CHAPTER I

APPROACHES TO UNDERSTAND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A CRITICAL REVIEW

SECTION I

Gender analysts represent varied frameworks regarding the perspective, approach and strategies advocated for understanding and combating women's unfavourable placement in society. These concerns include providing enhanced access to facilities and resources, eliminating discrimination and violence on the basis of sex, structural transformation of the existing gender hierarchies, establishment of women's interests as represented and shaped by women's experiences and focus on female pluralities emerging from local specificities.

Concern for increasing women's access 'in order to eliminate all obstacles that stand in the way of enjoyment by women of equal status with men' is reflected in the strategies of international agencies such as the United Nations. The Declaration of the Mexico Plans of Action initiated a fourteen-point objective plan focusing on increasing women's access to literacy, technical skills, employment, legislative, health and other services.¹ Some of

¹ United Nations: Declaration of Mexico Plans of Action, 1975. Taken from Government of India, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource
the objectives to be achieved included, 'marked increase in literacy and civic education of women, especially in rural areas;' 'increased employment opportunities for women, reduction of unemployment and increased efforts to eliminate discrimination in terms and conditions of employment' etc. The focus of these efforts was on making available infrastructural resources to women.

Discrimination and physical abuse such as sexual harassment that women face is also a forefront issue in women's rights. The convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, is directed towards national legislation to ban discrimination against women in all spheres - political, economic, social, cultural and civic. Efforts for structural transformation of gender hierarchies target women's discrimination as only a manifestation of women's subordinate position to men in society. It is the underlying structures of society that they challenge. For instance, Molyneux identifies women's 'real' interests as what she terms 'strategic gender needs' 'that arise from the analysis of their subordination' and evinces some of them:

The abolition of the sexual division of labour; the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and childcare; the removal of institutionalised forms of discrimination such as rights to own land or property, or access to credit; the establishment of political equality; freedom of choice over childbearing; and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.

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By combating these strategic gender needs that vary according to specific socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, she suggests a change in the existing gender roles to challenge women's unfavourable placement.

Still other approaches view women's oppression as caused by men and concerns revolve around delineating women from oppressive male structures of dominance. These have been represented by the radical feminists for whom,

the first and fundamental theme is that women as a social group are oppressed by men as a social group and that this oppression is the primary oppression for women.4

Another concern is represented by discourses on female autonomy, contextualised within local particularism. According to Elizabeth Gross,

Feminist theory seeks a new discursive space, a space where women can write, read and think as women. This space will encourage a proliferation of voices, instead of an hierarchical structuring of them, a plurality of perspectives and interests instead of the monopoly of the one – new kinds of question and different kinds of answer.5

These frameworks fall into two broad categories. One aims at achieving equality in different sections of society. In the gender context, it aims at equality between men and women. The other category focuses on difference, be that between men and women, or among women themselves. The essence epitomised is specificity rather than homogeneity.

These two perspectives have been represented in contemporary debate under a contention for equality and a contention for difference.6

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While the debate continues, both the frameworks of equality and difference continue to strengthen and challenge social theory, its epistemology, framework, concepts and techniques to understand and change social reality which had predominantly been patriarchal.

The politics of equality and difference has shaped diverse spheres of feminist politics and also sharpened the concerns in their confrontation. Efforts towards gender equality have succeeded in making visible the unfavourable status of women in society by spreading awareness, facilitating access, and mobilising support and resources to provide women equality with men, and by contesting against discrimination. To this end feminist politics has succeeded in directing legislative changes and determining policy initiatives. More importantly it has helped to bring women's concerns to the centerstage of mainstream academics, allowing impetus to diverse perspectives and subsequent strategies for feminist politics. The focus on women's unfavourable placement also led to questioning the premise of providing women equality with men and thereby undoing the

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7 Within the debate gender equality has been accepted by some to have evolved into issues focusing on heterogeneity of local cultural specificities. On the other hand 'equality' and 'difference' continue to remain competing frameworks. Such analysis refer to this debate as a paradigm shift yet others locate these issues as competing frameworks.

"Many feminists might regard the shift from 'equality' to 'difference' models of feminism, which has characterised the past decade of western feminism, as a shift of that order; on the other hand, one might, conceptualize the equality-difference debate as itself a paradigm within which either position can be taken without undue strain on the model."


8 "In the late 1960s and early 1970s - the aim was to make women visible as objects of study. Existing studies had either ignored women altogether or homogenized them with men, subsuming them under the supposedly engendered category of 'human-being'. Women as a gender were thus invisible, either because they were absent or because their gender was thought irrelevant. The task of feminist studies in those early stages was to render women visible, to claim equality for women as objects of knowledge."

injustice women faced. The difference perspective underlined the specific placement of humans determined by their socio-economic, cultural, political and even biological conditions and focused on heterogeneity rather than achieving universal homogeneity. There are diversities within this approach, with a focus on women specificities and a focus on specificities of women in a local cultural sphere. Irrespective of these diversities, the heterogeneous approach highlights the different forms and peculiarities that define the shape of women’s placement. The specificities that are blurred under the march towards homogeneity are provided identity.

APPROACHES

Within the broad perspectives of ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ scholars vary in their approach, use of concepts and strategies for dealing with women’s unfavourable situation. In the equality perspective, the unequal gender placements are regarded as fundamental to women’s subordination. However, approaches differ in allocating the causation and consequently the strategies for intervention to achieve gender equality.

THE EQUALITY APPROACH

The equality approach has varied from enforcement of non-discrimination or provision of ‘formal equality’ to a more structural transformation of unequal power relations.

Equality remains of course central to feminist discussion, but its recurrence in the writing signals as much disagreement over its meaning as certainty over its goals. A commitment to sexual equality does not of itself tell us what shape that equality should take. Equal pay for the jobs women do or equal shares in the jobs done by men? Equal opportunities to compete with men
or numerical equality in each sphere of life? Equal responsibilities for housework and children or better conditions for women at home?

Equality of opportunity

Universal equality among individuals by virtue of their being humans is the founding assumption that propels gender equality for availing opportunities. Since each human is deemed to be equal to the other, a male and a female are inherently equal. Women's unfavourable placement in society is assumed to be a function of prejudiced behaviour and subjugative customs against the female sex. In order to rectify women's restricted access and enhance participation facilities vis-à-vis men this strategy is aimed at promoting and protecting individual women by checking discriminatory practices.

Initial efforts were restricted to providing women with increased access within the existing socio-economic and political context. Intervention towards male-female equality was based on the acceptance of the biological differences which had to be compensated. Progressively, the recognition of gender differences as being socially constructed rather than merely biological shifted emphasis from providing access to regulating discriminatory and

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10 The hierarchy of monarchy, the order of the church and natural fortitude was challenged and replaced by the privileging of the individual as a human with unassailing rights of liberty and democracy...conception of individuals as free and equal beings, emancipated from the ascribed, hierarchical bonds of tradition. Mill, J. (1869), The Subjugation of Women Reprinted in Three Essays. London: Oxford University Press, p. 103
prejudiced behaviour\textsuperscript{12} and subsequently to the concept of androgyny. The reasoning that humans are equal by virtue of their humanness and that human qualities in each human need to be promoted, lent support for an androgynous society.

An early contention for women's rights was represented by Mary Wollstonecraft in the late eighteenth century. In her book 'A Vindication of Women's Rights', she linked women's unfavourable status to their unequal access to education. Equal education rights for women was sought to achieve women's equality with men. This demand was endorsed by John Staurt Mill and Harriet Taylor. In the book 'The Subjugation of Women' they proposed that women's inferior status needs to be uplifted not only by providing education but also by providing them equal civil rights and employment opportunities as are available to men.

The first-wave feminism which questioned the naturalness of women's exclusion from citizenship rights, education and employment, not only gained women some legal political and economic rights, but importantly brought into focus women's impoverished status and the need to improve it\textsuperscript{13}. The challenge was taken up by the second wave feminism during the 1960's. Betty Friedan, initiated the National Organisation of Women (NOW) in

\textsuperscript{12}Classic liberalism argues that women are not essentially different from men and that equality depends on women's capacity to freely compete and contract, thus requiring equal treatment - without prejudice or favour. This claim has undergirded real gains for women - not only through dismantling exclusionary practices but also by expanding the definition of discriminatory behaviour, for instance to include unequal pay for comparable male and female jobs in the public sector and sexual harassment."


\textsuperscript{13} "To start with, first wave feminism achieved a victory principally at the political level of the state, the eventual changes at the economic level provided the material possibility of the mass of women taking advantage of their legal independence."

America and campaigned for the legislation of equal rights and focused attention on women's discrimination in employment and politics on the grounds of sex.¹⁴

These assertions find endorsement in the efforts, importantly by the State to bring parity between men and women in the public domain as represented by political and employment rights with equal access to infrastructural facilities such as education, health services, law etc. This approach has widespread appeal for governments and international conventions. According to the Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi,¹⁵

The Constitution of India provides for equal rights and privileges for men and women and makes special provisions for women to help them improve their status in society. A number of social enactments have been put on the statute book for removing various constraints which hindered their progress. In spite of these measures, women have lagged behind men in different spheres.

The National Commission for Women - Its objectives, functions, powers and priorities follow the approach of providing women with equality of opportunity.

The National Commission for Women has been set up with the main objective of safeguarding the interest of women, gaining for them equality of status and opportunity and eliminating, as far as possible any discrimination against them.¹⁶

Some of the important legislation providing Indian women equity are the Equal Remuneration Act and equality in inheritance laws. The handicap of legislation, constitutional provisions and policy enactments in attaining

¹⁴ She was instrumental in setting up the National Organization of Women (NOW) to campaign for equal rights for women, by which was meant primarily legislative change to prevent women being discriminated against in the public world of work and politics on the grounds of sex.
enhanced access for women and undermining discrimination became apparent in the exclusion of support from social attitudes, practices and beliefs. Advances into socialisation theory reinforced the view that women were not discriminated in society due to the biological incapacities of their sex but due to socialisation into sex specific roles. Gender came to define the socialised sex specific behaviour, roles, attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes. That gender was socially constructed, advanced the prospect of promoting equality in human beings by the recognition of socialisation processes in shaping and channelising behaviour, anti-theoretical to women's rights.

