CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

The rising trend of violence against women is a burning, topical issue of everyday life. It establishes the subaltern status of women, the world over. This transcultural phenomenon while being a cruel reality of our lives, is a recurrent motif in fiction and writing. The aim of this study is to establish the cognizance taken by writers towards this reality. It probes certain representations of violence against women in post-colonial Indian writing. However, the study engages primarily with the analysis of rape as a crime of violence against women. The focus of this research study is the evolution of the theme in Indian writing since 1947.\(^1\) The examination of physical, psychological and social aspects of such violence in rape and its dynamics, fall within the purview of this study. The practice of this crime against women in war and peace is the paradigm that will be examined vis-à-vis post-colonial Indian writing. The study also attempts to establish the relationship between sociological and psychological theories about rape and their correlation with the insights arrived at by Indian writers. The evolution of narrativisation of rape as a motif in Indian writing is the other target of this study.

Rape, as described in the Oxford English Dictionary is 1(a) “the act of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse against her will (b) forcible Sodomy 2 (often followed by of) violent assault, forcible interference, violation 3 (poetical) carrying off (esp. of a woman by force) and as “violate, assault and pillage”. Derived from the Latin root “rapere”, the most crucial aspect of this crime is the use of force. “Rapere” is explained as ‘seize’ which further corroborates the
importance of the use of force in such a crime.²

Mythic Representations of the Theme in the Hebraic, Hellenic and Indian Tradition

Allusions to rape or sexual assault / abduction of women have often been made to in the traditions of various cultures. However, myths have eluded an active engagement with the theme and treated it only cursorily. In the Bible, Chapter-34 of the Genesis refers to She-Chem’s rape of Dinah. In Judges 21-10-14, Exodus 21:7-11, Zecheriah 14: 1-2, and Samuel 12: 11-14 we come across references to the violation of women.³ In the Hellenic tradition, there are allusions to the rape of Lucrece which has been a bedrock for many narratives.

The rape of Leda and Europa by Zeus; that of Lucrece are famous paradigms from which narratives derive.⁴ In the Indian context numerous mythological tales in the epics and Puranas enumerate various instances of sexual assault of women. The very familiar instances are those of Draupadi, Sita, Amba, Ambalika, Shakuntala etc. Brahma’s assault of Saraswati and Indra’s seduction of Ahalya, Sage Gautam’s wife are instances of Gods too being guilty of such acts. Parasher’s rape of Matsyagandha reveals how even sages are guilty of this crime. Kunti’s coerced union with Surya and the birth of Karna are some allusions to the untold suffering of women.⁵

Rape seems to be the most heinous and serious fallout of gender inequality in our world. It is one of the most serious offences as it marks the body and blemishes the future of the victim. The ongoing debate about what would be a suitable and commensurate punishment for this
crime is a testimony of the uniqueness of this crime. Since the body is the site of selfhood, the harm done to it by sexual violence seems irreversible. There seems to be a lot of confusion in society regarding what would bring peace to the victim because there seems to be so little that can be done to make amends. Hence the confusion regarding justice in cases of rape and the debate that surrounds rape laws. The uniqueness of this crime lies probably in the fact that this crime not only marks the body in the present: it continues to haunt the spirit of the victim in the future and may be until the death of the victim.

Rape is a symptom and outcome of a society that suffers from gender inequality. It is a weapon in the hands of patriarchy to perpetuate spatial politics as the fear it induces ensures the banishment of women from the public sphere. The restriction of the movement of women due to the fear of rape is literally implemented. It is the crystallization of the aggression of society against the individual. Since it is not only an individual act of violence against the victim, we are interested in examining the psyche of patriarchy that this crime reveals. What is worse that women end up being insecure due to this crime not only in their surroundings but also in their homes (one can see the connection between this restriction that rape imposes and the movements such as “Take Away the Night” etc.). Rape is therefore a unique crime as it involves not just a sexual act but also a criminal act; involves the individual as well as society. Besides the spatial politics entailed in the crime, we witness the textual politics in terms of not allowing its representation.

Representation is a word that implies the process of “creation of signs” i.e. something that stands for or takes “the place of something
Thus, the narrative and the real world meet to create an interface and transform each other. Representation of violence against women seems to be a sparingly addressed theme in writing. If at all it was addressed in a covert manner. The contention of this study is that the body is a crucial agency and metaphor to understand the world.

