CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The research study has been located in the discipline of women’s studies and employs feminist methodology in collecting and analysing data. This chapter briefly proposes to present an understanding of what comprises women’s studies, what its focuses are, and the nature of studies undertaken under the discipline. It proposes to elaborate the purpose of feminist research and what feminist theory and methodology intends to do. It also intends to make a brief presentation explaining the nature of researches conducted in India under the discipline of women’s studies since 1975. Since the study is inter-disciplinary, it explores Gandhiji’s approach towards women’s issues. It gradually progresses to the focal point of sexuality, the social construction theories in relation to sexuality, the Indian viewpoint of sexuality, feminist critique of Gandhi’s view of sexuality. At the end of the chapter, there is a brief overview of the issue of Child Sexual Abuse and how the study is placed within the framework of women’s studies.

A defining assumption of feminism is that ‘woman’ is a necessary and valid category because all women share, by virtue of being women, a
set of common experiences. These shared experiences derive, not casually from supposed "biological facts" but women’s common experience of oppression. That is "woman" is a socially and politically constructed category, the ontological basis of which lies in a set of experiences rooted in the material world.

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise are concerned to see that analyses see "women’s oppression" as single, determined, and a state in which "women" almost by definition have no power. In contrast, they argued that "oppression" should be seen as an extraordinarily complex process in which "women" are only rarely and in extreme totally powerless and in which, ordinarily, "women" utilize a range of resources—verbal, interactional and other—in order to "fight back" (1984, 87).

Feminism is single-mindedly committed to the task of exposing and fighting the oppression of women and has revealed deprivations and sufferings that had hither to been masked and questioned practices that were passed over as women’s destiny or lot. Further, feminism has seriously questioned the stereotypes by which programs for the welfare of women have been guided—particularly the notion that they are the “weaker sex” or they cannot but function as “dependants” [Suma Chitnis, Women’s Studies in social work education, a new challenge, Exploring Feminist Visions: Case Studies on Social Justice issues, Ed. Francis Maria Yasas and Vera Mehta, 1987].
Women’s Studies

The first aim of women’s studies has been to focus on various aspects of women’s lives and experiences. The process is described as allowing women ‘to find a voice’, ‘to claim space for themselves’ or ‘to render women visible’. Male domination refers to the nature of power relations between women and men, which have advantaged men. Feminist scholarship has made us aware of the scale and extent of men’s ability to control women and to place us in a subordinate relationship to them. Men’s power in relation to women is referred to as patriarchal control, which has resulted in the widespread oppression of women. One aspect of this oppression has been the failure to recognize women’s knowledge in standard forms of received knowledge.

Women’s studies is not only about women but it is for women. Participating in women’s studies is a political engagement. The recovery of knowledge that belongs to women has political implications. This recovery promotes change by challenging traditional views about received knowledge; it fosters the agency of women to be in control of their own lives; it implicates the institutions in which we study and work since women’s studies challenges not only received notions of what should be taught [Humm, 1991]; it empowers women collectively, leading to changing them as people.
Women's studies is about experience. Women's experience, both individual and collective, is at the heart of women's knowledge [Griffin, 1994]. It is a rich resource for a women's studies curriculum. Women's lives are to an important extent socially constructed meaning by this that our ideas, identities and actions are shaped and modified by the social context in which we have been positioned. The implication of this is that we need to go outside ourselves and locate our experience in complex social orders.

Women's studies is about difference. While commonalities between women remain important and a source of power for women, more recently developments in women's studies have revealed the extent and significance of diversity, increasing attention has been given to the diversity of women's experience, particularly in relation to class, race, ethnicity and sexuality.

Women's studies is about celebration. While much of the intellectual energy stimulating the growth of women's studies has been used to unpack the basis of women's oppression [from a variety of different theoretical perspectives], an equal important outcome of rendering women's knowledge visible has been to facilitate recognition of women's achievement. Achievement can be understood in many different ways. Aspects of women's achievement, which we think are particularly important, are our ability to gain control over our lives [personal
autonomy, our ability to sustain positive feelings of self-worth; the influence that women have had through the exercise of creative human potential on the course of human history; our contribution to the growth of human knowledge.

A set of themes has also been identified which is central to the understanding of the ways in which we construct our identities and the variety of our life experience. They are: space, history [time], power and cross-cultural perspectives. Space may be conceptualized in a number of ways, ranging from physical to ideological [room for new ideas]. Locating women in history is crucial for the task of interpreting past experience and relating it to the present and the future [change]. Power is a key concept and the emphasis would be on power relation between women and men [patriarchal power]. Cross-cultural perspectives focus our attention on both the commonalities between women arising from a shared gender category and on the significance of difference. Women's studies are multidisciplinary. Feminist scholars from a wide range of academic areas of knowledge [disciplines] participate in the study of women and are concerned with all aspects of women's lives. [Beryl Madoc Jones and Jennifer Coates. An introduction to women's studies, Blackwell Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, 1996].

A great many practitioners of women's studies have transcended their disciplinary barriers and made innovations which of course is an
urgent necessity and an incontrovertible must if a discipline has to grow. But it has to be mentioned here that the process of drawing upon the resources of other disciplines has not been confined to gender studies alone. Women's voices have to be restored, their visions reinstated. This requires inter-disciplinary exchange. Such a perspective will not dilute but strengthen both history and the field of gender studies.

Gender studies aims at changing the nature and character of the concerned disciplines. Women are subjects of social processes who constitute, reproduce and change social system characterized by power. The social sciences ignore this at their peril; they remain incomplete and reality is distorted.

In India, sociological theory has uncritically accepted Western models without paying attention to how roles differ in different family and kinship systems. In development studies we have failed to look at intra-household discrimination; gender ideology and gender asymmetry have escaped our attention. Who gains from development? Do men and women in a family belong to the same class? This is a question that cut across the disciplinary divide of the social sciences. Studies of inter-caste relations have neglected the critical role of women as subject and object. Castes as birth status groups are after all maintained through marriage. Sexuality and women, gender ideologies and practices are critically implicated in the
mechanisms of sustenance of caste boundaries. A historically sensitive analysis of caste must focus on changes in kinship and gender.

The focus on kinship, marriage and the family meant that women were not exactly absent from anthropology. However, the methodology was faulty and its practitioners carried a strong andocentric bias.

In economic theories, concepts and techniques of analysis generally are premised upon the insignificance and indeed the absence of women. In the well-known debate on the mode of production in Indian agriculture considerations of the differences between male and female rights to resources and the range of women’s contribution to production did not enter the picture.

The calculation of the value of women’s share in agricultural work much of which is substantial but largely constitutes family labour is made on the basis of concepts of use value and exchange value. The complex processes involved in production and social reproduction do not bother the economist. Moreover, there exists an insidious distinction between hard economics and soft economics. Those who focus on women’s participation in labour force, women’s work and its measurement, and the effect of land reforms on women tend to be considered as soft economists, more so if they are women. Even Amartya Sen’s interest in some of these issues does not radically alter this view.
Since around the mid-seventies, in fact, there has been considerable work done in women’s history. The objective is not merely to locate women protagonists but to raise the question of gender within the discipline of history. Behind this lies the conviction that the neglect of women as conscious acting subjects and a reproduction of deeply ingrained ideologies – for instance – “the honour of a family rests on the honour of its women”-distort a proper understanding of historical processes and social reality.

Language is a means of communication, an expression of shared assumptions and a medium that transmits values and behavioural models. The term ‘man’ used to be considered a short cut for human beings but it no longer stands for both men and women. In the social sciences man includes woman; “anthropology is the science of man embracing woman” says Malinowski. We need to ponder if the term ‘man’ evokes the images of human beings or of males? The psychologist Eric Fromm describes man’s vital interests as life, food, access to females, etc. Are women to be defined only as accessible resources? And, here to whom is Fromm referring when he talks about men’s vital interests? A sociologist, similarly, provides us with correlates of high status: “Americans of high status have more years of education, more children attending college, less divorce, lower mortality, and less chance of having a fat wife. Surely American women do not have fat wives. The social sciences and the media work in tandem. A sentence about Australians in a news paper
reads".

