According to Martin Heidegger, the human being is *deinotaton*, the strangest of all. A human being remains exposed to violence, but she or he is also the most violent being who “gathers power and brings it to manifestness.” Heidegger emphasizes that such violence exceeds the common usage of the word which implies “mere arbitrary brutality” (150). He describes this kind of violence as terrible in the sense of an “overpowering power” which compels true fear but also inspires an overwhelming sense of awe (149). In fact, violence, in Heidegger’s view, is the essence of human existence. In other words, violence is the fundamental trait of the human’s ‘being.’

Heidegger’s study of the metaphysics of human existence suggests that violence is inevitably linked to every aspect of the human being’s existence. Moreover, its parameters are too vast to be exhausted by a mere definition. Violence is, indeed, a multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires extensive analysis. As we have seen, thinkers have paid serious attention to its diverse forms. But they have failed to take into account the role played by every a person’s gender, race, religion and class in her or his experience of violence. In fact, Western theories of violence have been largely ineffectual in the articulation of violence that targets women. The works of thinkers like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Walter Benjamin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, Frantz Fanon, Hannah Arendt, Louis Althusser, René Girard, Michel Foucault, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek shed light on the violence that works on social, political, economic, religious, artistic, and existential levels. However,
they do not take into account the complexities that gender introduces into an individual’s experience of violence. Violence, to all intents and purposes, is implicitly viewed by these theorists as belonging to the male domain. They analyze violence from a viewpoint that sees man as both the perpetrator and the victim of violence, and so they overlook the implications of violence for women. Or these thinkers tend to neutralize a person’s gender and conveniently overlook the fact that violence takes different shapes in its intersection with different sexual categories.

Against the absence of a concrete analysis of gender-based violence, Western feminism affords a cultivated sensibility towards the victimization of woman. Feminism includes an amalgamation of the socio-political movements that address issues, such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, equal pay, sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, and sexual violence. In addition, it is a critical discourse that explores and critiques the concepts of objectification, stereotyping, and dehumanization of women. However, Western feminists have wrongly assumed that violence against women is purely gender-specific or merely patriarchal. The fact is that patriarchy has never existed in a vacuum; it always intersects with other factors such as race, class, caste and religion, and generates multi-dimensional violence. Third-World feminism is, to some extent, a response to Western feminism’s Eurocentrism. It is founded on trust in collective struggles for different identities. Postcolonial feminism dwells on issues like slavery, oppression, resistance, representation, race, caste, gender, etc. Moreover, Indian feminists seek ‘indigenous’ roots of a woman’s history for it is shaped by colonialism as well as the various firmly established indigenous cultural traditions. Yet they
have not been able to comprehensively explore and properly articulate the experience of violence fraught with complexities associated with Indian women’s specific experiences of class, caste, and religion. Suffice it to say there is a visible gap between feminist theoretical insights and feminist movements’ focus on women’s experience of multiple forms of physical violence. Fiction bridges the gap that underlies feminist theory and movements of feminism.

Derrida views literature as a historical institution both “brought into being and governed” by laws (“Before the Law” 181). However, the texts that come under the literary aegis possess the specific quality of being able to stage, confront and suspend all the presuppositions upon which any kind of social institution rests. Derrida also points out that the uniqueness of a literary work lies in its ability to be put into question as “stable properties and concepts” (181). It exposes the inadequacies of theory as well as provides new theoretical insights.

In other words, literature is the best source to examine the multi-dimensional forms of violence that women undergo. Therefore, the present research project undertakes a study of the complexities of Indian women’s experience of violence. We have tried to demonstrate Indian fiction provides ample testimony to this experience. However, no one has attempted a comprehensive and detailed analysis of violence against women as it appears in Indian fiction. The present study examines the representation of women in selected Indian literary texts written in English as well as those translated into English. The study is carried out, in part, by relating the theories of violence with feminist theory. The theorization of violence is also brought to bear on
women’s representations in the selected texts to articulate various subtle and overt instances of violence.

