CHAPTER - II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The last few years have witnessed an alarming increase in the number of cases in which married women die in circumstances which are highly suspicious. As these deaths have come to be associated with dowry, in popular parlance they have come to be called as 'dowry-deaths.' (1) In majority of cases, the victim is often a young and a recently married woman, the phrase "bride-burning" has come in vogue.

The general public reacts vehemently against such inhuman acts and demand exemplary punishment to the culprit. But paradoxically enough the culprit invariably goes unpunished taking advantage of some loopholes in the law and the connivance of many corrupt local minions of law and order who are often found hand-in-glove with the perpetrators. Sometimes, the helpless young bride herself in sheer desperation resorts to suicide as an escape from her hellish life. Rape and physical torture of

1. Whereas by the latest figures, the number of bride-burning for the year 1994 stands at 4,277 in the country and Uttar Pradesh on the whole is found to be a leading state by representing the figures of 1,952 in 1993.
young women are common in most parts of the world, but "bride-burning" (dowry-death) appears to be a purely Indian phenomenon(2).

Very often, newspapers have printed banner head-lines: "Bride-burning" - A burning question; "Dowry - Death"; "Husband held in a dowry case"; "yet another dowry death in the capital"; "Husband and in-laws sent to jail in a bride-burning case" and the like. In fact, the bride burning and dowry death are synonymously used. Indeed, the phenomenon of dowry-death stands in sharp contrast with the general socio-cultural environment in the country and it has aroused much public concern.

Two major questions often strike in the minds of the people about 'bride-burning': firstly, how common is this problem in our society; and secondly what causes the in-laws and husband to be violent toward the bride/daughter-in-law?

Since dowry related crimes and other forms of violence against women is an area product of socio-cultural context, besides exploring linear relationship between forms of such violence and other variables such as types of dowry demands, socio-economic background of victims or of interacting families etc., there is a need to develop theoretical

---

frame work by evolving concepts and theories to understand the problem of bride-burning. An attempt has been made in this chapter to analyse the problem of 'bride-burning' with a psychological and sociological backdrop.

(A) Components of Bride-burning

According to Oxford English Dictionary the word 'bride' means, "a woman at her marriage; a woman just about to be married or very recently married". The term is particularly applied on the day of marriage and during the 'honeymoon', but is frequently used from the proclamation of the banns, or other public announcement of the coming marriage. The word 'bride' had originally the force of 'bridal wedding', the primitive marriage being essentially the acquisition of a bride. (3)

The Law Commission of India (4) has identified certain factual components of a typical "bride-burning" (dowry-death). The following analysis of these components, elementary though it may appear, is basic to an understanding of this peculiar social phenomenon:


(i) Sex - The person who dies in a dowry-death is always a woman.

(ii) Age - She is mostly in her twenties.

(iii) Status - She is a married woman, totally dependent on her husband or his relatives. In many cases, she has already become a mother, or is about to become a mother.

(iv) Mode of death - In the vast majority of cases, the death occurs as a result of burns sustained by the woman in a fire-though some cases of injuries or poisoning have also been known.

(v) Condition - The woman is extremely unhappy, by reason of the demand for dowry. She has no other cause for unhappiness except that resulting from or connected with the demand for dowry. The demands are persistent, determined and oppressive.

(vi) Nature of the Act - Initially, a case of dowry death is presented (and even recorded) as one of accident or suicide. Homicide takes a back seat, and is brought into the front only with great reluctance, and only after great persuasion. This is not to say that the police or any other enforcement authority is necessarily to blame for the situation. For various reasons, the general stance adopted in law enforcement is not to rush to a conclusion of homicide, in the absence of
some concrete proof. In the cases of dowry-death, such concrete proof is not easily available.

(vii) Locale - The death mostly takes place within the house; the victim of the "accident" is always behind closed doors, when she dies.

(viii) Reporting - The death, where reported to the police by the husband or his relatives, is reported as caused by suicide, but where it is reported by the woman's own parents or relatives, the suspicion of homicide is put forth.

The features of dowry deaths mentioned above are significant enough. The first three factors mentioned above (age, sex and status of the victim) show that we are confronted here with the death of a person who is, or has become, too weak to resist. The will and power to resist has been largely eroded by the persistent demands. Inspite of these, there are several factual components of a dowry-death. In every case, the victim of the supposed accident is a woman, young and married, dependent on her husband or in-laws. Her desire to live is slowly eroded by oppressive conduct which emanates from no other source except the in-laws. Tension is built up to a high pitch. All these features would prima facie seem to justify the inference that such cases, occurring with regularity, frequency and monotonous uniformity, are the result of some human act and are not the consequence of an act of God.\(^{(5)}\)

5. Ibid.
Bride-burning (dowry-death) is a matter of great concern. It is a matter of shame that bride-burning has become a day to day phenomenon in our country. Brides are burnt to death or driven to commit suicide due to non-payment of dowry. The cause of bride-burning is mostly (with the exception of few cases) their incapacity to bring the expected or desired dowry in cash or kind or things demanded by their husbands and in-laws at the time of marriage or subsequently on other occasions.

The dowry-based marriages in contemporary Indian society are imposing a heavy burden on the bride's parents especially those who are not affluent. It is evident that married women are increasingly beaten, tortured, burnt to death and forced to commit suicide or murdered on account of dowry after the solemnisation of marriage(6).