Australians are fond of three things: watching the activities of royalty, watching cricket and watching women." Here again, the Australian males make up the Australian population. Similarly a supposedly perceptive remark scatters wisdom, 'Men will never give up power though they may give up wealth, children, wives'. In Christianity god is referred to as the Lord and the Father. What kind of images do these terms evoke in the mind of a child?

English language uses expressions that relegate women to a secondary status. In Indian languages, Telugu and Kannada for instance, wife is referred to as it which is, of course, neuter gender. In these languages neuter gender is generally used only to denote inanimate objects and non-rational beings. There are many expressions in Indian languages, which reinforce the gender inequality within the social structure. Any change in the conceptualization of a discipline has to take care of questions of language.

The problems of the present have their roots in the past. To understand adverse sex ratios, dowry, exclusion of women from rights to land, we have to turn to history. The discipline, to reiterate, has to devise new methods, search for new sources and adopt a new focus. When the author talks of a focus on women, she does not mean an exclusive focus. Gender relations cannot be studied in isolation. They have to be looked at in the context of structures and processes in which they are embedded. It
has been argued that the results of an exclusive focus on women will be disastrous the male bias of the past will be replaced by a female bias. Can we then really comprehend social reality? What is really advocated therefore, is bifocal analysis.

Mainstream social science in our country has been greatly influenced by the Western models. References to colonized minds and indigenization abound. With regard to the area of women’s studies, indigenous talent, understanding and perceptions occupy an important place. It is my conviction that indigenous researchers have the requisite sensitivity to grasp the subtleties of behaviour and native categories of thought. This does not mean, however, that internal differentiation in a society can be ignored. We cannot privilege or valorize an indigenous researcher’s understanding of social reality, particularly in a country, which consists of multiple cultures. Women have to prove that they are intellectually and emotionally equipped to carry out gender studies.

The author says emotional because often objectivity is a device for escapism, for not bothering about the problems that stare us in the face. It is not possible to be objective and value neutral in this sense. But it is also necessary for women to reflect on themselves and their own biases too.

A self-questioning and rigorous approach can help constitute gender studies as a genuinely oppositional genre, which will change the nature and character of the social sciences. We have to be wary of both,
the hostility towards women's studies as seen in the West and an attitude of condescension and an assumption of lightweight scholarship in this area witnessed in developing countries including India. There is a need to challenge received wisdom, to question established assumptions and to ask nuanced questions. [Dube Leela. Gender bias and Social Sciences. Ed. Kiran Pawar. Women in Indian History- Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Perspectives. 1996].

Feminist Research

Feminist research presents the challenge of reconsidering gender stereotypes, redefining them when they are wrong and instituting services to remedy the suffering, the injustices or the problems caused by existing erroneous definitions. Feminist research does in fact open the entirely new perspective on the deprivations, sufferings and needs of women [Suma Chitnis, 1987].

Deductiveism treats experience as a 'test' of previously specified theoretical hypothesis; and so within it theory precedes both experience and research. In apparent contrast, inductiveism specifies a model of research in which theory is derived from research experience and is often referred to as 'grounded theory'. In producing feminist research, what is needed is not adherence to one of the existing dichotomized models, but instead detailed descriptions of actual feminist research processes sited
around an explication of feminist consciousness: [and for alternative and complimentary views to this, see Bartky 1977; Kasper 1986; Stone 1975].

Feminism should be present in positive ways within the research process, a feminist epistemological principles underpinning behaviour and analysis both; and five related sites have been outlined:

- In the researcher-researched relationship
- In emotion as a research experience
- In the intellectual autobiography of researchers
- In how to manage the differing ‘realities’ and understanding of researchers and researched thus
- In the complex question of power in research and writing.

All research analysis and theories are inevitably grounded in the material experiences of researchers/ theorists. Second, a key problem of social science is how to understand ‘inter-subjectivity’-the fact that in spite of our ontological distinctness none the less we assume we can, and indeed we do, ‘share experiences’ such that we recognize ourselves in others and they in us and can speak of ‘common experiences’. And third, inter-subjectivity is possible; we all produce theoretical descriptions of the social world, which can be tested out against it.
Margrit Eichler derives four epistemological propositions for feminist research from the basic postulates of the sociology of knowledge. All knowledge is socially constructed: the dominant ideology is that of the ruling group, there is no such thing as value-free science and the social sciences so far have served and reflected men’s interests; and because people’s perspective varies systematically with their position in society, the perspective of men and women differ. All knowledge, necessarily, results from the conditions of its production, is contextually located and irrevocably bears the marks of its origin in the minds and intellectual practices of those lay and professional theorists and researchers who give voice to it.

**Feminist Theory**

A theory is a framework or set of ideas for making sense of the world. A theory allows us to explain in a systematic way the things we observe and experience in our everyday lives.

Feminist theory has arisen in the twentieth century as women try to make sense of their lives. One aspect of feminist theory, which is unique, is its emphasis on the link between theory and practice, embodied in the slogan ‘The personal is political’. Humm describing feminist theory says: a fundamental goal of feminist theory is to understand women’s oppression in terms of race, gender, class and sexual preference and how to change it. Feminist theory reveals the importance of women’s
individual and shared experiences and our struggles. It analysis how sexual difference is constructed within any intellectual and social world and builds accounts of experiences from the differences [Humm, 1989].

Feminist theory is defined as theory derived from experience analytically entered into by enquiring feminists. It is:

- Continually subject to revision in the light of that experience.
- Thus reflexive and self-reflexive and accessible to everyone and
- Certainly not to be treated as sacrosanct and enshrined in ‘texts’ to be endlessly pored over like chicken entrails.

Feminist Methodology

Methodology is a ‘perspective’ or a very broad theoretically informed framework, such as symbolic interactionism or functionalism within sociology and which may or may not specify its own particular ‘appropriate’ research methods techniques, and ‘epistemology’ is a theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as: who can be a ‘knower’, what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge, and what the relationship is or should be between knowing and being [that is between epistemology and ontology].

Sandra Harding [1986 a, 1986 b, 1987 b, 1987 c] focuses upon epistemology as the foundation for method and methodology. She examines various materialist feminist writing and identifies two distinct
transitional epistemologies': feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint. 'Feminist empiricism' is identified as the main feminist response to the biases and problems of traditional disciplines. It also contains 'inner tensions' which hold the promise of something more radical by acknowledging that: the 'context of discovery' of research is as important in constructing knowledge as research products or theories; 'scientific method' is insufficient as a means of eliminating overt sexism and povocentristic.

'Feminist standpoint' epistemology, as exemplified in the work of Hilary Rose [1983, 1986], Nancy Hartsook [1983, 1987], Jane Flax [1983] and Dorothy Smith [1979,1981] is described as more radical, Here knowledge based on a feminist standpoint is identified as scientifically preferable since it is more complete and less distorted. Its knowledge is derived from a committed feminist exploration of women's experiences of oppression. It is thus a practical achievement, not an abstract 'stance'.

To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see natural and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women's experiences instead of from the partial and perverse perspective available from the 'ruling gender' experience of men [Harding 1987 b: 185].
The Explosion of Research

Facilitated by the UN declaration of the decade between 1975 and 1985 as the Decade of Women, the impulse to explore into the realities of the situation of women and to listen to their voice has triggered a virtual explosion of research and writing on and by women. This is richly varied and covers a broad spectrum of issues and concerns.

The simplest and most direct of the studies are a range of statistical surveys and probes into different aspects of women’s situations. Surveys now offer details about the sex ratio, about mortality and fertility among women and about their health, nutrition and education that were not considered to be particularly relevant earlier. Similar socio-economic surveys offer information on their employment and occupation, their situation as workers in terms of the wages they earn, the conditions under which they work, their organization/unionization as workers.

There are also several intensive, qualitative probes into their situation in different spheres of life. For instance, there are detailed studies of the effects of industrialization and of the introduction of new technologies and modes of production on their situation.