17 ‘The concept of socialization theory reframed the equality efforts by suggesting that equal opportunities through legislation could not allow women availingment of equality since men and women are socialized differently with different roles, expectations, norms and values and shifted focus to the process of socialization. Socialization theory can be used to explain how it is that women may seem to accede in their own oppression and show thereby why equal opportunities cannot be enough to create an equal society. For if women and men are socialized differently, they cannot then be expected to behave in the same way when offered the same opportunities. Women are therefore unlikely to fit exactly the roles for which men have been socialized, even if the material barriers to their doing so are removed. Thus, for example, an engineering firm which was determined not to discriminate against women in its appointment of its managing director will still be more likely to appoint a man; for women's socialization will have meant that they will have been less likely than men at every previous stage to have taken the steps necessary to put them in a position to apply for the job. The recognition that women’s and men’s lives are formed by the different experiences and expectations made of them allows for the possibility that current differences, rather than being assumed to be biological, can be shown to be due to socialization.”
18 The focus thus shifted to gender differences from sex differences with implications that the differences were socially constructed rather than biologically determined. The development of science and social science in Euro-America in the past century can be characterized by a general movement away from essentialist frameworks toward perspectives that, although called by various names, are constructionist. These new frameworks have challenged the ‘natural’ status of many domains, presenting the possibility of a truly social inquiry as well as suggesting that human actions have been and continue to be subject to historical forces and, thus, to change. Gender and sexuality have been the very last domains to have their natural, biologized status called into question. Social construction approaches call attention to the paradox between the historically variable ways in which culture and society construct seemingly stable reality and experience. Vance, C.S. (1994), ‘Social Construction Theory: Problems in the History of Sexuality’ in Crowley, H. and Himmelweit, S. (eds.) Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge (pp. 132-133) Cambridge: Polity Press.
The impetus to promote equality in human beings was provided scope by the recognition of socialization processes in shaping and channelizing behaviour, anti-thetical to women's rights. The possibility of innate humanity in males and females could be universalised and homogenised in an androgynous human being incorporating both masculine and feminine traits was expected to ensure equal treatment to all.19

The socially constructed differences between the sexes were judged to be the chief source of female oppression. In the main, feminist theory concentrated on establishing the distinction between sex and gender, and developed an analysis of sex roles as a mode of social control.20

The proposition argued for entwining of 'difference' to reproduce a single human entity, an androgynous individual. It negated both the distinct identities of a male and a female while remaining unable to respond to the structures of hierarchy that construct gender differentiation. The proposal of a human standard build on an edifice of unrecognised differences and their corresponding hierarchy, projects the dominant norm which is the male norm as a human standard.

According to Anne Philips

"Human identity is sexually differentiated, and exists in a bodily form. Those who seek to deny the body, who deal only in the abstraction of 'the individual' or 'the citizen', who think it should make no difference whether these individuals are women or men, will be writing in one sex alone as their

19-The androgynous concept of psychological health defines the ideal person as having a blend of interests, abilities and traits which are both expressive and instrumental. In an androgynous society people are not forced into roles or traits on the basis of gender. To the extent that roles are not assigned on the basis of sex and that society minimizes the importance of gender and emphasizes individual capacity for taking on any set of responsibilities, we will probably find that the interests and characters of most people do become androgynous... In time, as the androgynous personality is recognized, gender could become irrelevant to the assignment of roles. Roles would depend overwhelmingly on individual characteristics."

standard. Women can be encompassed on an equality with men only if sexual difference is first of all acknowledged."\(^\text{21}\)

In effect the blurring of structural differentiation endorses the existing patriarchal hierarchies of domination. Thus to talk of an androgynous personality as a combination of the male and female is to ignore the relations of domination and subordination which produced them both.

The equality of opportunity framework has been criticised for being restricted to the ‘public’ spheres only and leaving intact the structures of oppression.\(^\text{22}\)

As a strategy, for being corrective in nature and individual oriented with a fall-out that formal equality may be counter productive.

This approach has been criticised as being restricted to achieving gender equality in the formal context by targeting only the public sphere. In effect this approach focused on extending to women the rights provided by the State to men. Spheres such as that of the family where the State does not intrude were left unattended. These provisions for equality demarcate between the public and the private, thereby ignoring not only the vital areas

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\(^{22}\) Sexual oppression shares with racial oppression the tendency to operate on two different levels. In both cases there have been long periods of history when the oppressed were denied their very place in humanity; in both cases the successful negotiation of this major hurdle (as, for example, when women and black people are admitted to the category of those who can vote) seems to leave the structures of oppression intact. In the case of women’s oppression it is the first aspect that has given liberal feminism its power and resonance, for the extraordinary denial of women as citizens is a gross expression of arbitrary power. The second aspect is what leads so many to view liberalism as inadequate, for while few societies today will dare to contest the legal equality of women with men, it still remains the case (in the...[words] of the United Nations) that ‘women constitute one half of the world’s population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world’s income, and own less than one-hundredth of the world’s property’. Liberalism typically focuses its attention on formal equalities; what relevance can it have for women today? Philips, A. op. cit. (1994), p. 208.
of women’s subordination but also the ideology of gender differentiation which percolates all social functioning rather than being departmentalised.

The private is very often taken to mean the family, and in the family men and women are unequal...The split between public and private may present itself as a neutral, 'sex-free' distinction, but its effects are unequal between women and men.”23

The achievement of formal equality is necessitated for women’s identity as citizens, yet it remains inadequate to undermine the structures of oppression.

To put this achievement and inadequacy in the words of Anne Philips,

"...the struggle for equal rights is important, even if insufficient, (this) is to voice an opinion on which many would agree : the equal right to a vote has not guaranteed women equal access to power, but this is not to say we'd be better off without it; the equal rights to employment does not give women equal jobs or equal pay, but it was (and still is!) worth fighting against discriminatory laws."24

The existence of discrimination necessitates a bias, a differentiation, and a hierarchy. To the extent that the underlying subordinating structures that give rise to and promote differentiation on the basis of the biological category of sex remain unattended, discrimination would persist, though it may change its form. It may not be widespread, all pervasive or visible.25

Such a strategy is corrective in nature. The state is targeted as an active medium for distributing equal opportunities and at the same time for providing

23 Ibid, p. 214.
24 Similar points of view have been expressed by Mitchell, J. "A new society that is built on an old society that, within its limits, has reached a certain level of equality clearly is a better starting point than one that must be built on a society predicated on privilege and unchallenged oppression.

25 "Liberal solutions can only improve the access of a relatively small number of women to the prizes of existing society. However, if women as a whole are to be liberated, a fundamental transformation of the structure of society is needed, not just a different allocation of who does what. Such a restructuring would involve not only liberating women from their domestic and nurturing roles, but changing the goals of the public world of work and politics too.”

measures for redressal of violation of these efforts. No causation for women's existing status is addressed. By assuming that equal opportunities can be availed by adjustments in the systemic functioning, whereby prejudice, stereotypes and sex roles can be combated, the approach ignores the underlying ideology, values and social practices that determine women's unfavourable placement and therefore restricted access to opportunity.26

Intervention is made to rectify the imbalances at the level of visible impact, namely discrimination and physical abuse. It presupposes that discrimination and abuse is directed at defined 'victims' i.e. women, by defined 'perpetrators'. The problem is thus dealt within the preview of radical individualism rather than any social patterning or manifestation of structural conditions.27 Focus is thus on individual and segregated aspects of society for redressal. These acts, if seen as only individual acts and described as aberrations, result only in corrective justice being disposed whereby the victim is provided with relief and the perpetrator targeted for punishment. More importantly, when the victim and perpetrator are under the influence of gender norms, violence, discrimination may be perceived by both as only severe physical abuse, or extreme flouting of laws and therefore, no outrage or injustice is perceived or exhibited. In other instances the status quo of the situation is retained allowing perpetuation of the related acts and continuance...

26 Crowley and Himmelweit forwarding a radical feminist critique to this extent mention that: "They were sceptical of the extent to which legislation could improve the position of women, since discrimination was only a symptom of the underlying problem. Further, their structural view of women's subordination meant that all aspects of society were to be viewed as part of the same system and could not be seen as neutral instruments to be used by feminism. Thus, for example, the state, as part of the same system of oppression, was unlikely to produce legislation which really benefited women."
Ibid, p. 17.
27 For details see Phillips, A. op. cit. (1987)
of the subjugative gender system. The structural conditions that define male-female gender roles, desirable norms and practices remain unidentified and invisible. Thus corrective methods which are individual and relief centered are practiced.

The provision of equality in conditions of difference - men and women have different biological needs and thereby demand different opportunities, restrict the exercise of equality or in fact violate equality.28

Moreover restricting the scope of equality to equal treatment of individuals reinforces the assumption of homogeneity of the human race and thereby the male norm forsaking the specificity of the female sex.29

Equality of conditions

The efforts to achieve gender equality are not restricted to the legal removal of the discrimination women face or by provision of equal opportunities.

28 "The tension between political equality on the one hand and social and economic equality on the other is part of what has been at stake in assessments of liberal feminism. Is it enough to talk of equal opportunities and rights, or does the obsession with formality obscure the realities of power...The argument has particular pertinence to sexual equality, for the tension between calling for equal treatment or insisting on women's special needs is one that remains at the heart of feminist dilemmas. For women to have an 'equal right' to work, for example, they may actually need more than the men. They need maternity leave; they need workplace nurseries; they need extra safety conditions when pregnant; they may need time off for menstruation. Such arguments, of course, can be a hostage to fortune, for once you admit that women are different from men, you may diminish their chances at work." Phillips, A. op. cit. (1994), pp. 209-210.

29 Insistence on 'formal' equality, which comes from viewing people as abstract individuals, makes it easy not only to ignore these special needs, but even to claim that satisfying them would amount to 'reverse discrimination' or giving special privileges to women. Jaggar, A.M. (1994), 'Human Biology in Feminist Theory: Sexual Equality Reconsidered' in Crowley, H. and Himmelweit, S. (eds.) Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge (pp. 78-89) Oxford: Polity Press

As argued by Carole Pateman, the surrogacy contract laws promoted as gender free contracts, in effect negate womanhood by extending to woman the male standard.

"To extend to women the masculine conception of individual as owner, and the conception of freedom as the capacity to do what you will with your own, is to sweep away any intrinsic relation between the female owner, her body and reproductive capacities. She stands to her property in exactly the same external relation as the male owner stands to his labour power or sperm; there is nothing distinctive about womanhood." Pateman, C. (1988), The Sexual Contract Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 216
Some scholars are of the view that women's oppression emanates from structural causes and is tied to the forms of class exploitation, existing formations of the family and distribution of work within the family and exclusion from public production. It is these aspects of society the transformation of which would enable equality of conditions for women. Different feminists have emphasised on different aspects of women's exploitation.

According to Dorothy Smith then,

Our strategy then seeks for the determination and shaping of the interpersonal forms of domination and oppression of women in how the economic and political relations in which the family is embedded constitute inequality, creating relations of dominance and dependency within the family.30

The domestic labour debate re-emphasises the material significance of women's labour in a social structure determined by class relations.31

Feminists of this view targeted the nature of women's paid employment as

30 .... a method which locates the family and women's work in the home in the actual social relations in which they are embedded. The inner life and work of the family, and the personal relations of power between husband and wife are understood as a product of how family relations are organised by and in the economic and political relations of capitalism. The relation between internal and external, between the personal dimensions of relations i.e. those wherein particular individuals confront, cooperate, engage sexually, are related as parents and children, work together as individuals and those relations which are organised as economic and political relations, is the key to women's experience of the personal as political as a relation of oppression.

..... No matter how it is done, where men are wage earners and women cannot earn enough outside the home to provide for their children independently of a man and his wage, dependency permeates every aspect of the interpersonal process in the home - regardless of how loving, how caring, how much or little respect each has for the other ... how to grant autonomy to his wife, or she has learned to assert herself vis-à-vis him. The economic and political process is there as a continual presence giving shape, limits and conditions to what goes forward, and, as in every other aspect of a capitalist mode of production, supplying change, and necessitating adaptation in ways which render the examples of life time experience of the previous generations irrelevant as models for each new generation.


