Chapter 2
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Theoretical Constructions of Domestic Violence

The understanding of domestic violence requires an analysis of 'the structure and personal elements' that lead to its perpetuation. Thus a proper understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence calls for a clearly articulated theory. But since domestic violence is a narrowly focused social problem, it is difficult to find a single theory that will explain this type of violence and nothing else. Theorizing domestic violence has been made possible with the help of interdisciplinary approaches to the subject. Since domestic violence is a general problem across all societies, explanations regarding this form of violence are drawn from multiple disciplines like sociology, psychology and economics and from feminist discourses. The chapter looks into the theoretical explanations that are provided in the context of domestic violence with special focus on the theoretical groundings of the present study.

Although the perpetration of domestic violence against women has been committed since ages, research was not carried out in this particular field of inquiry with academic social science failing to recognise even the presence of the problem until the 1970's when it became visible as a serious social
problem. Historically field research in domestic violence has meant that advocates were the source of the subject pool for researchers (Edelson and Bible, 2001). Partnership between researchers and advocates took shape in terms of agencies, where students of domestic violence grappled with the problems of defining abuse and violence, sampling problems and measurement issues as they focused their efforts on measuring the incidence of family violence, the factors related to violence in the family and the development of causal models to explain family violence (Gelles R. J., 1980). Strauss, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) concluded that 'two decades of research on child abuse, wife beating and domestic violence are conclusive at one point- the causes of violence are multi dimensional (Strauss, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

At a micro level, explanations of domestic violence view violence in the family to be a consequence of a personality disorder or mental illness of the perpetrator. The psychiatric/ psychopathological theory was seen as the common theory which emerged out of research in child abuse and partner abuse and it hypothesised that violence was the result of some aberration in the character of the offender (Kurst-Swanger & Petcosky, 2003). As it was the first theory that was applied to studying abuse and violence in the family, abuse was seen as a psychiatric problem (Gelles, 1985). According to this theory, men who abused their wives were mentally ill and could be cured
through medication or psychiatric treatment (McCue, 2007). The offender was seen as having some type of psychopathology, personality trait or character disorder that caused that person to physically attack family members (Kurst-Swanger & Petcosky, 2003). Though initial studies characterised battered women as also mentally ill, it was proved to be wrong as the studies were conducted upon women in hospitals accompanied by partners who were calm and credible in contrast to their wives and who denied their partners account of the abuse. Thus in reality battered women were not mentally ill and many of those who were in institutionalised were misdiagnosed because of a failure to recognise or understand the physical or psychological effects of domestic violence.

Profiles of violent men suggest that they suffer from a low self-esteem, are jealous, have hostile or aggressive personality traits or suffer from depression. Low self esteem along with the self perceived failure to meet cultural expectations of achievement lies at the root of depression and drug abuse amongst men. Indeed, there is a case to suggest that personal pain, anxiety and depression underpin much male behaviour that appears to the outsider as needless self destruction. “Men’s violence, sex addiction, gambling, alcohol and drug abuse is a form of self medication, that is, an attempted defence against covert depression stemming from shame and toxic family relationships. For many men, life becomes a restless search for love and
overcoming of feelings of inadequacy rooted in the biochemical consequences of family experience” (Barker & Willis, 2003).

According to Margi Laird McCue (2007), “it seemed that this model was a simple explanation that brought some sense to a ‘hush-hush’ social problem while keeping the problem away from the general public. It was easy to say that family violence happened only in families with ‘sick individuals’. In this way, society could keep itself supposedly safe from the problem and not acknowledge its full scope not feel obligated to do anything about it” (McCue, 2007). She further notes that researchers could not categorise offenders into a ‘abuser profile’ and found that there was no consistency in labeling abusers as psychotic or neurotic, as some abusers were found to be no more psychotic than the general public. Kishwar says that domestic violence is often committed by men with low self-esteem who destroy a woman’s sense of self worth because they feel inadequate to cope with a woman who thinks and acts as a free human being with a mind of her own (Kishwar M. P.).

