situation even more oppressive.
3.2 Third-World/Postcolonial Feminism: Collective Struggles for Different Identities

Third-World feminism, somewhat coextensive with postcolonial feminism, highlights the debilitating effects that the gendered history of colonialism and racism has had on the economic, social and political aspects of the lives of women in the colonized and decolonized nations. It is a reaction against Western feminism’s disregard for the role that a woman’s specific nationality, culture, religion, community and history plays in her experience of violence. Western feminist theory usually proceeds on the assumption that the term “woman” signifies a universal category which is always defined by its gender and where her social, racial and cultural identities play a secondary role. The Western feminists’ ignorance of the gendered violence that is the consequence of the racist elements that are rampant in their own social environment has rather worked against their claims of being the sole champions of women’s rights all over the world. Their Eurocentric attitude towards women from Third World countries has irked postcolonial female intellectuals and social activists who refuse to be labelled as feminists. Eurocentrism involves Western feminists’ stubborn and forced imposition of their own specific feminist ideas and approaches upon women belonging to other nationalities. At the same time, many feminists share the view that the concept of difference – developed in opposition to the universalizing strategies of patriarchy – can subvert the entire feminist project because essentialization of the category of “woman” may be, according to them, a necessary step towards outlining the specific patriarchal oppressions as well as towards the development of strategies to overcome them. Postmodernist/poststructuralist feminism
challenges Western feminists’ emphasis on the notion of women as a fixed collective identity and demands an acknowledgement of the differences that exist among women. Julia Kristeva holds that “polymorphism, difference, and openness” in feminist writings has the potential to “undermine presumptions about fixity and stability of identity” (*Crisis of the European Subject* 16). This emphasis on the pluralization of subjectivity, in her view, has strong and progressive implications for a “vision of the polis” where social justice is realizable (16). Similarly, Third-World/postcolonial feminism is founded on the notion of *collective struggles for* *different* identities.

Third-World/postcolonial feminism draws parallels between the horrors suffered by the women of postcolonial nations and the victimization of women in a phallocentric society. It dwells on issues like slavery, repression, resistance, representation, race, etc. and seeks emancipation for the identities that have been suppressed by the dominant culture. For instance, *Manushi*, a magazine published in India, can be viewed as a cause taken up by Indian literati and social activists to revolutionize the current state of democracy, to improve the process of social justice and to strengthen human rights in order to alleviate the suffering of the oppressed groups, both women and men.

It has been argued that feminism in India is built on the foundation of Gandhian philosophy of *Ahimsa* or non-violence (*Chitnis* 15). Non-violence, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is based on the concept of moral power which can be cultivated only through a gentle and pure as well as firm and tenacious attitude which, he argues, is an important fiber of every woman’s character. Indian feminist theorists also vouch for the fact that Hindu religion has been a huge support system in ensuring that more women join the feminist struggle
by presenting the feminine principle in a positive light. An Indian feminist theorist, Suma Chitnis states that unlike in other major religions, the Divine in Hinduism is not envisaged as exclusively male. Rather, most of the male and female divinities are coupled together to represent the specific power for which they are revered, thereby highlighting the fact that the male principle is incomplete without the female. Moreover, the Hindu pantheon comprises number of goddesses who represent the highest values such as knowledge and prosperity. The importance of woman in Indian culture is, in fact, evident from the central role she plays in most religious rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices (“Feminism: Indian Ethos” 8-25).

But Rajesawari Sunder Rajan has criticized the radicalization and feminization of the traditional Indian culture. She challenges the feminists who invoke Hindu goddesses as role-models for the socialization of girls and asks whether modelling themselves upon the divinity is really an emancipatory act for woman. She states that the identification of the goddess-figure with “stri-shakti” and the feminine principle is primarily employed to attenuate the Western bias of feminism (“Is the Hindu Goddess” 324). Rajan, however, believes that the notion that the Hindu goddess is a feminist is problematic because even as it seeks to elevate the status of woman, it heaps a large amount of expectations on her. The valorized mythological divinities, in her view, promote those ideals that feminists have been fighting against since the beginning insofar as they tend ultimately to take the shape of stereotypes and thus strait-jacket women in specific roles. Moreover, the ideological promotion of powerful divinities, according to Rajan, fails to contribute to
ordinary woman’s welfare who, on the contrary, becomes a victim to the pressures of playing to the hilt the role of ‘devi.’