31 It proposed that women's unpaid work in the home not only reproduced labour power on a daily and generational basis but by doing so, also maintained the relations of domination and subordination required by capitalist production.

detriment to their status. Moreover, women especially married women as marginalised workers either part-time workers, or with low skills only augmented family income rather than productively marketing their skills.

Barrett stressed the importance of ideology, rather than only an economic analysis for women's oppression. She located the family as integral to the construction of the historically gendered categories and thereby the central institution for women's oppression.

The family-household system of contemporary capitalism constitutes not only the central site of the oppression of women but an important organising principle of the relations of production of the social formation as a whole.

This perspective advocates structural changes for a classless society which in itself would necessitate women's freedom from oppression and injustices. Male-female equality is recognised as achievable by providing equality of conditions. Such an approach is aimed at achieving social justice in society by transforming the conditions that cause inequalities, rather than merely promoting corrective measures such as legal stringency or provision of welfare schemes for dealing with women's unfavourable status. However, the emphasis on combating women's subordination by removing class hierarchies reflects, that the specificities of gender relations and conditions remain invisible. As Michele Barrett has pointed out 'gender varies according

32 The Reserve Army Theory has also been used to explain how women, more specifically married women, are used as reserve labour to maintain the labour surplus and consequent low wages.
According to Beechy married women 'provide a flexible working population which can be brought into production and dispensed with as the conditions of production change.' For details see Beechy, V. (1977), "Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production" Capital and Class No. 3, pp. 45-66.
to class and also determines class, thereby emphasising not only that gender shapes social relations but reflecting the inadequacy of an analysis that fails to recognise this.

Socialist, and more specifically Marxist, theory has been criticized for the way it can subsume all forms of oppression under a more ‘primary’ class exploitation, leaving issues of either sexual or racial equality as subsidiary concerns. Equal rights or liberal feminism may smooth over and deny class differences between women, but socialism smoothes over conflicts between women and men.

No doubt the mode of production, and capitalism as one mode, influences the nature of appropriation, yet it is patriarchy that identifies the female gender as a group for exploitation and subjugation.

Other scholars have analysed contemporary gender inequality as a result of both the structures of capitalism and patriarchy.

Z. Eisenstier refers to capitalistic patriarchy whereby patriarchy produces the system of control of law and order and capitalism provides the economic system geared towards profit maximisation.

Heidi Hartmann’s analysis of patriarchy and capitalism proposed a dual systems theory where the two systems are interactive but analytically distinct. Patriarchal relations predate capitalism and are fundamental to exploitation of women’s labour both in the household and paid employment.

According to Heidi Hartmann’s analysis of male domination of women is the result of women’s historical social placement wherein their labour is

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34 Ibid.
appropriated by men, both in waged employment and through household work.

Heidi Hartmann argues that job segregation by sex has been central in providing men control over women in all spheres of society. Male dominance in the labour market allows them to earn the 'family wage' (a male wage high enough to support a wife and children) which ensures that working men receive higher wages than working women, and also secures women's unpaid domestic services within the family. Hartmann emphasises the role of the trade union organisation among working men, which was a means not only of class struggle but also of gender struggle, as men secured gains for themselves often at the expense of working women.

Juliet Mitchell's analysis of gender equality also borrowed a Marxist material base for women's subordination at the economic level supplemented at the level of unconsciousness by stressing the ideology of patriarchy. According to Barrette, no cogent theory of causation can be conjured to explain sectional aspects of social reality since reality is not bifurcated in terms of dual analysis.38

In order to tackle women's unfavourable status, Sylvia Walby analyses women's subordination through the structures of patriarchy which provide different forms of gender inequality over space and time.49

38 Ibid, pg.
39 The concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination, and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class and ethnic group. For details see Sylvia Walby Op. cit. (1990).
She advocates a strategy whereby all the structures of patriarchy are undermined.

The different forms are dependent upon the interaction of six key patriarchal structures. These are the patriarchal mode of production; patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal relations in the state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions including religion, media and education. In different times and places some of the structures are more important than others. The elimination of any one does not lead to the demise of the system as a whole.\(^{40}\)

She stresses on the importance of undermining all the structures of patriarchy which would be manifesting differently according to the socio-economic formations of a society, to combat women's unfavourable placement.

Moleneux has also argued for transforming women's placement in society both within the family and the public domain by undermining the structures of oppression.

The battle must be fought, and is being fought, on two main fronts, the domestic and the public, attacking the structures of oppression within the home and removing the discriminatory barriers outside it. In both areas this means above all confronting the sexual division of labour and its social effects in particular by demonstrating the linkages between the domestic and public spheres.\(^ {41}\)

Moleneux further substantiates her position by demarcating Practical Gender Needs (PGN) and Strategic Gender needs (SGN). PGN are those which arise from the existing gender placements, such as alleviating the drudgery of

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\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Molyneux, M. (1979), 'Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate' New Left Review No. 116, p. 27.
household work which may demand a four hour walk in search of fuel or water. On the other hand, SGN are those that challenge women's unfavourable placement such as sexual division of labour or institutionalised discriminatory practices, which vary according to the socio-economic context. Strategic gender needs are conceptualised from the analysis of women's subordination and positioning within the gender division and seek to combat women's structural oppression in society. According to Moleneux strategic measures that could transform women's subordinate position is a negation of institutionalised forms of discrimination, measures against male violence including sexual exploitation of women and coercive forms of marriage. These also include alleviation of the burden of child care and domestic labour on women along with the abolition of the gender divisional labour. However, Moleneux, in striving for gender parity, suggests a prior recognition of difference between the equality rather than assuming homogeneity.

THE DIFFERENCE STAND POINT

In contrast, the difference perspective underlines the specific placement of humans determined by their socio-economic, cultural, political and even biological conditions and focuses on heterogeneity rather than achieving universal homogeneity. There are diversities in this approach, with a focus on women specificities and a focus on specificities of women in a local cultural sphere. Michele Barrett while analysing the concept of difference proposes two models for the term with three particular 'uses' of the idea of difference. According to her,
There is one model drawing on the idea of difference between women and men (whether seen in timeless, essentialist terms or in a more socially constructed approach) and the other a more deconstructive model that emphasizes the difference(s) within the category of woman itself as well as within the specific social existences of women.42

The difference perspective focuses on the particulars of the female sex, as different categories of not only men and women but also as different within the category of women. They maintain an endeavour for equality projects the male model as a standard and makes insignificant women's concerns. In fact they usurp the specific female identity. The aim is to represent women's organic concerns and a society reflective of their interest.

The initial framework was one which focused on the difference between men and women. However this also led to highlighting the difference among women on race, class, ethnicity and raised the question of the concept of equality within women and a feminist theory that would cater to all women's problems. Abortion rights was seen to be the predominant need of white middle-class women in the western world but did not represent black women's needs, who were more engaged in escaping sterilisation campaign of these governments.

**Inter-gender difference**

The radical or the cultural feminists represent an experiential diversity focusing on women centered knowledge and politics to combat a male dominating system of patriarchy. The radical feminist propose a society evolved around women's interests by women.

42 For details see Barrett, M. op. cit. (1987), pp. 29.
The radical feminists attribute women’s unfavourable status to the structures of male domination over women. Men as a group are perceived to be responsible for women’s oppression. Rowland and Klein claim that, “Patriarchy is a system of structures and institutions created by men in order to sustain and recreate male power and female subordination.”

Authors differ in their analysis of male subjugation of women. According to some authors women’s oppression is made functional by male control of female reproduction and sexuality. While for others social control of women through male violence is essential to women’s subordination. Still others refer to a domestic mode of production whereby men appropriate women’s labour to gain control over women.

According to Shaula Firestone women’s oppression is made functional by male control of female reproduction while to McKinnon inequality of power is maintained through sexuality. In Brownmillier’s analysis social control of women through male violence is essential to women’s subordination. Delphy refers to a domestic mode of production whereby men appropriate women’s labour to gain control over women.

Firestone proposes that reproduction was fundamental to women subjugation. The different reproductive biologies of men and women, it is argued, produces a differential hierarchy as the female reproductive functions physically handicap women and provided men with a natural leverage to dominate women.

Unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created different, and not equal...this difference of itself did not necessitate the development of a class system — the domination

of one group by another — the reproductive functions of these differences did. The biological family is an inherently unequal power difference.\textsuperscript{44}

The biological duress of reproduction such as pregnancies, child birth, breast feeding is postulated to make women dependent on men. It is this vulnerability through which control over women's procreation capacities is exploited by men to render heterosexual relations, specifically marriage the organising principle for females' material and sexual exploitation.

Male dominated sexuality forms the core of female subjugation according to some other radicals. According to Brownmiller, it is not male violence, rather the fear of male violence that subjugates women. Rape or violence is thus a form of social control. Not all women are raped, but the fear of rape guides women's' behaviour. The projection of women's persona as a sexual object encourages rape to occur. Thus the reduction of women to a sexual object is basic to their subjugation. She states that, rape 'is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.'\textsuperscript{45} She builds this argument on the thesis that the human anatomy decries women's vulnerability since they can be forcibly penetrated by men. This potential of physiological defencelessness of women provides the basis of female subjugation.

By virtue of the assumptions that male violence controls women, gender violence is restricted to violence as faced by women and perpetuated by the males. Through the structural oppression of this gender violence which includes deprivation, discrimination and atrocities women face, the


\textsuperscript{45} Brownmiller, S. (1975), \textit{Against Our Will} London : Secker and Warburg, p. 15.
understanding of gender violence remains fragmented since gender roles, norms or values are divested of the socio-economic, cultural and political milieu in which gender relations are placed.

The contention that men rape because they can biologically do so exposes such an analysis as being overtly biologically essentialist.

According to the domestic mode of production thesis, Delphy conceptualises patriarchal exploitation of women's labour through household formation to cause women's subordination. Wives are exploited by their husbands who benefit from women's labour in running the household. In a domestic mode of production, husbands usurp wives productive labour in the home, under allocation of social role functions. In this analysis, the focus is restricted to labour appropriation within particular social roles of marriage.46

Under patriarchal relations women's household production is postulated to be appropriated by husband, ignoring the social and economic array in which gender relations are placed.

According to the social construction of male dominance, hierarchy and control, the manifesting structures of patriarchy are targeted for decimation. Since, patriarchy is understood to be a structural condition, not only the legal or political institutions are to be changed but the religious, cultural, social formation all are expected to be revamped to tackle women's subjugation.

46 Molyneux has summed up Delphy's conclusion as, Reducing the subordination of women merely to the marriage relation, she leaves out of account the oppressive aspects both of motherhood, and of women's place on the labour market. Her narrow focus on the appropriation of labour within marriage also reduces the problem of women's oppression to purely economic concerns; it thereby fails to consider the ideological and psychological dimensions which are crucial if any understanding of why marriages occur at all is to be gained. Op.cit. (1979), p.7.
These structures, according to the radicals, have to be abolished in their existing frame and replaced, rather than changed, by either structures that promote female control or female isolation from males.

Universal male control over women claims biology to be the irreducible cause of male-female contraposition. By contention it made natural and unchangeable the structural ranking between the sexes within which patriarchy was detrimental to women. The clubbing of all women's interests not only ignores the causal connotations of socio-cultural specificities such as race, class, caste and ethnicity but also perceives all women as oppressed by forms that have withstood the changes of time and social context.47

The implications of such analysis reflect in their politics which emphasise collective women's movement against men, a separatist strategy that overtly or covertly advocates a hierarchy reversal in the sex placement.