Individual theories of domestic violence also see alcoholism and drug dependencies to be major causes of wife abuse. “Domestic violence is usually attributed to the amount of alcohol consumed by the abuser” (Leonard & Sanchek, 1996). While explaining the relationship between domestic violence and alcohol abuse, John Jung says that “in a specific episode domestic
violence related to alcohol abuse may be due to lack of attention to cues that originally inhibit aggression while directing more attention to cues that instigate aggression”. But, Jung further notes that because of individual differences among alcoholic husbands, alcohol abuse may not completely explain domestic violence (Jung, 2000). The other explanations for this may be that violent and non violent alcoholics may have different drinking patterns; binge drinkers are more likely to be violent than steady drinkers (Murphy and O’Ferrell, 1994) or alcoholics who are prone to domestic violence might differ from non violent alcoholics in their beliefs and expectations about the relationship between drinking and violence or their temperamental dispositions towards aggression or hostility (Jung, 2000).

Physiological explanations of domestic violence view head injuries to be another cause of the phenomenon (Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2000). Leonor Walker’s (1979) psychological study describes the development of domestic violence from three aspects: 1) A woman’s motivation to change the conduct decreases as a consequence of repeated battering episodes; 2) She believes her possible response will be a failure; 3) Generalising her defenselessness, she believes she will not be able to give an end to the situation. In this way the woman gives up on making changes, learns to live under the fear and believes it is impossible to modify the conjugal situation (Walker, 1979).
At a macro level, Socio-Cultural explanations of domestic violence view the society and other external factors as responsible for the perpetration of domestic violence. According to Swanger and Petcosky, “this is the macro level of analysis which views social problems in terms of the larger societal structures and organisations that affect it. Family violence is understood through socially structured variables, including but not limited to cultural values of different social organisations, differing socio-economic status groups” (Kurst-Swanger & Petcosky, 2003). “The shift to cultural studies emerges from an acknowledgement of the significance of the terrain of culture as a field for the study of gender. Few would question the position that ‘culture’-the complex of language, religion, customs, morals, manners, art, aesthetics and everyday practices-crucially defines the position of women, the relation of the sexes, sexual practices, kinship structures, marriage and patriarchy in every society or suggest that it is not grounded in the material aspects of social life” (Rajan, 2008).

This model examines criminal violence in terms of socially structured inequality and social and cultural attitudes and norms regarding anti-social behaviour and inter-personal relations, (Ahuja 1992). Religion and centuries old traditional practices often become the cause of suffering of women. This is particularly so because these practices receive social sanction. Rinki Bhattacharya notes that “the putative sacredness of a traditional marriage,
rigid ideas of conjugality and patriarchal traditions of family structure takes precedence over concerns for women and children” (Bhattacharya, 2004). Bhattacharya further observes that ‘whenever male authority is threatened, the lives of women and children become redundant.’ This refers to the constructions of masculinity in the society. She further goes - from forced marriages to maintaining a strict dress code like covering the head or wearing a veil women and young girls have conformed to sex role stereotypes in their day to day existence (Bhattacharya, 2004). The uneven distribution of power within traditional African marriages, the impact of polygamy and the acceptance of male promiscuity, the power of the extended family over the married couple and the almost universal institution of bride price are the underlying causes of the widespread abuse of wives in African culture (Stewart, 2003). Studies in Bangladesh highlight the centrality of marriage as a setting where various influences interact, particularly gender inequality and poverty and lay the foundation for women’s vulnerability. ‘Norms and practices’ are also a potential risk factor in Bangladesh for the perpetration of domestic violence upon women (Bates, Schuler, Islam, & Islam, 2004). Social practices like dowry in India are responsible for the violence or threat of violence in many families across the country. It is not only that traditional marriage and its related cultures breed factors for domestic violence. Even when marriages are undergoing transition in the contemporary globalised world, domestic violence is not being lessened but is becoming all the more...
complicated (Kumari, 2005). According to Kumari, demands for dowry are also undergoing changes which become a burden on the girl’s family and the inability to meet the demands becomes the precipitating factor for the many dowry deaths Indian homes. In the Indian contexts, multiple forms of subjugation is faced by most women after marriage which is due to the cultural tradition of going to the groom’s household after marriage where she lives with her in-laws.