Feminists situated in India also seek for ‘indigenous’ roots of feminism which constitutes concepts such as nation and culture linked both with their colonial past as well as all the firmly established traditions (Feminism in India xxvii-ix). Gail Omvedt, Vidyut Bhagat and Rajesawari Sunder Rajan are feminist writers whose work marks a foray into the ideals of tradition and indigeneity with reference to the oppressive situation of women in India.

A renowned America-born Indian scholar, sociologist and human right activist, Gail Omvedt’s work brings together several theories that have brought a transformation in the Third-World feminism. In her book Violence against Women: New Movements and New Theories, she concentrates on the anti-caste tradition in India as a key concept for the emancipation of oppressed women. Omvedt has been greatly influenced by the views of anti-caste leaders like Jotiba Phule and B. R. Ambedkar who are considered to be pioneers of emancipatory dalit movements. The works of Jotiba Phule, in particular, highlight the multifarious hues of violence that are connected to the experiences of dalit and untouchable women who become victims to exploitative and caste-based tendencies in Hindu culture. Omvedt also examines the writings of Shivraj Patil who, despite his conventional attitude towards the association of woman’s organizations with political parties, is open-minded enough to discuss caste, class and economic issues regarding the situation of Indian women in relation to concepts, such as man-women relationships, sexual domination, kinship and family forms, etc. She also
focusses on ecofeminism, using the works of Vandana Shiva who considers Western science and technology to be the focal point from where the violence against women emanates. Shiva’s views on women and ecology have invited controversy in the form of the nature/nurture debate as well as accusations that her feminist ideologies subserve patriarchy. Nonetheless, she remains steadfast in her view that woman’s harmonious relationship with nature shows that she is not a victim but the vanguard in the struggle for liberation for she possesses the power to bring a change in society.

Vidyut Bhagat believes that the traditional Marathi literature has the scope and potential of being a major force for the woman’s liberation movement. In her comprehensive study of the writings of thirteenth century Marathi Mahanubhav sect, of women writers, she discovered the feminist ideology of the founder of this sect known as Chakradhar, who rebelled against the ill-treatment of women at the hands of Brahmins. These works are a protest against the imposition of various restrictions upon women in the name of privacy, refinement, modesty and chaste behaviour, such as the ritual isolation of menstruating women, bathing in seclusion, covering all parts of one’s body on every occasion, etc. Bhagat also talks about the Varkari women saints who were the part of the ‘Bhakti movement’ that urged women to divest themselves of their familial obligations, turn a deaf ear towards all cultural impositions, and venture out in search of freedom which, according to the Varkari sect, could be found only through true devotion to God. She states that most feminists shy away from a comprehensive analysis of the Bhakti literature for the fear of being castigated for their indulgence in Hindu ideology, thereby remaining deprived of the valuable insights provided by the
women saints. Bhagat also believes that the Marathi literature penned during the colonial period marked the beginning of a new and revolutionary wave of feminism. The front runner of this feminist movement was Tarabai Shinde who is also considered to be the first Indian feminist literary critic. In her works, Shinde presented the first detailed analysis of the ideological framework of Hindu phallogocentric society, where woman is victimized and stereotyped according to the predominant patriarchal assumptions.

