CHAPTER – 3

CAUSES OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN: A THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

3.1. Introduction

One question that is asked by sociologists, criminologists, law-maintenance officers and the public alike is, what causes men to be violent, abusive and cruel towards women?

Some of the theoretical propositions on criminal violence generally are: (i) it can be an instrument useful in obtaining some end or reward, (ii) it is a normal response to provocation, (iii) it involves the acting out of some psychopathy, and (iv) it can be a response that is consistent with norms supporting its use, and so forth. A few social scientists have attempted to explain criminal violence by presenting a summary of factors found to be related to various types of violence against women. These associations and correlations, howsoever, do not provide a scientific theoretical insight into the causes of violence against women.

The analyses of various types of violence against women and their varied patterns presented in this study, therefore, calls for examining and testing some important theories.

So far as Indian scene is concerned, in the past few decades, with increasing evidence regarding the phenomenon, crime against women has drawn the attention of several concerned feminists, human rights groups, social scientists and social work practitioners. Many scientists have also attempted to study the phenomenon and have proposed several theories to explain the same. It will be desirable to have an overview of various theories that have been put forward in this regard.
3.2. Theoretical Propositions

We have identified several theories which we believe have some relevance for understanding violence committed by an individual. These theories range from intrapsychic theories to macro-sociological theories. We may classify these theories on the basis of four (theoretical) levels of analysis:

(1) Feminist theory,
(2) Psychiatric or psychopathological analysis,
(3) Socio-psychological analysis, and
(4) The social problem approach.

I. Feminist theory

As the name suggests, this theoretical perspective emerged during the height of the Women’s movement in 1970s. Advocates of this theoretical orientation argue that domestic violence is broadly defined as male coercion of women. Violence against women, includes domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, female infanticide, marital rape and female circumstance.¹ The common elements in all these type of violence against women are gender and power.

At the core of feminist explanations is the view that all violence is a reflection of unequal power relationships: domestic violence reflects the unequal power of men and women in society and also, therefore, within their personal relationships.² Feminist theorists never employ terms such as “family violence”, “spouse abuse”, “marital violence” and “conjugal violence” because they believe these terms shift the focus away from the concept of male coercion and away from the woman. Rather, they advocate for terms such as “wife-beating”, “domestic violence”, “battered women” and “woman abuse”.³ By defining and conceptualizing violence in this manner, the victims are clearly women and wives, and they should be the focus of research, interventions, and policies.
Advocates of the feminist theory assert that the etiology of violence lies in the patriarchal structure of society, in which men play a dominant role in most social institutions. Male dominated structures are exhibited in the economic structures, social institutions, sexist division of labour, and traditional gender role expectations.

Along with verbal, emotional, and economic abuse, violence is a means of maintaining male power in the family when men feel their dominance is being threatened. Economic roles have left women dependent on men and unable to escape abusive situations. Men’s superior physical strength may enable them to dominate women through violence.

Feminists argue that a consequence of the social arrangement in which men hold the positions of respect and power is that men and women alike devalue the feminine and over-value the masculine. This differential access is the result of society assigning value to certain characteristics. In other words, there is a hierarchy of what is viewed as inferior or superior, and the attribute “male” for gender is valued more so than “female”.

Paul has identified the close relationship between the control and management of money in marriage and the exercise of power. Wives were likely to have greater decision-making power if they were in paid employment. Research by Kalmuss and Straus shows that women’s economic dependence is a mediating factor in violence against wives; the greater the dependence, the greater the risk of serious assault.

There can be no doubt that feminist analysis have added greatly to our understanding of violence by viewing it in the context of power relationships and the more general position of women in society. However, ‘feminists... have focused too narrowly on patriarchy and sexual oppression, and therefore failed to consider class, racial and cultural oppressions’.

II. Psycho-Pathological Theory

The psycho-pathological model for uses on the personality characteristics of offenders and victims as chief determinants of criminal
violence. This model includes analysis that links mental illness (i.e. a small number of mentally ill persons are violent, alcohol i.e. what one does under the influence of alcohol and other drugs and other intra-individual phenomenon to acts of violence. This theory gives two different explanations. According to one, the causes of violence against women arise from the offender’s psychological problems (like depressive impulsiveness, uncontrolled emotions, etc.). According to the other, violence against women arises out of psychological problems of victims.

There are, however, no adequate data to support either of these point of views. If women who are battered, raped, tortured, molested or kidnapped behave strangely, it is possibly the consequence and not the cause of being battered or raped or kidnapped. The evaluation of the psycho-pathological approach to violence has also shown that the proportion of individuals who use violence against women and suffer from psycho-pathological disorders is not greater than the proportion of population in general with psycho-pathological disorders.9

III. Socio-Psychological Theories

The socio-psychological model assumes that criminal violence can best be understood by careful examination of external environmental forces that exercise impact on an individual offender. This model also examines the type of everyday interactions which are precursors of violence. Theories such as the Frustration Aggression theory, Perversion theory and the Self-Attitude theory approach criminal violence from a socio-psychological level of analysis.

This theory first stated in 1939 by Dollard, derived many of its basic postulates from Freudian theory. It explains the process by which aggression is directed to the source of frustration. The aggressive drive is an innate drive. It helps explain individual violence because the individual is the focus of high personal involvement and of high frustration in the family.
Whenever something interferes with an individual’s attempt to reach some goal or end, he feels frustrated and frustration in turn leads to some form of aggression. After taking various criticisms into account, this theory was modified. Today it is recognized that an actual display of aggression may be inhibited by either internalized norms of external controls, even though the impulse for aggression may be strong following some frustrating experience. It is also recognized that frustrations can be cumulative and that they can remain active over a long period of time. It is also acknowledged that people perceive frustrations in varying ways, with those deemed arbitrary or unreasonable most likely to trigger aggressive responses. Further, it is recognized that responses to frustrations can be learned. In short, aggressive actions are not an automatic consequence of frustration, and their occurrence depends upon numerous factors.