Socio-cultural theories of domestic violence view factors like poverty, education, unemployment and stress to be closely associated with the issue of domestic violence. Domestic violence also appears to be typical phenomenon of transitional societies that are undergoing a process of social change from traditional to urban cultures. Women’s growing independence and their participation in the social process at an equal footing with the men of the household may lead to violent outbreaks in the home especially since the men may find their dominant position as traditional breadwinners threatened owing to an equalization of income and wealth. Suad Joseph uses the phrase ‘religious patriarchy’ while speaking of cultural practices to refer to the privileging of males and elders in religious institutions and practices. “Such privileges often become the cause of domestic violence in the Arab world and acts as an obstacle to women’s development and construction of identities. ‘Religious identity is important in the Arab world. Children and women take
the religion of their fathers and husbands...Moreover marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance are governed by religious laws. The privileges of patriarchy include patrilineal custody over children and male privilege in inheritance, in divorce initiative and in passing on religious identity" (Joseph, 1996).

Social and cultural practices have contributed to the evolution of the Gender Roles theory to explain domestic violence (Wharton, 2005). The theoretical construct of gender roles provides an analytical framework from which to identify norms and beliefs within a specific cultural context that supports violence in the household (Kapadia-Kundu, Khale, Upadhaye, & Chavan, 2007). This theory describes situations where individuals are socialized to perform certain roles based on their gender leading to gender discriminations creeping up from a very early age. It starts with a process of gender socialization and the internalization and acceptance of these gender roles by the women. The process which starts with the birth of the child continues throughout adolescence, maturity and old age. As Joshi observes, “When a girl attains menarche, there is a tightening of controls on her movements, and her parents impose an entirely new set of rules that she must comply with in order to conform to the social norms. After reaching puberty, a girl is not any longer permitted to play outside the house and she cannot wear frocks unless it is the school uniform. Girls are strictly instructed not to talk to strangers and any
such instance is sternly rebuked if it comes to the attention of the parents” (Joshi, 2004). Such a process of socialization associated the attributes of courage, strength and brevity to young boys and those of simplicity, feminity, love and care to young girls. The acceptance of such gender roles leads young boys, when they grow up as adults, to exercise domination over their wives or female members of the family. Such social constructions of masculinity are closely linked to domestic assaults upon women. These social practices construct and maintain the notion that men and women are different and reinforce men’s dominance in both a real (e.g. greater economic resources) and a symbolic fashion (Anderson, 1997). The consequences of gender role socialisation on the position of women and their development are found to be more severe. As Aruna Goel says “at the heart of most of the situations affecting the social development prospects of women are strongly prevailing ideologies which differentiate between women and men to the disadvantage of women. A perception of women and men as different means that different roles, rights and values are attributed to women and men; while a perception of women as inferior means that anything perceived as women’s roles or work is regarded as inferior. So, there can be found in most countries a gender gap in employment, wages, right regimes, access to services and so on” (Goel, 2004).
A study on nutrition and gender conducted in three sites, two in India and one in Bangladesh, found the internalization of gender roles in the young married women. “Young married women are expected to seamlessly fit into several new gender roles as they enter their marital home. The concurrent and often competing roles include those of daughters-in-law, wife and mother. The related gender role expectations are divided into four domains-household chores, mobility, so-called modesty behaviours and sex”. Women had also accepted the norm they will be abused if they made a mistake however small it might be (Kapadia-Kundu, et.al, 2007). Recent studies of abusive behaviour (Toews, 2006) suggests that “males are socialized within a patriarchal culture that supports rigid masculine stereotypes such as male dominance, female submissiveness, suppression of feelings and emotions, aggressiveness, forcefulness and violence. A masculine gender role identity is formed by these stereotypes which emphasize (a) male dominance and superiority (b) use of power and control to establish and maintain one’s muscular identity and (c) the rejection of anything feminine including feelings and emotions”. Toews, further, asserts that gender role socialization theory evolves from a feminist perspective and it hypothesizes that “when a man’s power, control or gender identity is threatened, he may attempt to establish his masculinity through the use of psychological or physical abuse” (ibid, 2006). Such use of force or other means of exercising control amount to the perpetration of domestic violence against women. A similar observation was also made by Dobash and
Dobash when they said that “men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society- aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination—and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). In some societies the socialization of gender roles has reached a state that particular ‘colours’ and ‘symbols’ have come to be associated with the two sexes. The event of birth for boys into the blue world as described by Lipman-Blumen is symbolised by a blue blanket that marks the beginning of socialisation into a prescribed gender role. The blue world is characterised by ideas that encourage boys to directly confront the environment and to take the world by storm. Lipman-Blumen suggests that independent and direct action by way of force, power, competition and aggression are how boys should meet goals and accomplishments. On the other hand, Lipman-Blumen describes girls as being born into the ‘gentle pink world’ which is symbolised by a pink blanket. As soon as girls are born, they are treated as much more fragile than boys. For girls to achieve their prescribed gender role, feminity is the goal. The gentle pink world is characterised by girls being required to stay closer to home to assure that they will be kept away from physical danger (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). However stark realities of the present times, that reflect the dismal picture of women, both within and outside their homes, is far away from the ‘gentle pink world’ categorised by Blumen.(see also Amy Wharton on gender roles)
Social Learning Theory of violence also known as the Intergenerational Transmission of violence theory examines social influences as a causative factor of domestic violence. It is the most often studied explanations of partner violence. Through the intergenerational transmission process, children learn how to behave both by experiencing how others treat them and how their parents treat each other. Children whose mothers are abused are found to suffer more corporal punishment and verbal aggression from their parent than other children (Moore, Pepler, B Weinberg, Waddell, & Weiser, 1990). Social Learning theory provides the rationale for understanding how marital violence is transmitted inter-generationally. According to social learning theory children learn through direct behavioural conditioning and by imitating the behaviour they have observed or seen reinforced in others (Stith, Rosen, Middleton, Busch, Lundeberg, & Carlton, 2000). Thus, if one grows up witnessing violence or experiencing it, they are predisposed to become violent in their own intimate relationships (Widom, 2001). The major contention of the theory is that violence is learned in the family through the process of socialization. Individuals learn and imitate abusive behaviour from the family and the society and also the media. A person imitates violence by observing violence in the family of origin when they learn that it is an appropriate tactic of getting things done. Strauss and associates (1980) have also suggested that each generation learns to be violence by participating in a violent family. The social learning theory has been proved to be true in a number of studies.
concerning domestic violence and is widely accepted. The contention that children who are abused or who witness inter parental aggression grows up to be abusers have come to be seen as deterministic truism (Stauss & Geles, 1995). Violence does seem to beget violence and research seems to support the idea that it is transmitted from one generation to the next (Harris & Dersch, 2001). Research conducted by Bandura and Ross has given sufficient credibility to the social learning theory as an explanation of domestic violence. According to Bandura, parents who use aggression to solve problems have similar behaviour being imitated by their children for solving their own problems (Bandura, 1978). The social learning theory provides a more credible explanation for spouse abuse than child abuse. Kalmuss says that observing violence between one’s parents is more strongly related to future spouse abuse than being abused as a child (Kalmuss, 1984). Violence in the family of origin becomes a factor for future violence as children who observe such violence are more likely to develop some behavioural and emotional problems. Analyzing the cause of such behaviour Rosenbaum and O’Leary has said that this happens because (a) they are constantly exposed to violent role models (b) they are continuously exposed to marital problems that result from spousal abuse (c) they have to cope with fear not only for their mother’s safety but also their own safety and (d) one or both of their parents may be abusing them as well (Rosenbaum & Leary, 1981). Though widely used as an explanation for domestic violence, resiliency observed in some cases of
witnessing parents’ abusive behaviour has led to the criticism of this theory. Such resiliency may be promoted by factors such as activity level of the individual, self understanding and positive self esteem. Resilient individuals have control over their lives and have the power to overcome stressful events by perceiving the future in a different way. In the face of violent behaviour in the family, outside support system helps in making an individual or child resilient. Such factors may be the warmth and nurture given by a relative, other family members, teachers or peers which help to offset the love not provided by their parents (Harris & Dersch, 2001).