The postcolonial women’s literature in Maharashtra, on the other hand, marks the emergence of dalit writers which, in Bhagat’s view, parallels the Black movement and its literature in the US. Here according to her, the term ‘dalit’, which is primarily used to refer to the untouchable castes of the Hindu society, implies a “secular, egalitarian, emancipative, militant self-identification by the lowest rungs of the Hindu social order” (“Marathi Literature” 314). It signifies a deliberate rejection of the vocabulary employed by caste-driven Hindu community to describe the tribal communities and minority groups such as the designation of the term ‘untouchable’, the condescending term ‘harijan’ coined by Mahatma Gandhi, and the legal terminology used to refer to them, including the term, ‘scheduled caste.’ The works of these Marathi dalit writers like Baby Kamble, Mallika Dhasal and Urmila Pawar, in Bhagat’s view, articulate the ordeal of patriarchal violence within the specificity of caste. Hence Bhagat stresses that Indian feminist writers need to discard the pre-conceived notion that traditional literature is an embodiment of stagnation for it resonates with the troubled and protesting voices of women who have been struggling against the repressive, caste-infested, class-driven social order.
Sharmila Rege is another Indian sociologist working in the areas of Gender and Dalit Studies. She says that an investigation of the violent practices against women reveal definite variations by caste. In fact, gender needs to be viewed as a crucial aspect to the maintenance of reproduction of caste inequalities. Women belonging to the upper caste, Rege argues, are generally subjected to the control and violence within the family, such as dowry murders, widow burning, female infanticide, the various stereotypes promoted by Hindu religion, enforced seclusion, glorification of domestic work, etc. However, it is the absence of such controls that makes lower caste women vulnerable to rape, sexual harassment and the threat of public violence (“Caste and Gender” 32). In other words, the idea that labour outside the family is a requisite for the survival of a lower caste, leads to the lack of rigid controls on the labour, mobility and sexuality of women belonging to the lower castes. Hence the instances of violence directed against lower caste women are mostly ignored or marginalized for they are rendered as “impure” or “lacking in virtue” by the dominant castes and class of society (30). Nonetheless, the feminist movement in India faces an impasse with reference to the conceptualization of varied as well as “real interests” of the marginalized Indian women (19).

Some Western feminists raised the slogan that “the personal is political”, suggesting that violence against women is an expression of the prevailing politics of gender even though it takes place within the private sphere of a personal relationship (Feminism in India xxxiv). The situation in the Third World nations, however, can not be completely described, according to Maitrayee Chaudhary, by concentrating on the political dimension of
gender oppression; a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of Third World women requires a new slogan, that is, “the local is global” (xxxiv). A renowned postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty states that Western women studies have tried to incorporate the concept of race/racism in their curriculum; nonetheless, they have remained unsuccessful in their venture because of their parochial mode of thinking and their unwillingness to understand the globalization of the local. She critiques the textual strategies deployed by Western feminists in cross-cultural studies where they have constructed a monolithic image of Third World women as being eternally victimized, and unremittingly oppressed by her patriarchal culture, thereby thwarting the possibility of cross-cultural feminist alliances. Western feminism, according to Mohanty, overlooks the fact that the phenomena of globalization has also hit the Third World, and produced a new set of problems for the women.

The global restructuring of nations caused by changes in economies has had a huge impact on the feminist movement in India. The changes that globalization has brought about include the growth of international trade in goods and services as well as foreign and multinational investments in countries, changes in labour laws and technological revolution (which has introduced more options in working arrangements) and erosion of the legitimacy of welfare system, etc. (Feminism in India xxxvi). Some of the changes that have adversely affected the situation of Indian women are the sudden rise of NGOs, undervaluation and mechanization of women in labour reorganization, and commodification of the image of the liberated working woman. Maitrayee Chaudhary states that the NGOization of feminism has
hardly been beneficial for women as it has taken away initiative from the State to undertake reforms for oppressed women while it has mostly failed to alleviate their suffering. Also, the state has relinquished its reform-making rights to the WTO by making itself an active member of its regime, thereby divesting itself of its duty to address issues of food, health and medicine which have a huge impact on poor and marginalized women. The revolution in technology and the restructuring of labour relations have also promoted cost competitiveness so that women have become victims of cheap labour availability and transformed into “flexible robots” (xl). Moreover, women and femininity are now being defined along a domestic, familial mode which ensures that their work is always seen as “supplemental” to this primary identity (Feminism without Borders 154). Moreover, the print media has vigorously promoted the image of a liberated woman who seeks to be a complete anti-thesis of everything feminism wants a woman to be as a “subject.” Media has completely displaced, if not entirely obliterated, the image of the poor sections of society concentrating on the glossy image of an independent modern woman, thereby pushing out of visibility the marginalized Third World women.