According to the Frustration Aggression theory, aggression is always directed towards one who is believed to be responsible for frustration. If this is so, this theory does not explain criminal violence in the types of crimes we have analyzed here. Take for example the case of a dowry-death. Why does the mother-in-law/husband kill the daughter-in-law/wife when the source of frustration is not the girl who is killed but her parents who fail to fulfill the dowry demands? The same is true in the case of a brother who murders his sister to escape sharing his father’s property with her. The source of frustration here is the government which has enacted the Succession Act and not the girl who is murdered. Or, the case of a girl who is abducted and raped because her father does not agree to marry her to the rapist. Here, the source of frustration is not the girl herself but her parents who refuse to marry their daughter to the assailant. The parents in the first and third cases and the government in the second case have the ‘command of force’ and aggression cannot be released against a potentially dangerous object. We thus find fault with this theory not only on the ground that aggression is not always directed to the source of frustration but also because it is often directed towards some other object. It is
also criticized on the grounds that: (1) the relationship between frustration and aggression is not innate, (2) a wide variety of responses may result from frustration and aggression is not the only response, and (3) aggression may be an adaptive response and a rational choice of behaviour.

Yet other criticisms against this theory are: (i) human behaviour is not an extension of animal instinctive or innate behaviour but the product of a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors. An individual’s social behaviour depends upon his social and cultural milieu; (ii) responses to frustrations are learned just like any other social behaviour and what is learned has a lot to do with socialization practices which themselves differ from group to group and society to society; (iii) people could do many things though they never do them, and hence receive neither rewards nor punishments. Thus, people’s own experience of rewards or punishments is not a necessary ingredient in the formulation of their behaviour patterns. Rather, they can anticipate whether a certain action will get them rewards or punishments by learning what happens when others do it; (iv) this theory overlooks the cases in which aggression can be an instrumental act for aims other than causing injury or pain. Thus, sexual conquest may be the sole reason for of but a minor element and (v) this theory cannot explain the epidemiological aspect of the offence and has made distinction between reactive type of aggression and habitual learned aggression which receives situational reinforcement and facilitation. In the latter case, aggression becomes customary, persistent and not just an ad hoc reaction. This learning and being exposed to aggressive modes of behaviour create an aggressive view of the world. Aggression creates counter aggression and a vicious circle is thus established. This can happen only when the value system is aggressive and is accepted by members who behave accordingly.11

Two components of Socio-psychological theory can be summarized as under:
a) Perversion Theory

The psychoanalysts explain violence on the basis of the Theory of Perversion and the Theory of Symptom Formation. They do not regard perverts as constitutionally inferior people but maintain that perversion develops from instincts. Perversion essentially means persistence in the adult of infantile instincts and behaviour at the expense of adult behaviour. In the pervert, infantile traits fail to undergo the normal process of integration during puberty but are not converted into neurotic symptoms. Violence can be the product of strong inborn drives or of pathological experiences in infancy or early childhood. In the latter cases, childhood conceptions of the relations between the sexes as being aggressive and sadistic and the idea of pleasure as a negative process, essentially achieved by relief from a state of “unpleasure” are carried into adulthood.12

Explaining different kinds of perversion, psychoanalysts point out that maturation involves leaving early aims and objects and choosing new aims. Perversions can, therefore, be conceived of as distortions of aims and objects and in the absence of the distortion of appropriate feelings towards these objects.

The consolidated approach is that aggression arises from castration fears which in turn are derived from earlier oral sadism. This was later accepted by most psychoanalysts as a possible explanation of the etiology of perversion, in particular violence against the weak. This theory was considered important because it was supported by the clinically established fact that there is a higher incidence of perversion among males than among females.

A discussion of the dynamics of perversion has included the objects of aggression and the operations of the ego and super-ego. One theory suggests that the ego is ‘split’ in perverts; another that through ego mechanisms, the object splits suggests that a ‘good’ object is idealized by the pervert while he uses aggression towards a ‘bad’ object.
We reject this approach in explaining violence against women because of the limitations of this approach. Explaining psycho-analytical hypothesis of ‘infantile instincts’, ‘inborn pathological drives’, ‘distorted feelings’, ‘childhood sadism’ or ‘split ego’ about causes for committing an offence by individual male offenders is to ignore an important dimension of environment in the causation. Wife-beating, rape, abduction, bride-burning, and even murder cannot be the result of a mere primary instinctual component of a personality or a means of solving psychic conflict. Though aggression is a basic element in personality structure, its origin and direction in social relations, especially between the sexes, cannot be explained only as a result of personality pathology.  

b) Self-Attitude Theory

This theory maintains that in a society, a culture, or a group that values violence, persons of low self-esteem may seek to bolster their image in the eyes of others and themselves by carrying out violent acts. It explains the propensity to violence of those for whom society makes it difficult to achieve an adequate level of self-esteem. Accepting this theory would mean that all individuals who use violence against women (that is, rapists, abductors, murderers, and batterers) suffer from low self-esteem.