A study of Premchand’s *Godan* reveals the way in which its characters’ distinct ideological positions help in the establishment of various prejudices which, further, strengthen the binaries of caste and class. It traces the violence that underlies the social laws, rules, and norms which are constructed according to the ideological standpoint of the dominant caste and class. A significant fact comes to the fore in the analysis of *Godan* that the position of women remains marginal on both sides of the socio-economic spectrum. *Godan* throws light on the “symbolic violence” experienced by women in both caste and class-driven society. Pierre Bordieu considers symbolic violence to be the most refined, gentle, [freely] chosen and socially recognized and approved form of violence that takes place in the event of “negative sanctioning” of overt, physical and economic domination (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 192). It includes the violence which is a product of virtues that define a code of honour, such as obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety, etc. In *Godan*, the lower caste people are the perpetual victims of symbolic violence. Here women become the embodiment of symbolic capital – honour and social prestige. Hori and Dhania, for instance, accrue a large amount of debt to marry off their daughter Sona. Laden with fine clothes and jewels, Sona acquires the quintessence of symbolic capital. Hori provides shelter to the unmarried and pregnant Jhunia. The villagers decree Jhunia to be a fallen woman. Hori’s sympathy towards Jhunia is, in their view, a transgression of the social code of honour and piety. Thus Hori is forced to give away his grains, pay a heavy fine, and return the
“gift” of the cow to Jhunia’s father, Bhola. Hori’s second daughter Rupa is forced to marry a man close to her father’s age as her family does not have any money to spend on her dowry – a form of “social capital” that is necessary for procuring a suitable bridegroom. Rupa is thus another victim of symbolic violence.

Furthermore, Premchand’s description of the relationships of various couples shows the feeling of love to be a normalized form of violence. A rich businessmen’s wife Govindi’s lofty ideals of love encourage her to lead a violence-filled existence. Govindi realizes that Mr. Khanna’s blatant cheating acts on her have made her fall from grace in public. Yet her love for him has turned her into his slave, made her turn a blind eye to his indifference towards their children, and submit unflinchingly to her miserable married life (Godan 175). Govindi’s acceptance of her victimization can also be attributed to her warped perspective that being oppressed is far better than being a tyrant (278). Love, according to Govindi, entails foregoing one’s own happiness and making others happy. Govindi is a victim of patriarchal ideology’s “misrecognition.” She is deceived into believing that she is making conscious, moral and free decisions. Her pride in her status as a victim ultimately leaves her destitute, gravely ill, and abandoned by her husband on her death-bed.

Malti and Mehta’s relationship befits Sartre’s description of the concept of love as the conflict between two gazes. Malti is a class-conscious, ambitious doctor. Dr. Mehta is a self-proclaimed idealist who considers all ambitious and independent women to be morally bankrupt and basically a curse on womankind (146). On the other hand, he considers women like Govindi to be the epitome of femininity. Over the course of time, Malti falls in love with Mr.
Mehta despite his constant insults to her character. She is shown to successfully incorporate Mr. Mehta’s perspective that Indian women must uphold the tradition of “sacrifice and penance” (147). In fact, it becomes essential for her to transform herself based on the values outlined by Mehta in order to be accepted by him.

Saadat Hassan Manto’s Partition narratives focus on the role played by ideological demystification in communal violence. Slavoj Žižek interprets ideology as being paradoxical for it maintains its misrecognizing power over subjects by exposing its own operations. He terms it as the fetishistic logic of disavowal where the individuals realize their actions as meaningless; yet they continues to indulge in them (The Plague of Fantasies 137). In his stories on communal riots, Manto pinpoints the desire to indulge in meaningless violence that propels his protagonists to commit heinous acts of violence against others. Furthermore, Manto’s representation of women provides an insight into the varied forms of violence. According to Hélène Cixous’s idea of literature as “stigmatexts,” the scars inscribed on the female body as represented in Manto’s select narratives can also be analyzed as bearing the stigma of patriarchy (Stigmata: Escaping Texts xvi).