Patriarchy, in radical feminist session, was seen as a universal, trans-cultural phenomenon; women were everywhere oppressed by men in more or less the same ways. Such actions of patriarchy tended towards a biological essentialism that provided no basis for theorising the vast historical and contemporary variations in women's situations.48

Differential social placement of women challenged the assumption of 'women's unity' and exclusive victimisation by males. The social reality of racial and ethnic minorities posed conflicts with women of the dominant culture, as did women of different classes.49

47 "They subsume complex socially and historically constructed phenomena under the simple category of biological difference, and empiricist, in that they assume that differences in social behaviour are caused by the observed biological differences with which they correlate.... In practice, too, such an analysis may well lead to a feminist glorification of supposedly 'female' capacities and principles and a reassertion of 'separate spheres' for women and men."


49 Women from ethnic and racial minorities, as well as working class women, pointed out that such theory could not be the basis for political action that included minority of working
An analysis that claims male supremacy on the assumption that sexual differences favour the male of the species, ignores the ideology of gender, and takes as synonymous social constructs of gender and the biological categories of sex.

The establishment of a distinction between sex as a biological category and gender as a social one - is itself threatened by an emphasis on the causal role of procreative biology in the construction of male domination.50

Biological reductionism emphasises on sexual difference and rejects the ideology of gender differentiation.

For Barrette, the sex differences are biological but are extended to be the criterion for social placement. It is the practice of male-female differentiation that forms the core of a gender based system, detrimental to women which is the substance of women’s oppression.

The pattern of gender relations in our society is overwhelmingly a social rather than a natural one, but it is a social construction that caricatures biological difference in the most grotesque way and then appeals to this misrepresented natural world for its own justification.51

However, Jagger further contents that the detriment social relations in fact affect biology to sharpen the biological capacities and differences within the sexes. To quote:

Women’s biology is clearly relevant to the sexual division of labour in which their subordination is rooted, but it does not cause women’s subordination because it is, in part, determined precisely by that subordination.52

The thesis being built by Jagger is that there is a dialectic relation between biology and socio-cultural patterns.53

class women because their situations differed from those of white, middle class theorists, whose notions of patriarchy seemed to reflect a while, middle woman’s reality.

51 Ibid, p. 76
An extended analysis by Andrea Dworkin is that the practice of differentiation could have resulted in exaggerated biological differences between men and women and may even have led to selection of an exclusive heterosexual society. Even the sex distinction itself may be in part a result of a social production because ‘inter-sex’ individuals were less likely to be preferred as marriage partners. 

In view of these arguments biology cannot be labelled as the exclusive determinant of the existing gender placement, nor can the thesis of social construction of sex differences be advanced in the face of a dialectical interfacing between fundamental biological differences that are shaped by social focus to produce both the existing sex and gender differences.

The proposition that physical anatomy is a detrimental factor for women’s subordinate placement proclaims women’s social placement, roles, social prejudice and attitudes to be determined by birth and, therefore, unchangeable. This thesis proposes a sectional perspective both at the level of problem identification and at the level of strategy implementation. Biological essentialism proclaims the ideology of gender as restricted to male exploitation rather than as a relational interaction which throws up its own

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53 Just as the process of human reproduction was a social as well as a biological development, so the fairly exaggerated sexual dimorphism that we see in contemporary industrial society may also have resulted, at least in part, from social factors. In some ethnic groups, there is little sexual differentiation between women and men. Women are as tall as men, have equally broad shoulders and breasts so small that it is often difficult to tell an individual’s sex even from the front. The relatively smaller size of females in other ethnic groups is often due directly to the social fact that the nutrition of females is inferior because of their lower social status. Differential feeding may also have resulted in selection for genetically shorter females, however, since taller women would have found it harder to survive on minimal food. 

Ibid, p. 85.

Ibid, p. 85.
processes, practices and values as represented by the functioning of social institutions.

Thus there is scepticism whether a separatist feminist polity emanating from feminist centered politics is valid or practicable. Women, it is contended, are part of a heterosexual world, one that had in fact given rise to the gender differentiating society.

One main reason women do not, did not, keep to a separate track is, of course, the institution of heterosexuality. Institutionalised heterosexuality helps to create gender and thus difference, and simultaneously set limits on that difference. Lesbians and straight women alike, we are members and participants in all sorts of heterosexual institutions - economic, educational, cultural and commercial - which construct our identity, willy-nilly. The possibility of negating structures of domination promotes a strategy of seclusion emanating from the creation of a parallel society for women. This further raised two questions regarding not only the possibility of such politics plus desirability of promoting separatism in the context of gender hierarchy.

An analysis of sexuality in terms of male supremacy, with no real understanding of the construction and meaning of heterosexual femininity as it is experienced by a majority of women today, can lead to a political position of radical lesbian separatism. While this is a possible strategy, it remains a solution which exists within a fundamentally gender-divided society, and advances little hope, or even claim, for changes which would affect, let alone liberate, all women.

No doubt the assumption of a radical separatist strategy is intended to liberate all women, even though in practice the approach, in its inadequacy, propounds the case for 'a type' of women and is non-representative of women's subordination. Such a strategy is sectional in its address at best and separatist at worst.

Moreover, the approach is not aimed at achieving justice within the genders but is only concerned with providing women freedom from the condition of their subjugation, even if it may result in a matriarchal society of female domination, reflective of all the differentiating manifestations within the many strata, ethnic, caste and other differences among women.

The radicals in their separatism are thus not opposed to the practice of gender differentiation which may lead to male deprivation, discrimination or atrocities on men. Justice between the genders is not given any attention, their primary concern being limited to female liberation even at the cost of the male incurring unfavourable conditions. As put by Michele Barrett,

There is both a critique of 'male' knowledge as itself based only on experience, and an insistence that the experience of women leads to a better knowledge. Not absolutely better, or better according to some criteria that could be applied to any knowledge-claim, but better for women. So there is in this relativist approach a clear attribution of quality in relation to knowledge, but it is done on the basis of differentiation of experience.57

No doubt, this specific system of patriarchy leads to restrictions on women’s, access to resources, limits the extent and quality of women’s participation within society.

The question is not of female subjugation but of a system of subjugation where women are the victims. It precludes the possibility of being replaced by a system of subjugation where males are the victims. However, men are not the only perpetrators. In fact women themselves subjugate other women and men are also victimised. The crux being that both males and females are only instruments of the system and the structures of dominance remain intact.

The inter gender framework has also been criticised for being independent of the development process. The mode of development in particular has a

significant impact on women's conditions by shaping the historical organisation of the family, and in particular women's role in wage labour and domestic labour. Women's social and economic dependence on a male member, the role of the state in forming laws dealing with marriage, rape, pornography and positive discrimination have all determined the extent and distinction of gender discriminatory ideology. Any theory that ignores the causal role of the development process remains unable to comprehend the specificities of women's subordination and an incomplete analysis cannot proclaim an effective strategy of change.

Difference: Intra gender and specificity

There was concern that diversities within the context of women did not find representation. Moreover, experiential feminists approach to reverse the patriarchal hegemony was perceived as a woman oriented perspective rather than gender encompassing.

The appeal of post-modernism beckoned in its non acceptance of unitary, universal models which it claimed were essentialist. The pursuit of

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58 The context of women's role in the home, financially dependent upon her husband, unpaid for domestic labour except in her upkeep and badly paid outside the home, that we must consider the dominant features of female sexuality — passivity, maternalism and so on — as they have been developed in the ideology of contemporary capitalism. Barrett, M. op. cit (1984), p. 78.

59 Feminist theory of the kind proposed by Millet or Delphy might be said to constitute an internally consistent theoretical approach, yet in posing patriarchy as either completely independent of capitalism, or as the dominant system of power relations, it completely fails to provide an analysis of women's oppression in a society characterised by capitalist relations of production. Ibid, p. 38.

60 "We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities." Scott, J.W. (1994). 'Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: or, the Uses of Post-Structuralist Theory for Feminism' in McDowell, L. and Pringle, R. (eds.) Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions (p. 253) Cambridge: Polity Press.
subjective truth, provision of identity to ethnic, racial and other specificities in which different women were grounded, simultaneously rejected a universal male norm and advocated political practices that were particular, local and cultural specific.

Inherent in post-modernism is the inclusion of various differing analyses, even goals for feminist theory proposed by different scholars. Due to its emphasis on particularism and denial of a theory of knowledge, subjective reality was seen as original and different from others, and was not contextualised as a reaction or relative to another subjectivity.

A post-structural consideration of feminism, according to one of its proponents, Elizabeth Gross, is context specific and provides choice to feminists in selecting their goals and aims. It thus distances itself from proclaiming assumptions, a perspective or in specifying a specified strategy of feminist politics.

"It cannot be specified in advance what an autonomous feminist theory would involve, for this contradicts the very idea of autonomy, the right to choose and define the world for oneself. In their diversity and multiplicity, women claim the right to define their own aims and goals."61

In the context of equality and difference, as in other spheres scholars of post-structuralist thought have differing standpoints since they discard the causal inter-linkages of theory and emphasis on method. According to Elizabeth Gross the aspiration for equality between men and women was 'problematic and ultimately impossible' yet a political necessity since the fight for equality

According to Flax, feminist theory classifies itself as post-modernist by challenging the notion that gender relations are fixed and natural.


to basic citizenship rights made visible women's unfavourable treatment and their special conditions. This provided a platform to evolve female autonomy — 'women's right to political, social, economic and intellectual self-determination.'

Due to its emphasis on particularism and denial of a theory of knowledge, subjective reality was seen as original and as different from others, and was not contextualised as a reaction or relative to another subjectivity. Elizabeth Gross builds on Irigaray's autonomous defined woman's identity, rather than as a reaction to phallocentrism where women are analysed as opposite, identical or complements to men.

Autonomy implies the right to see oneself in whatever terms one chooses - which may imply an integration or alliance with other groups and individuals or may not. Equality, on the other hand, implies a measurement according to a given standard...Struggles for equality...imply an acceptance of given standards and a conformity to their expectations and requirements. Struggles for autonomy, on the other hand, imply the right to reject such standards and create new ones.

Such a post-structural consideration of feminism focuses on autonomy, is localised to reflect feminists differing objectives in differing contexts. It thus distances itself from proclaiming assumptions, a perspective or in specifying a strategy of feminist politics.

"In other words, feminist theory cannot be accurately regarded as a competing or rival account, diverging from patriarchal texts over what counts as true. It is not a true discourse, nor a mere objective or scientific account. It could be appropriately seen, rather, as a strategy, a local, specific, concrete intervention with definite political, even if provisional, aims and goals."
For Joan Scott equality and difference have been projected as opposites, provided as an either or choice, when difference is the very meaning of equality.

Of meaning expressed in a politically self-defeating way - is the 'equality-versus-difference' debate among feminists. Here a binary opposition has been created to offer a choice to feminists, of either endorsing 'equality' or its presumed antithesis 'difference'. In fact, the antithesis itself hides the interdependence of the two terms, for equality is not the elimination of difference, and difference does not preclude equality.

Scott calls for the deconstruction of the equality-difference debate on the premise that a representation for equality or for difference proposes the two to be antithetical with the feminist selecting one and rejecting the other.