IV. Socio-Cultural Theories

The sociological or socio-cultural model provides a macro level analysis of criminal violence. This model examines criminal violence in terms of socially structured inequality and social and cultural attitudes and norms regarding anti-social behaviour and inter-personal relations. Besides the two well known theories, viz. the structural-Functional theory and the Theory of Sub-Culture of Violence, the Learning Theory, the Exchange Theory, the Atomic Theory, and the Resource Theory also come under socio-cultural analysis.
While earlier theories sought the causes of violence against women within the characteristics of individuals or in external factors affecting individual’s behaviour, later on other theories developed which focused on interpersonal or interactional processes as the source of violence. System Tension Theory, Anomie Theory, Theory of Sub-cultural of Violence, Resource Theory, Patriarchy Theory, Social Interaction Theory and Social Exchange Theory are some such theories, which explain male violence.\textsuperscript{15} We will briefly analyze all these theories.

\textit{a) Structural Theory}

This theory asserts that social groups differ in respect to their typical levels of stress, deprivation and frustration and in the resources at their disposal to deal with these stresses. It explains that those individuals would be more violent who combine high stress with low resources. This theory thus explains an individual’s action in terms of the ways it is shaped or determined by social forces of one kind or another. The offender’s violence is seen as determined by the degree of his integration in the system. One consequence of accepting this position is that the action of individuals has nothing to do with their personalities and values, and that violence cannot be described in terms of conflict, suppression, sublimation, guilt, and so on. The role of rationality also has to be rejected in social action. The structuralistic perspective, thus, leaves some questions unanswered because of which it is criticized.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{b) System Tension and Feedback System Theory}

This theory was developed by Straus to explain intra-family violence. Straus accounts for violence in the home by viewing family as a purposive goal-seeking, adaptive social system. Violence is seen as a system product or output rather than an individual pathology. Straus specified positive feedback in the system which can create an upward spiral of violence, and negative feedback which can maintain, dampen, or reduce the level of violence.
According to this theory, violence is precipitated by factors such as stress and inter-individual conflict and is followed by consequences which maintain or escalate violence in family and in society.

Tension in the board sense, of which stress and strain are manifestations under conditions of felt blockage, is ever present in one form or another throughout the socio-cultural system – sometimes as frustration, aggression or normative deviation and sometimes as conflict and competition or upheaval and destruction. It may be put as: (1) Man is always trying to live beyond his means. Life is a sequence of reactions to stress; man is continually meeting situations with which he can not quite cope. (2) In stress situations, energy is mobilized and a state of tension is produced. (3) The state of tension tends to be disturbing, and man seeks to reduce the tension. (4) he has direct impulses to take action.¹⁷

This theory has been criticized on the basis that there has been little research specifically concerned with the learning of marital violence. It also over-emphasizes the social system and completely ignores the role of individual’s personality. Since in our integrated approach, aggression is recognized as a basic element in personality structure, we cannot reject personality as a factor in social relations among people, especially between the sexes. In the relations between them, the male is perceived as aggressive and the female as passive, which may sometimes take the form of direct aggression of the male against the female. Aggression thus is concerned with personality and not necessarily the result of social system.

c) Anomie Theory

Robert Merton in his Anomie Theory, developed in 1938, discusses socially learned needs, goals and aspirations and the restricted structural access or institutionalized means to their attainment. He maintains that some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in society to engage in non-conformist rather than conformist conduct. When there is a tendency to
overemphasize goals without sufficient attention to institutional means, it leads to willingness to use any means, regardless of their legality, to see that the goal is attained. The theory thus delineates the relationship between one’s social position, the strain which accompanies that position, and the resulting deviant and non-deviant adaptations. Merton has outlined the possible adaptations that can occur when the goals have been internalized but cannot be legitimately attained. However, his major concern is with the innovator, the person who uses illegitimate but nonetheless effective means to achieve goals.\textsuperscript{18}

Using Merton’s framework to explore crimes by men against women, we find that it doesn’t explain any crime analyzed by us. Merton himself had admitted that all crimes are not explained in terms of anomie. The rapists, the kidnappers, the murderers and the batterers may not have any monetary success goal in their minds which may push them in the direction of illegitimate behaviour. In fact, the anomie theory poses many questions; for instance, those of the validity of assuming a dominate value system, the location of anomie within the individual or the normative system, and the nature of the conflict between the norms and the general culture and those of the norms internalized by the individual. Wolfgang and Ferracuti have also maintained that the anomie theory has failed to explain violent aggressive behaviour. Leonard too believes that Merton’s theory does not explain sexual deviance.\textsuperscript{19}

d) **Theory of sub-Culture of Violence**

This theory claims that the life circumstances of certain groups trigger violence as a relatively commonplace outcome of social interaction. It also asserts that values and norms provide meaning and direction to violent acts and thus facilitate or bring about violence in situations specified by these norms and values. It explains that violence is a response that is consistent with norms supporting its use.\textsuperscript{20}
Sub-cultures of violence, made up of groups quick to use force in interpersonal relations, are centralized in urban slum areas. Grindng poverty, unstable community organization and disorganized family life in such areas lead to the emergence of certain lower-class values or focal concerns. Two important concerns identified by N.E. Miller are trouble (i.e., suspicion of others and anticipation of difficulty from police, fellow citizens, schools, etc.) and excitement (the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures). Persons with these concerns, values and motivations, thrown together in close contact, heighten the potential for violent incidents. This theory thus rejects the notion of personality pathology.\(^\text{21}\)

