CONCLUSIONS

The equality and difference approaches which have been dominant in the feminist discourse suffer from theoretical inadequacies and methodological infirmities. As mentioned earlier, the equality frame remains incapable of capturing the spectrum of female's specificities such as ideological complexities of reproduction or sexuality, whereas, the difference framework is unable to capture the structures of domination that promote gender ideology.

The major thrust of the equality framework is to ensure women the same rights as availed by men. The male-female inequality is reflected in restricted and discriminatory access to education, health, employment and pre-entry human capital discrimination. The purpose of this approach is to correct these restrictive and discriminatory practices, which include not only unequal pay for equal work but also sexual harassment. The proponents of this approach have considered sexual harassment as a sex discrimination leading to violation of equal rights. If sexual harassment is taken as a violation of equal rights rather than also a form of sexual abuse which results in undermining the female identity, it will reinforce structural conditions of sexual subjugation. Also under the equal laws to contract, surrogacy is legalised but can the reproduction function be seen on a par with selling of labour power — can biological
nurturence for the gestation period be termed only as commodity production? The moot question remains - does equal treatment ensure conditions for equality?

This debate has resulted in the questioning of equal treatment strategies within the equality frame on the ground that since male-female needs are different they have specific needs which have to be recognised and valued. This has laid the ground for special treatment strategies. The provision of special treatment strategies to accommodate female specificities have been implemented through maternity benefits and other positive discriminations to enable women to compete freely. However, these strategies have resulted in an increase in labour costs thereby, effectively blocking women's opportunities to employment.

To overcome these constraints, feminists have argued that the aim of feminist theory needs to be 'result equality' rather than 'rule equality'. They have advanced the formulation that equality can only be achieved by recognising the difference of people. "If our goal is to enable everyone to have the same opportunity to participate then it is necessary to accommodate people's differences." The logical proposal then centres around 'gender neutral approaches that neither accommodate women to the male spheres (equal treatment) nor universalise the gender difference (special treatment).'

But again the gender neutral approach cannot address the male or female specificities. The universalisation of special treatment, in other words the approach that female interests need to be viewed to the exclusion of the gender differentiation, negates the existence of patriarchal structures. In fact, it is these patriarchal structures that have to

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be undermined if efforts to empower women have to succeed. The radical feminists have maintained that it is 'male power that is exercised through the mobilisation of bias rules, norms or procedures' that subjugates women. However, this ignores that systemic rule making and adjudication is ideologically rooted in the institutions, gender roles, norms, practices and beliefs rather than controlled by individuals. This ideology of gender differentiation manifest in female deprivation, discrimination and abuse. These perhaps need to be addressed as a whole rather than in isolation from the processes or the concepts of differentiating gender ideology.

The inadequacies of both the equality and the difference approach have been empirically captured. The underlying thrust of the equality approach in particular has been to ensure that women have access and control over resources. The formal equality framework, implemented through the strategies of women in development (WID) perspective, advocated for increased access to women in spheres of health, education and employment. In particular it proposed that an increase in income would result in greater access to women to health, education and other material resources. The validity of this proposition has been questioned.

For such an understanding accepts that the practices of gender differences (i.e. differential access to health, education, property etc.) is a function of poverty. However, female health differential were found to exist in all income strata as was restricted access to education in the rural areas thereby suggesting that the gender differentials are not poverty bound. In fact the male child preference was found to be widespread among all income and rural-urban groups. Similarly, the availability of
The availability of infrastructure is reflected in male access to health and education yet females are discriminated in varying proportion to their socio-economic settings. Thus the opportunity to equal rights does not ensure their availment.

Also, an increased access to employment is expected to translate in a greater role in decision-making powers. The findings of the research study have revealed that women's role in decision-making differs in different income strata as also in the urban and rural areas. In the additional sample, the variation was reflected in the four skilled categories. For instance, less than half the women in all groups mentioned being party to decision making regarding the need and place of their medical treatment. However, the highest control over these decisions was reflected in the middle income groups in the urban areas.

In the additional sample, working women did report some change in their decision-making capacities. The skilled and semi-skilled workers mentioned an increase in participation in decision-making within the family. However, women's access to property remained negligible and was mostly availed of due to their widow status rather than as an equal share of inheritance. Thus employment as a single factor was not found to affect women's increased access to control resources.