(B) Wife-Beating in Indian Setting

The age old phenomenon of wife-beating has unique manifestation in India. It is clearly associated with social pattern of the society where family feuds, excessive alcoholism and frequently demands of subsequent dowry instalments are quite common. In most of the Indian homes, wife-beating is in fact one of most accepted crimes committed against women. It

exists mostly in slums and amongst working class. In fact, now it is gradually creeping amongst middle class and rich families as well.\(^{(7)}\)

The problem of wife-beating is not confined to one particular strata of society alone. It exists everywhere though in different forms. In upper middle class it is symbolic just as pushing, slapping or throughing of objects. In middle class families it can amount to any aggressive form such as attack with knife or gun, strike with an object, kicking or biting. In lower-class groups particularly families living in slums, women are subjected to beating frequently by their husbands\(^{(8)}\). According to a survey conducted by the Women Centre in Bombay, Women of all ages, from 16 to 65 are victims of wife-beating.\(^{(9)}\)

The Wife-beating seems to get camouflaged under the term 'dowry-deaths'. The deaths which occur within the home is the ultimate manifestation of the violence suffered by most Indian women in varying degrees.\(^{(10)}\)

---


The genesis of such deaths lies in the tension created by persistent demands, accompanied by beating and torture for dowry by the greedy husbands and in-laws. The greed for money, the aggressiveness increased by resistance to the demands, with which the young bride can be exploited and all combine to encourage the family members to take the bride’s life.

There are many cases in which the fathers of the brides have to incur heavy debts or even sell their property to meet the dowry demands of the eligible bridegrooms and their parents. In several cases, they continue to fulfil the demands of their daughter’s in-laws forgetting that a woman cannot buy peace, not to speak of affection, by meeting the monetary demands of her in-laws. The demand may lead to constant nagging and bullying which is even more damaging to the human spirit(11).

Thus, the institution of marriage may be regarded as the central feature of all forms of human society with which we are acquainted. It stands in an especially close relation to the family - using this term for the group consisting of parents and children. This social group rests absolutely on the institution of marriage. Marriage has two main functions: it is the

means adopted by human society for regulating the relations between the sexes; and it furnishes the mechanism by means of which the relation of a child to the community is determined. (12)

The vulnerability of the woman is highlighted in descriptions given about her by her parents and neighbours. She is 'passive', 'homely', 'dutiful', 'patient', 'quiet', sensible, 'nice', 'one who never emerged from the confines of the home' and 'one who took seriously the religious injunctions given at the time of marriage' according to which a wife should be dutiful and patient (13). The qualities expected of young brides are well captured in the words of the neighbours of the victim who stated:

'Teach your daughters patience. Girl must learn to bear every thing patiently. What is the use of such education when parents don't teach their daughters how to behave in their husband's house? Cursed be such education'. (14)

She is described by her parents-in-law and neighbours as 'mad' 'prone to violence', 'immoral',


'fashionable flirt' and 'adulterous'. In a puritanical society like India, character assassination on the part of the in-laws is a powerful technique in attempts at face-saving. (15)

Every society has rules governing the assumption of the conjugal roles of husband and wife; there are also discernible rights accruing to and obligations incumbent upon the individuals who assume these roles. Marriage in all societies thus brings about a change in the jural status of the parties to the contract. Marriage entails not only a change in the jural status of the individuals who enter the roles of husband and wife but also a change in the lawful status of specifiable consanguineal kinsmen of the individual partners. Only marriage creates or maintains affinal relationships between the kinsmen of individuals who claim the roles of husband and wife. (16)

In the new family, the innocent bride considers herself inferior and remains meek always available and ready to render any service to her in-laws. If inadvertently or out of desperation sometimes, the daughter-in-law defied the orders of her mother-in-law or any of her children, hell was let loose on her. She was pounced upon and humiliated by all the

15. Ibid.
members of the family. Out of "family loyalty" her helpless husband was but an uncomfortable spectator to all the baiting his young wife was subjected to by the sadistic team. Indeed, many times the boy (husband) was also provoked into joining the wolfpack. Even without any offence on her part, the complaint against insufficient dowry or presents was an unending taunt against the poor girl.\(^{(17)}\)

J.P. Atray is of the view that the institution of marriage has different meanings for different persons involved with it. For the parents of the boy it is a means of providing a respectable place to their son in the society and also a binding upon him to always conform to the social code of life. Without this binding he is likely to go astray. This is also the only socially accepted means of continuing their lineage through him up to posterity. For the parents of the girl, this is the best way out of the social necessity of giving her away and ensure for her a second home away from them wherein she will not only get the same social acceptance but also physical safety throughout her life as also the only accepted means for her of having her own offsprings who could further increase her sense of belonging and safety. For the society, marriage is an essential means of ensuring its own

\(^{(17)}\) Tikoo, P.N., op. cit. pp. 28-29.
existence, both moral as well as physical. (18)

For the girls, in societies like the Indian society, marriage has another important aspect as well. As per existing social traditions they have to permanently shift their residence to the home of their married partner leaving their parental home for good and for all purposes. For them, it is a new start at a new place. They not only move to a new place but also live amidst new people who are almost total strangers. In many cases the difference may be so much that she may have to unlearn all she had learnt till then in her parental house and start learning everything a fresh. The newly married woman is, obviously, at a great disadvantage in this initial phase of readjustment. Demand for dowry and the unfortunate results, consequences that follow when it is not fulfilled, are the most common of such extraneous forces which are not only threatening the whole fabric of marriage and family in India but are also posing a serious threat to the person, including their life, of the newly married women. (19)

The problem of bride-burning is not considered a private family matter. This problem has been largely recognised by the public, the

intellectual community and the criminal justice system as a crucial problem of criminal violence.

The increasing incidence of such deaths has also led to demands for change in the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and Indian Penal Code, 1860, which are frequently violated and variously interpreted. No effective amendments have yet been made in the Act despite the appointment of a Joint Parliamentary Committee in 1980.

The problem of violence against women occurs in all countries-rich or poor, with no regard to creed, colour, social status, wealth, size of family, urban or rural areas, age of the victim. The phenomenon of violence is a necessary concomitant of the patriarchal order.