Scholars like Albert Cohen, Walter Miller, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin have also referred to the culture of violence. But their assertions in fact explain the criminal violence of lower-class adolescent boys in gangs. Their theories do not explain all crimes but both implicitly and explicitly emphasize their interest in lower-class male delinquency. As such, these theories cannot be applied to crimes committed against women by individuals in isolation. As explained most of the crimes against women are individual crimes and not gang crimes.\(^\text{22}\)

Anthropologist Oscar Lewis explained violence in terms of the culture of poverty. According to this view, the important traits of poverty are fatalism, authoritarianism and violence, as well as a sharp contrast between advocated and actual sexual conduct. Lewis asserts that people with a culture of poverty are aware of middle-class values but they do not live by them. Thus both learned ideas and living conditions encourage violence.\(^3\)

This sub-culture of poverty explanation for criminal violence has been challenged on the ground that generally the poor are law-abiding and the affluent are not.

e) Resource Theory

This theory of intra-family violence developed by W.J. Goode was in fact the first theoretical approach applied explicitly to family violence. Goode
states that all social systems rest to some degree on force or threat. The greater the resources a person can command within a social system, the more force he or she can muster. However, the more resources a person can command, the less the chances are that a person will actually deploy violence. Thus, violence is one of the resources that individuals or collectivities use to maintain or advance their interests. But violence is used as a last resort when all other resources are exhausted. Applying this set of resumptions to the family, Goode explains that family is a power system in which four sets of resources are in operation to maintain stability: economic variables, prestige or respect, love, and force or threat of force. As a child, the batterer, torturer, murderer or humiliator learns to use force or threat of force if he feels there is an imbalance in family transactions. For example, when he feels he is missing out on respect or love or faithfulness, force is the only resource he has at his command. A husband who wants to be the dominant family member but has little education, job prestige or income and lacks inter-personal skills, is likely to resort to violence to be the dominant person.

This theory also does not stand good when applied to some forms of violence against women. Various arguments can be given against this theory when applied to wife battering, dowry-deaths, murders, rapes, and so on. For example, this theory does not hold good in violence which are generally committed outside the family. Even within the family it does not explain the cause of more aggravated crimes such as dowry death, suicide etc.  

f) Patriarchy Theory

This theory developed by R.E. Dobash maintains that throughout history, violence has been systematically directed towards women. Economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal social order and family structure. Dobash’s central theoretical argument is that patriarchy leads to the subordination of women and contributes to a historical pattern of systematic violence directed against females.
Dobash's theory, while perhaps the most macro-level approach to violence against women, has a major drawback of being a theory that is essentially a single factor (patriarchy) explanation of violence towards women.

4) Conflict and Control Theories

Scholars like Foucault, Thompson and Rothman have presented a domination model of deviance. They have talked of rules imposed on the powerless by the powerful. Radical and conflict sociologists like Quinney have argued that the purpose of controlling deviance is to protect the interests of the dominant classes and to prevent access to their resources by outsiders. In other words, the control apparatus is created to prevent the powerless from pursuing their interests, particularly if that pursuit involves gaining access to resources monopolized by the powerful. Imposing varied restrictions on women and compelling them to remain dependent on men economically, socially and emotionally to make them realize that they are 'weak' and powerless in the respects, stand as an example of this argument. To the extent that the agents of control belong to the dominant group, an overall system of devaluation of the 'powerless group' (women) can easily be implemented. Schur contends that male control of deviance labeling results in their continued dominance in most spheres of life.

The constraints on women's rights can be interpreted as a function of the successful definition of women as different from and inferior to men. "Man talks of woman not in herself but as relative to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being. She is differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her. She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute; she is the other".

Sex role norms clearly differentiate men from women. When these norms become internalized, they are accepted as facts and seldom questioned. Millet has said: "Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different. Women live
in such a different economic, cultural and social world from men that their reactions cannot be understood from a master model developed in male society.  

What is in question is not the existence of gender differences but the extent to which such differences justify restrictive role assignments to each gender. There is little disagreement regarding the cultural construction of gender, but there are conflicting views on the role biological factors play in such development.

Thus, women are (i) declared as different, and (ii) defined as inferior, and (iii) women stereotypes are justified, (iv) they are systematically deprived of rights, and (v) all attempts at change are restricted.

**h) Interactionist Deviance Theory**

This theory, exemplified by theorists such as Erikson, Becker, Schur and Lemert has three characteristics: (i) it cites sex roles as causal factors of why people engage in crime and deviant behaviour, (ii) it maintains that societal expectations about appropriate sex role behaviour influence the diagnosis and labeling of certain actions as deviant or criminal, and (iii) it holds that gender affects the response to such (deviant) behaviours by society.

Since women tend to be less powerful and of lower social status than men, they are easily labeled as deviant in cases of domestic violence. This theory explains family violence in terms of sex role or gender norms, i.e., differential expectations for values, attitudes and behaviours as a function of one’s gender. These norms serve as important standards against which women and men are evaluated through application of various sanctions.

