Evolution of the Discourse of Violence against Women (Sp. Rape) in Indian Writing

Mikhail Bakhtin says in *The Dialogic Imagination* that the novel “and the world represented in it enter the work and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation.”\(^1\) The discourse of representations of violence against women is a mimetic one, yet one that has evolved to include corrective strategies to deal with this hydra-headed phenomenon. Mimesis, however, is not a neutral exercise aimed merely at representation. It has its orientation. In Post-Colonial Indian writing this theme has surfaced gradually. In fact, it is a theme that writers wished not to take up for a long time and only after the 60’s and 70’s of the 20th century, finally this silence was broken and the theme began to be taken up in Indian writing.

While certain arts may have a certain clarity about them, representation is a science of using signs to create meaning. Aesthetic practice, therefore is essentially esoteric and exploratory. As a critic commented: “Subaltern pain is a public form”.\(^2\) And this public from, that is representation has embedded values such as patriarchal bias. This is seen in the representations of violence against women. Representations of violence against women are expressions of the cultural psychology. The late articulation of the theme in Indian writing can be attributed to the dominance of the nationalist discourse. The latter half of the twentieth century sees a spurt in the representations of violence against women in
writing across the world. This may be attributed to the success of suffragette and feminist movements across the globe.\(^3\)

Examining the politics of representation of violence against women is one of the concerns of this study. At the outset, it needs to be stressed that this is the serious discourse that addresses the theme of violence against women (especially in the form of rape) as a crime and is clearly differentiated from pornographic portrayal. In fact it needs to be stressed that it is definitely differentiated from any discourse that does dis service to the cause of women. Since, the personal has ceased to be private, it has become the political, one needs to examine the politics of representation of this theme and its variations that have emerged on the literary scene.

**The Discourse of Corporeality and its Aim**

Diverse literary strategies have been adopted by writers to address this theme.\(^4\) The discourse that addresses the theme of violence against women specially in the form of rape is an enabling one. Its aim is to empower women and bring justice to women. This discourse of corporeality, succeeds a period of silence on such women’s issues in the colonial period. One can trace the movement from the absence to the presence of the female body in the text. The movement from absence to the presence of the female body in the post-colonial discourse on violence is analogous to writing the female body in the text as suggested by Western feminists such as Joyce Carol Oates, Adrienne Rich, Gwendolyn Brooks etc.\(^5\) This transition spelt the movement from the unnarratable female body to one that relocates women’s corporal identity and problematizes issues of power and agency.
The victimized woman in the colonial narrative is either a married wife or prostitute. Both images had the sanction of mainstream society as one was the tamed image of women’s sexuality in the institution of marriage, while the other was the accessible, powerless fallen woman. In the post-colonial narrative the victimization is more transparent as in the paradigm of rape vis-à-vis violence against women. The absence of the female body implied a liminal and ethereal identity. Indian critics Tharu and Lalitha, Meenakshi Thapan, Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan and others have stressed the need to represent the embodied self of women in writing. They have also amply commented on the cultural containment of women’s identity through their embodiment. Western scholarship too has commented on the cultural and social control and conditioning of women’s bodies (as suggested by Simone de Beauvoir etc.).

Embodiment in mainstream narratives for women implied a voice being endowed to women and addressing the crises in their lives. Thus, the representation of violence against women, in post-colonial Indian writing was a novel challenge and writers explored strategies of representation to deal with this nascent theme.

The discourse of violence against women reveals the marginalized and exploited status of women, nevertheless it is an empowering one. The erasure of the female body in the colonial discourse can be contrasted with the felt presence of actual, living women in contemporary writing. Even if patriarchal violence aims at demolishing identity for a particular gender, its presence as a theme ensures that it is an issue society and the individual need to grapple with. Modernity and modernization, two aspects of modernism seem to ensure that the individual is sacrosanct and that the liberty of the individual is honoured. However, the irony of most
civilized societies is the spurt in rape cases. Its ensuing culture of fear is a lived reality, universally perceived. This culture of fear created by crimes of violence against women successfully restricts women through their incarceration to the private sphere. This reifies the patriarchal gender bias and spatially restricts women. Indian sociologists Veena Das and Ashis Nandy have commented on the amorphous nature of women’s identity that ranges from goddess to the evil woman. They also note the attempts to regulate women through regulation of their sexuality. This aspect of spatial politics is amply corroborated by feminists from Susan Brownmiller to Katherine Donovan etc. Further, Feminist movements such as “Give us Back the Night” and Slutwalks have emphasized the need to restore the denied space to women.