Manto’s “Colder Than Ice” shows survival of patriarchy to be contingent on the torture of another being. Here the protagonist Ishwar Singh is a patriarchal subject whose previous attempt to possess (rape) the defenseless other has been thwarted because the victim turned out to be already dead, thereby escaping her subjection to violence. He views his failed attempt at violation of a living girl as a major threat to his stance as the aggressor. Hence he attempts to transfer his violent intentions towards his
mistress, Kalwant Kaur. Ishwar Singh thus represents the phallocentric self that depends on violence to assert subjectivity. The bodies of the two women, the corpse and Kalwant Kaur, become the agents through which Ishwar Singh supplements his subjectivity. However, Ishwar Singh’s subjectivity disintegrates as soon as he encounters resistance from his first victim, the frozen body of the dead girl. It shows that the conventional notion of the phallus as the siege of aggressive, penetrative, essentially masculine, potency/power is, in fact, contingent upon the terror that is evoked in the gaze of the other. In other words, the existence of the phallocentric male relies on inflicting violence on the body of the other, or woman, to maintain his illusion of power.

Manto’s “The Woman in the Red Raincoat” unravels the violence that underlies the asymmetrical relationship between the phallic subject and the other. Here Manto narrates the interaction between the two protagonists: the ideologically demystified, patriarchal subject ‘S’, and his captive, the object of his desire, the quintessential other, Miss ‘M’. The male protagonist’s seduction of his hysterical and terrified captive through kind words shows discourse to be a more violent, effective exercise in control than the use of brute physical force. In “Colder Than Ice,” Ishwar Singh inflicts violence on two women because his phallic power survives on the presence of terror in the gaze of the other. ‘S’ in “The Woman in the Red Raincoat,” on the other hand, transforms into a full phallic presence only through the loving, compliant and reverential attitude of Miss ‘M’. In short, ‘S’ is assigned with phallic power only after he obtains acceptance and approval by Miss ‘M’. For ‘S’, however, the purpose of possessing the power is primarily to reduce Miss ‘M’ to an
object of desire. As soon as ‘S’ realizes that ‘M’ is an old woman he quickly aborts his plan to have sexual intercourse with her. Her body thus becomes a mere object – studied, measured, judged by the violent, patriarchal gaze of ‘S’, and quickly relegated to the realm of abjection. Both stories highlight the violence inherent in the relationship between the patriarchal subject and the other. Patriarchy thus requires the presence of violence to maintain constant asymmetry in a relationship.

The character of Babaji in Manto’s “The Price of Freedom” represents the power and violence that characterize the panoptic aspect of patriarchy. Patriarchy operates on the principle of the panopticon, which Michel Foucault considers to be a disciplinary mechanism which induces a state of conscious and permanent visibility in the subject, thereby assuring the automatic functioning of power. In a panopticon, control over the subject is achieved by the means of subtle strategies of normalization carried out through the medium of constant surveillance and discourse. Similarly, patriarchy functions through social institutions and its various representatives who isolate, observe, instruct, and control woman’s every move. For instance, Babaji is a pseudo-revolutionary who devises new tactics to maintain control over a legion of followers. Babaji’s various ashrams are, in fact, more like reformatories where the activities of disciples/residents are closely monitored and controlled by him. Manto’s narrates the way Babaji manipulates and controls his disciple Ghulam Ali to live a sterile married life. A follower of Babaji’s ideology, Ghulam Ali is forced to endure an abstinent and childless marital life. Ghulam Ali’s blind faith in Babaji’s ideology indeed makes him suffer and lead an immanent existence. The most obvious yet mute victim in
this narrative is Ghulam Ali’s wife, Nigar. The narrator describes her as an
educated, self-assured, and compassionate woman. Yet Ghulam Ali reduces
her body to a mere womb, an object, a means for to him to achieve the goal he
considers to be his life’s true purpose. In brief, Ghulam Ali is the primordial
phallic subject who controls and reduces the female body to an object and uses
it to achieve transcendence.

The violence directed at women in Manto’s narratives reveals
patriarchy to be a paradox. It shows itself as a structure of normalcy whereas
its sole purpose is to sustain violence. Another paradoxical aspect of
patriarchy is that the phallocentric subject strives to evoke both terror and
acceptance in the victim. A patriarchal subject is able to integrate phallic
power within the self only by inflicting violence on the other. On the other
hand, any form of resistance by the other is capable of deconstructing the
spontaneous, natural power of the phallus and revealing it to be an “artificial
prosthetic element” (Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies 36).