According to the prevalent sex role norms, a husband expects a ‘good wife’ to behave in a certain manner. She has to run the household smoothly, ensure children’s well-mannered behaviour, avoid assertiveness and remain submissive to elders in family. Any show of independence on her part would violate sex role expectations for female behaviour. According to deviance
theory, norm violations tend to trigger forces aimed at making the violator conform to expected standards of behaviour. Thus, when women do not behave like the male’s ideal of wife, husbands use violence against them to make them conform to norms.\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{i) Social Learning Theory}

This theory asserts that human aggression and violence are learned conduct, especially through direct experience and by observing, the behaviour of others. According to this theory the individual learns violence through imitation. Individuals pick up the behaviour patterns of those they are taught to respect and learn from. Whether observed in the flesh or via visual media, the behaviour of aggressive models is readily imitated by individuals. Aggressive behaviour patterns learned through modeling and imitation remain part of our repertoire of social responses over time. Rewards and punishments also play a crucial role in the learning and expression of behaviour patterns. One might think that physical aggression directed against one’s fellows could hardly have any rewards, actual or anticipated. But it is not so. Violence offers abundant rewards and one learns it very early in life.\textsuperscript{30}

This theory explains both the variations of persons and situations in their tendency to respond aggressively by reference to prior experience, reinforcement patterns, and cognitive processes. Steele and Pollock and Bennie and Sclare have maintained that abusive male adults are likely to have been raised in abusive homes. In fact, this ‘family determinism’ approach maintains that all victims of childhood violence will grow up to be violent adults. This explanation does not appear to have a scientific basis. Accepting this theoretical explanation would be accepting a relationship in a too simplistic deterministic form.\textsuperscript{31}

We applied this theory in studying a wife-batterer’s history of abuse as a child and found that about half of the batterers (55\%) had faced conditions of manifest physical brutality or severe emotional rejection in their childhood.
The data, thus, supported the social learning theory. Yet, our contention is that violence which is the result of victim’s provocation or victim’s complicity, etc., cannot be explained on the basis of this simple theory. We have to look for a theoretical approach which may be applied to all types of violence against women.

**j) Symbolic Interaction Theory**

This theory specifics the process by which self-image and identify of a person as ‘violent’ are formed, and the process by which violent acts acquire individual and socially shared meaning. It explains the origin and maintenance of the structure that is necessary for all human social behaviour, including violence.32

This perspective focuses its attention on the nature of interaction, the dynamic patterns of social action, and social relationships. It attempts to understand action as the participant himself understands it. Although the participant would probably use different language to describe his feelings and behaviour, the general intent is to discover the actor’s predicament and situation as he sees it.

Although the basic idea of symbolic interactionism dates back to George Herbert Mead, this theory is linked more with scholars like Herbert Blumer, Everett Hughes, Erving Goffman and Howard Becker. According to Mead, an individual’s self (consciousness) depends on his ability to take the same attitude towards himself as others take towards him. He sees himself as others see him. The grasping of attitudes and views of others is possible because individuals share the significant symbol, i.e., individuals can engage in meaningful communication with one another through the medium of language. It is through a dialogue with others that an individual becomes aware of the views and attitudes of others and through social interaction and exchange that he develops self consciousness.33
Howard Becker has a different view on the stimulus response model. While this model emphasizes the primacy of external events and maintains that human actions are seen as response to stimuli which occur in the outer world, Herbert Blumer points out the facts that human beings can initiate action without having to wait for external events to stimulate them into action. He also emphasizes the fact of action being purposive. It is taken in pursuit of some end that the actor has in mind, and towards which the organization of action is a means. The stimulus-response not only leaves little room for conceptions of purpose, but also offers a view of behaviour as being automatic, as a reflex which is tied to a stimulus. Herbert Blumer submits that action may be both deliberative and creative. It is deliberative in that the actor thinks about what he is doing, recognizes, assesses and chooses among alternative courses of action. He makes plans prior to acting and revise them as he encounters changing or unforeseen circumstances.34

Applying Blumer's views on violence against women, it could be said that it (violence) is not always the result of provocation by the victim. The offender uses it because he considers it as the only means to achieve his end. In other words, violence is seen as a means to achieve the end which is preplanned. It is not a mere reaction. An individual is not a mindless, instinct-dominated organism. What the circumstances are for the individual are dependent on the purposes, plans and knowledge that he has in mind.

Could we accept the idea of rationality demonstrated by symbolic interactionists? The very idea of violence involves the belief that their (offender’s) rationality is impaired and that they are incapable of conducting themselves in a rational way. But symbolic interactionists find an element of rationality in violence too. Thus symbolic interactionists are inattentive to the importance of structural constraints and underestimate the extent to which choices are effectively fore-closed by given social circumstances. Their perspective lacks a convincing account of motivation. It is important to know why people consistently choose to be violent (act in a certain way in certain
situation), instead of behaving in other ways. The symbolic interactionists’ view that it is the individual’s decision to act so as to maximize his effectiveness completely ignores the constraints prescribed by the existing social structures.

\( k \) Exchange Theory

Richard J. Gelles feels that the Exchange Theory is the best theory of violence because it integrates the key elements of the diverse theories of human violence. According to the Exchange Theory, interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishment and costs. In addition, an individual who supplies reward services to another obliges him to fulfill an obligation and thus the second individual must furnish benefits to the first. The exchange does not pertain to concrete or tangible things; rather, it involves intangibles such as esteem, liking, assistance and approval. If reciprocal exchange of rewards occurs, the interaction will continue, but if reciprocity is not received, the interaction will be broken off. Thus, actors expect rewards to be proportional to investments (distributive justice). The costs and rewards are judged in the light of alternatives.\(^{35}\)