There are intensive studies both on the effects that male migration, from village to city have on the family life of women as well as on the manner in which such migration affects the economic status of women in
the rural economy. A number of studies focus on how those who work outside their homes handle their dual role as earners and homemakers.

There are studies that look at the political and the civic behaviour of women, which study their utilization and non-utilization of political and legal rights and facilities as well as of facilities provided for their health and education. Most of these latter studies aim at acquiring insights into whether or not and to what extent women have acquired autonomy, whether or not they are allowed and do use the equal rights made available to them by law and whether or not they participate and contribute to society, as is now expected of them as responsible individuals and as citizens of a democracy.

There are a range of novel explorations for qualitative information, through the use of methods such as the content analysis of novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies, poetry, and devotional verse and through the compilation of oral histories and documentation of information on life cycles of women to understand their upbringing and their socialization. There are efforts to analyse myth, folklore, customs, practices of life, to understand hidden messages and injunctions that guide the daily behaviour of women and subtly and imperceptibly determine whether and why women will accept or resist change.

The established notion, in the census and in all other universes of discourse, is that men invariably head households. However, using data,
from the census of 1961 and 1971, Praveen and Leela Visaria [1985] have shown that in some parts of the country as many as 16 to 22 percent of the home holds are headed by women. The women who function as heads generally combine the roles of earners and homemakers. They are not really accepted as full functionaries and decision makers in matters of business, property or in politics and civic affairs. Without a man to ‘protect’ them, and their honour, they and their families are vulnerable to sexual assault, and exploitation. Yet, none of these problems, specific to women-headed households, have ever found their way into the defined frames of welfare programmes or services for women.

One of the major outcomes of the feminist effort to examine the status of women in India has been the realization that working class women are often the principal earners and, more significantly, in many cases, the principal providers. They toil as cultivators, agricultural labourers, peddlers, hawkers, bonded labourers or as family labour in home based production without being formally listed as earners. Among the most devastating revelation in this connection is that even the decennial census of the country conducted, for over a century, has, by and large, failed to recognize these categories of women workers. By remaining invisible, the work that women do remains uncovered by legislation aimed at preventing unfair employment practices and exploitation in the labour market.
In a very telling study, Srilatha Batliwala reveals how the food intake of women is totally inadequate, measured against the energy that they expend as workers or even merely as home-makers.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that obligations towards home making, coupled with traditional norms and customs which restrict their movement to a limited territory, and disapproval of their interaction with strangers, restrict the autonomy of women engaged in home-based production. Since they cannot go out or deal with strangers, they have very little control over purchase of raw materials for their products, or for the marketing of their finished goods. They have to depend for this on other male family members further, their restricted movement makes it difficult for them to procure loans, or other assistance that they need from government and from welfare agencies. To add to all this, these women find that when they venture out against all odds they are liable to harassment by the authorities that are supposed to help them.

Studies show that women have often been marginalized in the operation of development plans and programmes. These studies quote profusely from experience ranging from agriculture, where simple technologies, such as weed killers or threshers, have displaced female labour, to sophisticated slots of urban employment, where mechanization has produced much the same results, to family planning.
There is good deal of discussion and information on how the explosion of new kinds of pleasure and entertainment, which seems to follow upon modern forms of prosperity and urbanization, spawn new forms of the flesh trade of women.

One of the most critical is the area of family planning and birth control. Research findings reveal that family planning programmes have caused targets for sterilization and for the popularization of birth control practices of various kinds, with total disregard for health and psychological hazards to women.

Studies reveal that one of the major causes of the high rate of the female mortality is the utter neglect of the nutrition of females-from birth onwards.

Questions are also being raised by feminists about the ‘rehabilitation’ of unmarried mothers, or about counselling for marital breakdown and discord. Traditional norms for rehabilitation run counter to new concepts regarding the rights and responsibilities of women, new definitions of happiness and new notions of where ‘propriety’ and ‘justice’ lie.

Studies have been exploring into how women’s self-concepts and identities are moulded and formed. Some of the interesting work being done in this area relates to the manner in which Hindu mythology,
folklore, rituals and custom such as maintenance of ‘vratas’ [vows] and 
fasts reinforce traditional concepts of womanhood.

Feminist research does in fact open up entirely new perspectives 
on the deprivations, sufferings and needs of women.

The committee on the status of women had shown that because 
women were seen as dependents, their contribution to the economy, the 
family and the community had been neglected and allowed to remain 
invisible. It revealed that women are not weak but oppressed and powerless, 
not inadequate but unacknowledged, unrecognised and rendered helpless due 
to denial of opportunity, subjugation and suppression. Traditional norms, 
customs and behaviour expectations failed to recognize this and make it difficult for them to function as earners or as decision makers, regardless of 
the fact that in crises such as death, disability or migration they have regularly taken on the functions of men.

**Feminism and Its Relation to Social Work**

Feminists have demanded that the entire concept of ‘charity’, 
which has motivated much of social work and welfare, be reconsidered in the context of the ideals of equality and the right to some minimum standards of life and of the concepts of social justice and human dignity, today professed by most of the world.
The feminist exposure of the exploitation of women and the feminist critique of traditional concepts of welfare, pose a stimulating challenge to social work. In the third world countries, where social workers are already expected to function as agents of development and change, this often implies that they must venture into totally unchartered fields and perform tasks that render the boundaries between social work and social action or political intervention precariously thin.

Gandhi on Women

Gandhi’s attitude towards women can be best understood in the context of his general philosophy of life. It can be termed as Ahimsa or non-violence, in which there is no room for any discrimination or a feeling of high and low. For Gandhi, every social position/occupation has equal value and womenhood could be no exception.

Addressing the annual gathering of the Bombay Bhagini Samaj held on Feb. 20 1918, he said: ‘women are the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest detail of the activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he. He attributed the Hindu Sastras’ bias for male offspring to historical reasons and expressed his view in clear words: ‘I make no distinction between son and daughter. Such distinction is in my opinion invidious and wrong. The birth of a son or a daughter should be welcomed alike.’ In a true advaitin’s sprit he viewed that ‘the soul in both
is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings and considered each to be “the complement of the other.”

It would be interesting to examine the dilemma which Gandhi was bound to face vis-à-vis the Hindu Sastras for which he had high regard and normally would not like them to be overruled but some of which contained derogatory remarks about women. It should be noted that whilst Gandhi had immense faith in the wisdom of the Sastras, he in the spirit of a true rationalist, believed in the application of reason on every issue which an individual or society confronted. He was fully aware of the fact that the writing generally correspond to various social, cultural and environmental demands and necessities of their times and therefore, in adjudging an ancient author’s statements or views the historical context should always be taken into consideration. Commenting on controversial Manu, he said: “The saying attributed to Manu that for women there can be not freedom is not to be sacrosanct. It only shows that probably at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are ardhangini, ‘the better half’ and ‘sahadharmini’, the helpmate. The husband addressing the wife as devi or goddess does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the women was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a state of inferiority. [M.K. Gandhi, Conquest of self. Compiled by R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao, August, 1943].
Broadly speaking, Gandhi would fall in the category of those reforms whose models were typically Indian and not western. He had a deep sense of appreciation for Indian ideas and wanted a change in Indian society in conformity with them. He has often remarked that the ideals of wom*en*hood for him were Sita and Draupdi. He was totally against the blind imitation of the West by Indian women. He said, “...They must apply methods suited to the Indian genius and Indian environment. Their must be the strong, controlling, purifying, steadying hand, conserving what is best in our culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sita’s, Draupadi’s, Savitri’s and Damayanti’s, not of amazons and prudes. This, however, does not mean that he was against Indian girl getting modern education or intended to anathemize all girls who had received English education. In his concept, the emphasis should be on the universal and essential qualities of women and not merely on the character of women’s rights. The Indian ideal of womanhood he felt that “it was a very high concept, not only of Indian women hood but of all women hood irrespective of race, religion or country” [M.K. Gandhi, Conquest of self, August, 1943].