The demand for equality depends on the existence of difference. The politics of equality, according to her, is the deliberate indifference to specified differences.

The only alternative, it seems to me, is to refuse to oppose equality to difference and insist continually on differences - differences as the condition of individual and collective identities, differences as the constant challenge to the fixing of those identities, history as the repeated illustration of the play of differences, differences as the very meaning of equality itself.

However, the fragmentation of universal, unitary concepts loses the focus on the concept of gender more particularly the gender differentiating ideology would not enable identification of the determining or supporting factors for women's subordination, exploitation or oppression.

In the face of the complexity of the social world the post-modernist response is to deny the possibility of causality and macro-social concepts.

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66 A binary opposition has been created to offer a choice to feminists, of either endorsing 'equality' or its presumed antithesis 'difference'. In fact, the antithesis itself hides the interdependence of the two terms, for equality is not the elimination of difference, and difference does not preclude equality.
A focus on pluralities or diversities not contextualised in a gender perspective reduces the functioning of gender injustice to just an inequality, discrimination or abuse as the particular case may be. Such an analysis that disregards the ideology and concept of gender, only functions to provide invisibility to gender ideology and in fact undermines the very cause of feminism. Representation of particularism of a local cultural specification captures the complexities and diversities of a situation in a given time and space. However, attempts to empower multiplicities only through their diversities unattached from historical, socio-cultural, political or economic placements, deny the existence of power hierarchies that systematically disadvantage the multiple identities.

In the context of gender, the blanket denial of macro concepts and metanarratives by post modernists incapacitates defining of a causality for women's subordination and subsequent strategy to empower women. According to Denise Thompson,

"While feminism needs to be able to identify domination in general, and male domination in particular, in order to challenge it, post-modernism refuses to identify, and hence cannot contest, relations of domination and subordination."\(^{70}\)

The negation of a causal perspective, even if it may not identify male domination as the specific condition of women's subordination, the argument

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69 Some of contemporary feminist theory does overplay its hand, presenting the orthodoxy as more straightforwardly abstract and universal than in fact the case. Some does read as an affirmation of sexual differentiation against universal concept or ideals, and where it does this, I believe it risks losing what has been a powerful weapon against women's subordination or exclusion.


remains that domination and power structures of patriarchy can only be dismantled when they are recognised as causal factors in women's unfavourable placement.

Post-modernism has been categorised as a useful and sophisticated linguistic tool for textual analysis but challenged in its utility as a tool of social analysis since it ignores the social context of power relations. According to Delphy it is irrelevant for analysing the material reality of gendered relationships because as a linguistic tool it was not designed to discern the existence of socio-economic hierarchies that give meaning to gender difference.71

In a gender analysis the causal function of gender ideology cannot be undermined, though its practice would be determined and shaped by the specific context and its multitude diversities, where ethnicity, race, class and caste and these in combination would determine the form of oppression, subjugation, exploitation and, of course, corresponding strategies to combat these unfavourable placements.

Moreover, a focus on pluralities or diversities not contextualised in a gender perspective reduces the functioning of gender injustice to just an inequality, discrimination or abuse as the particular case may be. Such an analysis that disregards the ideology and concept of gender, only functions to provide invisibility to gender ideology and in fact undermines the very cause of

feminism, gender ideology, the historical and structural basis of women's placement.

No doubt, the situational factors such as religion, caste, sexual preference, age, ethnicity etc. shape the nature and extent of women's unfavourable position, yet the gender ideology whereby biological differences become the criterion of differentiation persist irrespective of situational pluralities or diversities.73

Not only does a focus on multiplicities makes gender ideology invisible, it also fails to incorporate the diversities into a holistic analysis, providing a separate identity to each specificity. ‘But too often these narratives do not criticize the generalizations...made about femaleness, and instead confine themselves to the assertion, in a liberal relativist way, of variety.’74

If each specificity were to have a separate identity, irrespective of a binding gender context then feminist analysis would be reduced to a descriptive analysis,75 with each identity competing with the other.

73 Some of contemporary feminist theory does overplay its hand, presenting the orthodoxy as more straightforwardly abstract and universal than is in fact the case. Some does read as an affirmation of sexual differentiation against universal concepts or ideals, and where it does this, I believe it risks losing what has been a powerful weapon against women's subordination or exclusion.

73 The energetic assertion of black/white (or any other) difference tends to create fixed and oppositional categories which can result in another version of the suppression of difference. Differences within categories - here black and white - are underplayed in order to establish between them. Consequently, each category takes on a deceptive air of internal coherence, and similarities between women in the different categories are thus suppressed.


75 The naming of differences became a way to claim a political identity, and at one level seemed to undermine the idea of women having any identity or politics in common.
Interestingly, both the equality and difference perspectives share a similarity in analysis. Both are a response to the dominant norm, the male or in case of the post-modernist view, a further reaction to the dominant female model. Keeping the dominant model in consideration, both perspectives recognise the difference between the dominant and the subordinate and the differentiation that dictates the subordinate’s unfavourable social placement but strive for opposing outcomes. Equality compensates women with an aim of equating the difference, whereas the difference standpoint aims at recognising and maintaining that difference. The response of these perspectives remains restricted vis-à-vis the dominant model, whereas the gender ideology and placement escapes notice keeping the structures of dominance intact. Moreover, both remain relative to each other, as opposites – claiming either equality or difference.
The approaches, discussed in the earlier section have tried to analyse and intervene for various gender related issues such as women’s empowerment, feminist movement, female poverty, reproductive and sexual health. They have also been used to understand violence against women which is the focus of this research endeavour.

The equality framework is based on the assumption that the violence directed against women is rooted in the practice of differentiation. In other words, women face violence on account of their sex. There is also a tendency within the equality perspective to consider atrocities against women as an aberration and behavioural dysfunction of psychologically deranged men. Another variation within equality framework is to understand violence against women as a manifestation of women’s subordination. The logic of this framework is to achieve equality propelled by the context of non-uniformity, in view of the existence of differentiation. Under the preview of homogeneity, gender violence gets restricted to violations vis-à-vis the other sex. Therefore, gender violence emanating from sex specific functions have no gender comparison in the realm of reproduction and sexuality, and remain outside the purview of the equality framework. The negation of gender specificities per se embodies violence.
The underlying gender ideology is ignored in its totality and only differentiation is focused on. The reference to the discriminatory institutions and derivative structures including atrocities against women finds value only in the context of male positioning.

Thus according to this perspective, the negation of violence against women becomes a necessary criterion for achieving equality between the two sexes. On this premise it can then be inferred that gender violence refers to only that violence which only women face. This gives rise to a number of questions; Is gender violence only limited to violence against women? Or to violence that women face from men? Or can men be also the victims of this violence? Another related question is, can the unequal treatment per se constitute violence? For instance, sex determined foeticides fall within the preview of inequality, but do they constitute violence?

Another question is, Is violence only a behavioural act – such as rape or dowry death? Such a definition would preclude the social neglect of girl children whereby they are denied nutrition or medical treatment that can result in eventual death. But no single act of denial of nutrition can be identified as violence since only a systematic denial at various levels would lead to eventual sex specific deaths. However, within the equality perspective, there are scholars who attribute denial of life chances which includes deprivation in terms of food, nutrition or health as also violence. Therefore, aspects of gender differentiation that can be defined as violence need to be analysed.

Similar questions regarding violence arise also in the context of the
difference debate, according to which lack of specific identity of women is the cornerstone for gender violence. According to this standpoint, identity defined according to another dominant identity (whether male or female) subjugates its specificity – which in turn results in subordination and even abuse. In fact in the case of experiential feminists, male control over females could be checked only by developing a male identity to the exclusion of female identity.

By virtue of the assumptions that male violence controls women, gender violence is restricted to violence as faced by women and perpetuated by the males. Similarly, for the post-modernists, the focus on local cultural specificities recognise the existence of gender violence in specific forms, as a subject-object phenomenon and by such definitions are restricted to a strategy of corrective justice. Thus the understanding of gender violence remains fragmented since gender roles, norms or values are divested of their controlling function in the manifestations of violence against women.

The question is not only of female subjugation, but also of a system of subjugation where women are the victims. However, men are not the only culprits. In fact women themselves subjugate other women. The crux being that both males and females are only instruments in the context of patriarchy. No doubt, this specific system leads to restrictions on women’s access to resources and limits the extent and quality of women’s participation within society by implementation of biological sex differences for social placements. The point being that biological essentialism cannot be taken as the criterion, either by radicals or by the patriarchal ideology to perpetuate a particular
system of male or female domination. Moreover, not all women are
subjugated or exploited in the same manner. Some women may face
discrimination in jobs or in education while others may be deprived of access
to education, while still others may face atrocities such as rape or wife-
beating. If women’s subjugation is to be countered in the context of social
justice then it is the ideology of gender differentiation the practice of which
results in deprivation, discrimination or atrocities on one sex. The process
through institutions, norms, values and role typing which promotes this
ideology has to be combated in order to curtail retrogressive impact on either
sex.

Both the difference and equality framework raise questions referring to the
definition of not only what constitutes violence but the definitions and
corresponding causations for gender violence. Within each perspective
scholars differ in attributing structural or behavioural acts to encompass
violence and thus difference in their attributing causations for the violence
occurring against women.

GENDER VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

Historically, the invisibility to violence against women remains considerable.
Institutional response continues to identify only some abuse and violence
against women. Rape in marriage continues to be absolved from being
recognised and termed as a crime in many countries.¹ The efforts to check

¹In fact, historically the institutionalised practice of violence against women can be gauged
from not only the legal sanction of wife beating, decreed by the 'rule of thumb' which allows a
husband to beat his wife with a stick not thicker than his thumb, but also from the fact that
British law recognized cruelty to women as a ground for divorce after it passed a law against
cruelty to animals in 1976. In fact this Act was an extension of the Cruelty to Animals Act of
1849 under which it was a crime to 'cruelly beat, ill treat, over-drive, abuse or torture' any
Atrocities form an integral aspect in defining laws on violence against women. However, gender violence has also been understood to include psychosomatic abuse, to encompass female subjugation, oppression and exploitation. Scholars have addressed and defined these issues with a focus on legal, sociological and experiential spheres. Legal definitions of violence against women cover aberrations of conduct as codified in conventional society. Sociological definitions range from the psychoanalytical to social learning to structural themes and also cover the definitions of violence as expressed by women who have faced it. Gondolf identified three broad theoretical approaches that study violence against women:

Psychoanalytic themes (that) focus on stress, anxiety and anger instilled during child rearing...social learning theories (that) consider the abuse to be an outgrowth of learned patterns of aggressive communication to which both husband and wife contribute...socio-political theories (that) hold the patriarchal power plays of men oppressing women to be at the heart of wife abuse.

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3 For details refer to Walby, S. op.cit. (1990) and Maynard, M. op.cit (1993)
Such an identification previews violence against women to include psychological essentialism, learned behaviour and patriarchal subjugation. A categorisation of psychological, social learning and structural violence against women would encompass the existing efforts to analyse violence against women. Psychological factors such as dysfunctional personality formations, sexual frustration and learning from disturbed social contexts have been studied to comprehend and define violence against women.