This theory explains the growth of resentment, anger, hostility and violence when the principle of distributive justice is violated. In applying the principles of the Exchange theory to explain violence in a family (in our case wife-beating, dowry death and rape by a family member), we expect that people will use violence in a family if the costs of being violent do not outweigh the rewards. Goode suggests that force is used more by those in the poorer classes partly because they have less alternative resources and partly because their socialization experiences teach them to depend more on force. However, all researchers do not agree that the poor classes do use more force, though statistics show more violence against women in lower classes. Higher figures of violence in poor classes are there because of the fact that greater proportion of the population belongs to lower classes or it may be that middle classes have more sources or have greater motivation to hide their offences.\(^{36}\)
Intra-family relations are more complex than those studied by Exchange Theorists. A wife cannot break off interaction with her husband and parents cannot break off interaction with their children, even if there is no reciprocity. However, believes that violence is used as a last resort to solving problems in the family. But Nye does not accept Goode’s viewpoint. Giving an example, it may be said that just as spanking is frequently the first choice of action by many parents, beating his wife is also the common practice of an unemployed and frustrated husband. In applying this theory to intra-family violence, we find some costs for being violent. First, there could be the chance of the victim hitting back; second, a violent assault could lead to an arrest and/or imprisonment; and finally, using violence could lead to loss of status. Thus, since the cost is greater than the reward, how does the Exchange Theory explain violence against women.³⁷

l) Equity Theory

This theory propounded by Walster like Social Exchange Theory is concerned with what individuals feel they contribute to a relationship and what they receive in return. If one partner perceives an inequality in the exchange, he/she may react with anger or resentment before seeking ways to increase his/her benefits. However, if the partner perceives himself as the exploiter, rather than attempting to make the exchange more equitable, he may restore equity psychologically, reducing shame or guilt for exploitation by convincing himself that the victim deserves to be exploited.³⁸

m) Cognitive Dissonance Theory

According to this theory of Davis and Jones the exploiter may begin to denigrate his victim. The assaulting husband may either be reacting to perceived exploitation by his wife or may be justifying his own exploitation of her by debasing her psychologically and physically.³⁹

n) Role Interference Theory

According to this theory of violence proposed by Palmer, Henry and Short, an individual becomes violent towards the person he perceives to be
frustrating his attempts satisfactorily to play out competing roles. Humphrey gives an example of an alcoholic whose drinking interferes with performance of his occupational role of husband. He then behaves aggressively towards the person whom he perceives as making demands and having expectations he cannot meet.\(^{40}\)

\textit{V. Integrated Approach Theory or Multi Factor Theory}

All theories described above may be classified in two groups: those emphasizing ‘disturbed personalities’ and those emphasizing ‘social situations’. The former suggest that criminals are almost separate types of persons from the rest of humanity; the latter explain crime on the basis of functioning of social systems and social structures in society in such a ‘disadvantageous’ way that certain persons react by carrying out offences. Some sociological theories have also been constructed to ‘explain’ the differences.

We now present a new theoretical approach to explain violence against women. One approach is that we could combine crimes like wife-battering, torture, dowry-deaths and murders, and analyze them on the theoretical model of intra-family violence and the remaining crimes like rape, abduction, molestation, eve-teasing, etc. may be separately combined and analyzed on the theoretical model of violence exogenous to family. The other possibility is that we could take up all offences/types of violence and examine them together through one common theoretical model. On this basis, an attempt has been made here to develop a theoretical model which would explain all types of violence against women. We may describe this a middle-range theoretical proposition.

This approach has been adopted by borrowing certain concepts from sociologists and criminologists like Hirschi, Schultz etc. It not only explains the etiology of violence against women but also uncovers the recurring patterns in which particular types of people are found to commit a particular type of
crime against a particular type of individual, in particular types of circumstances.\textsuperscript{41}

A crime against a person is necessarily ‘violence by somebody’ and ‘violence against somebody’. As such, violence against women has to be understood as violence by an individual against an individual in contrast to violence by a group against an individual or violence by a group against a group. In violence by the individual, its origin or form must be determined in the individual himself. If we remain at the micro-sociological level of analyzing violence (against the macro-sociological level which concerns itself with institutional violence, class violence, state violence, violence of the international system, etc.), an individual’s behaviour may be partly seen as innate behaviour, that which concerns his predatory instincts, and partly as acquired behaviour, that which concerns his environment and his learning. Innate behaviour is capable of control and long-term conditioning and consequently of suppression through learning. Acquired behaviour on the other hand may vary from individual to individual.\textsuperscript{42}

An integrated model takes into consideration both innate and acquired behaviours. This model assumes the role of four factors: (i) social norms and social organization which socialize the individual, (ii) the personal characteristics of offenders and victims (psychiatric view) like emotional disturbances, aggressive impulses, a tendency to be rigid and domineering, a history of having been neglected or abused in childhood, low self-esteem, and so forth, (iii) the inter-personal characteristics of offenders (socio-psychological view) such as failure to get praise, appreciation, words of affection and polite modes of address from others, higher than normal levels of coercive-behaviour from others, such as verbal threats and words of dislike and disapproval, below average (or below normal) frequencies of overall family interaction and lack of outside social associations, etc., and (iv) the ecological or environmental factors, for it is within ecological boundaries that personal disposition to use violence or commit crime are developed and crime-evoking
This model concentrates on the sociological analysis of social-structural conditions. The important conditions which lead a person to woman’s victimization are: status frustrations, life stresses and career crisis, and structural opportunities. This view focuses attention not only on the aggressive act itself but also on the person who uses aggression and the person against whom aggression is used. The man who assaults a woman, physically or mentally, is often the man who either feels at a disadvantage with woman or who feels at an advantageous position in demanding a specific thing from a woman. He is demanding or jealous or lacks resources, and so on.