Narratives are therefore not only about the victims of violence but in a big way try to reveal the world around. Mark Ledbetter rightly draws our attention to the eminent role played by the body in the understanding of the ethic of reading and writing. Defining victimization, he says:

Victimization is body made unhealthy, the body hurt and the body scarred. We cannot talk about victimization without body metaphor, therefore… we cannot talk about a narrative ethic without reference to the body.¹⁰

The victim of violence is the ‘Other’ whose identity is constantly threatened by the world around. Victims of violence in narratives are not only victims of patriarchy who suffer violence, but are metaphors of lost, wounded and violent narratives which have mostly been silenced in a heliocentric universe, both of literature and reality. Rape in any case is a gendered construction: a crime perpetrated by men on women primarily.¹¹ In this light the strategy of the writer who brings to the fore a narrative of violence becomes crucial. The motivation, the politics and the possibility of such representations becomes important.

The dimensions of such crimes of violence against women and its mimesis in literature becomes an interesting issue. To talk about violation is to seek wholeness and empowerment, and the representation of such a
mutilated and dismembered entity, is ironically the endowment of identity. Thus, the representations of acts of violence become a crucial agency of empowerment and liberation. How it is inscribed on the palimpsest of a text becomes a subject worthy of study.

The act of narration of violence against women is an empowering act. This statement may seem ironical. The act of narration endows a voice to the muted, silenced voice of a victim; it spreads awareness, it compels society to consider the act of violation and punish its perpetrators. It furthers the cause of the victim by bringing the victim out of the isolation of subjectivity to embrace the community. When the act of violation gets crystallized in words and gets enframed in a narrative cast, it becomes an artifact. An artifact is an emblem, a sign of the times and its culture. Thus, it signifies either the positive or negative energies of a culture. It reveals either the culture or anarchy of a given moment in history. The act of writing about such violence then is an apocalyptic moment.12

Mark Ledbetter says about the ethic of writing that if it is an assay “to discover and to make heard silenced voices; an ethic of reading is to hear those voices”13. This contrapuntal exercise of postmodern writing is witnessed in operation in narratives of violence against women in post-colonial Indian writing. These victims of narratives long for a voice as they are mostly silenced or get lost amongst narratives of the privileged of our society. One such marginalized and suppressed voice is the voice of the raped woman in Indian writing.

Ancient Indian society was aware of various crimes against women. This is established by the ‘context-sensitive’ laws framed and
practiced by the ancient law-makers represented by Manu. In *Manusmriti*, “violence and power exercised over another-were celebrated on their own terms.” Nevertheless, several punishments (though hierarchical) for sexual assault on women existed since then. In the second century AD too, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* laid down laws and punishment for sexual violation of women from various strata of society. Myths in ancient Indian literature too allude to various acts of aggression against women. However, mainstream literary representations of the theme steered clear of any in-depth engagement. They either dealt with it tangentially or even superficially without exploring its various dimensions.

The theme of rape and violence against women has often been garbed in order to maintain decorum in the history of writing upto the present times. A quick survey of literature reveals how the voice and identity of the rape victim has been suppressed in Indian writing. The dominant epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have garbed the violation of women in many instances. Kalidasa’s *Shakuntalam* too aims at representing the seduction or violation of the innocent Shakuntala with a subtle twist with the device of the curse. A long history of silence about this theme in writing is the outcome of patriarchal motivation to control representations, specially in mainstream Indian writing.

Frederic Jameson’s assessment of the self-consumptive nature of the post-modern culture; as an attempt to cannibalize is an apt description of post-modern writing. The post-modern novel erases the dichotomy between outside and inside, collapsing them into an hourglass – like fluidity. At the same time it becomes iconic of the imperialistic urge to overpower and possess, thereby achieving the annihilation of the other
and the vindication of the self. The frontless, vampire like rapacity signifies the self-absorptive and consumptive characteristic of the post-modern culture that the writers offer as a critique of our times.

The definition of rape suggests many forms that it may take. However, law recognizes and defines it in a very limited manner. In most cases not only is the victim denied justice, the legal machinery makes it difficult even to recognize the crime. With few chances of obtaining justice, the hope of these silenced voices is to get heard and the narrative is the hope of communication for the victim. “Presenting absence” then is a crucial responsibility of the writer.¹⁸ There is a strange silence across cultures regarding the representation of rape or violence against women even upto the 19th century. Landmark works such as Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* took on the tremendous and difficult task of representing such voices.¹⁹ The female body in any case was not considered fit enough to be spoken about in the public domain.