Child marriage, to him, was “an immoral and inhuman act” which made innocent girls objects of men’s lust, ruined the health of many a child, mother and converted tender-aged girls into widows. He advocated mobilization of strong public opinion and supported agitation by the local people to put a check on such happenings. For Gandhi, child marriage was
not only a moral and social evil; it was an obstacle even in the way of Swaraj. He tagged the issue with the struggle for freedom and attacked the custom by appealing to the nationalistic feelings of the people.

Gandhi was totally against the dowry system, which defiled the pure character of the marriage institution. He condemned the system and said that it was nothing but sale of girls.

Gandhi believed in certain basic differences between men and women and accepted the principle of division of labour between them, which according to him had existed since the beginning. He considered women the embodiment of self-sacrifice and non-violence and, as such, their occupation should be in conformity with their essential nature. According to him, the duty of motherhood, or a caretaker and the household work is the basic task of women and these are in no way less significant than the works done by men. By resorting to different works in accordance with their basic nature men and women simply complemented each other and there was no ground for women to suffer from any inferiority complex.

The most important feature of the Gandhian programme vis-à-vis women was his attempt to involve their active participation in the national movement. He often said that women were an embodiment of love and suffering and in a non-violent struggle she could easily play the role of a leader. Significantly, it is important to note that it was Gandhi’s concept of
suffering that formed the cornerstone of his concept of non-violence and Satyagraha.

It has been considered that Indian women have demonstrated tremendous capacity to suffer as subordinate members of the family. They inflict suffering on themselves through servitude, devotion, self-deprivation, self-denial, self-starvation, patience and endurance. Their suffering, within the family, in a way, was a process of empowerment that eventually gave them access to decision making in the household.

Gandhi built upon this historical fact of the experience of women as sufferers. He brought women’s suffering from the private realms of family and household to public sphere where in their capacity to suffer was transformed into a Shakti for breaking the chains of enslavement to colonial rule as well as their own enslavement as women. Viewed from a feminist perspective, Gandhi’s emphasis on women’s natural and inborn capacity to suffer can be construed as a strategy for the perpetuation of dominant cultural patriarchal ideal of feminine identity.

The participation of women in national problems on such a large scale was no doubt a novel and unique phenomenon in history. During the Indian National Movement, women did not remain passive onlookers but they actively participated in it and made important contributions.

Viewed from the perspective of women’s participation, Indian freedom struggle crystallized into a tremendous confidence building
process, which altered women’s own perception of their self-image. Participation in the larger liberation struggle not only generated amongst them the confidence to lead their own struggle against patriarchal domination but it also symbolized a significant breakthrough in the entire public/private debate by producing social sanction for women’s new extra-familial roles.

**Sexuality**

Sex refers to female and male physiology, our sex organs, whereas gender is what Catherine Mackinnon [1982] calls a ‘learned quality’—in other words gender corresponds to the roles attributed by society to women and men which we describe as feminine and masculine.

Sexuality refers to a set of ideas about sex. It also refers to the meanings and social practices within which ‘sex’ takes place. These ideas, meanings and social practices include

- Sexual behaviour or social practices such as monogamy, polygamy or having more than one wife, polyandry or having more than one husband, celibacy.

- Sexual orientation or identity—whether we define ourselves as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual.

- Sexual desire.

- Sexual relations or sexual politics.
Sexuality is often considered primarily biological and socially part of the private domain but it is not solely a biological or private phenomenon but a product of the social forces of culture and history.

Biological determinism and social constructionism are two of the dominant theoretical explanations of sexuality. Most people understand sexuality as a biological force or an instinct, which needs to be released. They perceive sexuality as made up of drives or urges both related and separate from society.

Sexuality is also attributed to the private realm of the home. This view of sexuality as private rather than public permeates many aspects of everyday life. One example is the general understanding of rape: the focus is on the women's provocation of the man, either by her dress or by her behaviour. There is never any questioning of oppressive forms of sexuality, which are upheld by society's institutions such as marriage, the family and heterosexuality. The male sex drive is sanctioned as natural and is not seen as socially and politically constituted.

Furthermore, this so-called natural male sex drive upholds heterosexuality as the norm: most men and women are not actively aware of being heterosexual. To view heterosexuality as the norm relegates other forms of sexuality to the realm of the deviant and the abnormal. The challenge posed to biological assumptions allows feminists, lesbians and gays to view the institutions of heterosexuality as compulsory and oppressive [Rich, 1984].
If we assume by contrast that human behaviour is learned and not innate, it becomes possible to study how sexual behaviour and its meanings have changed. This lies at the heart of the theory of social constructionism. Social Construction theory challenges and highlights the dangers of assuming that definitions of sexuality are grounded in ‘nature’ or that they can be universalised, generalized or made into all-encompassing categories. Instead this theory reminds us that we need to take cultural, social and historical forces into account when we try to understand the different meanings of ideas about sex and sexual practices.

This new approach to sexuality lies at the heart of historian Michel Foucault’s work [1981]. Viewing sexuality as socially constructed allowed Foucault to examine how ideas about sex have evolved over the centuries. He challenges traditional descriptions of the history of sexuality in terms of repression and prohibition and offers a way of thinking about sexuality in terms of mechanisms of power: according to him sexuality must not be seen as a drive but ‘as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power’ [Foucault 1981:103].

The focus on power in Foucault’s analysis has been seized upon by feminists trying to theorize the link between sexuality and power in order to explain women’s subordination. While feminists such as Carolyn Ramazanoglu [1989, 1993] have drawn on Foucault, they have also
criticized him for ignoring gender in his analysis, especially regarding the silencing of female sexuality.

Foucault has influenced feminism through his argument that sexual desires are not biological essences but are constructed in historical discourses. Power and knowledge came together in sexuality. The problem with Foucault's position is that it does not explain why women have so generally lost power in sexual relationships [Ramazanoglu, 1989:156].

We have examined the theory of the social construction of sexuality, the way that the social categories of sexuality are variable rather than biologically fixed and the way that sexual behaviour is shaped by and shapes the wider social and political context. Sexuality is a product of the times and of other factors—political, economical, biological, geographical, class and gender related—that are entirely external to the so-called 'sexual drive'.

Catherine Mackinnon who argues that sexuality is the locus of male power asks how useful the nation of 'consent' is for distinguishing between wanted and unwanted sex: [1982].

Few women are in a position to refuse unwanted sexual initiatives. That consent rather than non-mutuality is the line between rape and intercourse further exposes the inequality in normal social expectations. If sex were ordinarily accepted as something men do to women, the better
question would be whether consent is a meaningful concept. Penetration
[often by a penis] is also substantially more central to both the legal
definition of rape and the male definition of sexual intercourse than is to
women's sexual violation or sexual pleasure. Rape in marriage expresses
the male sense of entitlement to access to women they own: incest extends
it. Although men rape most women they know, the closer the relation, the
less likely they are to claim it was rape. [Mackinnon, 1982: 532]. Closely
related to the concept of the private ownership of property is the
ownership of women. The honour of the family rests in the purity and
chastity of the woman and the underlying assumption is that the man has
the prerogative to satisfy his sexual urges irrespective of the desire of
woman. To extend this privilege further, he owns the children in the
family and they are available for him to use at his whims.

Unwanted sexual initiative other than rape includes sexual
harassment; sexual violence in the home including incest and child sexual
abuse [Kelly, Regan and Button, 1991] pressure to have sex against one's
will and pressure to engage in specific sexual practices.

Socialization plays a great role in the formation of women's
sexuality, especially her passive behaviour. Another point that
Mackinnon makes is that men are more powerful both physically and in
terms of their social power to define what sex is [penetration], to initiate
and control sexual encounters and to deny women any say or control about the content of sexual encounters.

Coercive sex reflects the 'compulsory' aspect of heterosexuality as the dominant form of sexuality in western industrialized societies in the sense that it is forced upon women and often difficult to resist. [Rich, 1984]. It also reflects the way that women are disciplined and their behaviour regulated while the mechanism of power remain hidden; 'this invisible operation of power is extremely efficient because it obviates the need for overt force and violence’ [Gavey, 1992: 348].