Dalip Kaur Tiwana’s novel *And Such is Her Fate* narrates the
experience of violence undergone by a bride-for-sale named Bhano. The
author shows Bhano to be the victim of her brother-in-laws’ lascivious
intentions. Her husband Sarban succumbs to the critical injuries caused by his
four elder brothers because of their “mimetic rivalry” over Bhano (Girard,
*Violence and the Sacred* 194). Her attempt to commit suicide, after Sarban’s
death, is foiled by an alcoholic named Narain, and she goes on to marry him.
Bhano silently suffers Narain’s abuse. She belongs to him, and she does not
know any other means for survival. Bhano is, in fact, the quintessential other
looking for validation and a sense of belonging in people’s lives. She yearns to
belong to another human being or to some place within the world. For instance, Bhano chooses the path of suicide to finally unite and belong to the soul of her dead husband, Sarban. Moreover, in an attempt to gain acceptance among her community, Bhano tolerates her second husband’s abusive behaviour as well as the disdain of people.

Martin Heidegger states that non-human identities are said to be “belonging to the world” (Being and Time 13). Moreover, he considers “belonging to others” to be a drastic irresponsibility for these “others” control the consciousness of the particular Dasein, thereby depriving him/her of its own accountability. Such Dasein, in his view, is defined by inauthenticity. Hence Bhano’s desire to belong to another person makes her vulnerable to violence. She tries to escape violence by continually immersing herself in several activities. Friedrich Nietzsche terms this condition as “mechanical activity” which involves “absolute regularity, meticulous and mindless obedience, and training in impersonality, in forgetting oneself” (On the Genealogy of Morals 112). Bhano chooses conformity as a substitute for her constant yet futile attempts at “belonging.” Mechanization and constant activity become the balm for her over-whelming guilt at falling short of the community, including her husband Narain’s ideal for femininity. Bhano thus represents the passive yet self-destructive victim of violence trying to “alleviate her suffering existence” through the “hypnotic collective deadening of her sensibilities, of the ability to experience pain” (112).

A critical analysis of select short stories penned by Mahasweta Devi reveals the violence that erupts out of a woman’s specific experience of caste, class, religion. “Breast Stories” sheds light on the violence signified by the
capitalistic axiomatic. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define it as the most formidable apparatus of domination which directs the flow of meaning to fixed points and constant relations (478). Devi’s narrative shows capitalistic axioms to be crucial to the functioning of patriarchy. Here the patriarchal axioms appear in the form of religious allusions like “Lionstead” which is a reference to Durga, the mythological character of Jashoda, also known as the divine mother whose heart brims with forgiveness and selfless love, or the “Mother Cow” revered in Hindu culture. In this narrative, these axioms establish the relation and connection between Jashoda and her victimization. These persuade her to willingly become a paid “year-breeder” (“Breast-Giver” 54). Her breasts receive inscriptions of violence as she is exploited, revered and rejected with reference to them. However, her victimization and agonized death owing to breast-cancer are disregarded by people because they see her as “God manifest” (75). Also, “Breast-giver” throws a challenge to the miscalculated assumption of Western feminism about childbirth and child-rearing as forms of domestic labour: Jashoda makes a career out of the feminine and maternal processes like gestation and lactation. But this ultimately becomes the cause of her life-threatening disease. An analysis of Devi’s “Breast-Giver” thus reveals the way in which patriarchal ideology in alliance with capitalism traps the human body into a system of dominations repeated throughout history.

In fact, the ‘breast’ of a woman in Devi’s Breast stories also becomes the instrument of a vicious denunciation of patriarchy. “Draupadi” highlights the manner in which the aboriginal revolutionary Dopdi transforms her wounded breasts into weapons against her domination. Here Senanayak is an
intellectual revolutionary who claims that he prefers using theory, instead of brute force, to deconstruct and comprehend the ways of the subaltern. But he is forced to confront his powerlessness in the presence of a naked Dopdi. It is an easy task for Senanayak to have Dopdi’s body forcibly disrobed, raped and mutilated. However, he does not possess the power to cover the marks of violence inflicted upon Dopdi. It shows that violence lacks any real foundation and is ultimately powerless when it is deprived of its victim.