An alternative definition of violence against women has been framed by the radical experiential feminists according to whom violence against women is best captured by what is expressed as violence by women themselves. Kelly (1988), Stanko (1985) argue that women’s experience of abuse and perception of threat extend beyond the legal frame and professional analysis. According to Kelly, ‘if we are to reflect in our definition...the range and complexity of what women and girls experience as abusive, we must listen to what they have to say.’

According to Walby, the approach which adopts the definition of women themselves ‘capture more than any other method the extent of impact of violence on women’.

However, scholars who understand violence against women to be structural while including perceived violence against, women focus on the ideologically determined social placements that determine female subjugation. Initial efforts to combat violence against women were initiated by the theoretical understanding that incidents of violence against women were aberration in

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6 Walby, S. op.cit. (1990)
society propelled by psychopathic behaviour of a few deranged men. Traumatic, adverse experiences and psychologically deranged men have been cited as behaving violently towards women. Empirical investigations by West, Roy and Nichols reported that impaired personality development from childhood experiences, followed by frustration led men to commit rape.\textsuperscript{7} Sexual frustration due to dysfunctional family background have been supported by Stanko.\textsuperscript{8} Similarly, according to Dobash and Dobash, wife batterers are emotionally disturbed or neurotic men.\textsuperscript{9} Social learning through the ‘cycle of violence’ led Prizzy to conclude that childhood witnessing of wife beating leads boys to grow up and beat their wives.\textsuperscript{10} Dysfunctional role behaviour of wives and mothers has also been attributed to encouraging men to abuse wives and children.\textsuperscript{11} The problem was specified to be individual and relief oriented. Subsequently remedial measures which were corrective in nature were undertaken. Laws framed dealt with individual instances recommending counselling or institutionalisation of the perpetrator. These strategies were supported by the psycho-analytical view of violence centering the problem on abnormal behaviour. Criticism of psychoanalytical and social learning theories has been made on grounds that they represent ‘an exceptional explanation of a universal problem.’\textsuperscript{12} A number of studies have reported widespread violence against women as have investigations of

\textsuperscript{10} Pizey, E. (1974), Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear Harmondsworth: Penguin.
perpetrators revealed a negligible number to be affected by mental disorders belying the understanding that violence against women is committed by a few deranged men. Lori Heise, et al., reporting on the extent of wife beating prevalent in 35 countries, reveal that 'in many countries one-quarter to more than half of women report having been physically abused by a present or former partner. Moreover, Walby's analysis of sentenced rapists in British Courts in 1978 reveals that only 3.5 per cent were sentenced to a hospital order. She concludes that 'the empirical evidence does not support the contention that rapists are psychologically deranged.' Similar studies of abusive men by Maiuro, et al. confirm that few men suffered from psychopathic ailment and further studies of diagnosed psychopaths revealed no consistent pattern of mental illness, disproving the belief that most violent men are mentally deranged. Methodologically, criticism of non-representative samples and ignoring the gender context have been levied as serious problems in advancing theories of psychological or socialised misconduct of some men.

The view that psychopathic disorders or external factors such as alcoholism were causing violence against women have been challenged by scholars, who have analysed the issue of violence against women through structural theories, where lack of equality manifesting in social deprivation or

14 Ibid. p.15.
patriarchal power in a male-dominated society directs the formation of practices abusive to women. Unfavourable economic conditions have been one factor analysed as causing men to behave violently against women.\textsuperscript{18} Wilson concluded that stress emanating from economic deprivation characterised by unemployment, lack of housing etc., resulted in frustration and consequently wife abuse among the lower strata of men.\textsuperscript{19} Class based analysis where poverty was found to cause disproportionately higher abuse of women in blue collar workers in comparison with white collar workers has been reported by Gelles.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, Eisenhomer reported that rape cases were found predominantly in the lower class, which had three to five times more rape cases than in families with higher incomes.\textsuperscript{21} Inherent social inequalities of class and race positions have been further extended to a deviant sub-cultures of violence by Amir, through empirical investigations of socio-economic and race backgrounds of reported cases. He argues that men from the lower classes adopt alternative values to the existing cultural values which they find difficult to achieve and replace it with attributes of machoism and physical dominance where rape as a form of violence is an acceptable value.\textsuperscript{22}

Economist analysis of violence against women has also been forwarded due to poor productivity of women and their lack of market value. In this

\textsuperscript{18} See for details Smith, L. op. cit. (1989)
\textsuperscript{19} Wilson, E. (1983), \textit{What is to be Done About Violence Against Women?} Harmondsworth : Penguin.
\textsuperscript{20} Gelles, R.J. (1972), \textit{The Violent Home} Beverly Hills, California : Sage.
\textsuperscript{22} Amir, M. (1971), \textit{Patterns In Forcible Rape} Chicago : Chicago University Press.
economic determining frame, Indira Rajaram proposes the spread of dowry as a consequence of declining productivity of the female labour force. In the context of agriculture, modern practices with higher productivity marginalise women labour. According to Indira Rajaram, Dowry is defined as:

"Value of the cost of supporting a women over her life time, if female earnings drop to zero, and something less if female earnings drop below the cost of subsistence but not all the way to zero."\(^{23}\)

Mies, in her criticism of this argument says that such a proposal is based on the view of woman as a liability where dowry is meant to compensate in part or in full for the lifetime subsistence of a woman.\(^{24}\)

Similar arguments based on economistic logic have also been proposed by Bardhan, who perceives women's discrimination and the unfavourable sex ratio as a result of women's lack of participation in the production process.

the differential survival chance of the female child improves with higher female employment rate or with a lower male-female earning differential per day. If there is any validity to this, this means that expanding employment opportunities for women or lowering the male-female were differential in rural India is not just another 'feminist' cause : it may actually save the lives of many little girls in rural households.\(^{25}\)

Such analyses have been criticised for economic determinism, which ignore the gendered structure of society and imply entry of women into social production would negate the existence of patriarchy.\(^{26}\)

\(^{23}\) Rajaram, I. (1983), 'Economics of Br be - Price and Dowry' Economic and Political Weekly 18(8), pp. 276
\(^{25}\) Bardhan, P. (1982), 'Little Girls and Deaths in India, Economic and Political Weekly 17(36), pp. 1450.
Walby has criticised these economic centered studies for ignoring the fundamental social analysis of gender and concludes: "They provide no explanation for what is surely the most crucial aspect of these attacks, their gendered nature".\(^{27}\) She also cites methodological problems of samples taken by these studies which studied cases of rape reported to the police. Most cases of rape are not reported and those reported in a racist society are more likely to be of racial minorities.\(^{28}\) Other studies have found no race or class differences in perpetrators or victims. Russell mentions in a study of marital rape, husbands were drawn evenly from all classes – 36 per cent from the upper middle, and 32 per cent each from the middle and lower-class with ethnic cases representative of ethnic population.\(^{29}\) Pahl also supports the finding that battered women who sought shelter reflect that domestic violence cuts across all class and social groupings.\(^{30}\)

Attention to gender politics as manifesting in violence against women was drawn by Frances P. Cobbe as early as 1878. Maynard reports that according to Cobbe and others violence against women was not pathological behaviour of a few ‘sick’ men but ‘rather it was an extension of a system of practices and laws which sanctioned men’s rights to regard women as their property and therefore to keep them under their control.’\(^{31}\) Millet comments

\(^{27}\) Walby (1990) p. 134
\(^{28}\) Ibid. (1990) p. 133.

Initial attention to violence against women dates back to the first wave feminism where Cobb (1878, 1894, and Panhurst, 1913) drew attention to issues of domestic violence with wife beating being termed as wife torture and to issues of rape and incest.
on the insidious force of patriarchy that is systemic and its pervasiveness allows the belief that abuse is an individual dysfunction.

We are not accustomed to associate patriarchy with force. So perfect is its system of socialization, so complete the general assent to its values, so long and so universally has its prevailed inhuman society, that it scarcely seems to require violent implementation. Customarily, we view its brutalities in the past as exotic or 'primitive' custom. Those of the present are regarded as the product of individual deviance, confined to pathological or exceptional behaviour, and without general import. And yet, just as under other total ideologies...control in patriarchal society would be imperfect, even inoperable, unless it had the rule of force to rely upon, both in emergencies and as an ever-present instrument of intimidation.\textsuperscript{32}

Structural analysis of the violence women face has been proposed by socio-political theories, which analyse violence against women within two broad approaches — under one are the radical feminists who view patriarchal structures to be synonymous with male domination over women whereby violence against women not only subordinates and subjugates women but is also a mechanism of control. The gendered analysis of violence against women has been explored by the radical feminists, to whom male domination and male violence in particular is at the core of women's unfavourable placement. They define violence against women as that which women experience as a threat or abuse.

The other view challenges the existing gender roles and balance of power between women and men and which recognising male violence as one of the forms of power over women and view it to be 'shaped as a result of patriarchal control over women in other areas'.\textsuperscript{33} Importantly, gender violence is analysed as part of patriarchal structures historically contextualised in

\textsuperscript{32} Millett, K. (1972), \textit{Sexual Politics} London : ABACUS, p. 43
\textsuperscript{33} Walby, S. op.cit. (1990) p. 143.
class and primordial group based society.

The conceptualisation of male violence against women has been analysed by radical feminists as both a reflection and manifestation of the unequal gender power relations. The gender difference as a hierarchy is established and maintained according to authors like Brownmiller, Hanmer and Sounders, from the practice of male violence against women.

Hanmer and Maynard term the unequal power relations between men and women as gender stratification and according to them gender violence needs to be analysed in the context of power inequality and oppression that is institutionalised in society.

The hierarchical nature of a society where gender stratification is fundamental and violence plays a major role in the social control of women. This is both from individual men and via the institutionalisation of violence in a social structure dominated by men as a group (or class).34

Conceptualisation of gender violence as provided encompass the structural hierarchy and institutionalised forms of stratification but specifically analyse abuse faced by women as directed by men.

The term ‘gender stratification’ underlines the unequal power relationship between men and women in both the public and private spheres. The analysis of violence, including the threat and fear of violence demonstrates some of the mechanisms through which the domination and subordination is maintained and reproduced.35

Underlying the experiential definition of violence against women is the analysis that violence against women is perpetuated by males and the norm of heterosexuality whereby men demonstrate their power over women

35 Ibid.
through force and abuse. Moreover, Saunders and Hanmer caution that in terms of personal experience there is no necessary grading of severity of abuse.36

This approach analyses both violence and sexuality to be socially constructed in a manner that maintains male dominance. Brownmiller, in particular contents that male violence is the basis of men's control over women. Male socialisation patterns glorify male physical power and violence as a method to settle disputes making rape a fall-out. Since both violence and masculinity are socially constructed, the sexual objectification of the female form furthers the likelihood of rape. Brownmiller contents that rape is a mechanism of social control not because all men rape but have the biological capacity to do so whereby the possibility exists as a threat to intimidate women into submission. Hanmer substantiates that 'force and its threat is never...residual or secondary...rather it is the structural underpinning of hierarchical relations'.37

Brownmiller analysis of rape as social control over women was extended by Hanmer and Sounder to include other forms of violence against women specially wife beating.