Economic explanations for the incidence of domestic violence on women are primarily provided by Goode (1971) in his Resource theory. This was in fact the first theoretical approach applied explicitly to family violence. Goode explains that family is a power system in which four sets of resources are in operation to maintain stability: economic variables, prestige or respect, love and force or threat of force. As a child, the batterer, torturer, murderer or humiliator learns to use force or threat of force if he feels there is an imbalance in family transactions (Ahuja, 2005). The major contention of the resource theory is that families rest on the use or threat of use of force. The amount of force that an individual exercises will depend on the social, personal and economic resources at his disposal. But again, the fewer resources a person has, the more he/she will actually use force in an open
manner. Thus a husband, who wants to be the dominant person in the family but has little education, has a job low in prestige and income and lacks interpersonal skill may choose to use violence in order to maintain the dominant position (Mckinrey & Price(ed.), 2005). Scholars have found a higher rate of violence among couples in which a woman’s occupational status was higher than her husband’s status and a protective effect against violence when a man’s resources were much higher than those of his wife (Anderson, 1997). A close connection is observed between the occurrence of domestic violence and possession of property. Women’s access to immovable property such as housing and land is important not only for the well recognized reason of enhancing women’s livelihood options and overall empowerment but also notably for reducing their risk of marital violence (Aggarwal & Panda, 2003). The non possession of property is one of the reasons why women continue to stay in a violent relationship because of the material disadvantages they would encounter were they to leave the violence household and support themselves. Thus wife’s share of economic resources is related to the likelihood of abuse. The link between violence and lack of economic resources and dependence is circular. On the one hand, the threat and fear of violence keeps women from seeking employment, or, at best, compels them to accept low-paid, home-based exploitative labour. And on the other, without economic independence, women have no power to escape from an abusive relationship (Khan, 2000).
Domestic violence is said to be an instrument for the redistribution of resources. Economically motivated violence in the Indian subcontinent with widespread use of wife abuse is used as a means of extracting transfer of resources from the wife’s parents which in extreme cases result in dowry murders where wives are burned alive by their husband’s families (Bloch & Rao, 2002).