Nevertheless, the threat of sexual violence is real, never far off and constitutes a form of social control difficult to challenge. [Kelly, 1998]. Some feminists see sexuality as a form of supremacy or power men have over women, which are institutionalized by heterosexuality [Mackinnon, 1982; Hester, 1992]. Others see men's sexual violence as a form of punishment, a way of 'policing' women who transgress the gendered power relations of patriarchy.

The presence of sexual violence is one of the defining features of a patriarchal society. It is used by men, and often condoned by the state for a number of specific purposes: to punish women who are seen to be resisting male control; to police women, make them behave or not behave in particular ways; to claim rights of sexual, emotional and domestic
servicing: and through all these maintain the relations of patriarchy, male dominance and female subordination [Kelly and Radford 1987: 238-9].

Feminists have analysed men’s sexuality as based on the power to define what ‘sex’ is—usually heterosexual vaginal intercourse, to define appropriate looks and action, to sexually initiate and pursue, and the right to sex per se. All of these stem from and remake male power and are linked to male economic, social and cultural power [see Coneney et al, 1984; Kimmel, 1987; Seidler, 1989; Segal, 1990; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe, 1993]. In addition, feminists have pointed out how men are sexually serviced by women whether in marriage or in the sex industry in the form of pornography and prostitution. [see Dworkin, 1981; Every woman, 1988; Farley, 1992] As Lynn Segal [1992] explains, objections are voiced by feminists ‘not to the sexual explicitness in pornography but to the sexism; to its characteristic reduction of women to passive’.

She continues: ‘porn caters to men’s sexual fantasies of female availability and eagerness for sex in the context of societies which have proved unable, and until recently, unwilling, to offer women protection from widespread sex harassment, abuse and violence, indeed, unwilling not so long ago, and for many men still today, even to acknowledge the existence of these issues [Segal, 1992:5]. Prostitution is another aspect of the sex industry that reinforces ideas of women’s sexual availability [see, Roberts, 1986]. The sex industry is where sex ‘goes public’. Prostitution is
no longer illegal in the UK; only soliciting and loitering are offences, as well as two or more women working together from a flat, a set up deemed to be a ‘brothel’. Here, sex becomes work, labour, income, powerlessness and power, exchange commodity, consumer product. Feminists’ focus on the economics of sex, where sexual services are exchanged for income, is often absent today from the debate about the sex industry.

Women’s sexuality is often generally perceived as passive, its role to service men’s sexual needs. Men’s sexuality is defined as demanding and deriving sexual pleasure, men’s orgasms determine sexual encounters and sexuality becomes a coercive force where women are denied their sexual pleasure.

In India, the need to discuss sexuality seems to emerge much more as a tailpiece to the discussion of fertility and fertility control. The compulsion to get and remain married is overwhelming. Bearing children is as compulsory as marriage. Escaping into “motherhood” often appears as an escape into sexlessness. This has to do with the overall assumption that consent to marriage is an overall consent to have sex with one’s husband at all times and, of course, with no one else at any time. The whole concept of marital rape appears extremely alien.

The compulsion to have sex leads to the compulsion to use contraceptives. It is often only when the disastrous side effects of contraceptives on women’s health become visible that their total lack of
control over their own bodies becomes apparent. Often, this is the point where discussion on sexuality starts. It is usually a discussion on suffering. Sexual desire and fulfillment of desire remain peripheral. The sense of shame, which becomes visible in these discussions is real and needs to be respected.

It is to be reiterated that sex is not a biological but a social phenomena, and that attitudes towards sexuality are shaped by class/caste factors, and are highly culture-specific and gender-specific. For example, it is often observed that among tribal communities sexuality is handled more liberally and is somewhat less male-centered. Among low caste-working class women, sex is often described as a daily household chore, the sexual demand of the male goes unquestioned and women’s own role being expressed in terms of beast of burden where satisfying male sexual desire becomes part of her daily monotonous routine and she hardly has a choice to express her desire.

There are some basic material factors, which make the Indian approach to sexuality and fertility different from the Western. One aspect is climate. The heat accounts for less clothes and therefore less alienation from one’s own body from early childhood. This goes together with more indulgent patterns of child rearing and a lot of skin contact between child and mother as well as many other persons. Body functions are keenly observed, oil baths are given, and home remedies are used. At the same
time, living patterns are such that over crowding is normal and, while being in harmony with one's body is easier, there are at the same time many constraints due to limited space. Gender segregation is an important cultural factor. However, children sleep with their parents and thus unavoidably witness sex but they are never enlightened even at a later stage about what is going on. This contributes to the assumption that sex is an underlying possibility everywhere all the time, but that it cannot be brought out into the open.

There is also a marked difference in the attitudes towards one's body inculcated in girls and boys. Girls are schooled in a sense of shame from an early age. This reaches a climax at the onset of menstruation. Boys are also physically controlled, but to a much lesser extent. Women in the countryside and in the slums have to ease themselves, under cover of night, always with the possibility of sexual assault in mind while men can expose their private parts freely. In the home, men can move about more or less bare-bodied while women always have to be dressed "decently". Privacy and nakedness are nowhere in the picture.

Marriage is virtually compulsory and that bearing children is imperative. Sex is highly institutionalised and functionalised. The need for a wife has primarily to do with need to have access to the facilities of survival; cooking, washing, cleaning, emotional support and sex are all part of a package deal of facilities to which a man has a birthright.
Women are brought up to provide all these services, including sex. What they are promised in return is “protection”, “security”, and “respectability”. It is obvious that this arrangement is maintained by the constant threat of violence. While a woman is trained in housekeeping to provide these services expected of her in the proper way, she is not told about sex, except that men “expect” it and that she has to “fulfill” her husband’s wishes and to “adjust”. There are marriage vows in which the husband promises to love his wife, while the wife promises to “obey”. This has obvious implications for the physical side of the relationship as well. Sex is thus completely removed from her own subjectivity; her body is the “property” of the husband and decision-making about her own body, be it with respect to sexuality or fertility, is conceptually ruled out. If quite a number of women start to assert their right over their own bodies only after years of marriage and this happens in defiance of the dominant ideology and social arrangements.

Some of the prevalent ideological assumptions about sexuality have already been mentioned. Sex is “dirty” and therefore taboo. Sex is also considered to be such an important drive that any man and woman left alone with one another are expected to end up in sexual intercourse. Men are born sexual beings: women are born for motherhood. This dichotomy is expressed in cultural values, which go back to ancient times. While the “masculine” values include sexual potency, the “feminine” values deny and control sexuality. By definition, a women’s physical
existence does not lie under her own control. She is meant to pour her love out to her children, and to concentrate all her physical desire on marriage and on her husband. Even in this relationship, the point is not her well being but invariably his. This stereotype is glorified also. The good wife is still the one who, according to folklore, carries her bed-ridden husband to the brothel house because he so desired, or as a variation, behaves herself like a prostitute in bed if he so desired. The common denominator in both cases is the denial of a woman’s subjectivity, self-respect and self-determination. Invariably, therefore, the other side of the picture of the chaste housewife is the prostitute—the myth that a woman’s sex-drive is insatiable if it is not kept under masculine control and the idea that any woman who develops her own skills, talents and decision-making will end up in prostitution.

Gandhian ideology has done much to encourage women’s autonomy. It encouraged women to refuse being sexually used; it denounces men’s “lust” and tendency towards violence. All these we witness today are indeed very valid positions to take in the face of a rising tide of pornography and assault we witness today. Gandhi also saw women as pillars of resisting rape, able to determine their own lives and to make a contribution to national development. But he did all this at the cost of not acknowledging
Sexuality in any positive sense. *Sexuality, in his view, was legitimate only as an instrument of fertility; it did not have any value of its own. The moral superiority of women was located precisely in their supposed sexlessness. Since nobody else seems to be able to do their job, it looks as though the women’s movement will have to answer the question of how sexuality and fertility can be reconciled, and to spell out what we mean by control over our sexuality.