Mohanty states that a proper articulation of the oppressive experience of the Third World women is possible only if feminist solidarity is maintained across the world. She states that Western feminism needs to re-vision Third World women not only as victims lost in the politics of subjectivity but also as products of historical complexities whose future is being shaped by the “macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes” (223). The identification of the underlying connection between the local and the
universal will make, Mohanty argues, the task of feminists much easier because bridging the gap between the two worlds shall highlight the differences and peculiarities both possess, thus enabling them to effectively address various issues. Feminist struggle faces challenges, such as global capitalist hegemony, privatization, and growing religious, ethnic and racial intolerance. These challenges fail to be addressed adequately because of the division of the issues into those related specifically to the ‘First World’ and the ‘Third World’. Mohanty says that both Western feminists and Third World feminists need to find common differences in order to effectively tackle the multi-dimensional oppressions that plague women. She thus envisions a cross-cultural feminist project that straddles different worlds and becomes a site for the analysis of woman trapped in a common globalized, capitalist, racist, ethnic, heterosexist realm of oppression.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, however, puts a different spin on feminism’s attempt to articulate woman’s experience of violence by stating that despite claiming to be the voice of the minority groups, most intellectuals who locate themselves in liberal feminism are, in fact, deeply implicated in silencing the subaltern. Spivak has mostly concentrated on the critique of imperialism and Western feminism. A self-described “practical Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist”, she exposes those institutional and cultural discourses/practices which exclude and marginalize the subaltern, especially subaltern women. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak questions the path that the elite academicians have usually followed in their study of the construction of the decolonized subaltern. She problematizes the Western feminist project and analyses the way in which the Western Subject is still
operational in the poststructuralist theory of difference. Here she singles out Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze in her criticism of postmodern thought, stating that these theorists implicate themselves in the situation of the “crisis of the subject” through their introduction of the concept of "subject-effects" which differs in name but not in function from traditional subjects (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 271). She criticizes them for emphasizing the pervasiveness and heterogeneity of power while ignoring the manner in which power produces ideology and replaces it with a generalized ‘culture’.

In this essay, Spivak also considers the debates over the project Subaltern Studies as it emerged in India in the early eighties, primarily in the work of Ranajit Guha. In her critique of the Subaltern project, she highlights the incongruity between the research and its subsequent analysis by scholars of Subaltern Studies. She criticizes those groups of Indian elite who regard themselves as the “best-native informant[s]” for First World academicians with interest in unravelling the mystery of the other by making their voices audible (284). She objects to the claim made by theorists of postcolonialism/subaltern studies of being the only section of intellectuals capable of lending their own voice to the mute subaltern, thereby establishing the true knowledge of the consciousness of the other. Spivak also states that the idea of the subaltern as a kind of collective individual, conscious of itself; an author; an actor; the standard subject, allows the movement to distinguish between the subaltern, and the representation of the subaltern through the imperialist discourse. Hence it brings to light the blank spaces present in this imperialist account of the postcolonial other. The scholars engaged in the Subaltern project also attempt to attest to the consciousness of the subaltern
but they try to achieve this feat primarily through suppression of women’s heterogeneity and non-contemporaneity. These theorists assign woman a pre-conceived essence and, thus, fall into the same metaphysical abyss that has engulfed Western feminists.

The principal question Spivak poses in her above-mentioned essay is whether discursive space will ever materialize for a subaltern woman in which she can formulate an “utterance” (287). The title of the essay is mostly misconstrued as Spivak’s assumption that the experiences of the subaltern can never be articulated. Spivak, on her part, never says that the subaltern are incapable of speaking or writing. It is a fact which, in her view, becomes evident through the postcolonial archive that comprises the political treatises of their parties and organizations as well as literary texts, newspapers, films, leaflets, songs, etc. that echo both the spontaneous and the organized protests all over the world. She, however, does ask for the need to seek a distinction between appearance and reality, for what everyone assumes to be the voice of the subaltern may only be a façade of verbal communication imposed through a theoretical framework. Spivak supports her claim by an analysis of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. She states that nowhere in his critique of logocentrism does Derrida imply that the other cannot speak but must always be spoken for; in other words, Derrida never intends to say that the other is to be represented both discursively and politically by those who can speak, that is, the real subjects of speech. Hence our acceptance of Derrida’s arguments against the speaking subject as ideal origin of speech, present to the other’s utterances as a guarantee of its truth and authenticity, in Spivak’s view, leaves
us with the fact that there is no pure, original working class or subaltern possessing a consciousness.