Post-colonial Indian writing constructs the new identity in literature for a Janus – faced civilization that endorses and yet critiques violence. The discursive aggression present in Post-colonial Indian writing stresses the relationship between masculinity and violence. Male dominance and female status are interrelated as sociologists such as Kimmel and Allan Johnson have revealed. The connection between capitalism, commodification of women and occurrence of rape in society too has been adequately examined by several critics. Veena Das, Ashis Nandy, Radhika Oberoi, Maria Mies, Madhu Kishwar and Brinda Karat are some of the critics who have commented on the connections between capitalism and violence against women. The surfacing of the theme of rape as a gendered construction in Indian writing begins primarily after the 1960s. The first manifestations of this theme are seen in the form of Partition-based narratives. However, it is worth noting that though a few male writers take up the theme of rape in writing in the Partition context,
there are very few male writers exploring this theme after this. It is primarily women writers who have addressed this trope in writing. This compels one to examine the politics of representation of such violence against women in Indian writing. Very few male writers have dealt with this theme in peaceful situations and that too only in recent times.\textsuperscript{13}

**The Politics of Representations of Violence against Women: Writing the Body in the Text**

Textual politics has kept women’s sexuality out of the canon for a long time. The silence on the theme of violence against women is an aspect of subdued representation of women’s sexuality in Indian writing through the colonial period. Thereafter, in the post-colonial canon there is a gradual introduction of this theme in a reticent, disguised and shy discourse. Gradually, it takes up the theme of violence against women, significantly in the sixties and seventies, fortified by the parallel feminist engagement with the issue of violence. The metaphor of sexuality is an expression of women’s aspiration to freedom. Even, a negative aspect related to it such as violence against women empowers women, once it is represented.

This study aims at excavating the politics of representation of the theme of violence against women which has been shrouded in silence for a long time. Adrienne Rich refers to the cross-cultural silence across continents about the female body. She prescribes that feminists needn’t transcend the body, they need to reclaim it. The narrativisation of the rape discourse is a literary phenomenon which is no less than a cross-cultural revolution. Breaking the silence and speaking of the body is important. Rich suggests: “Pick up the long struggle against lofty and privileged
abstraction. Perhaps this is the core of revolutionary process, whether it calls itself Marxist or Third World or feminist or all three.” The abstraction of women in Indian writing can be understood by examining the silence about the theme of rape and bodily violence against women in Indian writing. In the colonial period, hardly any significant writing speaks about this crucial, yet ironically absent aspect of women’s lived experience. The narrativisation of a theme that has been taboo is bound to be a problematic one in a literary tradition where there has been a “moratorium on saying the body”. Women’s sexuality, that is considered a crucial metaphor in writing, emerged late on the Indian literary scene. And a theme like rape, naturally arrived late on the scene due to the sexual politics associated with it. As noted Hindi writer Mridula Garg observes it was important to address the theme of “strivimarsh”, the woman’s point of view, even if there was resistance against it.

The Politics of Rape

Feminists such as Susan Brownmiller, Sharon Marcus etc. have stated that rape is a weapon used by cultures to feminize women. Marcus rightly suggests that the rape act “presupposes misogynist inequalities”. It further exacerbates sexual difference. Capitalism alienates women from their bodies, through commodification and objectification, and their sexuality becomes an asset controlled by the menarchy around them. Thus capitalism, and imperialism go hand-in-hand to control women and violate their identity. Rape is just one of the ways in which it is perpetrated.

Thus, rape is the outcome of a culture that endorses violence. As
Sociologist Allan Johnson rightly argues, how can rape which is such a pervasive crime be the handiwork of a few lunatics. It is unimaginable that such prevalent violence against women can be the act of a small “lunatic fringe of psychopathic men”. The discursive aggression has its counterpoint in the lived reality. Representation of this violence against women in the theme of rape by writers therefore contributes to the voice against sexual difference. Rescripting the rape narrative to create a potent woman figure is the agenda of writing that takes up this theme.

**Rape: A Gendered Construction**

The mention of this crime evokes a gendered construction. This is so as almost in every culture and society more than 90% rape cases are man-on-woman rape. Hence, the power-relations embedded in the fabric of society are exposed in the rape paradigm. It is clearly the manifestation of a discriminatory culture that uses violence to suppress the other gender. Representation reflects the social relations of power in societies. It is the mapping of power politics in any society. Rape is a facet of that gendered identity and is a nihilistic response to women’s identity. As Rene Girard points out, “desire, for most modern thinkers, is anchored in an object”. In the crime of rape, the appropriation of women’s body as an object, illustrates the objectification of women in such cultures.