However, vis-à-vis rape the importance of the body cannot be understated. The body remains the most significant link with the universe and in such a crime, it is the seat of violation. The body in its wholeness and health is a microcosm of the universe and a metaphor of wholeness. When the same body is violated, it becomes the seat of ‘dis-ease’ and gets marked. This marked, violated and mutilated body represents the narrative of the marginalized and by seeking to represent it, the writer lends a muted narrative a voice. While writers have felt the need to bring the violated female body to the fore in these narratives, it does not underscore the need to study the trauma suffered by the mind of the victims in such instances.
Post-Colonial Indian writing begins to address the theme of violence with a greater openness and depth that was unprecedented. Simultaneously, we can see the rise of the issue of violence against women in the Indian Women’s Movement, the hesitations and inhibitions regarding the representation of this theme. We are aware that the patriarchal pressures and the thrust of mainstream Indian writing were at variance with the concerns of this theme. However, the Indian Women’s movement and Women’s studies have a shared trajectory, representations of violence against women being a part of the same.

RESPONSES OF THE INDIAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT TO RAPE

The history of the Indian Women’s movement’s response to the issue of rape goes back to the case of Mathura, Rameeza Bi, Suman Rani, Mukti Dutta, Bhanwari Devi and to the Bhuwaneshwari Devi case in 2002. These and countless other cases gave momentum to protests against the heinous crime of rape. They also draw attention to the need to make amendments in Rape Laws from time to time. However, unfortunately, till date we do not have suitable laws or solutions to the crime of rape.

At a meeting called by the Forum against the Oppression of Women, Bombay in 1990, some of the manifestations of the crime of rape were classified. To name a few:

- Communal rape
- Gang rape
- Political rape
• Rape of minors
• Army rape (in situations of war/peace keeping).
• Institutional rape (in hospitals, remand homes, etc.)
• Rape in economically dependent circumstances.
• Rape within political organizations.
To add a few:
• Date rape
• Custodial rape

The Indian Women’s movement’s efforts were initially dedicated to bring the issue of rape into the limelight and to bring justice to the victims. Thereafter, the inadequacy of the rape laws and their lacunae compelled it to agitate for more suitable rape laws which would expedite and ensure justice. One of the points of emphasis is to reframe the definition of rape as ‘sexual assault’ so that the law includes and can take cognizance of other forms of rape. At present, the struggle for a suitable law and speedier justice is on with an emphasis on rehabilitation. Reconceptualization of rape was required to reframe new laws: this realization of the Women’s Movement was the result of deliberations on the issue of rape. However, we notice that while the Women’s movements have made effort to divert attention from individual cases of rape to the larger issue of rape, the strategies of writers while representing these themes in Indian writing are different.

Writers, and more specially women writers who take up the theme of representation of violence against women in Indian writing, focus on
the individual women’s narratives. They situate this personal narrative of the victim within the larger context of the theme of violence against women, with its focus on the plight of the individual woman. It is not ‘every woman’s’ story but that of an individual. In fact, this is one of the major differences that we notice in writing by women and that of male writers that addresses this theme. While, women’s writing on this theme focuses on the individual, male writing, if at all it takes up this theme (primarily the theme of rape in war/crisis or dislocation) focuses on the community and not on the individual.²² Hence the inference that it is primarily women’s writing that focuses on this theme and the related crisis in the life of an individual woman. Of course, one of the challenges for women’s writing is to connect the individual’s narrative with the narrative of women as a community. This is a strategy that we see gradually develop in Post-colonial Indian writing. We can trace the gradual transition of emphases in such writing from victimhood to agency; from highlighting trauma to rehabilitation, along with an attempt to connect fiction with reality. Certain other shifts noticed in terms of this theme will be scrutinized in the course of this study.