In India the common violence against women are wife-beating, harassment, torture and bride-burning (dowry-deaths) for dowry demands or any other reason. The term dowry-death is an over simplification of a far more complex social phenomenon of power relationships within the family. And most of these women are beaten for a long time for dowry before they are murdered or driven to commit suicide and for every woman who dies in her home, there must be a million more who are beaten and harassed, economically deprived and mentally
humiliated. (20)

In Indian families domestic violence is not only inflicted by husband alone but as noted earlier the entire husband's family participates in it. Especially the 'mother-in-law' emerges as dominating figure who inflicts violence or harasses the daughter-in-law. This also leads to most popular myth that 'Women are Women's enemies' or women only are responsible for the harassment, which closes all the discussion of power relations. (21)

(C) Dowry Related Violence

The problem of family violence, especially violence towards women, is not a new one and evidence about the incidence can be found throughout historical records of any culture. (22) However, awareness about the extent and nature of these issues came to the forefront during 1970s in USA as a result of the National Family Violence surveys. In India, it was only during the early 1980s, in the wake of dowry and related problems, that crimes against women came to be recognised as an important social problem. (23)


Dowry related violence and bride-burning (dowry-death) are only peculiar to our country and largely in a culture-specific behaviour where, besides the husband, normally his kin also join together in persecuting the bride.\(^{(24)}\) The dowry and related customs provide a good excuse to husband and his kin for humiliating, insulting and even beating up of the woman.\(^{(25)}\) Impressionistic accounts documenting the coercion and the violence arising from this practice are in plenty,\(^{(26)}\) but very few studies have attempted to understand the problem and its impact on woman's life situation from a sociological perspective.\(^{(27)}\)

Persons participating in dowry related violence against the bride are found to be mostly husband, mother-in-law and sibs of husband\(^{(28)}\). According to Gautam and

---


Trivedi, in a majority of the cases the husband and the mother-in-law of the victim had played a leading role in planning and executing the bride.\(^{(29)}\) They observed that it appears from the data that the marital disharmony or dissatisfaction relating to dowry surfaced largely during the early years (2-5 years) of marriage\(^{(30)}\) However, it cannot be construed as specific to victims of dowry related violence, since studies in other cultures also indicated that eruption of violence in a marriage usually took place in the early years of marriage.\(^{(31)}\)

The alarming increase in the incidences of crime against women for reasons of dowry indicate that it is rather a manifestation of social process patterned both in its causation and distribution at structural level which cause distress to hundreds of women in similar life situations, than personal difficulties arising in marriage simply because of failure in mutual communication etc.\(^{(32)}\) Wright Mills called such phenomena as public issues involving crises in institutional arrangements or threats to important values cherished by the public. To understand such issues, one is required to took beyond them to trace linkages among a great variety of other

---


30. Ibid. p. 9.


32. Ibid. p. 293.
As a matter of fact, the crimes appear to be a product of socially structured expectations about dowry giving, the inferior status of women and consequently the low bargaining power of the women and her parents, the growing urban consumerism among lower and middle-class sections of the society and the lack of effective legal and social sanctions against such crimes. (34)

Dowry related violence in contemporary society can be understood as an issue arising out of the socio-cultural construction of the images and the role of women in the institution of marriage. By the same implication, to solve such problems, one cannot turn to private solutions but one has to adhere to social policies and institutional alternatives. (35)

When dowry demands are not met, it precipitates serious consequences for the young bride. In a survey revived from 'Manushi' from 1979 to 1985 by Ghadially and Kumar observed that domestic violence was reported in 78 per cent of the cases. In 31 percent of the case, the violence took a milder form such as shoving, kicking, quarreling, taunting, harassment, blackmailing and mental

35. Ibid. P. 294.
torture. The daughter-in-law was not permitted to speak to the neighbours, to attend social functions or to step out of the home. In almost half the cases (47 percent) violence was of the severe kind including beatings with belts, iron rods, starving, chaining and threats of murder.

In majority of cases (67 percent) the parents were aware of the violence their daughters were being subjected to. In more than half of these cases the daughter-in-law had been either thrown out of her husband's home or had returned to her natal home on her own. With the exception of one who filed a case for divorce on grounds of cruelty, in each case she returned to her in-law's home after working out some semblance of a compromise. Domestic violence accelerated upon her return to her husband's home and reached a climax resulting in either suicide or murder.

They, further, observed that little or no information in the personality dynamics of the groom is reported in the 36 cases. However, some inferences are possible. With the exception of a few, violence was present in the majority of the cases. It is possible that dowry seekers are nothing more than wife and daughter-in-law batterers and refusal or inability to bring dowry is simply an additional cause among many others for wife-

37. Ibid.
beating\(^{(38)}\).

✓Giriraj Shah observed that dowry deaths are caused due to ill-treatment, particularly at the hands of husband and in-laws. Subjugated and suffering women are to be found in every socio-economic strata. They are downtrodden and humiliated alike by the oppressors and the oppressed among men and their female accomplices. Very few cases are brought to the notice of the police. A microscopic minority of reports of bride-burning eventually find their way to the newspaper columns as true crime briefs which do not portray the physical and mental agony of women forced to live in pain and humiliation for the rest of their lives. Besides, there are hundreds who reconcile themselves to living without any hope in a state of suspended animation where suffering is the only reality\(^{(39)}\).

It is a strange situation in which women live in fear and terror, particularly when the woman is completely dependent on the person who physically assaults her.

For a crime to occur, two key elements are usually present. First the perpetrator must be sufficiently motivated to commit the crime and secondly the victim must be sufficiently vulnerable\(^{(40)}\) The most common

38. Ibid. P. 171


motives attributed to the groom and his family have been greed rampant consumerism, materialism and the need for instant upward mobility\(^{41}\).

It is pertinent to note here that in most cases neither the woman or her family reported the violence to the police or took legal action against the demand for dowry which is a punishable offence. Why do victims and their families fail to report dowry demands and violence that precedes death? It is possible that there is insufficient awareness of the Dowry Prohibition Act and its subsequent amendments. Moreover, the act itself deters families from reporting because it makes the givers of dowry offenders too. While there is no systematic information available as to why families fail to report demands\(^{42}\).

Since victims cannot reduce their fear by reporting the crime to the authorities, they may seek to reduce it by talking about their fears to family members, friends and colleagues.\(^{43}\). According to Berg and Johnson, a person simply avoids contact with any persons or organisations that might further victimize him/her. The victim and her family may feel and rightly so that the police and the judicial system may exact further cost in

---


43. Ibid. p. 170.
terms of time, money, energy and peace of mind in an already costly situation. (44)

The study conducted by Upreti and Upreti confirmed that in 50 percent cases the authority is in the hands of parents, that is the view of the parents reigned in decision making regarding one is marriage. Hence, women’s attitude towards marriage, and the parents influence over the women’s decision regarding marriage are the predominant psychological factors in the dowry system (45).