**THE SUCCESSIVE REVOLUTION OF THE THEME OF RAPE IN INDIAN WRITING**

**Some Observations Regarding Representations of Violence Against Women in Post-Colonial Indian Writing: Embodiment Vs. Symbolic**
Identity

The anxiety of embodiment is explored in most post-colonial Indian writing. There is an attempt to address the issues close to the heart of protagonists of literary works. The new ‘free’ woman of the post-colonial nation is different in many ways from the idealistic representations of sublimated ideal womanhood which is conceptualised in the concept of the ‘bhadramahila’. Rape is an important trope vis-à-vis the embodiment of women. However, often women’s bodies become signifiers of symbolic and cultural value. Possessing control over one’s body is crucial to the idea of identity, yet across cultures, the ability of women to control their bodies is suspect. In Indian writing, a significant observation is the treatment of women’s bodies as symbolic and cultural markers in mainstream male writing. The attempt of Post-colonial Indian women’s writing has been to rectify this perspective by placing the body per se at the centre of the discourse, and not as an emblem of communal honour or identity. The Partition narratives too report erasure of the woman’s particularity to make her into a boundary marker. When writers write about the harm done to the woman’s body, they engage in a discourse that draws attention to the dilemma of embodiment for women.

TRANSITION FROM CONTEXTUAL TO CONCEPTUAL EXAMINATION OF THE THEME

A transition from rhetoric to reality being represented in the image of the real women is perceived in Post-Colonial Indian Writing. A transition from the contextual i.e. mere examination of individual women’s destiny to the conceptual examination of the psychodynamics of rape takes place in the theme of violence against women in Indian
writing. For instance a novel like *Kathgulab* traces the individual destinies of Smita in India and Marianne in America and yet tries to see the analogues.\(^{23}\) It compares the different versions of rape and the impact it has on the lives of these women. The addition of the psychological dimension to the characters is a major development. Krishna Sobti’s *Surajmukhi Andherey Ke* attempts to analyze the mind of its protagonist Ratti to enable the readers to understand the long term impact violence has on the mind of the victim.\(^{24}\) Thus, the drift away from descriptive delineation which is also seen in films dealing with the representation of rape takes place.\(^{25}\)

The corpus of writing dealing with Partition narratives on the theme of violence against women can be classified as descriptive and one that engages in contextual examination of the theme. The comparison for works dealing with the practice of rape in peaceful situations as against works dealing with the Partition/conflict situations reveals that women are treated as symbols of their community’s honour.

Violence as an act of reprisal is a familiar aspect of conflict situations. The contrapuntal, violence is known as ‘the language of feud’ according to sociologists such as Veena Das etc.\(^{26}\) Thus, women become the language through which cross-border or cross-community argument takes place. Women become a mere medium of communication between men of two nations or communities. Often the double-bind of violence to which women are subjected by their community and the other becomes the theme of writing that resurrects conflict situations. However, in this this reciprocal violence, the dismemberment that Urvashi Butalia draws attention to is not just metaphorical as perceived in the Partition. It is a
metaphor graphically represented by the violation of the body of the pure Hindu Woman i.e. Bharat-Mata. It is also the more acutely experienced, actually-experienced mutilation of real women to which critics have often referred. The articulation of trauma of violence in real narratives of men and women is a gendered rendering. As pointed out by Veena Das and Ashis Nandy, since women experienced it they ‘remember it differently’. In men’s narrative it takes a formal and organized form that is reflected in the representations by male writers. The trope is treated in a gingerly fashion and treated superficially, whereas women writers who treat this theme such as Jamila Hashmi, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Jyotirmoyee Devi, treat diverse facets of the crime. The significant journey of women protagonists in works dealing with the theme is one of the transition from being symbolic carriers to full-fledged individuals. Most women described in the Partition literature are faceless emblems of their community. The women in Bhisham Sahni’s *Tamas*, Manto’s stories, Ajneyas’ stories are essentially representatives of their communities. The only exception being Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *EGOG*, a work too radical for the era of sixties that it was written in. Unlike most other Partition narratives that treat women as specks in the cross-fire on the border, this full-length novel unravels the multifarious aspects of a woman’s (Sutara’s) life.

As a contrast to the limited perspective of conflict narratives, the latter representations of women affected by violence, especially rape, includes a wide cross-section of women-working women, educated women of cities, women of the menial class, the outlaw. These are flesh-and-blood representations in the works of Mridula Garg, Suchitra Bhattacharya, Mahasweta Devi, Mala Sen and others. Thus, a journey
from gender symbolism to individual womanhood and an examination of the individual as victim takes place in these latter and more contemporary narratives.\textsuperscript{31}

**SHIFT IN THE PARADIGM OF RAPE FROM DESCRIPTIVE TO PRESCRIPTIVE**

The resignification of the body in the rape discourse takes place in the new discourse that emerges in recent times. The shift from a descriptive discourse to a prescriptive one where the idea of the self is not static but an evolving, dynamic self moving away from the stereotype of the vulnerable, devastated woman takes place. The self is depicted in latter narratives as resilient and successfully coping with circumstances. The emphasis on rehabilitation and life after rape is the focus of the new prescriptive discourse seen emerging in the more recent narratives. This is clearly seen in narratives such as Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab*, short stories in *Hans*, Shashi Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine*, Bani Basu’s ‘The Fallen Man’. The only exception of earlier writing that is prescriptive and looks at the corrective outlook of society that is required in the rehabilitation of the protagonist is again EGOG that stresses Suatras’s rehabilitation after dislocation. More than half the body of work examined, specially of more recent times, highlights the rehabilitation of the rape victim or examines the positive reconstruction of some aspect of the life of these women as in *Kathgulab, The Bandit Queen, The Fallen Man, The Binding Vine* etc.