One of the concerns of writers while examining the individual’s narrative is to examine her own perspective regarding rape. Vis-à-vis these individual cases of rape that have been represented in writing, one of the most crucial aspects is to make an attempt to understand her own perspective of her sexuality. The perception of the victim is very crucial in understanding the crime and what turn it may take. The conceptions of rape in the mind of the victim has far-reaching consequences. They can determine (to an extent) whether the victim will be able to get justice for herself or not. This is so because the aspiration of attaining justice is
proportionate to the perception of how the crime is perceived in the mind of the victim. Besides this crucial aspect the class/caste/cultural position of the victim is crucial and an analysis of the same can yield insightful information about the crime of rape.\textsuperscript{23} It can help us to understand the sociological economic, cultural and psychological factors that trigger off crimes of rape. Writers seem to adopt some of these strategies while representing this violence in writing. The analysis will probe the varying degrees of emphases that writers adopt towards the theme in writing.

**Existing Studies on this Subject: Some Responses**

Violence against women has been a stark lived, reality in most societies. In the Indian context as in most cultures, there has been a silence on this issue which is interrupted by some discourses on the theme. However, no full–length study on rape as a theme in Post-colonial Indian Writing has been attempted as yet. In fact, some of the most impressive essays on the theme have been written only in recent times. Perhaps the rare occurrence, (except those on Partition) of this theme in Indian writing for a long time is responsible for this silence. One can see the correlation between the absence of this theme from the Indian literary scene for a long time and its resultant paucity of studies on this subject. Some of the existing studies in the form of sundry essays in collections are as follows:

I. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan’s essay ‘The Story of Draupadi’s Disrobing’ in *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India* is a comparative study of Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’ and Manjula Padmanabhan’s story ‘Teaser’. Another essay by the same author on the theme is ‘Life After Rape: Narrative Theory and
Feminism’.

II. Priyamvada Gopal’s essay ‘Of Victims & Vigilantes’ is a study of the film ‘Bandit Queen’ and examines the theme of violence against women.

III. Sukrita Paul Kumar’s essay *Re-membering Women: Partition, Gender and Reorientations* is a study of some Partition stories.


V. Gayatri Chakravorty – Spivak’s study of ‘Draupadi’ in *Other Worlds* studies aggression and its motives in Mahashweta Devi’s work.

VI. Urmila Chakravorty’s essay ‘Art as Protest: Social Commitment in the Novels of Mahasweta Devi’ is a study of Draupadi with reference to the theme of violence.

VII. Isobel Armstrong’s study *Radical Aesthetics* devotes a chapter to the treatment of the theme of violence in Indian writing.

VIII. Jasodhara Bagchi’s essay “Female Sexuality and Community in Jyotirmoyee Devi’s Epar Ganga Opar Ganga” is a study of patriarchies endorsement of violence against women. It is a part of Meenakshi Thapan’s *Embodiment Essays on Gender & Identity*.

IX. Madhu Kumari’s essay ‘Patriarchy & Violence against Women in India’ in *Women & Violence* traces the interconnections between the two themes.

X. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin *Borders and Boundaries* examine
the theme of violence in the Partition conflict in light of narratives of first-hand experience of violence.

XI. Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* too traces the massacre in history written on women’s bodies during the Partition of India.²⁴

**Time-Span of this Study on Violence against Women in Post-Colonial Indian Writing**

The term ‘Post-Colonial’ itself defines the trajectory of writing that has been scrutinized in this study. This study engages in an analysis of Indian writing in the Post-Independence period that addresses the theme of violence against women with special emphasis on the theme of rape (i.e. man on woman rape). This is to suggest that writing from 1947 onwards is the subject of this study. This corpus of course is in diverse vernacular languages and in English as well. However, we can see that the significant occurrence of this leit-motif occurs in Indian writing since 1960s when a plethora of writing, centering around the Partition began to voice the trauma it entailed. As a result women’s sexuality, hitherto a taboo subject in Indian writing rose on the Indian literary scene in the form of the several Partition stories and novels in various Indian languages. The body of works examined by this study is as follows:

**RAPE DURING WAR/CONFLICT**²⁵

3. Jamila Hashmi ‘Exile’ (Urdu)
4. Rajinder Singh Bedi ‘Lajwanti’ (Urdu).
5. Ajneya ‘Getting Even’ (Hindi).
6. Lalithambika Antharjanam ‘A Leaf in the Storm’ (Malayalam)

RAPE DURING PEACE

10. Anita Desai Fire on the Mountain 1977 (English).
17. Pratibha Ray Yajnaseni 1995 (Oriya).
18. Pinki Virani Aruna’s Story: The True Account of a Rape & its Aftermath (English).
20. Suchitra Bhattacharya ‘Good Woman, Bad Woman’ (Bengali).