Further, the rapists, molesters, torturers, abductors, murderers, and batterers of women, or offenders committing crimes against females do not commit offences only because they are uninhibited hedonists. One category of these offenders consists of men who indulge in this deviant behaviour because they suffer from insecurity feelings and anxieties, while the other category is of those men who have an advantageous structural opportunity. The origins of feelings and anxieties are traceable to (1) inappropriate upbringing, (2) hindrances to childhood social development, and (3) unfortunate incidents in their life that serve to aggravate rather than to ameliorate the tendency to irrational and unrealistic attitudes towards women. This theory also takes into account, on the one hand, the three factors in offenders’ behaviour, viz., adjustment, attachment and commitment, and, on the other hand, the factor that lack of adjustment, attachment and commitment leads to ‘status frustrations’. Maladjustment, unattachment and non-commitment are to be examined in terms of demographic factors like age, income, education, etc., as well as the socialized personalities of the individuals.

Thus, in this theoretical model, importance has been given to the social system, the personality of the individual, as well as the subculture of the group in which an individual uses violence. In other words, integrated approach is based on the analysis of: (a) the social system, (b) the personality structure, and
(c) cultural patterns. In the social system, we include strains and frustrations and structural opportunities; in the personality structure, we include adjustment (in status), attachment (to groups), and commitment (to values and roles); and in cultural patterns, we include the synthesis of traditional and modern values which operate as a means of social control (in a group/community/society). Violence appears to be the result of combination of certain factors. There is the role of four factors in violence: (i) personality factors (of male aggressors), (ii) situational factors, (iii) cultural norms, and (iv) resistance potential of female victims.46

What are the personality traits which provoke men to use violence against the weaker sex – women? Characteristics like anger, irritation, dominance, possessiveness contribute to man’s violent behaviour. Development of these traits, i.e., violence-prone personality is the result of man’s childhood, adolescence and other life experiences. Similarly, certain personality characteristic of women also compel them to submit to and suffer from man’s aggression. Feeling of helplessness (as pointed out by Walker) is one such trait. But then the question arises: Is helplessness the cause of or the reaction to victimization?47

The study, however, showed that violence is not the result of provocation from irritating personality traits of the female victims, but rather form the aggressor’s learned behavioural responses. One such character is aggressor’s history of past violent behaviour. This includes witnessing (say, mother’s beating by father), receiving (say, being beaten by parents on slight pretexts), and committing (say, beating his younger brother or sister) violent acts in the childhood home, or violent acts in school, neighbourhood and other places. Some other personality traits are found to be temper tantrums, emotional insecurity, jealousy, possessiveness, suspicious nature, dominance, and being mean and hostile when one fails to get what he wants.48

What are the situational factors responsible for violence? What is the role of stressful family situation, work-place situation and situation at the time
of using violence in man's becoming aggressive? Is 'resourcelessness' one situation in the use of violence? To what extent economic deprivation, lack of employment, wife having a better job than her husband, wife’s total dependence on husband, and such factors contribute to man battering his wife or committing homicide?

To what extent cultural norms or socio-structural variables like norms which justify male violence against women or family functioning on patriarchal principles or employers functioning on ideals of sex role differences and inferiority of women or system structures of a given society contribute to violence?

Woman’s resistance/susceptibility potential would come from rigid sex role socialization patterns, leaving women with a sense of ‘learned helplessness’ so that they do not develop appropriate skills to escape violence. The potential for violence varies strongly with the degree of adjustment, commitment and attachment of the offender.⁴⁹

*Attachment* us the bond of affection between an individual and other (conventional) persons. The degree of attachment is how much a person cares for others and is cared for by them, and how much this person values others' feelings, opinions and expectations. An individual who is strongly attached to others is likely to consider how his behaviour will affect others and their attitudes, including their attitudes towards that individual. Unattached or less attached people lack such inter-personal stakes in conformity and have only themselves to think about. Attachment is, thus, a powerful inhibitor of deviant behaviour resulting from social frustrations and structural opportunities. The more a person is attached to other persons’ feelings and expectations, the less likely he is to remain frustrated or use structural opportunity to indulge in violence.

*Commitment* is a feeling of obligation to seek a particular goal or to follow a particular course of action. As a result, freedom of choice and the number of
alternatives in social action are limited. The greater the individual's commitment to a goal or to an action, the greater will be his stake in conformity to the social norms. Thus, commitment serves as a bond between the individual and social norms and represents what the person has to lose by violating the norms of society.

*Adjustment* refers to the smooth switch-over from one status to another, perceiving one's role as perceived by others, an active participation in all roles, and having a problem-solving attitude. Adjustment specifies a relatively harmonious relationship within and between individuals and groups. The greater the adjustment, the lesser the possibility of the individual's indulging in deviant/violent behaviour.\(^50\)

Maladjustment, unattachment and non-commitment lead to a feeling of relative deprivation or a superiority ego. Relative deprivation is a perceived discrepancy between an individual's value expectations (i.e., expectations pertaining to security, power, status, welfare, justice, freedom, etc.) and their value capabilities (conditions of life individuals think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them).

Relative Deprivation = Perceived Opportunities and Perceived Capabilities

\[
RD = PO + PC
\]

Or

\[
RD = P (O+C)
\]

Here, the important factor is perceived (as by the offenders themselves, hence different variations in behaviour or relative deprivations do not always lead to violent agitations).\(^51\)

This approach thus explains the differential distribution and patterns of violence against women and those involved, not in terms of the offender's motivations and mental processes which may have led to the crime, but in terms of the variations among individuals in their social adjustments, values
and beliefs and their social conditions. Because the highest rates of offences occur among individuals (both offenders and victims with relatively homogeneous values and beliefs), it is assumed that offenders hold a particular set of conduct norms which emphasize aggressive behaviour while victims have the least resistance potential towards aggressive behaviour. Thus, violence towards women is more likely to occur under specific circumstances. Furthermore, it is contended that individuals with these maladjustments patterns and values and beliefs are more likely to react aggressively than individuals having no such maladjustment patterns and values and beliefs. Hence, individual differences in aggressive behaviour may also reflect different degrees of integration with these values.