To a Indian woman the predominant psychological violence on the conflict would be the marriage itself. As most of the marriages are arranged by the parents and the dowry problems creep into a newly married couple’s life. Further, for the said reasons it is the husband’s family members who exercise more control over him. Hence, the husband’s family members have more access to influence the husband when there is a short fall in the money promises which is very prevalent nowadays by virtue of this, the psychological violence or conflict is caused (46).


Flavia observed that the women are physically and psychologically abused by their husbands and in-laws. They are blamed for getting beaten and then blamed for not ending their beatings. They are blamed for not seeking help, yet when they do so, they are advised to go home and stop their own inappropriate behaviour. Not only are they held responsible for their own beatings, they must also assume responsibility for their husband's health (47).

With the entire mass media oriented towards promoting the mindless consumerism, marriages are made and broken for such items as cars, scooters, TVs, refrigerators and washing machines ... (48). A boy who does not get my of these is ridiculed by his friends and colleagues and inability to bring these things may give rise to the bride being harassed, sent to her parent's place (49) or even burnt to death.

The social pressures thus built up, play an important role and parents of the girls yield to the demands made by the groom's family since they are aware that there lies behind the demands, the usually unspoken weapon, 'unspoken because it does not need to be spelt out, is harassment of the bride after marriage' (50).


50. Sengupta, R., "What Price a Bridegroom", Indian
As regards dowry related crimes in a marriage, the building up of tension on the bride probably would be gradual, the husband’s family making such persistent and determined demands for dowry on the girl that ultimately suicide becomes the last refuge for her\(^{(51)}\).

Investigations exploring dowry related harassment and deaths are not many\(^{(52)}\). At present journalistic articles,\(^{(53)}\) though they have methodological limitations, form an important source to assess the nature and extent of this phenomenon.

**Wife - Battering**

The problem of ‘wife-battering’ has only come into the limelight in the past few years, its progression toward public awareness paralleling the growth of the women’s movement. Historically, there has never been any public outcry against this brutality\(^{(54)}\). But now we are learning that the problem is far more pervasive and terrible than it was ever thought to be and that the myths which had previously rationalized why such violence occurred between men and women who supposedly loved each other are untrue.

---

53. Suri, S. and Ninan, S., "Not all are Dowry-Deaths", Indian Express, New Delhi, August, 16,17, 1983
Today, many men still believe their rights to rule their women are primary. This notion has been supported not only by religion but by the law, beginning with the century-old right of a husband to beat his wife with a stick "no thicker than his thumb" (55). In many cases, the girl is persuaded by her own parents to bear everything quietly, not to discuss her misery with others and encouraged to go back to a violent home.

A woman is trained right from her childhood that the man she is going to marry will be her 'pati parmeshwar' (God husband) and if she wishes to have salvation-her 'Gati' can only be through subservience to him and total abeyance, irrespective of whether he is good or bad. This determination of the unquestioned power structure in favour of husband is called the 'marriage gradient' by sociologists (56).

Wife-battering, though a universal phenomenon and existing through ages, has been shrouded in secrecy, guilt and shame on the part of the victims. It is only in the last decade with the emergence of second-phase feminism, that wife-beating has been recognised as, "a social problem of major proportions involving serious physical injury and sometimes death" (57). According to Straus, the study of family violence has shown that out

55. Ibid.


57. Ibid. P. 11.
of 47 million couples in the United States, in any one year approximately 1.8 million wives are beaten by their husbands. But according to Julian Kornblum, the data indicate the number to be 6 million and between 2000 to 4000 are beaten to death. But surprisingly enough even in the face of this violence most of these women make no effect to leave their spouse. In India, domestic violence also takes the form of dowry deaths. Bijlani says that there were 837 such deaths in 1985.

Prior research on family violence had tended to be clinically oriented and to focus on the pathology of the individuals involved primarily the intrapsychic conflicts of the man and the woman. Sociologists Straus, Steinmetz and Gelles found that at least 28 percent of all family members experience violence in their marriages. When the incidence rate reaches this level, we are dealing not with an problem of individual psychology but with a serious social disorder. A combination of psychological and sociological variables better explains the battered woman syndrome.

Social-psychological perspectives are especially well suited to the twin requirements of both locating a man's violence in the "normal" learning environment to which that man has been exposed and to differentiating assaultive from non-assaultive males on the basis of differences in the individual learning environment\(^{(62)}\).

The psychological characteristics of wife-batterers have been documented by Gondolf\(^{(63)}\). Some comparisons between wife-batterers and dowry seekers are made here. Like most wife-batterers, dowry seekers also come from all walks of life, want their wives to return when they walk out of the house. Wife batterers have low self-esteem, are over concerned about family's status and well being and try to control not only themselves but others. When their demands are not met dowry seekers also feel that the family's status and their sense of power and control are challenged. Sons-in-law in India not only enjoy special status but power in the family but they also act in ways that help them maintain it. And finally a wife-batterer's image is seriously threatened when there is a change or anticipation of extra responsibility and assertiveness on

---


the part of the wife (64).

(E) Psychological Theory of Learned Helplessness

A psychological rationale has been developed to explain why the battered woman becomes a victim in the first place and how the process of victimization is perpetuated to the point of psychological paralysis. This psychological rationale is in the social learning theory called "learned helplessness".

The underlying theoretical assumptions of the present study are based on social learning theory because its basic propositions provide the clearest explanation of the important questions raised herein. Social learning theory suggests reasons why some men use force and violence against their spouses, violent behaviour is unlikely to cease once initiated and rewarded. Some victims have great difficulty in either stopping the violence or terminating the relationships.