An important aspect of Spivak’s analysis is that she pits speech against action or activist struggle. In her view, action (which is ‘being’) is superior to speech (the realm of words in which individuals are trapped). Her claim is made on the ground that the subaltern never cease to resist and rebel; they wage their struggles for self-emancipation with or without the support of the intellectual elite of the First and Third World. Hence, the “theorizing individual” is incapable, according to her, of representing those who “act and struggle” (275). This does not mean that academicians should cease their feminist endeavours. Theory is extremely important for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the problems that plague society. But theory can only be effective when it is translated into action, mainly in the form of social movements. These movements, according to Mohanty, are crucial sites for the “construction of knowledge, communities, and identities,” and thus extremely useful to the feminist project (Feminism without Borders 248). Hence, social location of the Third World women is an extremely important aspect of the feminist analysis, for it enables demystification of the capitalist-patriarchal universalist ideology and provides hope for the establishment of cross-cultural social and economic justice.

The above-mentioned feminist insights show that feminist theory has indeed contributed to a better understanding of women’s situation in different contexts. Clearly, women are at the receiving end of a wide spectrum of violence. Specific women’s policy agencies and women’s movements campaign for reforms based on issues relating to physical violence against
women. These issues include domestic violence, systematic rapes during riots and social unrest, dowry-related murders, female feticide, incest, etc. Feminist theory deals primarily with women’s experience of symbolic violence. In his study on violence, Slavoj Žižek holds that preoccupation with brutal and physical acts of violence blinds society to the objective reality of violence that it commits on a daily basis. He classifies the objective or invisible form of violence as symbolic and systemic. Symbolic violence, in Žižek’s view, is derived from the Lacanian theory of the symbolic order. It is manifest in language and all its forms (*Violence 1*). Feminist theory also focusses on this subtle and ubiquitous form of symbolic violence which remains unacknowledged in the light of women’s experience with raw, physical violence. It carries out an extensive analysis of woman’s exclusion from the symbolic order manifest in language. Feminist theorists focus on how women are denied subjectivity in discourse. But they fail to theorize the systemic violence that targets women and forms the basis feminist movements. In other words, feminist theory is selective in its treatment of systemic violence which includes actual/physical violence as well as other subtle forms of coercion that operate through dominance and exploitation. In their attempts to focus on a wider and subtle form of symbolic violence thus feminist theorists fail to grasp and analyze the multiple forms of systemic violence that target women. Suffice it to say there is a visible gap between feminist theoretical insights and feminist movements’ focus on women’s experience of multiple forms of physical violence. Fiction bridges the gap that underlies feminist theory and movements of feminism.
Derrida views literature as a historical institution both “brought into being and governed” by laws (“Before the Law” 181). However, the texts that come under the literary aegis possess the specific quality of being able to stage, confront and suspend all the presuppositions upon which any kind of social institution rests. Derrida also points out that the uniqueness of a literary work lies in its ability to be put into question as “stable properties and concepts” (181). It exposes the inadequacies of theory as well as provides new theoretical insights.

In other words, literature is the best source to examine the multi-dimensional forms of violence that women undergo. Indian fiction provides ample testimony against the multiple forms of violence directed against women. The diversity inherent in Indian women’s experiences of violence as represented in fictional texts highlights both the symbolic and systemic forms of violence. It is indeed impossible to generalize the literary treatment of violence against women in Indian fiction. The criterion for the creation of Indian literature does not involve laying onus on woman being an elitist or tribal. In fact, Indian fiction describes women’s experience of violence based on the specific reality (socio-cultural, patriarchal, economic, political, etc.) of her situation. The selected Indian fiction of the present research project undertakes the examination of women’s encounter with such diverse forms of violence. The following chapters carry out a critical analysis of the selected works of Indian literature to expose those forms of gender-based violence that are yet to be investigated by feminist theory. A comprehensive and systematic critique of the multi-faceted forms of violence is, however, possible only through the use of tools provided by theory. Therefore, various theoretical
insights on violence as well as feminist theory are brought to bear on the literary representations to pinpoint the link between women, culture and violence. Hence, the present research project is an attempt to study select Indian literary texts to bridge the gap between feminist theory’s silences and disavowals, theories of violence, and the experiences of violence.

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The present research project aims at studying a selection of Indian fiction to examine the complex and subtle forms of violence against women. It is an attempt to systematically elucidate the manner in which patriarchy intersects with caste, class and religion and produces the many-hued violence that targets Indian women. It is in these Indian literary representations, in fact, that the violence inflicted on women becomes visible in all its complexity, subtlety and diversity. Hence the study carries out a comprehensive analysis of the multi-dimensional violence inflicted upon women as represented in selected Indian texts of fiction.