Studies such as those conducted by Diana Russell38 reveal the extent of violence against women. She reports that 44 per cent of the women in her random sample had been the victims of rape or attempted rape. 24 per cent

of the married women had been beaten by their husbands and another 16 per cent had been the victims of incest. Another study by Hanmer and Saunders found 59 per cent of the women to have undergone ‘threatening, violence or sexual behaviour’ towards them in the previous year. Similar findings have been reported by Radford where a majority of women had experienced violence either as a threat or experience physical sexual abuse. Forty four per cent reported a violent attack, 41 per cent were threatened in a public place, 32 per cent were attacked or threatened by a stranger in their home, 38.5 per cent were sexually harassed at work and 39 per cent had been threatened or attacked by the men they were living with. These findings indicate the pervasiveness and the many forms of violence faced by women.

The idea of male physical force and its threat represents the structural gender placement of male domination and female subordination. The extent of structural underpins have been studied not only by the pervasiveness of violence against women in its various forms but also furthered by institutions such as the state.

The state is also typified as an agent of male violence against women. Hanmer and Saunders have criticised the state as a supporter of patriarchal practices. In specific they argue that both the lack of provisions for a woman to acquire independence from a violent man and the lack of state intervention in routine cases of violence restrict women from acquiring an alternative from the abusive situation she is placed in.

The structural uncovering of violence against women and also incorporating forms of violence as perceived by women have led to viewing various forms of violence against women as a unitary phenomenon. Forms such as flashing, pornography are included as violence and abuse since women perceive these experiences as threatening and disturbing to their lives. It is the various forms of violence against women as a composite spectrum of violence that in their interrelation function with a detrimental impact on women.41

However, gender stratification according to these definitions pertains to male experience of power over women by individuals and through institutions. Male abuse of women has focused attention on the social construction of masculinity and its linkages with violence against women. Morgan contends that the construction of masculinity which are dominant notions about men are intrinsically linked with phenomenon's identifying, defining, explaining and legitimising violence. According to Morgan, "given the sexual division of labour and the particular position of men in relation to activities to do with the state and warfare, men may play a crucial role in defining the parameters within which violence is defined and understood."42

Morgan contends that the explanation and legitimisation of violence, including male violence against women along with militarism and warfare can be explained through the social construction of masculinities. By examining the links between different levels of violence, ranging from warfare to

interpersonal violence he also cautions against a uniform model of male violence perceiving patriarchy as only male violence directed at women, rather a construction of masculinities which are socially cultivated to legitimise various forms of violence.

This experiential feminists movement to control violence against women has generated a debate on perceiving abused women as survivors rather than victims in an effort to develop strategies and resistance through organisation of women to combat violence against women. Strategies to combat violence against women, are thus not centered around relief measures through shelters for battered and raped women are part of the efforts to attend to women's abuse.

Violence against women has also been analysed from a perspective that views violence as one of the structures of patriarchy rather than the only vital mechanism of social control and subjugation of women. In fact, Barrett stresses that violence against women cannot be separated from other means of controlling women.43

For Walby, violence against women forms one of the six structures of patriarchy that need to be undermined simultaneously in the public and private spheres.

Within the socio-political theories Lori Heise has made efforts to review and coin the appropriate definition of what constitute violence against women. According to her a definition of violence against women must focus on violence that accrues to women because they are female, which to her

constitutes gender based violence.

What distinguishes violence against women is force and coercion (whether verbal or physical) that is socially tolerated in part because the victims are female. At times this force may be consciously applied to perpetuate male power and control; at other times that intent may be missing, but the effect nonetheless is to cause harm in a way that reinforces female subordination.44

She also specifies that such a definition must have at its core concepts of fear and coercion to distinguish between behaviour that is violence or merely oppression. She proposes the following definition of violence against women:

An act of verbal or physical force, coercion, or life-threatening deprivation, directed at an individual woman or girl, that causes physical or psychological harm, humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and that perpetuates female subordination.45

She includes life threatening deprivation along with fear and coercion to define violence women face. Thus systemic deprivation that may not be directed at an individual female is also included by inclusion of structural inequalities such as laws against violence and structural adjustment policies rather than being limited to only acts perpetuated by individuals or the state. Moleneux has also analysed gender violence as one of the components of a differentiating system. She views the gender differentiating system which places women in a subordinate position to men in society. According to her gender hierarchy represents unequal power relations and manifests itself in violence against women. She proposed a strategy which identifies women’s interests to be comprising both practical gender needs and strategic gender

45 Ibid.
Strategic gender needs are conceptualised from the analysis of women's subordination and positioning within the gender division and seek to combat women's structural oppression in society. As mentioned earlier, according to Moleneux, strategic measures that could transform women's subordinate position include negation of institutionalised forms of discrimination, measures against male violence such as sexual exploitation of women and coercive forms of marriage. They also include alleviation of the burden of child care and domestic labour on women along with the abolition of the gender divisional labour.

Strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. Strategic gender needs vary according to particular contexts. They relate to gender divisions of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and men's control over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles and therefore challenges women's subordinate position.

The achievement of these strategic needs is what entails women's emancipation and achievement of gender equality by challenging the prevailing forms of gender difference.

Mies has analysed violence against women as a means for extraction of female labour which draw its life force from the patriarchal and class relations . embedded in society. According to her, it is "the use of structural or direct violence and coercion by which women are exploited and super exploited".

46 Gender interests are those that women for that matter may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes. Gender interests can be either strategic or practical each being derived in a different way and each involving differing implications for women's subjectivity.


48 Mies, M. op.cit. (1986) p. 145
and it is integral to all productive labour and labour relations under the capital accumulative society. She views violence against women as a "historically produced phenomenon that is closely related to exploitative men-women, class and international relations". All these relations are today more or less integrated into systems of capital accumulation. While linking the conditions of women and colonial people she propose that the dominant social premise is that of a property, a commodity, as nature rather than free subjects who could not, therefore, enter into contract and had to be subordinated by force and direct violence.

Gender violence constitutes a specific category of violence. The conditions for gender violence derive their life force from the interface between gender ideology and the development process, providing it a specific nature and causation. Its impact is unique to it and excludes other aspects of general violence. For instance, mob violence in which women may also be the victims would not fall under the purview of gender violence. Similarly, if a policeman beats up a criminal who happens to be a woman then this action does not constitute gender violence. In other words, infliction of injury or harm by individual men on women which is the outcome of the performance of social roles other than the gender roles cannot be counted as violence against women.

It is the denial of, and restricted access to, resources contribute to women's inferior status and make them vulnerable to various atrocities. The

49 Ibid, p. 169
50 ...life threatening deprivation ... includes systematic neglect of girl children in cultures that value sons over daughters. This type of deprivation (including withholding of food and medical care) leads directly to death and starvation on a significant scale, and is perpetrated against individual girls, distinguishing it from other acts of omission that more properly
underlying ideology of the male superordination blurs the gender
discrimination and conscious harnessing of male potentials. This situation
results in the cultivation of capacities to control resources on an unequal
basis. For instance, deprivation in terms of access to facilities and resources
and even life, discrimination in income inheritance, medical care and nutrition
and atrocities like dowry harassments and dowry deaths, are a reflection of
the operation of the differentiating gender system.
The differentiating gender system constitutes violence against women since it
is built into the structures and its practice results in unequal power and
consequently unequal life chances for women.
Gender violence has its basis in the misappropriation of the biological sex
differences, whereby these are projected not only to encompass the real
biological differences, but also to be the criterion for the differentiating
conditions and opportunities available to and availed of by males and
females. Such a process disseminates and maintains deprivation (denial of
access to resources and skills), discrimination (practice of social placement
based on gender typed roles, norms, practices, customs) and atrocities
(severe physical abuse) on the female gender.

DIMENSIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE
Violence against women has been defined variously, with reference to
subject-object i.e. perpetrator-victim relationship, by attributing meaning to
various acts as adversely affecting the status of women i.e. from constitute
discrimination or structural inequality (for example, lack of access to schooling).
discrimination to violence; through its manifest forms i.e. rape, molestation, dowry death etc.,

These definitions reflect the dimensions of gender violence – can its scope be restricted to only somatic effects which are visible and identify both the perpetrator and the victim, focusing on certain forms of violence only and keeping invisible the process and differentiating gender ideology that manifests itself to deprive, discriminate and abuse women with an impact that harms or injures the female gender?

Violence defined only in the subject-object framework as in legal definitions and as psychological, impaired functioning defines a specific target: women, and a perpetrator. Such a scope limits gender violence to only constitute visible action and reduces it to an individual victim perpetrator frame. Such an approach is restricted to locating the causes of violence against women in individual attitude and the socialization process rather than encompassing structural factors. Even when there is no definite target-victim or a perpetrator, women's life chances are reduced because biologically they happen to be females. For instance, many practices such as genital mutilation, rape, are faced by women irrespective of their caste, class, age etc.

Another aspect of gender violence is that it is not just the sex of the victim, that is females which falls under the category of gender violence but even males can be the victims of this gender violence. Many analyses of gender violence, though distinguishing random violence and gender-based violence, understand gender-based violence to be 'the notion of violence against
women, not include violence directed towards men or directed towards women for reasons unrelated to their sex.\textsuperscript{51}

It may not be a totally valid generalisation if the distinction is seen only in terms of the sex of the victim. It is normally believed that in violence against women the force or coercion (whether verbal or physical) is socially tolerated in part because the victims are female\textsuperscript{52}. It is not denying the fact that the majority of the victims of gender violence are females. But males also being the victim of this violence cannot be ignored. For instance, in dowry, a male is reduced to a commodity with a price tag. Commodification of the male is also the result of the practice of patriarchy which is not only degrading and dehumanising, but is also exploitative. The boy is also placed in the marriage market to be sold to the highest bidder. Males also face direct violence if they flout the norms of patriarchy by acts such as eloping with a girl. Of course, the severity of the punishment increases if the caste hierarchy is also flouted. Another corollary of this fact is that the use of force against the female gender directly reinforces the male norm. It is not merely the perpetuation of male power and control, but also reinforcement of the processes of patriarchy, which is central. For example, bride burning by the mother-in-law reinforces the male norm. In this case both the perpetrator and the victim happen to be female. The effect of this is the subordination of the female gender, in which the mother-in-law is equally affected. Thus radical feminists' understanding of violence against women that it is perpetuated by males may not be sound. Behaviour by the man, adopted to control his victim, which

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 46-47.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 47
results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced isolation, or economic deprivation or behaviour which leaves a woman living in fear.

(Australia 1991).\textsuperscript{53}

Such definitions claim the male to be the perpetrator of female abuse and fails to understand that individual and institutional violence against women is a factor of gender ideology rather than structural male subjugation of the female.

The point is that gender violence encompasses both violence against men and women. Both are victims and also perpetrators to the extent that they are instruments of the gender system and perpetuate the gender ideology.

More importantly, when the victims are under the influence of gender norms, violence may be perceived only as severe physical abuse and, therefore, no outrage or injustice is perceived or exhibited and the status quo is retained, allowing perpetuation of the related acts and continuation of the subjugative gender system. Thus if women are themselves victim of the gender ideology they may be invisible to gender violence such as rape in marriage. The experiential definitions and analysis of women abuse would not be able to capture or analyse such normatively accepted gender violence. Moleneux while discusses women's strategic gender interests and women's recognition of these says that their desire to realise them cannot be taken for granted.\textsuperscript{54}


\textsuperscript{54} “Even the “lowest common denominator” of interests (e.g. complete equality with men, control over reproduction and greater personal autonomy and independence from men) are not readily accepted by all women” Moleneux, M. op. cit. (1985), pp. 227-54.
What is normative and is socially acceptable such as wife-beating which is widespread may not constitute perceived violence.