**From Victimhood – To Agency**

Another significant difference in the portrayal of women in
conflict / war situations and in later Indian writing is the restriction of the victims to the domestic sphere. Most of the Partition narratives taken up in this study elucidate the fate of women who are limited domestic domain (as is seen in the stories examine here and in Bhisham Sahni’s Tamas). The only radical deviation is seen in Jyotirmoyee Devi’s EGOG where a transition from the passive domestic sphere to the active sphere of a working person is traced in Sutara’s evolution into a contemporary Professor of History. The latter works dealing with women as victims of violence depict women steeping out of the private, domestic sphere (as in Kathgulab etc). Thus, a laboured and slow transition from victimhood in the most passive state to a slightly more active sphere and finally, instances of empowering writing where there is a transition from victimhood to agency is seen evolving. This may be classified as the three phases:

The First Phase – Partition short-stories, Tamas, Yajnaseni, ‘The Incident and After’ etc.


The Third Phase – Kathgulab, Mala Sen’s The Bandit Queen, EGOG.32

Across literatures in various languages, there is a unanimity in the condemnation of violence against women. Addressing the theme of women’s sexuality is incomplete without this significant dimension of women’s lives. Even though the theme deals with coercive denial of that freedom to sexuality; it is more about patriarchal domination, yet it is an empowering one with a transformative agenda. The transformation of this
theme that was perennially garbed in myths to its representation as a reality of women’s lives is a long journey. The reinscription of myths I the palimpsest of contemporary narratives reinvokes the mythological analogues of Sita, Draupadi, etc. to recast and look for newer alternatives.

A revision of strategies of representation and recasting of the rape discourse takes place. The alternative image of women – from victimhood to an agent of self –transformation is realized in more recent narratives dealing with the theme of rape. Even the language and strategies shift from the covert to overt; from the shy to the bold discourse; from compete aneuria and from annihilation to rehabilitation. A case in point being the comparison of Krisna Sobti’s Surajmukhi Andherey ke and Mridula Garg’s Kathgulab. Hence a gradual movement towards grappling with rape rather than just representing rape ‘per se’ seems to be taking place.

THE AFTERMATH OF RAPE: BANISHMENT AND STIGMA

Despite the emphasis on rehabilitation, a significant proportion of most literary works on this theme highlight the ostracism and stigma associated with rape. They also emphasize the banishment of the rape victims to the margins of society. The rape victim invariably suffers not only by receding into a cocoon of darkness by shutting herself away, she also cringes from the unavoury cross-examination by the rest of the world. Opportunity and ability to perform in all spheres takes its toll as a consequence of rape. In all fields: personal, political and vocational – the impact of rape is address. Mala Sen’s biography, The Bandit Queen, describes Phoolan as a woman who is unable to lead a normal life, has been raped more than once in the forests by dacoit Babu Singh, Gujar,
who cannot bear children (as her uterus is badly hurt) and has been pushed into the profession of dacoits. Besides this, she is literally ‘apo-
polis’ – exterminated from her habitat into the Chambal ravines – the place for the outcaste. The only hope of rehabilitation is after her surrender which of course is her individual decision. Thus, we see that most of the characters who have been assaulted are left to their own resources. In terms of a social support system, we seem to have none.

In Mahasweta Devi’s story ‘Draupadi’, the activism of Dopdi is punished and her progress is stalled. From the forests she has been dragged to be paraded naked. She subverts the order by claiming her own mutilated body as a weapon to protest against the crime. She refuses to shroud the body in the private sphere and brings it into the public to shock the public gaze. In Bani Basu’s The Fallen Man, both Mallika, the elder sister-in-law and Bonomala, the prostitute have suffered. In fact the prostitute has even given birth to Nikhils illegitimate child. However, the work emphasizes that rehabilitation and justice are a must. Mallika has retreated into the dark recesses of her nightmares. The prostitute on the other hand has been banished to the outskirts of the city – to the red-light area of the city, Sonagachchi. Justice demands and so does Jina that she should be brought into the mainstream by being accepted along with her son as the wife and son. Nevertheless this does not imply that marriage is a solution to resolve rape cases.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel, The Binding Vine portrays the marital rape of Urmilla’s mother-in-law Mira in the past and Kalpana’s rape by her maternal uncle. Both are narratives of a close relative over-powering a woman to assault her. Mira is already dead and gone and her story is
locked up in the pages of her diary. The only justice and rehabilitation is in her case, as Urmilla plans to do, is to bring her writing out of the closet and to publish her poems. For Kalpana who has been brutally hurt, and is restricted to the hospital bed, even the bed is got after a fight and protest. This reiterates that attempts to banish the victim are always made but as Urmilla persuades, Kalpana’s mother, the struggle for justice must go on.

Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab* depicts the predicament of three women’s lives directly affected by assault i.e. Smita, Marianne and Narmada. The structure of the novel itself is like a dismembered body, like a collage. The fragmentariness symbolizes the destructive violence that permeates much of civilized society. Smita’s dual assault by her Jija and then attempted assault by her husband Jim Jarvis: both bust the myth of security at home. Smita is compelled by her situation to escape to America and Marianne whose husband plagiarizes her novel, banishes her from the literary realm. She joins the sorority of unacknowledged wives of writers like Lawrence and S. Fitzgerald. Thus, the women are often controlled, denied the right to motherhood (here, by the imposed abortions) and are colonized by the men around them. The issue of right to one’s space and denial is linked to the connection between the colonizer and the colonized. The novel’s title sums up the two contrasting qualities represented by the woman’s body – fossilized beauty – it being senseless and deprived of life like ‘Kath’ (i.e. dead) and contrastingly capable of blossoming into a flower. The punishment of the body, its disfigurement (whether metaphorical or literal); the banishment of these women from their roots, all are forms of stigmatization.

A fictional work like Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* and a
non-fiction like *Aruna’s Story* examine the ghastly and criminal possibilities of extermination. The victim Ila in *Fire on the Mountain*, is punished for her reformist zeal by the farmer Pritam Singh. He not only banishes her from the geographical territory of the village, but also exterminates her brutally, banishing her into the world of the dead. This is the nadir of aggression and violence against women, who are not only raped but also denied the right to life. The non-fiction, *Aruna’s Story* examines the most inhuman violation and strangulation of the victim with a dog-chain, resulting in the comatose condition of the victim for more than thirty-nine years. The incarceration of Aruna Shanbaug till date, as she lies in the KEM hospital, along with the successive attempts to bite off her tongue, amount to the most bestial assault and attempt to exterminate victims of assault.

The dehumanization of the victim by ruthless aggression is depicted in a subtle representation in Manjula Padmanabhan’s play *Lights Out* where the victim is infact a disembodied, anguished voice who is heard but not seen. The woman who is a shadow that appears everynight is subjected to nocturnal acts of aggression and is relegated to the world of darkness. This is the ultimate denial of bodily rights and extermination of identity into a shadow.

**BANISHMENT AND STIGMA IN WAR/CONFLICT SITUATIONS**

Victims of violence suffer a greater degree of stigma and ostracism in War / Conflict/ Partition-like situations. The loss of individuality and sublimation of the identity of women with that of the community identity results in an unsung saga of such victims in these narratives that revolve around the theme of national/communal identity.\(^\text{34}\) Rajinder Singh Bedi’s
Urdu story ‘Lajwanti’ depicts the deification of the wife amounting to rejection after she has been assaulted. The disruption of the normal husband-wife relationship for Lajo is a personal tragedy – the inability to return to oneself after assault. An analogous rejection is faced by the protagonist of ‘The Exile’ by Jamila Hashmi. Bibi, the nameless protagonist faces the post-trauma crisis alongwith rejection by her own family. She longs to be united with her community and hopes her bother will come looking for her but realizes that her own family has consciously abandoned her. The pain, rejection and exile suffered by the victim is comparable to Sita’s fate in this narrative that has as its backdrop the Dussehra festival and the legend of Rama’s rejection of Sita. Thus we see that when women’s honour is consanguineous with that of the community, their rejection is even more ruthless and harsh. Lalithambika Antharjanam’s attempt to portray the victim of violence against women coming to terms with the crisis, examines closely these anxieties. Jyoti, coping with her identity that has undergone mutation is not just a symbolic carrier but an individual grappling with a new predicament.

Jyotirmoyee Devi’s Bengali novel Epar Ganga Opar Ganga is the most radical work that delicately unravels the saga of the rejected woman’s torture. The turmoil in the life of the victim is suggested in the image of the churning river. Sutara’s banishment, her rejection in subtle ways by her own brothers who avoid her like plague and her dislocation from East Bengal to Calcutta and then to Delhi completes the journey of the rejected outcast. The perennial rejection and punishment of women for some one else’s transgression is summed up in the analogues of Lucretia, Sita, Sati, Amba, Draupadi etc. to whom Sutara is compared.  

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A bond of kinship in banishment from mainstream society unites the destiny of these women.