Walker is of the view that the learned helplessness theory has three basic components: information about what will happen; thinking or cognitive representation about what will happen (learning, expectation, belief, perception); and behaviour toward what does happen. It is the second or cognitive representation component where the faulty expectation that response and outcome are

64. Ghadially, Rehana and Kumar, Promod, op. cit. p.171.
independent occurs. This is the point at which cognitive, motivational and emotional disturbances originate. It is important to realize that the expectation may or may not be accurate. Thus, if the person does have control over response outcome variables but believes she/he does not, the person responds with the learned helplessness phenomenon. If such a person believes that she/he does have control over a response outcome contingency, even if she/he does not, the behaviour is not affected\(^{(65)}\).

Once we believe we cannot control what happens to us, it is difficult to believe we can ever influence it, even if later we experience a favourable outcome. This concept is important for understanding why battered women do not attempt to free themselves from a battering relationship. Once the women are operating from a belief of helplessness, the perception becomes reality and they become passive, submissive, helpless. They allow things that appear to them to be out of their control actually to get out of their control. When one listens to descriptions of battering incidents from battered women, it often seems as if these women were not actually as helpless as they perceived themselves to be. However, their behaviour was determined by their negative cognitive set, or their perceptions of what they could or could not do, not by what actually existed\(^{(66)}\).

---

65. Walker, Lenore E., op. cit, p.47.
Thus, in applying the learned helplessness concept to battered women, the process of how the battered woman becomes victimized grows clearer. Repeated batterings, like electrical shocks, diminish the woman's motivation to respond. She becomes passive. Secondly, her cognitive ability to perceive success is changed. She does not believe her response will result in a favourable outcome, whether or not it might. Next, having generalised her helplessness, the battered woman does not believe anything she does will alter any outcome, not just the specific situation that has occurred (67).

Walker has come to the conclusion that one result of learned helplessness can be depression and another result seems to be a change in the battered woman's perception of the consequences of violence. Living constantly with fear seems to produce an imperviousness to the seriousness of violence and death. There is unusually high incidence of guns, knives and other weaponry reported in the battering attacks. As we begin to see more battered women, we also realise the high probability that as the violence escalates, they will eventually be killed by their men (68).

A number of researchers of woman-battering utilize social learning theory to greater or lesser degrees. Social learning theory has been defined as:

68. Ibid. P. 52.
"An extension of differential association and reinforcement theories, holding that social sources, or people with whom one interacts, are the reinforces that result in the learning of non deviant and deviant behaviour. The type of behaviour that is most frequently and consistently reinforced by people will be the one most often exhibited. (69).

Social learning theory contributes to our understanding of spousal violence and helps to explain sex roles socialization and perceived appropriate and inappropriate gender roles. Social learning theory provides the most reasonable and testable explanation for violence between intimates such as spouses if we are willing to reject the innate aggression models of Lorenz and Freud's "instinctual inclination". (70).

One of the basic propositions of social learning theory is that reinforcement following behaviour increases the probability that the behaviour will be repeated and another is that intermittently reinforced behaviour is the most difficult to extinguish. (71).


71. Hilgard, Ernest and Gordon Bower, Theories of Learning, Des Moines, (Meredith, 1966).
Akers points out that two major parts of the learning process are reinforcement and punishment\(^{(72)}\). Emphasis is placed on reinforcement rather than punishment, because punishment has been shown to have relatively short-term effects on extinguishing behaviour, and immediate reinforcement outweighs effects of delayed punishment in controlling behaviour\(^{(73)}\).

In addition to reinforcement another important factor for learning is modelling\(^{(74)}\). In a variety of social psychological tests, children observing aggressive behaviour not only showed they remembered aggressive acts (although girls somewhat less than boys) but they closely imitated them, particularly when the acts were performed by a male adult model\(^{(75)}\).

Pagelow has observed, that social learning theory provides the best explanation of why battering is likely to continue. There are usually no or insufficient punishments received and there may be (and from

\begin{itemize}
\item[73.] Bandura, Albert, op. cit., p.13.
\end{itemize}
evidence gathered usually are) reinforcements(76).

One of the few things about which almost all researchers agree is that batterings escalate in frequency and intensity over time(77). Sometimes, the violence culminates in homicide. Accidental or purposeful, the results are the same: death of one or the other spouse(78).

The topic of woman-battering and the broader topic of domestic violence that had earlier been almost entirely ignored have recently been addressed from a number of perspectives. The first professionals to discuss this widespread social problem were from the fields of psychiatry, psychology and social work. Most of the writers saw the problem in terms of individual psychopathology, defining the victim, her abuser, or both, as neurotic or "mentally ill"(79).

According to this theory, violence is caused by the psychological means which affects the physiology of


human being. When there is a psychological violence, there is also physical injury.

The social psychologist Moyer defines violence as a form of human aggression that involves inflicting physical damage on persons or property. For psychologists, violence and aggression are twin terms but with certain differences between them (80). Allen uses the term aggression in both constructive and destructive senses, whereas violence is used only in destructive senses. Aggression can be sublimated in intrusive, assertive or domineering behaviour, such as humour, sports, scientific research etc. but violence cannot be sublimated. It can only be redirected or substituted. Social psychologists have dealt with inter-personal behavioural violence (81). They have tried to define violence in terms of human aggression which inflicts physical injury. In violence against women, cases of female infanticide, bride-burning (dowry-death), rape, women battering etc. may be included which involve physical injury.

It appears that besides cases which involve physical injury, cases of eve-teasing, harassment, torture, verbal abuse, threats, discriminations and deprivations in attaining goal responses of women are


all violences against women. Even if they do not involve physical injury, they lead to psychological injury and destruction of the personality of a woman.

Lakshmi in her paper entitled "Problem of Violence Against Women - A Multidisciplinary Conceptual Analysis" attempted to give an operational definition of violence which can include all cases of violence against women. According to her:

"Any aggressive behaviour of a person or persons hurting body or positive regard or both of another person or persons is human violence." (82)

Keeping in view the above definition certain misconceptions regarding violence against women may be removed.