Sexual maturity more or less coincide with fertility, though psychologists have acknowledged that sexual feelings are common and explicitly expressed in infants and latently present in growing children. Social taboo prohibits one to admit this, though motherly responses often have sexual undertones. The social assumption is that the awakening of sexuality for a girl coincides with the onset of menstruation. This is the reason for enforced gender segregation, and in earlier times, for child marriage. At the same time, menstruation is linked to ritual pollution, social ostracism and shame, and thus both sexuality and fertility get liked up with this kind of negative connotation.

Menstruation is associated with discomfort, pain, cramps, restricted mobility, social ostracism based on notions of purity and

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* Feminists criticize Gandhi’s approach towards sexuality and they believed that Gandhi appreciated women’s suppression of sexual desire and extolled it. He did not acknowledge women’s sexuality, sexual desire and preferences.
pollution going with it, enhances these aspects, and is compounded by lack of knowledge about one's physiology. Marriage is seen as a solution to many of these problems. Menstrual pain will be less after marriage and, of course, sexuality will be safely under control after marriage as well. Fertility control has been focusing on women, often with very disastrous side-effects and, thus, it seems that sexual activity makes women victims of physical risks causing bleeding, pain, blood pressure and many other complaints.

The media project sex crime and pornography for male audiences and “romantic love” images for the “female psyche”. In neither of these cases can women be seen as autonomous, thinking, feeling, and decision-making beings. They are depicted either simply as “the hole” into which a penis can be thrust or as “the heart” consuming itself in anxiety about the beloved. In both cases, to be headless and mindless is considered a major virtue in women. Both projections, are, thus, male-centred and deny women any personality. The two projections are also connected in that the servility, which is implied in the “romantic love” concepts, is indirectly enforced by the omnipresent latent or overt threat of violence. Romantic love implies both servility and “protection”; protection in turn is based on violence.

The existence and prevalence of rape, incest, pornography and brutality have been made much more visible due to the interventions of the
women's organizations. They are instrumental in enforcing control over women's lives and have a definite bearing on day-to-day relationship between women and men.

An aspect which needs exploration is the fact that women's bodies are constitutionally more multi-purpose than men's and are at least under the violent conditions of patriarchy, more vulnerable. While a woman's breasts are erotically highly sensitive, they also can perform the function of an udder. The vagina, which is used in intercourse, is also the birth channel, the outlet for menstrual blood and the road for invasive medical investigation and contraception. The fact that the sexual act itself can be torture, even leading to death, probably remains the most incomprehensible aspect. The greatest mystery overshadowing any intercourse is the question, why is it that men can derive pleasure from a sexual act, which annihilates another human being. Here the nexus between sexuality and power becomes most clear. Sexual violence is at the root of patriarchy. It is part of warfare, but also part of daily life. History reveals incidents of sexual violence commonly employed during warfare and annexations. During recent times, we have witnessed sexual violence especially rape being employed by the holders of power like the police, the military etc. during forcible evictions, during communal riots to violate a community's honour by violating the woman's chastity. It is used as a tool to avenge hatred and feelings of wrath against a community.
On the whole, men are more likely to use sexuality as an outlet to pass on the tension of their day-to-day life to women, while women do not have this kind of an outlet. While the penis can be a tool [e.g. for “making pregnant”] or a weapon [sex as punishment, conquest etc.] women’s sexual equipments [sensitivity of touch and smell] makes sense only in exchange of tenderness and pleasure. However, being constantly subjugated through men’s tremendous lack of sensitivity and ignorance about a woman’s body if not outright violence, women’s sexuality is systematically killed off.

Sexual subjugation is at the root of all other subjugations. In other words, sexual behaviour can only be changed if change in social roles is made possible and vice versa. A woman who is economically independent may still be sexually exploited, and a woman who is economically dependent may be lucky enough to have a husband who treats her well. However, on the whole, the crucial point remains that a woman is supposed to be the physical property of her husband and that a woman who is not “controlled” by a husband is supposed to be “free for all”. The whole concept of a woman having control over her own body is virtually unthinkable. This seems to be analogous to women’s lack of control over those areas, which is essential to keep women in subjugation. During a celebration of International Women’s Day, women raised the slogan “Does a woman ever have a house?”- Thus posing the problem that a woman is a stranger to the house of her birth and to the house of her
inlaws as well. Likewise, one could ask: “Does a woman ever have a body? Does she ever inhabit her body in her own right?” Similarly, women have no right to own land, and even if they do get involved in agriculture and do virtually all the work, they are not allowed to touch the plough.

Discussion on sexuality should turn out to be not discussion about ‘free sex’ but about power relationships and violation of human dignity. Women today say: “We want to be free to decide how we relate physically, emotionally and intellectually to others, men and women as well as our whole social environment. and we want also to be free to determine how others relate to us; we do not want to be made object nor mindlessly to follow prescribed roles. [Dietrich Gabriela, discussing sexuality, reflections on the women’s movement in India: Religion, Ecology, Development].

Child Sexual Abuse-C.S.A.

Sexual abuse is a crime; the crime is committed against the abused. It is not the fault of the abused and nobody has the right to sexually violate another person. Sexual abuse takes place when you have been kissed, forcefully fondled, handled, forced to have sexual intercourse or when sexually violated through oral or anal intercourse and penetrated with a foreign object against your will. Sexual abuse may involve touching private parts, asking him or her to touch himself or others, bathing together, showing the child sexually arousing photographs or films, taking
pornographic photographs, making personally gratifying sexual comments in front of, or with reference to the child, forcing the child to indulge in oral or anal sex and sexual intercourse. The body of a girl child is not the private or public domain of men where all acts by then have to be suffered silently.

By sexual assault, men assert power over the most private aspect of a child’s life; her body. Sexual assault is an attack against children on a physical, emotional, psychological, moral and social level. The concept of virginity and sanctity of the vagina valued and upheld by our society transfers the whole blame of the act on the girl child and women when they are sexually abused. She is thought as not worth living [Sumitra Bhave, “Pan on Five Eight Women tell their story”, 1988]. Underlying this offence is the approach towards the girl child and women, which considers her as commodity or thing to be possessed, owned and used. It is assumed that she is devoid of any feelings and individuality of her own.

Sexual abused is a stigmatized subject and people do not like to talk about it. Concerted efforts are made to conceal the subject. Girl children, irrespective of their racial and ethnic background, economic status, caste, creed, and religion have been sexually abused. Their vulnerability and ‘powerless’ position are taken advantage of by the abuser who exerts his power to satisfy his desires [Booklet produced by Jasjit Purewal and Naina Kapoor, Sakshi]. The unspeakable crime is so hidden
under layers of guilt, shame and societal pressure that it goes undetected and unpunished, while its victims live with the torment all their lives.

Dr. Asit Sheth, a practicing Psychiatrist says that sometimes, genitals related games are played, which slowly leads to abuse. Children have no control over situations, and they are forced into performing sexually, either through physical coercion or through emotional gratification of some sort. Often, the offenders extend favours to their victims. This could be in terms of gifts, money, and outings—little things that children like. Soon, a pattern is established. And the child could begin to enjoy the physical act. It has to be understood that the touch as such is often pleasurable. So, there were instances when the children actually enjoyed what was happening, which was natural. This is no fault of the child. But that is where the guilt sets in. Not sure of what is happening is right or wrong, yet feeling pleasure (material or otherwise) make them uneasy.

Most children do not mention what is happening or happened for fear of what the offender may do, because they have usually been threatened physically and emotionally. When children do speak out, there is a tendency to disbelieve them. Communication about abuse between parent and child depends on how much the child accepts the parent. If parents scoff at what the child reveals, the child will stop telling them what is going on. So, either way, the abuse continues.
Anuja Guptha, from Rahi an organization that helps rehabilitate women who have been sexually abused as children, pointed out that the abuse often starts with some ‘mild’ gesture, like a kiss. It is generally some thing the offender can do in public. With increased opportunities, the acts become more intimate. A lot of abusers stop short of actual sexual intercourse because they know that the physical signs of penetration are quite conclusive in a girl child. She emphasizes that accessibility and the kind of relationship between the offender and victim are also significant factors, which affect abusive behaviour. If the offender lives in the same house as the victims, his or her access to the child is easy and immediate. And the closer the relationship between the two, the greater the chances of prolonged and secret abuse. Children will just not tell/discuss either because of verbal threats, fear, guilt, shame, inability to explain [especially in very small children], fear of not being believed, etc.