**Feminist Theory**

Historically feminists and feminist movements worldwide have been consistent in their cry against patriarchal domination and the consequent women oppression. “the feminist model is grounded in the principle that intimate partner violence is the result of male oppression of women within a patriarchal system in which men are the primary perpetrators of violence and women the primary victims” (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Though crimes of domestic violence have occurred throughout human history, domestic violence came to be seen as a social problem only with the growth of the feminist movement (Mooney, Gender, Violence and the Social Order, 2000). Lori Heise thus, says that, in the context of a discourse of violence that had traditionally been very slow to acknowledge the significance of gender inequalities and power differentials in the etiology of violence, feminist
researchers have been understandably reluctant to endorse any theory that is not grounded in a thorough understanding of the way that male privilege operates to perpetuate gender-based abuse (Heise, 1998). During the first wave of feminism, domestic violence and wife-beating emerged as a concern of the women's suffrage movement in the mid nineteenth century. In the United States many nineteenth century feminists campaigned against wife beating through the temperance movement (Mooney, Gender, Violence and the Social Order, 2000). 19th century feminists also questioned the image of the battered women as 'nagging' and provocative which was frequently presented in mitigation to the courts, their main concern being to emphasize the inadequacy of the law in its response to cases of wife beating (Mooney, Gender, Violence and the Social Order, 2000). However liberal feminism does not question the social structure as a factor that leads to the oppression of women. Francis Power Cobbe held that if wives were granted the same political and legal rights as their husbands it would result in a change in social attitude and the transformation of marriage from a relationship of dominance and subordination into one of equality and intimate friendship (Cobbe, 1878). This view might be due to the fact that she was concerned with the security of wives who reported violence cases against their husbands who had killed their wives after serving prison sentences for assaulting them. Thus according to Cobbe "it is not expedient on the women's behalf that they should be so punished, since after they had undergone such chastisement, however well
merited, the ruffians would inevitably return more brutalized and infuriated than ever; and again have their wives at their mercy”. Cobbe’s answer to the dilemma over what to do to assist women was to give the wife the power of separating herself and her children from her tyrant (Cobbe, 1878). 19th century feminists gave importance to formal equality with the hope that “if the husband saw their wives being granted equality by the state they would be less inclined to regard them as their property and this would reduce women’s susceptibility to abuse and also encourage women’s resistance” (Mooney, Gender, Violence and the Social Order, 2000). But in the later years with the realisation of the fact that more specific structural changes were required to end the subjugation of women and free them from the clutches of patriarchy it was argued that “it is not enough for women to possess the same formal, legal rights as men: they also needed actual economic power if their social status was to improve. However, very few 19th century feminists challenged the traditional division of labour between the sexes. They accepted that housekeeping and child rearing were naturally and exclusively women’s work and, in doing so, they consigned the vast majority of married women to continued financial dependence on their husbands. Such women could not compete with men in the outside world on equal terms, particularly if they had children” (Doggett, 1992). It was radical feminism which sounded a vociferous cry against the oppression of women within the home and attributed it to patriarchy and its structures focusing on power imbalances that
perpetuate violence against women in the family. The radical feminists’ concern with patriarchy as the root cause of women’s oppression expresses their philosophy that the ‘personal is the political’, meaning that women are dominated not only in the public sphere but also in their private lives. The common thread of patriarchy underscores all political, social and economic structures and found in every historical and contemporary society (Millet, 1970).