First, it is generally believed that men alone are violent against women and it is a battle of sexes. But violence against women is both an inter-sex and intra-sex problem. The victimiser may be a male or a female or both. In bride-burning, the husband alone or with the in-laws male or female may be the victimiser. The mother herself discriminates between a male and a female child in her rearing practices. In many cases of domestic violence, females also play their roles in victimising women.

Second, violent behaviour is misconceived to be only on physical level. It is not so. Aggression may be expressed in physical torture like beating, burning, poisoning, killing, no doubt, but it is also expressed on verbal level in the form of eve-teasing, harassment, torture, verbal abusing, or threatening and also in its latent or indirect forms like all sorts of deprivations, discriminations and obstructions imposed upon women in achieving their goals. These latent forms of aggression psychologically hurt women.

The third misconception is that violence always results in physical injury only. Not at all, violent behaviour of the victimiser may result in physical or psychological injury or both to the victim. When a woman is harassed, tortured or burnt to death or pushed to commit suicide or abducted or raped, she is not only physically injured, but also psychologically hurt. Her positive regard is wounded.

Walker's theory of violence maintains that the interaction between husband and wife tends to follow a cyclical pattern attempting between (a) tension building phase, (b) the explosion or acute battering incident and (c) the clam loving respite\(^\text{83}\). Over the time, the first and second phase become more common and the third phase has declined.

\(^{83}\) Walker, Lenore E., op. cit., p. 46.
Wife beating has been considered an acceptable resolution to marital disagreements as long as the violence is confined to the home. While it seems that the marital situation may contribute to woman-battering and although Straus has commented that the, "marriage licence is a hitting licence" \(^{(84)}\). As Martin suggests, it may be that the shared living situation contributes more to interpersonal violence than do the legal documents. \(^{(85)}\)

Family sociologist Goode presents a theoretical argument for legitimate authority and the use of force, when necessary, to uphold family authority. He also shows that the social system is set up to enforce maintenance of authority that is usually vested in the adult male in the family. In his discussion of force (and the threat of force) and violence in the family, Goode deplores excessive exertion of power in the family but nevertheless sees the need for force, bolstered by social supports, to maintain the family structure. \(^{(86)}\)

A study on attitudes and use of violent behaviour by Stark and McEvoy made an important


\(^{85}\) Martin, D., op. cit., p. 18.

contribution to our understanding of the frequency of violence between spouses. Their sample showed that there was a high rate of approval of slapping one’s spouse, yet men were more likely to approve of this behaviour than women. One of the unexpected findings of their research was that middle-class people are more likely than people of the lower classes to approve and use violence. (87) Dobash and Dobash observed:

"To conceive of violence in the family as 'marital violence', 'family violence', or even 'spousal violence' ignores the obvious fact that several types of violence occur in the family ... Even this degree of delimitation may not be enough since violence may mean anything from a slap to severe beatings resulting in death. The point is, we must be more concrete about our conceptions of violence, partialing out various types and forms of violence, not assuming a necessary interrelatedness between these forms and types and seeking explanations and understanding of these concrete forms in the wider society, as well as within family interaction" (88).

87. Stark, Rodney and James, McEvoy, Middle-Class Violence 1970, quoted in Pagelow, Mildred Daley, op. cit. P. 23

Ashit Sheth, a psychiatrist from Bombay, says men who do not learn appropriate assertive behaviour in their early life turn out to grow up into wife beating adults. They give explosive vent to minor irritations which are initially put off and get built up over a period of time. This kind of violence, in his opinion, is not directed solely at the wife. When it is directed at the wife, it can be triggered off by the mother-in-law's instigation, or by things like jealousy, suspicion about the wife's fidelity, or just by an improperly kept home. Some time trifling matters ignite violent behaviour. There is one case of a Nagpur house-wife whose husband had chopped off all her hair in a fit of anger because she happened to have added a bit more salt in the food.

Another theory propounded is that a child who is himself abused in childhood by any adult member in the family, grows up to be an aggressive and violent man in his own personal relationship, most of all in his relationship with his wife. Then there is the "Othello Syndrome" which is actually a morbid jealousy about the wife that makes the husband 'read' imaginary meanings in her relationships with other men. This often leads to violence by the husband on the wife. This is pathological because such husbands are mentally

ill, anti-social and never learn from experience (90).

(F) Sociological Theories

A proliferation of sociological approaches to study the problem began developing in the past decade. There are not only vastly different research designs with assorted theoretical perspectives but also differing units of analysis and definitions. There seems to be two major divisions categorised by focus: one group studies the family as a whole in a violent culture framework where spouse abuse is only one of many forms of violence (91) and the other focus on the marital relationship within the patriarchal family (92).

Considering the fact that violence is a primary instinct of all creatures for survival in the hostile environment and its ubiquitous nature, social scientists like Coser (93), Gurr (94), Daniels (95), Hannah Arendt (96).

90. Ibid.


92. Dobash, R.E. and Dobash, R.P., op. cit.


Mackenzie\(^{(97)}\) etc. have considered some amount of violence as natural and functional and only when it becomes volatile the destructive aspects of violence are recognised. H. Arendt observed, that violence in itself is neither beastly nor irrational; violence in its occurrence and form is socially structured as a part of human communication-as an area of achievement, a danger signal and a catalyst, as a mechanism of serving social structure for conflict resolution then established authority fails to accommodate demands of new groups for hearing; the aim of conflict is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (and thus is not always pathological); some violence e.g., political, familial is a normal phenomenon and is a 'self-adjusting conflict' situation, contributing to the eventual maintenance of social equilibrium\(^{(98)}\).