Dr. Maya Kripalani, a child psychiatrist says that if the parent has open extramarital relationships or abusive habits like high alcohol or drug consumption, it sets a very warped picture of reality before the child. The child grows up assuming that these distorted patterns of family behaviour are acceptable, considerably lessening his or her internal resistance to abnormal gestures. It is only much later in life that the child realizes that he or she has been abused. The major problem with such children was that they have no role models to look up to.
The family is a very delicate structure. And, unfortunately, parents often don’t believe what their children say in such matters. Sadly, however, even when they do know that there is a possibility of such abuse, they barely do anything for fear of disturbing the peace within the family. They prefer to remain silent and do nothing about it rather than create a storm. And since the offender is usually someone in close proximity, the child is subjected to continued abuse. This leaves the child with no one to talk to or trust, and builds up the fear and shame about the whole incident.

Each case of CSA is so unique that no universal laws can apply here. It is impossible to describe a typical case of CSA. To focus on just one factor that seems to provoke the abuse and say that it is the sole cause, is doing injustice both to the offender and the victim.

Latha, who works with street children, reveals, “Over-crowding and having no one to turn to is what facilitates CSA, on the streets. Homeless children are, for the most part, left to the mercy of circumstances. Coercion-physical and sexual determines the hierarchy of power on the street.”

Most victims struggle with a host of mixed emotions- sadness, anger, shame, disgust, fear, shock, helplessness, frustration, confusion, worry, humiliation but the one they grapple with the most is guilt.
Offenders often victimises children for two reasons. For a sense of power or a sense of pleasure. They may be sexually repressed people who are not able to find adequate sexual gratification with adults. They are people with low self-esteem, who find it easy to dominate children. Or people who have a fixation about having sex with children. Dr. Sheth says there are alcoholics who tend to abuse a child when under the influence of alcohol. And the psychopaths or paedophiles, who are sexually attracted to minors.

In most cases of CSA, the abuser is known to the child- a family friend, sibling, relative, servant, uncle, teacher etc. CSA is most frequent with in the acquaintance/family circle of the child. The abuser usually violates a relationship of trust with the child. Abuser takes advantage of their power and position. They know children usually do what they are told by adults/elders. The abuser may use tricks or threats to persuade the child to take part in a sexual activity. The abuse usually takes place in the child’s home or the abuser’s home. Given that the abuser is often known to the child and usually has both access to as well as authority over the child, the abuse does not commonly involve physical violence. The abuse may continue over a long period of time. Generally, the abuser uses threats or emotional blackmail to warn the child against telling anyone about the abuse. This may be a primary cause for a child’s silence. Where the abuser happens to be stronger, he may resort to deception or favours to entice a child.
The frequency, duration, and intimacy of sexual contact determine the effect of CSA on the victim. There are various behavioural factors that could point to sexual abuse. Sleep disturbances are an immediate aftermath. Victims tend to have violent dreams with strong sexual overtones, and often wake up crying. The child may not be performing academically either. These children do not form good peer relationships and realize they are ‘different’. They are very lonely and have very small attention spans and with draw into their fantasy world. The persistent question that occupies their mind is ‘what did I do wrong?’

As children and even as adults, victims of CSA do not have control over their bodies and lives. They are not assertive and are given to being over-complaint. They constantly battle acute depression and suicidal feelings. Often they have persistent inappropriate sexual urges and are sexually aggressive.

Sexual abuse affects every area of life. Especially if you have never spoken about it. You feel dirty damaged and different. You don’t fit in among your peers and you don’t really identify with anyone. There is a lot of anger, guilt and shame involved. All survivors blame themselves. Many attempt suicide, become addicted to drugs, exhibit self-mutilating behaviour and are prone to panic attacks and severe depression and anxiety.

Dr. Sheth says that extreme feeling of guilt and shame, and long term morbidity and depression are typical of the psyche of the abused.
Abused girls cannot relate to men sexually and are given to body disorders like hating their own bodies, anorexia and bulimia. They usually have unsuccessful relationships and may not consummate their marriages for a long time. Sometimes, the physical trauma leads to the other extreme—promiscuity—when victims use their sexuality as a tool for seduction. They have learned very early in life, what favours sex can bring and begin to capitalize on it. Especially in the case where the family member is the offender, the victim finds it very difficult to adjust to his or her family. They suppress their anger and thus their ability to be assertive. (Femina, April, 1988).

Incest is considered as the most serious tabooed practice, which the institution of family supposedly abhors. Yet, it is a taboo that is transgressed and broken all the time. And under all the horror associated with violation, victims of abusive incest remain stifled by the blanket of secrecy, guilt and self-blame. So ingrained is the secret it is rare that victims will seek help or acknowledge that a problem exists.

Dr. Neeru Kanwar, a Delhi based psychologist who has dealt with several cases of incest, says that most cases come for help with children suffering from anxiety, panic attacks and depression as a consequence of the abuse. The fact that the child has been abused comes up much later during the process of counselling. And even then, people are not willing to talk about it or deal with it or to see the connection between the stated
problem and abuse. In adults who are victims of incest when they were children, there is a total sense of dissociation. They are blocked out from it as though there were no emotional associations with it. Actually, the emotions are so ravaging that it seems best to the person to leave the abused unowned, unacknowledged.

Acknowledging the abuse means dealing with the very basic issues of violated trust, shame, anger and fear. The victim feels a deep sense of self-condemnation, waves of self-hatred and repulsion and a high degree of low self-esteem. These are coupled with feelings of being abandoned, unprotected, worthless and insecure. There is a sense of utter disbelief that someone in your family, somebody you trust completely is violating that trust. The person thinks, "is this really happening or am I imagining it?" So there is self-blame in the first place for thinking that one has falsly sexualised an advance, says social worker of Tarsh.

Anuja Gupta, social worker of RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) says that if you disclosed the abuse and are disbelieved, it has even worse effect on you. You feel guilty; you stop trusting yourself and question your own sense of reality. Everything you feel as a child remains with you as you grow and other feelings are added on of which self-hatred is a very central one.

Children who have been coerced into sex grow up blaming themselves for not refusing. And they take up responsibility for what
happened thinking they had consented to it, sometimes even liked the physical sensations and the closeness. But even this sort of willing participation does not constitute consent when children are concerned. Incest perpetrators use the victims' age, dependence and immaturity to gain consent. And the consent is not informed consent, as the children do not have the sexual knowledge or understanding that the adults have and they are inherently innocent and in a powerless position vis-à-vis the adults.

Children are scared to tell anyone that they have been abused. Often they don’t have the language to describe what has happened and most often adults don’t understand what children are trying to tell them. Life becomes bewildering as they try to cope with the hurt and fear. They feel a deep sense of loneliness and isolation, experience depression, anxiety, withdrawal, have bed-wetting problems, avoid particular individuals, have difficulty in concentrating at school or failing examinations and may suddenly start using sexual words, may start sexually exploiting/exploring other children, have irritation in the throat, anal and genital areas, have constant throat and bladder infections and sexually transmitted infections.

Some complex and long-term effects of CSA are low self-esteem and a feeling of powerlessness. A child who has been sexually abused will grow up feeling that she/he has somehow caused the abuse. The ability to say ‘no’ to sexual abuse violates a child’s sense of control. The
helplessness may continue in their adult life leaving them powerless in decision-making. A child learns to hide all feelings of pain, hurt and fear, if she/he finds that no one believes her/him nor is willing to understand his/her trauma. As a result she/he may have problems expressing her/his feelings for the rest of their life.

A small child may develop fear of relationships, when a person whom she/he had trusted betrayed the trust. It becomes very difficult for the child to trust another person. Loneliness sets in.

When the pain is too severe or the emotions too strong, the child will tend to deny the very existence of that pain. Becoming numb or not exhibiting any reaction is one way of dealing with the pain. The child may try to keep the pain and the hurt away by not actually denying the abuse but by minimizing its magnitude. Depression and a feeling of isolation are very common signs of CSA. This may lead to a desire to destroy oneself.