While some women are disowned by their dear ones, exiled or uprooted from their homes, the ultimate cruelty is penned in a narrative that unravels the darkness that engulfs the victim’s destiny. This narrative is aptly entitled *Tamas* that is ‘Darkness’. Bhisham Sahani’s work explores the imposition of suicide on women who are potential victims of rape. On the one hand the women in the Gurudwara are compelled to embrace involuntary suicide, when their community honour is at stake. On the other hand, even the other community does not spare them. In an instance where a woman was willing to be assaulted so as to be spared her life, the other community kills her. This goes to show the Scylla and Charybdis situation for woman in a conflict situation. In one they are mesmerized to walk to their death and jump into wells, in the other they are brutally murdered at the razor’s edge.\(^{36}\)

**THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF RAPE**

The study of representations of violence against women in Post-colonial Indian writing is the study of women’s identity as a still-colonized one in many ways. We are aware that conventions, practices, and rules regarding the use of space by women are directly related to the question of control of female sexuality. Rape, by instilling a fear of public space, deepens the chasm between the genders and suppresses female sexuality. The ‘purdah’ (veil), confinement of women to the private realm; instilling a sense of insecurity in so-called safe places, shunning late hours, risky behaviour, dresses etc. are all codes framed by patriarchal society to control women’s sexuality.\(^{37}\) The constant dialectic
of the self and the other is perenniably linked to the question of space. The manifestation of spatial politics against women takes place in two ways: firstly, by banishing them to the margins (as shown in the above analysis of banishment) and secondly in the act of targeting and committing rape on women in various domains.

The analysis of the domain where rape happens in these narratives reveals that no place is a safe haven for women. An examination of the works reveals that women suffer this violence in the most intimate of places use in the domestic sphere as in Kathgulab, The Binding Vine, ‘The Intrusion’, ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’ The Fallen Man, Yajnaseni, The Bandit Queen etc. It could be any public place in the city as in Dahan and Lights Out. It could be the workplace as in Aruna’s Story, ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman. It could be in custody as also the Chambal ravines where Babu Sinh Gujar violates her. In ‘Black Horse Square’, again custodial violence is the theme. At the same time, the impression emerges that no woman is spared such treatment, whether she is a working woman like Aruna Shanbaug in Aruna’s Story or Kalpana in The Binding Vine. She may have be an activist like Rosa or a home maker like Mira, the protagonist of ‘The Intrusion’ or ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’.

In conflict situations it could be any place – the home, the neighbourhood, the border, as seen in the Partition narratives. Many writers have seen parallels between the situation of women during Partition and that of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the Serbs raped the women and saw to it that they give birth to Serb children. Stasa Zajovic’s comparison of the female womb to ‘occupied territory’ is an apt
The act of rape therefore is an act of appropriation of the woman’s body as territory.

DISMANTLING NOTIONS OF SECURITY AT HOME OR THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

The notions of security at home or in the domestic sphere have been shattered. This is borne out by various studies, interventions and documented adequately. Violence against women, specially rape in the domestic sphere, has dismantled nations of comfort and security at home. The lurking danger of the rapist father/uncle/husband or any close relative reiterates that there is no safe place for women. The much-venerated guidelines of Manusmriti have prescribed against incest and any sexual misconduct within the family. Harsh punishments such as capital punishment and death are recommended in instances of rape by father/brother etc. Nevertheless such crimes have been a part of society. Many of the works that have been subjected to analysis, right from Mala Sen’s; Bandit Queen, Yajnaseni, Kathgulab, The Fallen Man, The Binding Vine, ‘The Intrusion’, ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’, ‘Dhai Aakhar’, ‘Dehdansh’ reveal that the rapist is either the father, an uncle or the husband or a close relative (a brother-in-law), as in Mallika’s case in The Fallen Man. The two stories ‘Dhai Aakhar’ and ‘Dehdansh’ that examine father-on-daughter rape resonate familiar infamous real-life cases of the Fritzl family or the Mumbai case. Ironically he ‘domus’, the familial space is the most violent and the nearest ties suspect. On the other hand in Mahashweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’, the naxalite home, the forest – the notional home of a tribal is the site of crime.

We observe that whether the aim is perpetuation of heterosexuality
or settling scores with someone, even with the wife as in Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab* or Ajay Nawaria’s story ‘Dhai Aakhar’, Suchitra Bhattacharya’s ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’, the end-result is the female body – disempowered by patriarchy. During the Partition too homes were targeted and women were abducted and raped. Most of the Partition stories analyzed in the study elucidate the fate of women who are in the safe, domestic domain. Even in a work like *EGOG* women are depicted as unsafe and targeted by the communal fundamentalists in their own homes.

The woman’s body, in her home, enervated by aggression against it, provides insights into the rights discourse. The home or domestic sphere is the first building-block of the patriarchal structure and hence crucial as a place for indoctrination of ideas and gender-role stereotyping. The home as the seat of assault and the domain where aggression flourishes in the manifestations of marital rape, makes the woman cringe from contact with a partner. This results in a breach of faith and distrust of the institution of marriage.