Respondents from the additional sample predominately mentioned increasing financial pressure as their reason for working. The variation among the four categories was that the lower skilled worker took up a job for survival whereas in the upper hierarchies it was done to ensure supplementary income through a double income. The women
workers perceptions in a comparison to non-working women mentioned that working women faced a double work burden with the grouse that home and children were neglected due to this additional responsibility. These beliefs were further supported by the outrage that women are sexually vulnerable when exposed to society (especially the lower skilled women) by being propelled to earn an income, and are in need of protection, endorsing the norm of seclusion and condemning the necessity for women to work. Variations in justifications existed in the context of those drawing utilitarian or normative support in accordance with their socio-economic placements. Besides keeping intact their gender considerations while employed, their access to property remained negligible even though they had increased access to finances and decision-making. If power is a derivative of skills, then empowerment mandates transformation and reallocation of skills not based on gender determined functions. Thus the capacity of increased access to resources in itself or increased participation in decision-making may not have the capacity to change women's unfavourable social placement. In fact, findings from the additional sample in the study indicate that with role extension the nature of discrimination and abuse that women face also changes. Even though some women reported greater role in decision-making, they also reported an increase in sexual harassment and discrimination at the work place varying according to their skill hierarchies. These finding support the hypothesis that participation of women in socio-economic processes leads to newer forms of violations. In fact, under these circumstances, it would be fair to observe that, 'In spite of dramatic changes in
economic and political relations, the ideology of gender hierarchy has not been eliminated but simply modernized.²

The systemic discrimination of women in terms of limited access to resources such as education, skills, employment disempower women. The systemic discrimination operates through the incorporation of values and norms that are ideologically determined and based in the gender system. This prescribes differential placement and roles for males and females on the basis of biology. Empowerment, therefore, is a function of transforming the gender based system which is shaped by anonymous social mechanisms which provide invisibility to the deprivation, discrimination and abuse that women face. According to Allen, ideology is a process by which ideas, values and purposes act to influence behaviour and is essentially a mechanism of social control.³ Gender norms, values and practices are imbibed by individuals in varying degrees and importantly are also maintained through institutional means. In other words, they manifest in the anonymous social mechanisms. Thus both individual adherence and institutionalisation of the gender ideology provide invisibility to violence against women. That there is widespread invisibility attached to gender violence and its various forms can be inferred from the prevalence of gender typed roles, gender typed values and norms, and also by the pervasiveness of the gender ideology as reflected in the respondents' perceptions and justifications for male child preference, affinity to female role of nurturers and caretakers and acceptance of gender practices such as dowry exchange. This widespread gender ideology produces

a partial and fragmented understanding of the assumptions, processes and even acts of the gender system. Moreover, this inadequate understanding isolates the events and acts from the assumptions and processes of the gender system and reduces them to mere problematic aberrations. Such a situation blurs some of the most pervasive forms of gender violence and consequent solutions revolve around welfare or relief and are unable to empower women.

Visible violence pertains to either individually perceived or socially discernible aspects of violence against women. Invisible violence, on the other hand, reflects individually unperceived and socially latent aspects of violence against women. Visible and invisible violence are inter-changeable whereby some acts acquire increasing acceptability and thus become invisible.

Gender differentiation, resulting in female deprivation, discrimination and atrocities against women, represents the inter-linkages in violence against women. In regard to visibility and invisibility, the differentiation - deprivation - discrimination - atrocities can be viewed in the form of a continuum with maximum visibility to atrocities, then to discrimination and high invisibility to female deprivation and gender discrimination. The more the visibility among the continuum and its inter-linkages, the more the awareness of the elements of the gender system. Wider social and individual visibility was found to exist in cases of atrocities where severe physical abuse is suffered by women. After atrocities, the next visibility was that of discrimination against women but it varied in different socio-cultural strata. The discrimination the women face vis-à-vis men in terms of opportunities in the development process was also perceived to be
unjust in certain sections of society. Again, the injustice may not be widely perceived with regard to a certain form of violence such as wife-beating.

Efforts are undertaken to provide women with equal education, health and employment opportunities as are available to men. Since this discrimination is perceived to be only vis-à-vis men its visibility remains further inadequate and to a certain extent inappropriate. Men as a category do not have access to the best terms of employment or to productive skills and education. Also the element of biological sex differences is bypassed whereby differences between the sexes do need to be incorporated in work conditions where maternal benefits need to be reflected. Structural conditions which deprive women in terms of access to resources and skills are mostly invisible. Since women are not perceived to be productive individuals, and are only expected to imbibe the roles of household caretakers and child nurturers, they do not have qualitative access to skills, education or inheritance resources and these conditions, therefore, remain unperceived. The underlying assumption that gender differentiation is based on biological differences encompasses and legitimizes the differing social placement of males and females.