More than merely a criminal justice issue, rape and sexual assault are now being recognized as an issue of health and human rights. Women who have been sexually assaulted experience the threat of physical injury and death, threats to their sexual integrity, their personal control, their worthiness as human beings and to their confidence and trust in others.

In 1995 there were 13,754 cases of rape reported from all over India. Almost one-third of the numbers were minor girls. 747 of them
below the age of 10 years. In the same year 2,8475 cases of molestation were reported. Statistics show that conviction rates of completed trials were 30.5%.

In the standard textbooks of forensic medicine, there is a preoccupation with virginity in relation to the deliberation of sexual offences. One forensic textbook shows sketches of no less than 15 different types of hymen. Only one textbook states that with regard to sexual intercourse, full penetration is not necessary to constitute rape and undue emphasis on the rupture of hymen is therefore irrelevant. (Issues in Medical Ethics VI (4) Oct-Dec. 1998).

Another problem with the legal procedure lies in the matter of consent and willingness. It has been written that it is necessary to prove that the resistance offered by the women was up to her utmost capability, and that every means such as shouting, crying, biting and beating had been tried to prevent the act. Relatives and persons known to minor girls within their homes are the perpetrators of the majority of cases of sexual abuse. No matter what socio-economic class she belongs to, she is not conditioned to react in an aggressive or loud manner, especially when the attack takes place inside the home by men who are powerful in the household or community. How, then, can one expect to prove, that she did her utmost to resist the attempt at assault. In law, there is insistence on
proof of complete penile penetration in order to charge for the crime of rape. Anything less is termed as ‘indecent assault’.

Whereas authors of all the medical textbooks on the subject of sexual abuse state that erection, penetration and ejaculation are not necessary to prove sexual intercourse; there is an emphasis on the potency of the assailant. While questioning the usefulness of this test, it is pointed out that none of the textbooks guide the doctor on how to go about establishing the man’s potency.

The doctor must offer medical curative treatment, primary level counselling and referral for physical and psychological sequel of the assault. For the traumatized woman, it is most important for the doctor to believe her story and to offer comfort. Second, doctors can provide important evidence of the crime and help judges understand the physical and mental condition of the woman. Reports produced by doctors can serve to corroborate the woman’s story and enhance her credibility. A doctor must act independently or in collaboration with other doctors and not be dictated or influenced by political or administrative doctrines or pressure.

During abuse, a child has an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and loss of self-control. This feeling then transfers itself into all spheres of the child’s life and she/he may grow very diffident and insecure. Suppression is the single greatest cause for distorted emotions after sexual
abuse. (Child Sexual Abuse. Beyond----Fear, Secrecy and Shame. Produced by Sakshi, 1994).

Myths and Facts

Let us take a look at some of the myths behind child abuse and probe into facts.

Myth: Children are rarely abused.

Fact: Children are extensively abused, as they are the most vulnerable section of our society owing to their dependence on elders.

Myth: CSA occurs mostly in poor, illiterate families.

Fact: Child sexual abuse cuts across class boundaries. Children of all families are equally vulnerable irrespective of their family background.

Myth: Children should not be allowed to play outside because sexual abuse occurs outdoor on playgrounds or other public places.

Fact: Most children are sexually abused inside their homes, as the abuser is an acquaintance, relative or a family friend.

Myth: Often precocious children provoke sexual abuse by their seductive behaviour.
Fact: Children can never invite sexual abuse, as it is an act of violence. 'Precocity' and 'seductiveness' are adult justifications or misinterpretations.

Myth: Children often fantasize about being sexually assaulted.

Fact: Children are ignorant about 'sex' and so cannot fantasize about being raped, sodomized or brutally assaulted.

Myth: The abuser is generally a psychopath.

Fact: Abusers don't have special distinguishing features. Most of them fit well into the definition of an average 'normal' person, a psychopath is an exception.

Myth: Usually the mother is aware of the fact that her child is being sexually abused.

Fact: Most mothers are not aware of the fact that their children are being abused, because children are afraid of disclosing it to anyone.

Myth: Reporting the abuse causes more harm than good.

Fact: If the abuse is not reported, then the same abuser may persist in abuse and harm other children also.

Myth: A child should be encouraged to forget about the abuse, as there are no really harmful effect of child sexual abuse.
Fact: Child sexual abuse always exerts an extremely negative effect on the victims. If a child is not encouraged to disclose, it could lead to severe behavioural disorders.

Myth: Generally children are abused by servants and drivers.

Fact: Children are generally abused by members of their family, relatives or acquaintances who are in a position of power and authority within the family.

Legal Situation

There is no specific legislation in India against child sexual abuse. It is usually taken up under the rape law i.e. Section 376 IPC and under section 377 IPC which criminalizes “unnatural” sexual offences. The punishment for rape of a girl less than 12 years should not be less than 7 years, but may extend to life imprisonment and fine. For children, there is no need to prove lack of consent. The mere act of sexual intercourse, defined under this law as penetration, is enough to constitute rape of minors.

There are several lacunae in the rape law. For instance, penile penetration of the vagina is not the only way in which the girl child is abused. Penetration by other parts of the body or by an object is not legally defined as rape, but goes under the less serious offence of section 354 IPC i.e. outraging the modesty of a woman. Other forms of abuse as
reported by children include exhibitionism, forced oral or anal sex and being shown pornographic material are not covered under the above sections.

There are provisions under section 509, 294 and 354 of the Indian Penal Code for dealing with eve teasing and its aggravated form, sexual harassment but the way these provisions have been worded, the complexities of the procedural laws and the type of proof that is required, make it very difficult to get the culprit punished. Theoretically any person who intrudes on the privacy of a woman or utters any word or makes any sound or gesture or exhibits any object with an intention that such word or sound shall be heard or that such gesture or object shall be seen by the woman, can be booked for sexual harassment, but it is not easy to prove the intention which is an essential ingredient of this offence.

If a man intending to outrage the modesty of a woman exposes his person in an indecent manner or uses obscene words intending that she should hear them or exhibits to her an obscene drawing, commits this offence. There are innumerable such incidents which happen each day but no one reports them because no immediate action is stipulated under this section and gathering proof afterwards is almost impossible. Generally,

* Law is worded in a mystical and wordy language making it incomprehensible for the layperson and procedural complexities render it baffling to use.
the woman who is harassed will rather ignore such behaviour than fight a losing battle.

Section 506 applies to cases which involve an insult to the modesty of a woman while in section 354 includes cases in which the modesty is intended to be outraged. Assault is an essential ingredient of section 354 IPC; it also includes gestures, which is an element of section 509 as well. For a charge under section 354 proof of intention is essential.

Section 294 IPC punishes doing of obscene acts or singing of obscene songs at public place, provided the same causes annoyance to others. This section would apply to uttering obscene words and also making indecent gestures.

Protection against abuses of human rights of children is integral in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in various international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Woman and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In 1959, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child was drafted and has been a guide to private and public action in the interest of children asserting that “mankind owes to the child the best it has to give.” The declaration was the moral framework of children’s rights and led to the
drafting of the convention on the rights of the child. The convention went further than the declaration by making states, which ratify it, legally accountable. It was adopted on November 1988. Some of its provisions specifically deal with the protection of children from sexual offences and violence, in particular articles 34, 35 and 36.

Alarmed by the increase of sexual abuse of which children are often victims, the commission of Human Rights, decided in 1994, to establish an open ended working group to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the convention on the rights of the child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In India, the problem of child sexual abuse is all too often ignored, hushed up or swept under the carpet. In a society that places so much importance on female virginity, and where as, in rape, the guilt and blame are often heaped on the victim rather than the offender, victims cave in to overpowering feelings of shame and low self-esteem. The fear of being maligned, of besmirching the family name, drives most victims into a fomented silence. With girls, the all too important question, "Who will marry me?" is the final deciding factor.

It is a vicious self-perpetuating cycle that needs to be broken immediately.