**GETTING RID OF THE DISHONOUR GUILT SYNDROME**

Shame controls a woman. The Foucauldian idea that the body is forever under surveillance can be extended to suggest that the surveillance of woman’s body does not cease even after the crime of rape. The crime of rape, ironically, further stigmatizes a woman and society uses shame to suppress a woman’s voice against the crime. For this reason, rape is a strange crime that traps a woman in a catch-22 situation. Silence about the crime is not advisable but speaking against the crime seems impossible due to the shame and stigma associated with
it. Besides, rape trials too put the onus of evidence on the woman’s body. Thus, consciousness of dishonour vis-à-vis rape has been an important strain in representations.

The discourse of violence against women in Post-Colonial Indian writing has taken into cognizance the syndrome of dishonour associated with this theme. The evolution of this discourse from one that emphasizes the loss of honour for the victim’s family or community to one that examines the trauma of the victim is a gradual journey. The transition is perceived developing especially in the comparative treatment of this theme in Partition literature as compared to later writing after the 1980’s. The reticent, earlier discourse is about guilt, shame, rejection by one’s own community and about silent suffering as seen in the Partition short-stories or as in Krishna Sobti’s *Surajmukhi Andherey Ke*. The latter, enabling discourse that emerges with the second-wave of Indian feminism is about getting rid of the guilt, the dishonour syndrome as in works like the short-stories (*Hans*, 2004), Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab*, Shashi Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine*, Bani Basu’s *The Fallen Man* etc. The phenomenon of getting rid of dishonour manifests itself in the transition of the discourse from descriptive to prescriptive, and from stressing upon the incident to emphasizing the post-trauma rehabilitation.

*The Encyclopedia of Women and Gender* draws attention to the varying treatment of violence against women from culture to culture. It suggests that coping with rape may be easier for an American woman than for Asian, Hispanic or Middle-Eastern groups where loss of honour and shame jeopardize recovery of victims. The possibility of social support too is narrower in such cultures. Overcoming shame and
dishonour and how victims of rape grapple with it is seen in a comparative model in Mridula Garg’s *Kathgulab* where Smita who undergoes rape has a cross-cultural counter part in Marianne. The short-story ‘Asvikaar’ too depicts the need to overcome the guilt syndrome. Numerous other engagements with the theme are seen in *The Binding Vine, Aruna’s Story, Dahan* and the play *Lights Out*. Writers are consciously addressing this issue, which is at the heart of the theme. Mridula Garg rightly sums up about Indian writing: “the disassociation of rape from dishonour was necessary” (in an interview in *Storylines*).

Hence, a crucial segment of recent writing on the theme takes up the metaphor of guilt and the associated dishonour syndrome.

Women who take up vocations or are working are seen as coping with rape better. This is because the positive work ethic keeps them diverted from the trauma. This we can see suggested in works, like *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga, Kathgulab, ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’, Asvikaar* etc.

**THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF JUSTICE IN THE DISCOURSE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The patriarchs of ancient Indian society laid down many injunctions against violence in all its manifestations. Since a woman was considered unfit for independence (as laid down by Manu), she had to be guarded. Violence against women was prohibited yet prevalent. To this effect the ‘dandaniti’ or the code-of-laws was laid down by law-makers like Manu and Kautilya. Punishments for various situations vis-à-vis rape are prescribed by the ancient law-makers. This corroborates that justice and penal action for offences of violence and against women were
two facets of the legal system even in ancient society. However, though the ancients were aware of it and even through the colonial period laws were framed to punish such crimes, society failed to deliver justice to women.

Perhaps, the inability to acknowledge women as individuals comes in the way of acquiring justice. The inability of most cultures to treat women as independent entities lies at the root of non-conveyance of justice in cases of violence against women. Cross-culturally it may be observed that just as there were provisions for justice and punishments for such crimes in ancient Indian society, there has been an analogous Western legal system. However, as Susan Brownmiller has also suggested there is a connection between the ownership of women by men and the crime of rape. The rape laws can be traced from the Babylonian code through Hebrew law and to the English common-law tradition. And what is common to all these laws is that the legal action of rape is considered as an action brought by one man against another for damage of his property. This reveals the logic of this crime to some extent. It shows that in many instances rape can be the result of vendetta against other men (as has been seen in war and conflict).

It is noteworthy that the legal machinery not only stops short of acknowledging women’s individuality, it has failed in delivering justice across cultures. Post-Colonial Indian Writing in the representations of violence addresses the issue of the elusive nature of justice, the hurdles in the way of the victim and the legal lacunae. The absence of a clear-cut marital-rape law due to the patriarchal bias of society is another issue raised in works like Kathgulab by Mridula Garg, Suchitra Bhattacharya’s
‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’, Shashi Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine* and the short story ‘The Intrusion’.