Another major issue is whether gender discrimination or deprivation should be counted as instances of violence or not. The contention that these should be described as 'gender inequalities – discriminations' is useful so long as it is understood as part of a continuum i.e. differentiation - discrimination - deprivation - violence. The first three constitute the necessary conditions for gender atrocities. Gender differentiation is social placement on the basis of stereotyped roles. For instance, women are typed procreators and nurturers, but men are the earners, therefore the inheritors of resources. This differentiation in practice leads to gender discrimination, since it negates the women's right to productive resources and maintains these only for men. Gender deprivation is denial of access to women to resources and skills. For instance, if medical treatment to women is provided by male doctors then some women are denied access to health facilities, particularly relating to gynaecological problems. In fact, acting out of these gender inequalities may cause emotional harm to its aware victims.

The practice of gender violence functions within the following broad conditions:

(i) the gender differentiating ideology and

(ii) the force unleashed by the interface of the gender ideology with the development process. However, in accordance with the scope of this research only gender violence in the context of its impact on women will be studied.
TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

The feminist debate of equality and difference has raised dilemma both in theory and in politics over the equal treatment or the special treatment strategies. It raises questions not only about the extent to which equality can be practised, but is itself a viable concept given the essential biological differences and corresponding needs of men and women. Theoretically a 'gender neutral' approach could encompass only aspects of human nature ignoring the specificities of either sex. Arguing in the frame A. Phillips on gender equality remains synonymous with the male standards.

Insisting on equality as something we claim despite all differences, women have been encouraged to deny aspects of themselves and to conform to some unitary norm; the second is that this norm was never gender-neutral.\textsuperscript{55}

Equality to the given standard which is an established male standard rather than a human standard further falters on two accounts. One, it does not take into account that men also suffer injustices, abuse, exploitation, discrimination etc. (minimum wages have no applicability in the exploitative informal sector) and, therefore, this standard cannot be promoted as a human standard\textsuperscript{56} for either males or females. Two, in the context of the prevailing


\textsuperscript{56}The feminist political project of creating equality for women, where that meant equality with the existing position of men, by the removal of those disadvantages currently associated with being a woman. However, this perspective failed to recognize that men's positions in society were just as gendered as women's. It was not only that women were disadvantaged by their gender, but that men were privileged by theirs; in a hierarchy it is, of course, impossible for everyone to be on top. Similarly, in the theoretical project of making women count as equals, if women were to be rendered invisible by measuring them against scales appropriate to men, all that could be shown was the ways in which women were either the same or as different from men, and little could be said about the structural interdependence of women's and men's characteristics.
gender ideology, a male standard reinforces male superiority and female inferiority since norms established for men are extended to enable women parity, especially in the context of positive discriminations applicable to women and encourages normative sanction to violence against women.

The concept of equality pre-supposes that equal treatment would lead to equal outcomes. The aim of equality finds relevance only because there are differences between men and women whether biological or socially constructed. However, treatment of equality can yet lead to an unequal outcome.\(^{57}\)

The assumption of providing equality in the context of inequality (determined either through difference or differentiation) would restrict the exercise of equality or in fact violate equality by dismissing the specificities. Equal work opportunities may not allow women to exercise the option of night shifts for fear of sexual abuse and if they do exercise the option they may be violated in a society that lays restrictions and codes of conduct on women's

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Bell Hooks ... [has] suggest(ed.) that the language of equality is simplistic and glib. "Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure which men do women want to be equal to?" (Hooks, 1987, p.62). When feminism defines itself as a movement to gain social equality with men, it judges the crucial question: relying on the abstractions of equal opportunities, it obscures the real problems that beset women's lives. Phillips, A. op. cit. (1994), pp. 211-212

\(^{57}\) Various incidences including internationally debated legal cases to achieve equality can be stated to forward this argument. For instance, the Foetal Protection Policy of Johnson Control in America was taken to court to equalise access to women to higher paid jobs. According to company policy women were not provided access to certain higher paid jobs which involved working on lead on the basis that exposure to lead would lead to foetal maldevelopment. Women employees had to present a certificate of sterilisation in order to be considered for these jobs. Under the Equal (Law) discriminatory acts such as this imposition was abrogative of women's equal rights. The debate was further fuelled by the court's judgement which while equalising access asked women to choose between reproductive hazards and higher pay. The judgement signalled the incapacity of equality efforts to cater to biological sex or gender differences. A number of such cases found representations in court where similar treatment was producing unequal outcomes. Moreover, the equality debate also questioned the provision of alimony in case of divorced women and some states in America even abolished this settlement. Brenner, J. op. cit. (1996), p. 17-72.
movements. Equal opportunities provide equal treatment in conditions of difference - men and women have different biological needs and thereby demand different opportunities.

Equality, it is argued, cannot be achieved by holding everyone to the same abstract standard — similar treatment. Rather, equality can be secured only by recognising that people are different in many different ways. If our goal is to enable everyone to have the same opportunity to participate, then it is necessary to accommodate people's differences.58

Biological differences between men and women need to be recognised. Men do not get pregnant, whereas women do. Provision of maternity leave for women has been resisted under the auspices of equal treatment.59 Accommodation of the maternal condition in employment laws in the guise of special treatment and positive discrimination has resulted in disadvantaging women. For instance, to avoid maternity benefits, women's recruitment in the formal sector was avoided by certain corporations yet substantiated in the informal sector.60 Such practices towards equality ignored women's specific placement arising from sex differences and the differential gender ideology. Besides, women being subordinated to male standards, results in specificities of women being ignored.

The project of women's equal inclusion meant that only women's sameness to men, only women's humanity and not their womanliness could be

58 The argument has particular pertinence to sexual equality, for the tension between called for equal treatment or insisting on women's special needs is one that remains at the heart of feminist dilemmas. For women to have an 'equal right' to work, for example, they may actually need more than the men. They need maternity leave; they need workplace nurseries; they need extra safety conditions when pregnant; they may need time off for menstruation. Such arguments, of course, can be a hostage to fortune, for once you admit that women are different from men, you may diminish their chances at work."
Ibid., p. 46.
59 In the state of California, U.S.A., the law requiring payment of maternal leave was challenged on the premise of discrimination against men, since similar benefits were not provided to workers with other temporary disabilities.
60 For details see Punjab : Labour Department and Safety Council (1993), Working Conditions of Women and Girl Child in Industries of Punjab.
discussed.\textsuperscript{61}

The equality perspective highlighted that the existing theoretical frameworks were patriarchal and needed restructuring. Theoretical problems posed by the equality debate pertained to the utilisation of patriarchal discourse in social theory where framework concepts, methods and techniques relevant to men and which exclude female experience and biology are used to enforce a standard on women.

In theory the conceptualisation of equality is conceived on grounds of an universal uniformity and in the operative reality it concedes to the existence of an established standard as the prescribed ordain for the human species. The given standard is that of the male as the norm. Spike Patterson argues that the principal of equality enshrined in human rights — discourse is imposed by taking the standpoint of men.

Human rights are gender specific. This is established empirically by reference to gender-differentiated human rights practices, and conceptually by reference to the model of human nature underpinning the rights traditions. Both in application and in theory, human rights are based on the male as the norms.\textsuperscript{62}

The male norm perspective of equality retards gender claims for justice on two accounts. Gender specificities arising from distinct biological, social and other conditions which determine social placement, role typing or institutionalised practices remain unattended to, as these fall outside the preview of the given male standard. By transcending diversities, it not only ignores the biological differences, but concedes the practice of differentiation.

\textsuperscript{61} Gross, E. op. cit (1994), p. 356
and allows the dominant specificity to dictate and subordinate the particulars. Thus not only do women specific issues like reproduction, child care, rape or wife beating remain outside the central agenda of equality and the male as the norm reinforces the gender hierarchy.

The politics of equality directs energies to the spheres that are occupied by men, while the predominantly female activities around housework or child care remain obscured as always from view. Women are called on to fit themselves into slots devised for the men, and their own needs are in the process ignored. Why should equality mean women shaping themselves to a world made for men?63

The generalisation and naturalisation of male as the norm dictates a social reality that is male oriented excluding experimental reality of women domain. Also it remains external to gender power relations and their structural interdependence. Moreover, within this context of gender parity, if women are accommodated for having special interests such as abortion rights or maternal benefits then it undermines the very assumption of equality by focusing on the sex specificities and justifying the differentiation. Attribution of compensation or compassion for women’s biology arises since equality is defined according to male tenets. Compensation as a deviation further enforcing women as the other.

The limitations of the equality framework, which in operational reality substantiated a male hegemony rather than a human perspective, was made more profound by the advent of feminist politics that advocated human identity to be sexually differentiated. Women experiential world of the domestic domain, their sexuality and specific biological needs were not catered to by the human parity paradigm and women’s unfavourable

63 Philips, A. op. cit (1994), p. 219
placement remained intact.
Feminist theory started focusing on the differences between men and women and questioned the need for an equal standard for both.

The approach of the difference standpoint is sectional (focusing only on women or local specificities/problems) and in the process it ignores the context i.e. the gender ideology. The radicals target male dominance in particular male violence against women rather than the differentiating system, of which even women are a part. (Thus dowry related violence would not encompass the subjugative and abusive role of female in-laws).

Similarly, the post-modernists target a specific issue without contextualising it in the gender frame. In fact, such an approach is not directed at undermining women's unfavourable conditions but is problem specific, which may or may not address some interests of women. Focus on a specificity or on women in isolation to the gender context, as the case may be does not cater to the system of dominance. By addressing the questions of women's subordination in isolation, the interactive system of gender hierarchy is not undermined.

Radical feminists form part of this perspective, since patriarchy, according to them, is a system of universal male dominance over women rather than an interactive system of gendered roles, norms, values and practices. Accordingly, their strategy advocates displacement of a male hegemony rather than negation of the gender differentiation ideology and its manifestation in violence against women. The structures of dominance reign intact. It is the interface between the genders and the ideology of a differential gender system that has to be tackled. Determining women's
property rights or attempting to combat dowry is not possible without undermining the male child preference, gender specific norms, values or roles.

Feminists have now expressed doubt regarding the extremes of political strategies espousing equality or the difference perspectives in combating women's unfavourable status and violence against women.

In effect neither position was satisfactory. The equality end of the feminist spectrum had tended to highlight women as workers, while the difference end has highlighted women as mothers. Since most women in practice are both, stressing either aspect to the exclusion of the other is usually a dangerous choice.64

Anne Phillips endorses such a conclusion and mentions the need to achieve a balance between universal values and group differences to evolve unity while recognising social differences, according to her the question being, '..What balance one might hope to achieve between the ideals of the universal citizen and the reality of group differentiation.'65

To combat violence against women, the focus should be on the ideology of gender rather than on equal rights or particular needs. This is because equality targets universal values and difference targets particular needs and neither questions the structures of dominance and the subsequent violence against women. Patriarchy necessitates to be addressed in specific as an ideology, in the context of universal values manifesting through particular needs in local specific forms.

64 Ibid, p. 220