In Devi’s “Behind the Bodice,” the mutilated breasts of the aboriginal Gangor provide the image of the harsh reality about the lives of the subaltern. Her rape by the police signifies the rape, torture, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation carried out by the institutions and protectors of law. Hence the mangled breasts of Gangor are a metaphor of the violence, especially custodial, that has become an everyday occurrence in our democratic India. Yet her victimization remains a “non-issue” in a postcolonial nation where the government has denotified the subaltern but has failed to ensure to them the right to be heard, to settle somewhere permanently and, to be protected under the law (“Behind the Bodice” 138).

“The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur” by Devi shows the victimization of a subaltern woman under a corrupt government. It reveals violence to be an integral feature of the current administrative system. They are shown as capitalists who hide their greed behind false promises of social welfare. But once they attain power and political status, these leaders and government officials begin to operate on the basis of “cynical demoralization” (Žižek, First as Tragedy 49). They are impervious to criticism because they realize that no one expects them to remain true to their word. And they are rarely deterred by
any form of protest. Hence they freely indulge in corruption and exploitation.

In contrast to the capitalist administrators, the marginalized community is shown to have accepted violence as its fate. Moreover, they have become indifferent to their marginalization. Battling poverty, illiteracy, and the adverse effects of old age, Andi represents the conscious naïveté that extends from an individual’s desensitization to violence. Her victimization lies in her failure to comprehend the tragedy and farcicality of her medical treatment.

The three stories comprising *After Kurukshetra* are Devi’s re-interpretation of the war of Kurukshetra. Each narrative focusses on subaltern women’s perspective on the violent aftermath of the war for ‘justice’ fought by the royals. A critique of Devi’s representation of women living in ancient India reveals the forms of violence which are existent even now and relevant to the current state of gender-based violence. “Five Women” shows the royal women’s construction of a different universe, with its own “ideological imaginary,” where there is no acknowledgement of the existence or the suffering of women belonging to the lower caste and class. This ideological imaginary is patriarchal and functions through the deliberate distortion of reality. For instance, the royal women force the widows live the rest of their lives as “silent shadows” by misrepresenting their compliance to violence as the only course to experience the “hubbub of joy in heaven” (7-10). Hence ideological distortion is written into the very essence of patriarchy. It is a form of violence. The ideological distortion by the women of the *Rajavitra* posits woman as an entity who ceases to exist with the absence of a phallocentric subject in her life.
Devi’s “Kunti and the Nishadin” reveals Kunti’s false consciousness about morality as a form of violence. Devi’s representation of Kunti shows as a patriarchal figure. Kunti is a staunch follower of the moral code set by the Hindu culture. She professes to be a steadfast believer in the concepts of selflessness, spirituality, truthfulness, etc. Kunti’s ideal woman is Gandhari for she willingly undergoes self-imposed blindness to fulfill the rightful duty of conforming to the path followed by her husband, Dhritarashtra. Gandhari’s self-imposed blindness is, however, a nihilistic act. By deliberately covering her eyes, Gandhari reinforces her conscience’s negation of the violence around her. Moreover, Kunti manifests violence in her callous disregard for the lives of the nishads who lost their life for the sake of her family’s survival. The bodies of six the murdered nishads thus foreground Kunti’s patriarchal subjectivity which establishes itself or survives only through, wreaking violence upon the other subaltern.

“Souvali” by Devi elaborates on the sexual exploitation of subaltern women at the hands of men of to the higher castes. It focusses on a lower caste woman named Souvali living in the periphery of the town after being sexually used and discarded by the King Dhritarashtra. The violence against Souvali is, in fact, sanctioned and reinforced through society’s insistence that she observe strict rituals to mourn the death of the father of her illegitimate son. This violence is transferred onto her son Yuyutsu (also referred to as Souvalya in the narrative) who internalizes it. He is ignored by his father and mistreated by his half-brothers, the royal sons of Dhritarashtra. However, Yuyutsu is expected to forget and forgive his mistreatment by the royal family, and aid them in the war. Souvalya represents the subaltern who always exists in a
confused state because he internalizes the ideology of inferiority and considers
himself to be less than fully human. He is caught up in the system of
oppression and finds himself in “a condition of ontological ambivalence”
(Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* iii). Here the marginalized individual
is both the organizer and the victim of “a system that has choked him and
reduced him to silence” (*A Dying Colonialism* 32). Similarly, Souvalya
eventually albeit naively decides to return to the same oppressive environment
that was the cause of his subjection and humiliation.

Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* focusses on the
manner of female sexual body being transformed into a site of control and
violence by means of cultural ideologies. The female body is, in fact, a
“functional site” where different disciplinary institutions carve out individual
segments, establish operational links, indicate values and demand obedience
(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 149). In fact, patriarchy operates in these
disciplinary sites where an individual’s activities are controlled through
constant supervision. Roop’s every action is scrutinized and disciplined by
female members of her family. The constant regulation of a woman’s body for
the purpose of its “normalization” is indeed a form of violence. Roop refuses
to indulge in any strenuous outdoor activity to keep her hymen (the sign of
virginity) intact; she rejects education based on the patriarchal instruction that
men do not accept educated women; Roop’s mother meekly accepts the idea
of undergoing a painful childbirth without proper medical care; Roop’s
grandmother expresses horror at the thought of her pregnant daughter being
examined by a male doctor, but deliberately causes self-injury to show her
grief at the public funeral of her daughter; Satya’s inability to give birth forces
her husband to reject her and remarry, she internalizes this rejection, and commits suicide. All these instances in the novel show the body to be a hegemonic construction of patriarchy. Patriarchy thus wields violence upon women through maintainence of ideological control over her mind.

Indira Goswami’s novel *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* treats religion of a patriarchal, disciplinary institution that operates on the underside of law. In its representation of the harsh rituals and social practices outlined for the widows, the narrative pinpoints the way in which religion reinforces and multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 222-23). Here ethics help in the formation of the artificial link between religion and morality. Moreover, patriarchy manifest through religion signifies a state of lawlessness – a state of exception. The widows of Kamrup are stripped off their identity, their future, and their entire existence as per the religious norms. Here ethic-based religion is transformed into the force of law which no entity or foundation can “contradict” or “invalidate” (Derrida, *Acts of Religion* 241). Furthermore, the orthodox Brahmin community treats widows as “scapegoats” whose sacrifice is requisite to their own happiness and prosperity.

Amita Kanekar’s *A Spoke in the Wheel* focusses on the role played by discourse in “silencing” the multi-axial nature of gendered violence experienced by women. The suffering endured by Maya to give her royal husband his progeny, the familial and marital woes of Yashodhara, the gruesome killing of the slave Tara, the sexual exploitation of lower caste girl Nagamunda, etc. disclose caste, class, and religion as being central to the victimization of women. In her “revisioning” of Buddha’s life, Kanekar
articulates the suffering of those women from the past who remain submerged in the silences of history and myth. She delineates women who are viewed as a mythical non-entity – a subservient, traditional, home-bound and essentially silent other. In the light of Kanekar’s female representations thus the violence underlying the regular mobilization of mythic pasts to support aggressively chauvinist or fundamental politics comes to the fore (Huyssen, “Present Pasts”).

Neel Kamal Puri’s novel *The Patiala Quartet* narrates the lives of Minnie, Karuna, Monty, and Michael during the nineteen eighties when terrorism was at its peak in Punjab. However, the presence of violence in their personal lives overshadows the political violence taking place around them. The four individuals are products of dysfunctional families. Minnie and Michael are victims of the organized chaos and constant financial insecurity that marks their parents’ lives. Karuna and Michael grow up witnessing their mother behave like a docile victim of domestic abuse. Each character internalizes her or his experience of violence and becomes a victim of “bad faith.” Monty’s embracing of silence, appearing naked in front of others during a business meeting, drinking alcohol to dull his senses, etc. highlight his disconnection from all norms of civility and decorum. All fail in their attempts to awaken him from his zombie-like state and bring him into the “world of [the] living” (Puri 119). Minnie and Karuna make conscious efforts to transcend their violent existence. They succeed in escaping their oppressive environment yet continue to look for associations that remind them of their past. Both Minnie and Karuna are, in fact, like “zombies.” Michael’s “being” is shaped by his mother’s passive acceptance of physical and psychological
violence. He imbibes this passivity and believes that withdrawal and complete evasion of violence is the only available strategy for survival. Michael too is like a zombie, a “perfectly natural, alert, loquacious, vivacious behaviour but is in fact not conscious at all, but rather some sort of automaton,” and refuses to understand the gravity of the circumstances (Dennett 73). And when Michael eventually becomes self-aware, the reality of violence traumatizes him, and forces him to take his own life. It shows that most individuals’ experience of violence forces them to lead the life of an automaton. Moreover, their realization of their passive existence and their confrontation with violence results in self-directed violence.