Thus, the ideology of the gender system, symbolised by the preference for the male child remains invisible and its impact manifesting in wife-beating or dowry deaths remains totally unconnected. Both equality and difference approaches target their agendas towards the impact of the gender ideology and to a certain extent even to the process but leave unchallenged and unperceived the gender ideology which provides the necessary condition of gender differentiation and subsequently manifests itself in
female deprivation, discrimination and atrocities. This delinking of the ideology, process and impact creates pervasive invisibility to violence against women.

Another dimension of invisibility pertains to the demarcation at the popular level between the concept and manifestation of the specific forms of violence against women. For instance, the concept of dowry exchange remains unlinked to that of dowry death or dowry harassment. The practice of dowry exchange is an accepted normative concept of the Indian culture as reflected in research findings. The practice of dowry exchange is condoned, encouraged whereas severe dowry harassment and dowry death are condemned. Similarly, in the layers of sexual harassment ranging from eve-teasing, molestation to rape, the physical harassment of molestation and rape is perceived as an act of violence, But eve-teasing which does not endanger the chastity of the female is even encouraged in certain sections of society, where such practices are epitomized as appreciation of femininity. Another example in this context refers to the sex determination tests to beget a male child. The preference for a male child is rampant in all sections of society. Accordingly, the cultural modes of religious bigotry, hakims, tonas etc. are widely used to acquire the Almighty’s ordain to be blessed with a male child. This practice is again socially normative and well legitimized. But comparatively the same male child preference being manifesting in the utilization of sex determination test and female foeticide has been discouraged and even perceived as inhuman.

The understanding of gender violence is complex. Psychological and social learning theories segment atrocities against women from women's social placement and in
attributing the perpetrator status first to individuals (rather than to social processes) and secondly to men analyse gender violence as an aberration. These are to be corrected through legal institutional arrangements that project violence against women to encompass only certain forms of violence, dousing the web of ‘structural and cultural violence’ as invisible. The structural proponents of gender violence include the experiential radicals who only focus on perceived violence. They remain victims to preconceived ideas of abuse that therefore promote invisibility. For instance, wife-beating is conceived as a masculine attribute in certain sections of society and as such a slap or two may be perceived as ‘husbandly affection’ as may be rape in marriage rather than an abuse. The focus on unequal power hierarchies between the sexes takes into cognisance the gender ideology and its functioning through roles, values and practices. However, the pursuit of equality in the context of biological sex differences may not be appropriate or different in the context of the structures of domination.

Therefore, the empowerment project given the existing gender hierarchies may be retrogressive whether exercised through the anonymous social mechanisms or enforced through the coercive practices and/or behaviours. Power directed to exercise social control has been used extensively by the radicals in their proposition that physical violence against women by men is a form of social control for policing women into particular behaviour, thus an individual female may not be raped or battered but the threat of coercion or fear directs her behaviour as desirable to the submissiveness espoused by the hierarchical power based gender relations. That women are victim to the gender hierarchy is evident from the justifications that flow from the assumptions.
that the males are biologically superior or aggressive; propose that women are biologically determined to not only to bear but also to rear children; that hierarchies exists due to individual misfortune or through justifications that promote female victim blaming. The normative acceptance of the power hierarchies renders the systemic deprivation and discrimination as decreed by nature as unchangeable and outside the preview of decision making. This institutionalised power has its basis in the gender equation, and provides visibility only to brutal acts. Built-in prejudices and biases promote the gender system and even shape the interests of disenfranchised groups to present conflicts as invisible. It is here that the function of ideology is defined wherein interests and ideas are shaped to determine not only the areas of decision-making and prescribing an agenda for decision-making but also to determine the ‘socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups and practices of institutions’⁴ that prevail to determine people’s perceived interests. This level of power has been presented as the strategic gender needs by Moleneux who concedes that “the relationship between what we have called strategic gender interests and women’s recognition of them and their desire to realise them cannot be assumed.” According to her even the lowest common denominator of interest such as equality with men, control over reproduction and greater personal autonomy and independence from men are not readily accepted by all women⁵.

There is agreement among scholars who strive for equality of conditions that the social structures rather than individual decision-making need to be transformed in order to

provide women increased control over their lives. However, it is not only that gendered role allocation need to be transformed into a situation of role exchange between the males and the females because biological specific roles have been used to subordinate women and these cannot be exchanged. Similarly, the difference dictum that women need to be empowered through their biological specificities ignores the gender structures that control the specificities in a manner that renders women subordinate. Therefore, it is at this juncture that the nature of interests that are determined by the ideology of gender have to be debated. Can women's empowerment be attained through equality with men or through promotion of the identity of women as different from men outside the context of gender relations. The nature of interests that are perhaps be directed towards gender justice is not only empowerment of a group but undermine the gender differentiating system as a whole. Empowerment not only of men and women but establishing a just intervention democratic relationship between the genders.