Many other works in this study examined in Chapter V corroborate that violence against women is a strange crime where often the victim is blamed for it. Attempts are made to pass off the crime as an accident, an aspect mocked at by writing elsewhere as in Marge Piercy’s ‘Rape Poem’.

Works like *The Binding Vine*, stories like ‘Deshdansh’, Mala Sen’s *Bandit Queen* go to show that when close relatives are guilty, justice is even more elusive. When the victim belongs to deprived or oppressed section of society, her trauma gets exacerbated as seen in ‘Draupadi’ by Mahasweta Devi and Mala Sen’s *BQ*. The hurdles in the way of acquiring justice right from lodging the complaint to getting the culprit punished are aspects that have been examined in these works.

**THE DISCOURSE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POST-COLONIAL INDIAN WRITING IS PRIMARILY WOMEN’S WRITING**

Mainstream, male-writing across cultures is expressive, articulates and represents women’s experiences such as love, motherhood etc. perfectly. However, a strong moratorium or hesitation to address the theme of rape is evinced in writing by men. Women and their bodies may have become the objects of representation, but representation of aspects of women’s sexuality remained partial. While allusions to myths pertaining to the theme of rape are scattered across epics and ancient narratives, they have never been elaborated or examined. Perhaps, the collusion of sexuality with power relations, embedded in the patriarchal structure prevents or inhibits a sincere attempt to understand the theme of
violence against women in mainstream Indian writing. The limited engagement of men’s writing with the these is in the corpus of Partition literature, when the community honour was at stake or in a nascent form in recent men’s writing.

Women’s writing has therefore been endowed the responsibility of addressing this theme. The late 60’s and 70’s witnessed the beginnings of this theme. One similarity in the Western and Eastern model of representations of violence against women, is the late narrativisation of rape in writing. In America, the first experiments in a muted form (as autobiographies, sentimental literature) takes place in the late 19th century and then in a big way in the 60’s and 70’s in the twentieth century. Similarly, on the Indian scene a parallel engagement begins in synchronization with the feminist movement. Mridula Garg observes: “Sexuality is the most explosive thing in India”.49 This is the reason for the late narrativisation of representation of its anxieties. Of the entire corpus of writing examined here, not even twenty percent of it is written by men.

Rajinder Singh Bedi, S.H. Manto, Bhisham Sahani, Ajenya and in recent times short-stories of Shekhar Malik and Ajay Nawaria address the issue.50 However, the positive change is the maturity and completeness with which the recent men writers address the issue.

We can infer thus that mainstream writing has addressed the theme when communal or national identity is threatened by violence against women. Women writers, however have successively taken up the theme not only to pit masculine aggression against feminine vulnerability but to examine various related issues.
The different manifestations of rape in the representations of Post-colonial Indian-writing include:

(a) Rape as a weapon of restoring communal honour and revenge as in *Tamas, Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, and Partition stories.

(b) Rape as a weapon for Caste/Class revenge as seen in *BQ, Fire on the Mountain*, “Draupadi” by Mahasweta Devi, *Aruna’s Story*.

(c) Rape as a means of instilling fear or controlling the other gender for one’s pleasure as in *Dahan, The Binding Vine* etc.

(d) Rape as a means of subordination and exploitation in all castes and classes within the family in instances of marital rape as delineated in *BQ, The Fallen Man ‘GWBW’, Kathgulab, ‘Dehdansh’ etc.*

(e) Rape as a weapon to settle scores or at the workplace as a *Aruna’s Story* and *Fire on the Mountain*.

(f) Rape as a weapon institutionalizing heterosexuality as seen in all the narratives such as *Kathgulab, Epar Ganga Opar Ganga, The Binding Vine* etc.\(^{51}\)

Complicated issues and concerns like rehabilitation of the victim, analysis of the mind-set that leads to rape, the legal loopholes in rape laws the role of the media and of alcohol are some of the motifs scrutinized vis-à-vis the theme in Post-colonial Indian Writing. Women writers are engaged in redefining limits of the theme with their invasive approach. The open-endedness of most narratives suggests that justice eludes the victims of violence against women. The resignification of the discourse in the eighties into a more enabling and holistic one coincides
with the Second wave of Indian feminism. Gradually, the moratorium on the theme of sexuality is lifted and a more meaningful discourse on violence against women emerges on the literary scene.

Thus, the challenge to the personhood of women in Post-colonial Indian writing is crucial to the reinscription of representations of violence against women. It is certainly a theme that has made an unprecedented appearance on the literary scene and has engendered a meaningful dialogue on the discourse of violence against women. In the transition from descriptive to prescriptive writing vis-à-vis this theme, the writers discussed here have attempted to bridge the gap between the real and imagined women.