In order to understand the roots of violence against women, Niroj Sinha,\(^{(99)}\) in a paper presented at Workshop at Patna Women's College, observed that the patriarchal social order responsible for discriminations and violence against women where they have no rights on land ownership, they are taken to be


'non-persons' and as 'sex-objects', the dowry system degenerated womanhood, scriptual writings are against women including 'Manu's Laws', socialization processes for girl's aim at turning them into "ideal wives" and nothing else. She remarked that men and the patriarchal system responsible for all the ills and firmly believed that unless men and their attitudes changed, violence and discriminations against women will continue to exist. She has made an attempt to define violence against women. According to her, violence may include specially in relation to females both the physical violence against women and exploitations of all kinds. But she does not feel satisfied with such a definition. She further observed that any group of persons may be identified as, "victims of violence" if they are shown the threat of use of force against them if they do not act as per the desires of the group of persons identified as oppressors. In short, it will not only include all kinds of physical violence against women but will broadly also include the contexts and particular situations under which such "threats of use of force" are indicated. No doubt, Niroj Sinha's attempt to define violence against women is a good one nevertheless, like all definitions has a few limitations i.e., it does not operationally define the contexts and situations under which use of force becomes violence.
Here a question remains unsolved that who decides which acts are legitimate and which are illegitimate. Niroj Sinha is probably correct then she indicates that "threat of use of force" against female forcing her unwillingly to do a thing in a particular situation that, she would not do, is an indicator of violence against her. This may be a sensitive definition if all the indicators of situational oppressions are clarified.

Sociologist Elise Boulding observed, that structural violence refers to the structural patterning of the family, cultural norms and values and also political and economic system of a particular society that determine who will injure and who will endure. Some individuals are deprived of society's benefits and are rendered more vulnerable to sufferings than others. Structural violence establishes physical violence. Women experience both structural and behavioural violence. In all societies, where patriarchal family structure prevails, women are protected by the patriarch from other men, but they become victims of men in their own families. In many societies women are not allowed to born even (foeticide) or female children are killed for fear of financial burden in their marriages. Pregnant and lactating women are ill fed and may face risk of death in child birth in many societies. Most pitiable conditions are of
single women like unmarried, widowed, deserted or divorced. Outside the patriarchal families these women are considered to be easily available and are more vulnerable to rape or economic exploitation. They are erotic, objects-cum-victims in contemporary societies. They will have to be conscious and take their own initiatives in redefining their role models and breaking the irrational traditions\(^{100}\).

Thus, sociologists have explained why aspect of violence and not what the term violence in itself means. No doubt many manifestations of violence against women such as foeticide, female infanticide, bride-burning, wife-battering, deprivations and discriminations in child rearing practices have their causes in the social structure and systems.

Elise Boulding clearly points out that social violence against women are primarily based on: (a) social or institutional structure of the patriarchal order perpetuating all kinds of discriminations and oppressions against women which result into (b) behavioural violence. In general, she reports that because women are 'easy' victims, they experience a great deal of direct behavioural violence in every society. Of the most common expressions of behavioural violence against themselves women as victims find involved in rape, wife beating and prostitution all over the world\(^{101}\).


101. Ibid.
Boulding under structural or institutional violence lists all kinds of discriminations and oppressions perpetuated against women in the socio-economic fields, in political participation as citizens with equal rights and at home. She thinks that the 'patriarchal ethics' brings in different kinds of socialization practices for the male and female in the family which ultimately lead to turn the male child into an 'oppressor' and the female child into a 'victim' when they become adults. At the root of such oppressions against women is the reality that women are taken as 'objects' of both discriminations and violence by men. Only of late, it is now being realized that women's fights against oppressions is to emphasize that they exist as "persons" and not as a "property" or "sex-objects" of men. To quote her: "No matter how victimized, human beings are subjects as well as objects, and help to maintain the very structures that victimize them. Thus women in their roles as wives and mothers gives vital reinforcement to military structures by socializing battle-ready sons and docile daughters. Since boys spend much of their pre-pubertal life with their mothers it is impossible to minimize the role of mothers in creating the aggressive, fight-happy, rape-ready male. By forcing male children to repress tears and expressions of emotions and pain, mothers directly contribute to the emotional

102. Ibid. p. 341.
infantilism of the adult male, who has grown without adequate techniques for working through his feelings..." (103)

Gelles, in order to make things clear, categorised family violence into three varieties e.g., (a) normal violence (routine, normative and necessary) (b) secondary violence (when the use of violence to resolve a conflict is contrary to family norms, it creates additional conflict over violence which produces further violence) and (c) volcanic violence (occurs when the offender has reached the end of life has run out of patience). It is illegitimate violence that is explained as arising out of the building of stress and frustration - the stress builds up to the point where the offender, "erupts" into violence (104).

Pagelow observed that the Straus' study has served an important purpose in showing conclusively that the home is frequently the arena of intra family violence. The Straus' investigation included all forms of intra family violence: child, parent, sibling, and spouse abuse. Woman-battering was only one form of several types of violence inquired about (105). Ferraro observes that when the topic of 'wife-beating' or battering arises, general recognition is given to

---

103. Ibid.,
104. Gelles, R.J., op. cit.
Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz as the leading sociological experts on this form of violence (106).

Ptacek is of the view that the wife beater is presented not as an abnormal individual, but as an unremarkable individual, who perhaps is sub assertive and suffers from low self-esteem. His "explosiveness" is seen as anomalous to his general behaviour. He is not sick. He has an "anger control problem" (107).

There has not been much research work on the family violence in India. Prof. Mahajan in his work has pointed out the causes of family violence given by both the spouses. He observed that according to husbands they indulged in physical violence because their wives were of bad temperament, shirkers of domestic work, did not look after the children properly, and fought with their in-laws. According to wives, they were beaten by their husbands because of their frustration due to poverty, suspicious nature, quarrelsome children, consumption of alcohol and backbiting by in-laws. Further, he argues that social dependency perspective would be more useful in


understanding the phenomenon of family violence \(^{108}\). To strengthen his view he refers the work of voluntary organisation, 'Saheli'. According to this group, violence by husbands against wives is not only because of the social dependence of wives rather as well due to the cultural approval of violence by husbands \(^{109}\).