Sexual assaults on women could also be explained on similar lines. Man believes in sex role differences and in his superiority over woman. He wants her to submit to him at his will. Woman refuses to believe in man’s traditional attitude of his superiority. She has different perceptions of her own vulnerability. She rejects man's advances which motivates him to use his superior physical power and sexually assault or molest her. A woman who is afraid of losing her job or of affection and care of her male relative or of disrupting her life status quo permits sexual abuse and suffers victimization in silence. But, a 'bold' woman resists sexual attacks and refuses to be victimized. This explains the role of personality traits of aggressors and victims in violence against women. Whether or not a college girl, a maid servant, a teacher in a private school, a receptionist in a private firm, a run-away girl from home, and so forth will become victims of sexual assault of a college boy, employer, auto-rickshaw driver, etc. will depend upon to what extent she is afraid of breaking her ‘relationship status quo’ and upon her ‘boldly’ resisting the traditional man’s attitude of male superiority so that she can survive the violent attacks against her.\(^{53}\)

It is not contended, however, that when we talk of homogeneous values and beliefs, we accept Wolfgang’s thesis of a sub-culture of violence. Rather,
we maintain that violence is used by people who are either frustrated or develop a superiority ego due to lack of adjustment, attachment and commitment under specific circumstances. Frustrated relatively deprived individuals as well as those with a high ego are not constrained by their beliefs and values and they allow use of violence whenever and wherever they like. However, they are influenced by (i) the people against whom violence is to be used, i.e., victims have to be those who lack resistance potential towards aggressive behaviour, and (ii) by the idea of justification of their act (violence) before and after its commission. Thus, violence is used by these frustrated individuals when they view certain females as appropriate victims and certain situations as suggestive of, even opportune for the use of violence i.e., in specific circumstances and not in all circumstances.54

We also suggest another factor in violence based on either frustration and a feeling of relative deprivation or a superior ego-the conflict between love and aggression. In both types of people, feelings of authority and dependency become predominant in their relationships with others. In extreme cases, these acts of criminal violence and aggression are caused by a loss of affection for the other, and, the feeling of authority in the offender towards the victim becomes dominant.

The integrated model based on adjustment, commitment, attachment and the relative feeling of deprivation or superiority ego is different from the Frustration Aggression Theory in the sense that this theory views the emergence of frustrations in terms of an innate aggressive drive. Clinicians explain frustrations as a result of a variety of intrapsychic conflicts and pressures. We view status-frustrations as the consequence of inter-personal relations and the functioning of sub-systems in society. Our theory, thus, has a sociological orientation.55

The integrated approach explains wife-beating, dowry-deaths and murders on the basis of frustrations or feelings of relative deprivation while it explains rapes and abductions on the basis of structural opportunities and
maladjustments. Our contention thus is that sexually aggressive behaviour (single rape) is to be seen in terms of broad adverse family conditions. Rape is committed not to gain status, but mainly for sexual satisfaction, and as a response to a situational urge or the victim’s provocation and it is maladjustment, unattachment and non-commitment to the family and its norms and values that create an aggressive view and aggressive values. To sum up, an individual indulges in aggressive and violent behaviour in general as well as towards women when he receives situational reinforcement and facilitation.

3.3. Concluding Remarks

An analysis of causes of violence against women in the light of theoretical explanation reflects that crime against women is a complex and multifaceted problem in Indian society. Its root causes are as diverse and varied as there are researchers who study it. Much of researches into this area also indicate that there are several factors to be reviewed.

The psycho-pathological model focuses on the personality characteristics of offenders and victims as chief determinants of criminal violence. This model includes analysis that links mental illness (i.e., a small number of mentally ill persons are violent), alcohol (i.e., what one does sunder the influence of alcohol and other drugs) and other intra-individual phenomena to acts of violence.

The socio-psychological model assumes that criminal violence can best be understood by careful examination of external environmental factors that exercise impact on an individual offender. This model also examines the types of everyday interactions (say, stressful situations or family interactional patterns) which are precursors of violence. Theories such as the Frustration-Aggression Theory, the Perversion Theory, the Self-Attitude Theory and the Motive Attribution Theory approach criminal violence from a socio-psychological level of analysis.
The sociological or socio-cultural model provides a macro-level analysis of criminal violence. This model examines criminal violence in terms of socially structured inequality, and social and cultural attitudes and norms regarding anti-social behaviour and inter-personal relations. Besides the two well-known theories, viz., the Structural-Functional Theory and the Theory of the Sub-culture of Violence, the Learning Theory, the Exchange Theory, the Anomie Theory, and the Resource Theory also come under socio-cultural analysis.

Over the last two decades, the trend has been to move towards a more integrated "multidimensional" model in order to better understand and address the complexity of crime against women, that has psychological, inter-personal, social, cultural and legal aspects.

An analysis of various forms of crimes against women also reflects that this is such a complex phenomenon that a single theory does not and can not explain all sorts of violence against women. There are numerous factors such as socio-cultural, structural, economic, pathological and psychological responsible for it. Changing social norms and values shape the evolution and typology of violence. Therefore, multifactor theory provides a comprehensive framework to understand the nature and causes of crime against women in India.
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