The selected Indian fiction comprises texts that have been written in English as well as those translated from other languages into English. It includes the English translation of the Hindi novel Godan (1936) by Premchand. The novel focusses on the vein of corruption, manipulation and hypocrisy that lies hidden under pseudo-idealism. It shows the peripheral situation of women caught in the traps of poverty, feminine ideals and humiliating social practices. The short stories entitled “Colder Than Ice” (1950), “The Woman in the Red Raincoat” (1950), “The Price of Freedom”
(1953) are translations of Saadat Hasan Manto’s partition narratives written in Urdu. Here Manto presents a vivid account of the brutalization of Indian women during communal riots. *And Such is Her Fate* is the translation of Dalip Kaur Tiwana’s Punjabi novel *Eho Humara Jeevana* (1969). Here Tiwana narrates the pitiful existence of a bride for sale, Bhano. She is what Sartre terms as a quintessential *other* looking for validation and sense of belonging in other people’s lives. The misery ridden existence of Bhano shows the abject treatment meted out to a woman who is helpless to fight her circumstances due to socially-fabricated situations of woman’s dependence on man.

The present research project also comprises the study of select English translations of Mahasweta Devi’s fictional narratives in Bengali. These include “Breast-Giver” translated from “Stanadayani,” (1977) a story about the raw, stark and violent existence of a mother-by-hire named Jashoda in an orthodox Brahmin community; “Draupadi” (1981) which is a tale about the brutal rape of a subaltern rebel named Dopdi Mejhen, and its aftermath; “Behind the Bodice” is a translation of the narrative “Choli ke Peeche” (1997), a tale focussing on the mutilated breasts of the aboriginal Gangor to reveal the harsh reality about the lives of the subaltern. The story entitled “The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur” is the English translation of Devi’s “Mohanpurer Rupkatha” (2002) and presents the reality of contemporary democratic government where the politicians and government officials rule by the means of corruption and indifference towards social suffering. *After Kurukshetra* is an anthology of Devi’s three narratives based on her interpretation of the war of Kurukshetra. Here “The Five Women” translated from Devi’s narrative
“Panchakanya” (2005) focusses on the violent social practices promoted by royal women as opposed to the liberated perspective of subaltern women.

“Kunti and the Nishadin” is the translation of the Bengali narrative “Kunti O Nishadi” (2005), and reveals the bigotry that underlies Kunti’s pious and self-righteous attitude. She is shown to be a callous murderer whose crime is made all the more monstrous by the fact that she has no recollection of it. “Souvali” (2005) is a poignant tale about a dasi named Souvali who was forced to be a sexual companion to King Dhritarashtra while his wife Gandhari was with child. In her view, living in order to serve the royal people is a more disastrous and violent experience than existing amongst the subaltern.


Amita Kanekar’s *A Spoke in the Wheel* (2005) is a revision of the stories of the Buddha and Ashoka. Here Kanekar lends a voice to the suffering of those women from Buddha’s past who have remained submerged in the silences of history and myth. Neel Kamal Puri’s novel *The Patiala Quartet* (2006) describes the violence-filled existence of the residents of Patiala, a city of Punjab, during the nineteen eighties when terrorism was at its peak in the state. However, it is primarily an account of the lives of Minnie and Karuna.
who try to grapple with the patriarchal violence which has been part of their existence. In Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2007) the tragic tales of a South-Indian woman named Leela, a Punjabi immigrant woman named Sharanjeet and another Punjabi woman Nimmo show the way human existence is affected by and infected with irrational violence backed by seemingly rational ideologies. It brings to light the patriarchal violence with its roots in racism as well as the meaninglessness and perverseness of political violence that targets both men and women. It also shows that a person’s quest for belonging – marked by the feelings of alienation and powerlessness – is often transformed into self-destruction and, ultimately, the infliction of violence on others.

The above-mentioned narratives have been selected on the basis of their representation of the diverse socio-cultural contexts that frame the experiences of violence undergone by Indian women. These fictional texts take into account the victimization of Indian women belonging to different eras and different socio-cultural terrains. The present research project attempts to critically study the violence that is inscribed, represented and resisted in the selected Indian literary texts. The present study aligns the theories on violence with feminist theory in order to encounter, acknowledge and articulate those forms of violence that are represented in works of fiction. Hence the aforementioned texts are brought under critical scrutiny to carry out a subtle, systematic and comprehensive examination of violence.