Anita Rau Badami’s novel *Can You Hear The Nightbird Call?* narrates women’s experiences of multifaceted forms of violence such as economic, political, patriarchal, racist, etc. It shows the manner in which a victim, caught in a cycle of suffering, inflicts violence upon another individual. Born to an English mother, Leela is subjected to neglect, antagonism, and prejudice by her Indian father’s family. However, Leela repeats the cycle of violence when she transfers her prejudiced notions on to her English born-and-bred, future daughter-in-law. Sharanjeet is a childless Indian emigrant living in Canada who yearns for a sense of belonging. In her attempt to transcend her feelings of alienation, she persuade's her niece Nimmo to allow her son Jasbeer to be raised in Canada. Consequently, Sharanjeet becomes responsible for tearing her niece’s family apart, and consciously subjecting a young child to similar feeling of alienation. Hence the oppressive emotions of hopelessness, frustration, alienation, and sense of violation propel an individual towards self-destruction as well as infliction of violence on
others. Badami’s treatment of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 also highlights the meaningless of violence. In The Ground of the Image, Jean-Luc Nancy states that “violence does not participate in any order of reason…it has no interest in knowing….it is not interested in being anything but this ignorance or deliberate blindness….it is [in fact] the calculated absence of thought willed by a rigid intelligence” (16-17). Similarly, the act of setting several of the turbaned men in Delhi on fire shows the unreasonableness and senselessness of violence. In fact, most acts of violence are primarily a sequence of meaningless perversions.

Analyses of select Indian literary texts thus reveal patriarchy to be a complex agency of violence. Patriarchal or gender-based violence is the most lethal for it is legitimized, accepted, and enforced repeatedly. It can be overt, subtle, physical, psychological, biological or existential. Patriarchy can be construed as an imaginary bond that exists between law and anomie. This imaginary patriarchal bond operates through social institutions. Furthermore, all social institutions are based on different axes of power such as race, caste, class, ethnicity, and religion. In fact, the essence of violence is in power. Patriarchal power is a negative and repressive force that requires the presence of a human body to manifest itself. It operates through violent methods of control, discipline and punishment and, further, culminates in multifarious forms of violence. Control is, in fact, the fulcrum of violence. The patriarchal system of control functions primarily through ideology. There is, indeed, an undeniable relationship between ideology and patriarchy. The ideological mechanism works in the creation and continuation of social institutions, and is extremely essential for the legitimization of patriarchal power.
The present research project also sheds light on the role played by ideology in inflicting violence on women. Here women are victims of both ideology’s ‘misrecognition’ and its ‘demystification.’ The misrecognizing function of ideology makes her submit freely to her victimization for it deceives her into believing that she is making conscious and free decisions. On the other hand, the demystifying ideological aspect persuades her to willingly lead a meaningless existence and to force such fate on other women. Women are, in fact, themselves among the perpetrators of violence against women. Also, a woman’s experiences of hopelessness, frustration, alienation and sense of violation, propel her towards self-destruction and the infliction of violence on other vulnerable persons. Human consciousness is always involved in a struggle for power or dominant subjectivity. This struggle leads to the construction of hierarchies of caste and class. Women are placed at different levels (higher and lower) in these hierarchies. Women belonging to the lower sections of socio-economic level are marginalized beings. Women belonging to upper caste and class too remain victims of violence of the phallic power residing in social institutions. Denial of subjectivity prompts these women frequently practice patriarchal violence in their attempt to maintain their position as the dominant self. Hence the dynamics of caste and class transform woman into both the victim and the perpetrator of violence.