The concept of patriarchy which literally means ‘rule by the father’ and can refer narrowly to the supremacy of the husband-father within the family and therefore to the subordination of his wife and his children, is used to describe the power relationship between men and women (Heywood, 2003) which leads to the perpetration of domestic violence. It was first evoked as a theoretical concept to explain violence against women with the pioneering work of Susan Brownmiller in 1975. Patriarchy is a gender system in which men dominate women and what is considered as masculine is more highly valued than what is considered feminine (Chesney-Lind, 2006). This system of domination manifests itself not only in the family but has multiple structures of operation. Thus Renzetti and Curran while defining patriarchy say that “it is a system of social stratification which means that it uses a wide array of social control policies and practices to ratify male power and to keep girls and women subordinate to men (cited in Chesney Lind, 2006).
Thus feminist explanations of domestic violence focus on the concept of patriarchy as the central socializing principle that leads to the victimisation of women. According to Dobash and Dobash, gender inequality or patriarchy is both ideological and structural. It is ideological because the beliefs, norms are the motivating factor behind domestic violence in the family is the man’s desire to exercise general control over ‘his’ women (Johnson, 1995) and this necessitates the use of ‘multiple control tactics’ (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). In a later work Dobash and Dobash (1998), while identifying gender as a system that maintains the structure of authority leading to male domination and female oppression, found that men use violence to punish female partners who fail to meet their unspoken physical, sexual or emotional needs. It is through violence that batterers attempt to construct masculine identities which in turn sustain notions of natural differences between women and men. In the construction of masculine identities “gender proves to be performative- that is constituting the identity it is purported to be” Moreover, according to Butler, the performance of gender makes male power and privilege appear natural and normal rather than socially produced and structured. In the opinion of Anderson and Umberson, in the construction of masculinities, “men deny responsibility for their violence and constructed their violence as a rational response to extreme provocation, a loss of control or a minor incident that was blown out of proportion”.

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Feminist explanations of violence views social relations in terms of gender relations. According to Dobash and Dobash, the feminist paradigm views domestic violence “as a culturally supported male enterprise” and that female violence is always defensive and reactive (Dobash R. P., Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). “Violence is inextricably linked to all acts of violence in this society that occur between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated. While male supremacy encourages the use of abusive force to maintain male domination of women, it is the western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated. It is this belief system that is the foundation on which sexist ideology and other ideologies of group oppression are based; they can be eliminated only when this foundation is eliminated” (Hooks, 2000).

According to Gwen Hunicut, “the concept of patriarchy is especially useful for theory building as it evokes images of gender hierarchies, dominance and power arrangements” (Hunicut, 2009). Hunicut further argues the case for establishing patriarchy as the dominant discourse in explaining violence against women on the basis of five arguments

- A theory of violence against women has to account for varieties in patriarchal structures—that is, a range of different patriarchal manifestations among cultures and clans.
Men’s violence toward women is a product of social structural conditions. To understand male behaviour, it is necessary to reveal how men are situated in their own scheme of domination, especially relative to other males.

A theory of patriarchy must contend with the potential divergence of structure and ideology. Varieties of patriarchal ideology may exist apart from structural conditions. Patriarchal ideology may endure despite structural gains in gender equality.

The concept of patriarchy must be developed together with other forms of hierarchy and domination in which it is inextricably embedded.

There are labyrinths of power dynamics in patriarchal systems. Violence against women cannot be understood as a simple formula of “oppressor and oppressed.” Patriarchal systems must be envisioned as “terrains of power” in which both men and women wield varying types and amounts of power (Hunnicut, 2009).