According to Prof. Mahajan, the male respondents treated wife-beating as instrumental violence. They were of the opinion that their wives became frightened and started behaving according to their expectations. In other words, violence against wives was treated as a means to an end being obedience. The female respondents who were the victims of violence also endorsed the contention of their husbands by admitting that they behaved according to the wishes of their husbands after having received beatings. When the wives were asked, "why do you not leave the aggressive husband"? They submitted that they had no place to go even if they hated being humiliated. The study reveals that violence in the family occurs when neither the family nor other support systems meet the needs and demands of the individual, when a violent mode of expression is readily available and


when it is endorsed and rewarded.\(^{(110)}\) He concluded that wife battering is not confined to the lower segments of the society, though it is more frequent and severe among them. His study reveals that conjugal violence is prevalent in both scheduled caste and higher caste families. In the case of scheduled castes, husbands nearly 75% of them admitted that they beat their wives, though only 30% among them confided that they resorted to it often. Their wives endorsed the replies of their husbands with regard to the frequency only. In the case of higher castes, 22% of the husbands admitted having behaved violently with their wives, though most of them confided that it was not their regular behaviour. Only 13% of women from this section admitted that they were beaten by their husbands, but they confessed that such behaviour was almost routine on the part of their husbands. Frustration due to poverty, drinks, interference of in-laws precipitate conjugal violence which is directed against the wife because she is physically weak, economically dependent and socially enjoys a low-status.\(^{(111)}\)

Bhatti in his work, based on a large sample, observed that 67% respondents agreed that wife battering is an acquired behaviour, 73% said that it

\(^{(110)}\) Mahajan, Amarjit, op. cit., p. 7.

\(^{(111)}\) Ibid. p. 5.
is not socially approved, 80% said that the status of women has universally been low making her predicament helpless, 68% reported that wife battering is prevalent more among the patriarchal and traditional societies, 75% said that man takes it as his right to use obscene language, assault his wife, but the wife is not permitted these against her husband, 73% reported prevalence of wife-beating more among slum-dwellers and the socially depressed, 75% said that men beat their wives more often when they are drunk, 80% reported that a gambling husband tends to use force and violence to extract money or jewels from his wife for his stakes, 80% reported infidelity in wife as a cause for physical and mental torture, 75% agreed that men expect their wives to maintain a low profile of themselves, 75% maintained that men do not like their wives to outshine them in knowledge, intelligence and general prowess, 80% reported that a nagging wife provokes the husband and leads him to abuse his wife, 70% reported that frequent quarrels between wife and in-laws provoke the husband for physical assault, 68% reported that the women who are impulsive, stubborn, and short tempered get beaten up more frequently, 80% reported that wife has no authority to question the vice (drinking, gambling etc.) and 80% reported that the low income group has the

111. Ibid. p. 5.
high incidence of wife abuse.\(^{(112)}\)

Ashit Sheth says that wife-beating among the affluent classes sometimes results from the boredom and goallessness that is symptomatic of affluent lives. Police authorities are reluctant to involve themselves in cases of wife-beating because, traditionally, wife-beating is not considered a crime at all. Police indifference makes battered wives reluctant to seek their help.\(^{(113)}\) Commenting on this, Kanwaljit Deol, the then Deputy Commissioner of Police, Delhi, says that it could be true that many women feel hesitant to report to the police. More than often, the victim wife would rather keep mum or shield her husband than file a case against him.\(^{(114)}\)

It is generally observed that men who batter deny their actions but to a large extent due to some reasons, Indian women also deny that they are being battered. One of the prime reasons for denial is the woman's peculiar self image. It is believed that denial and silence over the issue is feminine. The values taught during socialization tend to force the women to remain silent for a long time. Folklore and mores emphasize the divinity in dying in the husband's home. A complaining


113. Chatterji, Shoma A., op. cit., p. 31

woman is regarded as deviant and often the maternal home is economically and socially too deprived to accept a battered girl back home. (115)

Though the emphasis is on the battering of low middle-class wives by alcoholic husbands, the truth is that the problem cuts across economic and social barriers. The upper strata women are not visible because they refrain from coming out in the open to own their problem. It is only since a few women from the upper middle-class came out in the open to break their stories to the press that the urban echelons from the upper middle-class became aware that economic and educational backgrounds really have little to do with the problem of wife-battering. (116)

Contrary to this opinion, drinking does not have much to do with wife-beating. Because most wife-beaters are found to be 'sober' while they are actually beating up their wives. Under a study of 50 battered wives from Bombay belonging to middle-class families, it was found that the range of injuries that the wives underwent was assorted in its variety - from deep cuts needing a few stitches to broken bones, miscarriages and nervous breakdowns. A Parsee lady who works as an officer in a nationalised bank, had her retina injured in one eye by

her husband, damaging it beyond remedy. (117)

Conclusion

However, as theories discussed above were developed in the West, they were primarily confined to the issues of violence between spouses or one actor using violence against other members of the family. In our country most familiar form of violence pertains to the dowry related violence and bride-burning.

It is, therefore, concluded that available psychological and sociological theoretical models can also explain dowry related violence and bride-burning in our society. Psychologists like Brenner (118) and Kohn (119) have ascertained psychological attributes like frustration, aggression and relative deprivation in the socialization process for violence. But the psychological attributes alone cannot explain the phenomenon as it also depicts a form of social behaviour. In this perspective, it appears that violence generates from the basic milieu of social structure and cultural values of society.

117. Ibid., p. 30.


The bride who entered the house as a 'bahu' is tortured physically and mentally by being abused and beaten. The violence in the practice of dowry and bride-burning is the fate of a bride in her new home. The greed of dowry and other reasons involved therein are the motives in which the young brides become the victims of domestic violence and fire by their husbands and in-laws.

Therefore, the bride-burning is an extreme form of wife-beating and domestic violence. The wife-beating and domestic violence reach to such an extent that the bride is burnt alive or killed in some other way or pushed to commit suicide. Sometimes, they are burnt alive or killed in order to give the colour of suicide. The actors involved in bride-burning are the members of the family. The husbands and in-laws are accused of maltreating, harassing and inflicting brutalities on young bride and systematically torturing her and finally get rid of the bride by setting her on fire or being compelled to commit suicide with a hope that the groom can remarry and may reap a bigger dowry.