Women often inflict violence upon others by assuming the panoptic function of patriarchy. Analyses of some of the aforementioned literary texts reveals that patriarchy operates on the principle of the panopticon, which Foucault considers to be a disciplinary mechanism which induces a state of conscious and permanent visibility in the subject, thereby assuring the
automatic functioning of power. Similarly, patriarchy functions through social institutions and its various representatives who isolate, observe, instruct, and control a woman’s every move. Family, educational system, religion, caste, and class are the most disciplining and controlling sites that inflict violence upon women. These are steeped in parochial socio-cultural ideologies that trap women in the biological aspect of their existence. These ideologies transform the female sexual body into a site of control by imposing different ‘patriarchal axioms’ referencing her femininity. For instance, the notion of motherhood is glorified, represented, and continuously reiterated through the system of ‘patriarchal axiomatic’ manifest in cultural myths, religious scriptures and even educational establishments. In other words, violence is committed through the agency of discourse. Language is a patriarchal construction that exercises control over woman by shaping her identity according to the dominant ideology. In short, language plays a major role in transforming the female body into a hegemonic construct, redefining its identity, and sanctioning it as the ideal image of femininity. Such an instance pinpoints discursive violence against women. Or woman’s existence is ignored and treated as meaningless and peripheral within the popular vernacular. Discursive silence is, indeed, another form of violence.

An important form of gender-based violence is the ideological production of the female body as symbolic capital. The combination of multiple axes of power, namely caste, class, and religion, result in the subjection of women to symbolic violence. She becomes the embodiment of virtues that define a code of honour, and thus she comes to stand for social prestige. Symbolic violence is, in fact, the most socially acknowledged and
legitimized form of gender-based violence. Also, a study of the literary representations of woman shows her to be an eternal victim in the phallic subject’s quest of social, material, and existential transcendence. The phallic subjectivity can be seen as sustaining power through its torture of the other. This torture may be either in the form of violent domination over the woman’s body, or it may manifest through love. Love can indeed be construed as a form of violence for it forces woman to transform or mold herself according to the lover’s perspective. Analyses of the various associations between the two sexes as depicted in the select literary fiction reveals patriarchy to be a pervasive system of oppressive power which introduces and maintains asymmetry within every relationship. In fact, a patriarchal subject transforms into a full phallic presence only by evoking terror or loving approval in the gaze of the other. Hence violence is instrumental in the achievement and maintainence of phallic power.

A critique of select Indian fiction shows violence as an integral part of woman’s existence. Moreover, it accentuates the problematization of violence with reference to women’s race, ethnicity and class. Multiple axes of power intersect and form an oppressive patriarchy-infested mechanism that leads to gender-based violence. The study also observes the responses of women to their victimization. For instance, a woman’s unknowing, forced or deliberate conformity to patriarchal ideology for the purpose of attaining phallic acceptance can be an act of self-directed violence. Conformity thus can be a form of violence. Being violated and rejected by the phallic/dominant subject can also cause a woman to self-destruct by internalizing her feeling of victimization. As evident from the reading of these texts, the internalization of
violence leads woman to self-injury or even suicide. However, this self-destructive feeling can transform into rebellion and give rise to a revolutionary form of violence capable of challenging patriarchy.

Gender-based violence shows itself to be devoid of rationality. In its association with power, the nature of violence can be construed as being instrumental. Moreover, violence always needs, a medium, an image, a body to implement or manifest itself. Both men and women are, in fact, an agency for the violent, power-based operations of society. Men too are victims of the dynamics of violence that exists at the economic, political, and socio-cultural levels. Nevertheless, an investigation of select literary representations shows that women’s experiences of violence is an extremely terrifying, irrational, and dehumanizing experience. However, it is not given sufficient space in the theorization of violence. The present study thus focusses on the diverse forms of violence inscribed, represented, and resisted in a selection of Indian literary texts. It aims to shed light on the legitimized, normalized, or overlooked forms of violence directed against women. Furthermore, it attempts to illuminate the violence that is yet to be articulated by feminist theory. Hence the present research project is a tentative endeavour where theories of violence are sought to be aligned with literary texts to comprehend women’s position as victims of violence.