Although the inferior status of women has been the focal point of all brands of feminism, be it, liberal, socialist or radical, ‘it was radical feminism which has taken male violence as its central motif and which has made the most significant innovations in the field’ (Mooney, 2000). For many feminists, especially radical feminists, a key concept for exploring the principles and structure, which underpin women’s subordination, is that of patriarchy. It is
worth noting that patriarchy, which literally means ‘rule by the father’, is usually taken to refer to the ‘systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination’.

Focusing primarily on patriarchy, feminists opine that these imbalances exist in patriarchal societies where structural factors prevent equal participation of women in the social, economic and political systems. It must be noted that liberal feminism in its emphasis on the public sphere has historically overlooked the inequalities that exists between men and women in the private sphere. In this context Mary Wollstonecraft claimed that the ‘distinction of sex’ would become unimportant in political and social life if women gained access to education and were regarded as rational creatures in their own right. In the Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) she argued that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men on the ground that they are human beings (Wollstonecraft, 2004).

It was radical feminism that developed towards the end of the 1960’s that offered the most detailed analysis of the function of male violence in terms of women’s oppression. Criticizing the long held conviction that ‘biology is destiny’ radical feminists believe that patriarchy is the root cause of women’s oppression and important to this is the idea that the ‘personal is political’. Shulamith Firestone saw the roots of patriarchy to be rooted in biology
(Firestone, 1972). Gloria Steinem has asserted that "The patriarchy requires violence or the subliminal threat of violence in order to maintain itself...The most dangerous situation for a woman is not an unknown man in the street, or even the enemy in wartime, but a husband or lover in the isolation of their own home." Men who abuse their mates act violently not because they as individuals can't control their impulses, and not because they are thugs, or drunks, or particularly troubled people, but because such behaviour is inherent in a patriarchy. Domestic abuse, in feminist eyes, is an essential element of the vast male conspiracy to suppress and subordinate women. To keep men from abusing women they must be taught to see the errors of the patriarchy and to renounce them. According to Jayne Mooney, for the majority of radical feminists patriarchal domination is considered to involve the male appropriation of women's sexuality and bodies and acts of violence. Radical feminists are extremely critical of the division of society into public and private spheres (Mooney, 2000).

Recent studies of domestic violence emphasize that the resiliency of patriarchy rests on ideologies that distinguish responsible exercise of power from abuse (Chambers, 1999). According to Chambers "Recent analyses of domestic violence provide a nuanced model of patriarchy, which encompasses competing visions of marriage. Husbands and wives recognized their relationship as unequal, but while men stressed their absolute authority,
women tried to make patriarchal rights contingent upon responsible conduct. Within such an arrangement, men had the right to punish their wives for misconduct, but women could appeal to the authorities if their husbands became excessively brutal. Men recognized a responsibility to support their families, but emphasized their irrevocable right to control the people and property within their households” (Chambers, 1999).

Overcoming the unidirectional explanations of domestic violence given by the academic disciplines, an all inclusive integrated ecological model to explain violence against women and domestic violence is provided by Lori L Heise. Factors explaining gender abuse operate at multiple levels (Miller, 1994) and are not the result of one single cause. Feminist theorists do not accept this and accept that gender violence is the result of only of patriarchy and its structures. The Ecological model sees violence against women as a multi-faceted phenomenon grounded in interplay among personal, situational and socio cultural factors. Based on the notion of embedded levels of casualty, the framework consists of four levels of analysis, visualized as four concentric circles. The innermost circle represents the personal history factors like witnessing marital violence as a child, being abused oneself as a child and having an absent or rejecting father. The next circle, the micro system, is used to represent the immediate context in which the abuse takes place and includes male domination in the family, male control of wealth in the family, use of
alcohol and marital/verbal conflict. The third level called the exo-system consists of the institutions and social structures both formal and informal like socio-economic status and unemployment, isolation of women and family and delinquent peer associations. The outermost circle, the macro system, represents the general views and attitudes of the culture at large. These include male entitlement or ownership of women, masculinity linked to aggression and dominance, rigid gender roles, acceptance of interpersonal violence and acceptance of physical chastisement (Heise, 1998).

Both India at large and Assam too within it are patriarchal societies as mentioned in historical accounts and socio-cultural literature. Domestic violence is a serious problem facing these societies and is seen to be the consequence of patriarchal control of the husband over their wives and also some socio-cultural factors. The present study will examine the problem of domestic violence against women based on the feminist theory, the socio-cultural explanations.
References:


