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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The universal phenomenon of domestic violence has seriously attracted the global attention during the past few decades. Violence against women exists in almost every society irrespective of caste, colour, sex, creed, status, religion, education etc. In India the phenomenon is viewed as an outcome of male patriarchal society and may take various forms like wife battering, torture for dowry, sexual perversion, use of abusive language, humiliation etc. Most often it is a hidden crime committed within the four walls of the matrimonial home and goes unreported. The poor victims of domestic violence suffer in silence considering it as their fate often they fear social stigma, involvement of family prestige, financial dependency, future of children, attachment of religious sentiments etc, because of which they prefer to remain silent, than to make such acts known to public.

KEYWORDS

Aggression, Domestic violence, Frustration, Stress.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic Violence covers the entire gamut of exploitation, discrimination, maintaining unequal economic and social structures and creation of an atmosphere of terror and threat, all of which are supported and mandated by the socio-economic context of power relations¹. Family with its underlying basis of hierarchical structure (gender, age and economic status) and sexual division of labour is a unit where violence is used as a tool to maintain its structures and also to ensure the continuation of the assigned roles of the members. "Violence inflicted on women in the internal life of the family, in so-called 'privacy' of the home extends beyond it, and so it should be understood in its total context"².

The theories of domestic violence to a very great extent centre round the concept of the subordination of women. In her excellent treatise 'Challenging Status and Adjustment of Women', Rita Sood³ has tried to review the various theoretical perspectives regarding the subordinate status and role of women. She discusses male supremacy and female subordination from biological, anthropological, Freudian and Marxist perspectives.

Before we discuss the major theories of family violence it would be relevant to consider some important factors associated with it. Richard J. Gelles⁴ in his article "Domestic Criminal Violence" has fully brought out the theoretical implications of the factors associated with domestic violence.

1.2. THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

According to Gelles one of the consistent conclusions of domestic violence research is that individuals who have gone through violent and abusive childhoods are more likely to grow up to become child and spouse abusers than individuals who experienced little or no violence in their childhood. Researchers report that less severe forms of violence are passed on from generation to generation. Data collected from various sources also lent support to the hypothesis that "Violence begets violence". Those who experience violence as teenagers indulge in domestic violence during their youths. "Husbands who were categorized as being reared in the more violent homes had a rate of wife abuse 600 times greater than husbands reared in the least violent homes"⁵.

Rehana Ghadially⁶ gives a different interpretation of the cycle theory of violence. On the basis of interviews with woman who had suffered at the hand of their husbands, she observes that women are generally beaten under stress and if they resist, they are beaten more severely but ultimately follows a peace loving respite. This theory, finds support in Walker's three phase theory of battering. (1) a tension building period followed by, (2) acute battering, and (3) then the clam-loving respite. These women – the ones who are put off their houses, hospitalized or seek the aid of institutions are the ones who are further victimized. The woman leaves the house when the man is in phase 2. Very often social workers do not accept the women's version of beating. When they meet the husband to know about his version, he has already moved into phase 3.

1.2.1. Socio-Economic Status

Early research on domestic violence claimed that social features were not related to acts of domestic abuse. The emphasis was in individual traits of spouses. Later research supported the hypothesis that domestic violence is more prevalent in low socio-economic status families (Byrd, 1979; Gelles, 1974; Elmer, 1967; Straus et al., 1980). This conclusion, however, does not mean that domestic violence is confined to lower class families. Recent reports confirm that gruesome spouse abuse can be found even in affluent families. The case of the burning of Naina Sahni in Delhi "Tandoor Case" June 1995) is a self-revealing instance.

1.2.2. Race

Data collected on the relationship between race and family violence have given mixed results. Data from the U.S. National Survey of Family Violence in 1980 indicates no difference in the rates of abusive violence towards children, among black and white families (15 percent in black families, 14 percent in white families). The National Family Violence Survey found that a rate of abusive violence among couples, i.e. towards wives and towards husbands was higher in black than in white families. Black couples reported a rate of abusive violence more than double the rate of whites⁷.

¹ U. Vindhya, "Battered Conjuality: The psychology of Domestic Violence" in Kalpana Kannabiran (ed.), The violence of Normal Times, Essays on Women's Lived Realities (2005), p.197.

² "Domestic Violence: The Perspectives and Experiences of an Activist Group" in Violence against women by Sushama Sood (1990), p.269.

³ Sood, Rita, Changing Status and Adjustment of Women, (Nanak publications, Delhi, 1990), pp.13ff.

⁴ Gelles, Richard J., "Domestic Criminal Violence", in Criminal Violence by Marvin E. Wolfgang & Neil Allan Weiner (Sage publications, London/New Delhi, 1982), pp. 220-222, He refers to the work done by Spinetta and Ringler (1971), Steinmetz (1977), Gayford (1975), Byrd (1979) in this field.

⁵ Ibid., p.220.

⁶ Ghadially, Rehana, Women in Indian Society, p.159.

⁷ Richard J Gelles "Domestic Criminal Violence", op. cit., p.221.

Though the picture of the relationship between race and family is somewhat blurred, it is clear that in terms of domestic violence, the differences between blacks and whites in U.S.A., parallel differences persist and have been found in studies of criminal violence elsewhere. In India relevant and authentic data regarding race and family relationship is not yet available.

1.2.3. Stress

Another important finding of most family violence research is that domestic violence rates are directly related to social stress in families (Gil, 1970; Maden and Wrench, 1977; Straus, 1980). Investigators also report association between various forms of family violence and specific conditions of stress, such as unemployment or part-time employment of males (Parke and Collmer, 1975; Straus et al., 1980), financial problems (Prescott & Letko, 1977) and pregnancy in the case of wife abuse (Gelles, 1975)⁸.

1.2.4. Social Isolation

A fourth major finding in the study of spouse abuse is that social isolation raises the risk that there will be severe violence between the married couples (Gil, 1970; Gell, 1974; Borland, 1976).

Researches of spouse abuse have reported higher rates of abuse when wife reports low job satisfaction of the husband (Prescott and Letko, 1977), when the husband has no religious affiliation (Prescott and Letko, 1977) and when there are alcohol problems (Byrd, 1979, Geyford, 1975). Finally, investigators have pointed out that there is an inter-relationship between spouse-abuse and child abuse (Rounsaville and Weissman, 1977-78; Straus et al., 1980).

1.3. THEORIES OF INTRA-FAMILY VIOLENCE

Scholars and researchers have approached the issue of family violence from three general levels of analysis Richard J. Gelles, summarizes it as follows⁹:

(a) THE INTRA INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS OR THE PSYCHIATRIC MODEL

The psychiatric model focuses on the offender's personality characteristics as the chief determinants of violence and abuse. This model includes theoretical approaches that link mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, and other intra-individual phenomena to acts of family violence.

(b) THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

This approach assumes that violence and abuse can be understood by a careful examination of the external environmental factors that have impact on the family. This model also examines the types of everyday interactions. Theoretical approaches that examine stress the transmission of violence from one generation to another fit into the social-psychological model. Theories such as the frustration-Aggression Theory, the Perversion Theory, the Self-Attitude Theory and the Motive Attribution Theory approach family violence from the social-psychological level of analysis.

(c) THE SOCIOLOGICAL OR SOCIO-CULTURAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

This model provides a macro-level analysis of domestic violence. It examines criminal violence in terms of socially structured inequality and social and cultural attitudes and norms about violence and family relations. Structural functional theory and sub-culture of violence theory are two famous theoretical approaches that come under the socio-cultural level of analysis.

As the incidence of family violence is more frequent, complex and even brutal in the developed countries, scholars, investigators, legal luminaries, social reformers, feminists and other social activists have been producing enormous quantity of materials on various aspects of domestic violence.

Within the three general theoretical levels of analysis, a number of specific theories of violence have been applied to violence in the family. The works of R.J. Gelles and M.A. Straus, "Determinants of Violence in the Family" in Burr, Hill, Nye & Reiss (Eds) Contemporary Theories About the Family (New York, 1979), pp.549-581; S.K. Steinmetz (ed) Violence in the Family (New York, 1974), pp. 166-172; M.A. Straus, The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression between Husbands and wives (California, 1974) and Wolfgang and Weiner, Criminal Violence (California, 1982) have assumed classical importance in the field of scholarship concerning family violence.

Gelles and Straus (1979) have made an inventory of fifteen specific theories of violence and discussed how they could be applied to domestic assault. The following discussion of the major theories of domestic violence is based largely on the insight provided by these scholars.

1.3.1. THE PSYCHO-PATHOLOGICAL THEORY

The theory concentrates on personality characteristics of offenders and victims as chief determinants of violence. It offers two different explanations for violence. According to Kemp and others¹⁰, the causes of violence against women arise from the offender's psychological problems like depressive impulsiveness, uncontrolled emotions. According to Snell and others¹¹, violence against women arises out of the psychological problems of the victims. It includes violence arising from mental illness, alcohol and other drugs and certain other intra-individual phenomenon.

Pizzey and Shapiro¹² go further than simply asserting that women provoke violence by their behaviour or personal characteristics. They claim that "battered women are addicted to violence; they need and enjoy it, deriving sexual excitement from being abused".

There is, however, no adequate data to support either of these explanations. If women who are beaten, kidnapped or raped behave strangely, it is possibly the consequence not the cause of being battered or raped or kidnapped. The evaluation of the psycho-pathological approach to violence has also shown that the proportion of individuals who use violence against women and suffer from psycho-pathological disorders is no greater than the proportion of the population in general with psycho-pathological disorders¹³.

1.3.2. SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

1.3.2.1. Frustration – Aggression Theory

This theory first stated in 1939 by John Dollard and is primarily based on Freud's concepts. In 1939 John Dollard and his colleagues in their statement of the theory tried to explain the process by which frustration is linked to aggression. The aggressive drive helps to explain individual violence because the individual is the focus of high personal involvement and of high frustration in the family.

According to the Aggression-Frustration theory, aggression is always directed towards the source of frustration. Whenever something interferes with an individual's attempt to reach some goal or end, he feels frustrated and frustration in turn leads to some form of aggression. An actual display of aggression may be inhibited by either internalized norms of external controls, even though the impulse for aggression may be strong following some frustrating experience. Frustration can be cumulative and can remain active over a long period of time. It is also recognized that responses to frustration can be learned. Again aggressive actions are not an automatic consequence of frustration, and their occurrence depends upon numerous factors¹⁴.

If this is so, the theory does not explain precisely as to why does a husband kill his wife or a mother-in-law her daughter-in-law when the source of frustration is not the girl who is killed but her parents who fail to satisfy the dowry demands of the husband or his family. Ram Ahuja¹⁵ holds that this theory is faulty not only on the ground that aggression is not always directed to the source of frustration but is often directed towards some other object, though also on grounds that (1) the relationship between frustration and aggression is not innate, that (2) a wide variety of responses may result from frustration and aggression is not the only response and that (3) aggression may be an adaptive response and a rational choice of behaviour.

⁸ Ibid., p. 221.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 223-224.

¹⁰ Kempe, Silverman, Steele et al., "The Battered Child Syndrome", Journal of American Medical Association, (1962), pp. 107-112, quoted by Ram Ahuja, Crimes Against Women (1987), p.187.

¹¹ Snell, Rosenweld & Robey, "the Wife-beater's Wife: A Study of Family Interaction", Archives of General Psychiatry (Aug, 1964), pp. 107-113, Ibid.

¹² With reference from Sharama, Bela Rani, Marriage, Family Violence and Divorce, 1997, pp.95- 96

¹³ Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, Behind Closed Doors, 1980; Violence in the American Family (New York, 1980), Supra note (10), p.187.

¹⁴ Dhar, Sheeba S., Domestic Violence Against Women: A Conceptual Analysis, The Academy Law Review, Vol. 31: 1&2 (2007), A half yearly review published by The Kerala Law Academy. p.125.

¹⁵ Ahuja, Ram, Crime Against Women, p.168.

1.3.2.2. Perversion Theory

Psycho-analysts like *W.H. Gillespie*¹⁶ explain violence on the basis of the theory of perversion and the Theory of symptom Formation. They do not think that perverts are constitutionally inferior people but hold that perversion develops from instincts¹⁷. Perversion means persistence in the adult of infantile instincts and behaviour at the expense of adult behaviour. In the pervert, infantile traits fail to undergo the normal process of integration during puberty but are not converted into neurotic symptoms. Violence can be the product of strong inborn drives or of pathological experiences in infancy or early childhood¹⁸. Perversions can, therefore, be conceived of as distortions of aims and objects and in the absence or distortion of appropriate feelings towards these objects¹⁹. The present theory is rejected because of the limitations of its approach. While explaining psychoanalytical hypothesis of 'infantile instincts', 'inborn pathological drives', 'distorted feelings', 'childhood sadism' or 'spilt ego' about causes for committing an offence by individual male offenders it ignores an important dimension of environment in the causation. Wife beating, rape, bride-burning, and even murder cannot be the result of a mere primary institutional component of a personality or a means of solving psychic conflict. Though aggression is a basic element in personality structure, its origin and direction in social relations, especially between the sexes, cannot be explained only as a result of personality pathology.

1.3.2.3. Self Attitude Theory

According to this theory persons of low self-esteem in a society or group that values violence may seek to bolster their image in the eyes of others and themselves by carrying out violent acts. It explains propensity to violence of those for whom society makes it difficult to achieve an adequate level of self-esteem²⁰.

Acceptance of this theory would mean that all individuals who use violence against women (i.e. wife-beaters, rapists, kidnappers etc.) suffer from low self-esteem and our data does not support this assumption.

1.3.2.4. Attribution Theory

According to *Gelles*²¹, this theory "specifies the process used by actors to impute the dispositional state (motivations) of others". It explains how the structure of family relations is such that there is a high probability of malevolent intent being attributed to the actions of other family members, thereby setting in motion an escalating cycle of resentment and aggression.

As a critique of this theory we can say that cases of violence are not always stimulated, aided and abetted by others. Tragedies in the family circles also occur as a result of an individual's own attitudes and the social structures. In the Indian context, however, the theory seems to be quite valid.

1.3.3. Socio-Cultural Theories**1.3.3.1. Structural Theory**

This theory asserts that social groups differ in respect to their typical levels of stress, deprivation and frustration and in the resources at their disposal to deal with these stresses. It explains that those individuals would be more violent who combine high stress with low resources²². This theory thus explains an individual's action in terms of the ways it is shaped or determined by social forces of one kind or another. Among the possible sources of stress are 'economic conditions, bad housing, relative poverty, lack of job opportunity and unfavorable and frustrating work conditions.' Men and women are socialized into particular roles to which are attached a set of socially determined expectations. If structural factors prevent expectations from being realized, frustration results and violence may ensue.

This theory explains an individual's action in terms of the ways it is shaped or determined by social forces of one kind or another. It leaves no room for conflict, guilt or rationality factors in the determination of the violence of an individual. The structuralist perspective therefore, is unacceptable.

It should also be observed, however, that while stress resulting from poverty, inequality and various forms of deprivation may be contributory factors in domestic violence, only a small proportion of those who experience such conditions behave violently and many of those who do behave violently are neither poor nor deprived.

The identification of structural factors gives a more political flavour to explanations of domestic violence. For example, a study by Straus revealed: (i) that there was a lower incidence of domestic violence when the inequalities between men and women were less marked, and (ii) that weaker social bonds gave rise to increased domestic violence²³.

1.3.3.2. System Tension and Feedback Systems Theory

The author of this theory, *M.A. Straus*²⁴, developed it to explain intra-family violence. He accounts for violence in the home by viewing the family as a purposive goal-seeking, adaptive social system. Violence is seen as a system product or output rather than an individual pathology. Straus specified "positive feedback" in the system which can create an upward spiral of violence, and "negative feedback" which can maintain, dampen or reduce the level of violence.

Tension in the broad sense, of which "stress" and "strain" are manifestations under conditions of felt blockages, is ever present in one form or another throughout the socio-cultural systems-sometimes as frustrations, aggressions or normative directions, sometimes as conflict and competition or upheaval and destruction.

This theory lays undue emphasis on the social system and attaches no importance to the individual's personality. In almost all cases of domestic violence, aggression in one form or the other is implied. Any theory, which suggests that aggression, is the result of social system or exclusively that of an individual's personal trait tends to limit its applicability to very few cases.

1.3.3.3. Anomie Theory

*Robert K. Merton*²⁵ in his articles "Anomie and social interaction" discusses socially learned needs, goals and aspirations and the restricted structural access or institutionalized means to their attainment. According to him some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in non-conformist rather than conformist conduct. The theory delineates the relationship between one's social position, the strain which accompanies that position and the resulting deviant and non-deviant adaptations.

If we apply Merton's theory to explore crimes by man against women, we find that it has a very limited range. The rapists, the kidnappers, the murderers and the wife-beaters do not have any monetary success goal in their minds, which may push them in the direction of illegitimate behaviour. *Wolfgang and Ferracuti*²⁶ have held that the anomie theory has failed to explain violent aggressive behaviour. *Leonard* too believes that Merton's theory does not explain sexual deviance²⁷.

¹⁶ Gillespie, W., H., "Notes in the Analysis of Sexual perversions", International Journal of Psycho- analysis (1952), pp. 397-402, Ahuja, Ram, op.cit., p.187.

¹⁷ Amir Menachem, patterns in Forcible Rape (Chicago, 1971), pp. 293-294, Ibid.

¹⁸ Johnson, A.M., "Parental Influence in Unusual Behaviour", in Psycho- Analytical Quarterly (1956), pp. 37-55, supra note 15 , p.187.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Three Essay", quoted by Ram Ahuja, op.cit., p.170.

²⁰ With reference from Ahuja, Ram, Crime Against Women, p.187.

²¹ Supra Note, 4, p.226.

²² Mishra, Preeti, Domestic Violence Against Women (Legal Control And Judicial Response), Ed. 2007, p. 241.

²³ Sharma, Bela Rani, Women, Marriage, Family Violence and Divorce, 1997, p.97.

²⁴ Straus, M.A., "A General Systems Theory Approach to a Theory of Violence between Family members", A Social Science Information, (June, 1973), pp.105-125, Supra note (15), p.172.

²⁵ Merton, R.K., "Anomie and social Interaction", in Clinard's (ed.) Anomic and Deviant Behaviour (New York, 1964), pp.213-242, Quoted by Ahuja, Ram, op. cit., p.188.

²⁶ Quoted by Ahuja, Ram, op. cit., p.173

²⁷ Eileen B. Leonard, Women, Crime and Society (New York, 1982), p.54.

1.3.3.4. Theory of Sub-Cultures of Violence

According to this theory the life circumstances of certain groups cause violence as a relatively common place outcome of social interaction. It also asserts that values and norms provide meaning and direction to violent acts and thus facilitate or bring about violence in situations specified by these norms and values. Sub-cultures of violence, made up of groups quick to use force in inter-personal relations, are centralized in urban slum areas. This "sub-culture of poverty" explanation for criminal violence has been challenged on the ground that generally poor people are law-abiding and generally the rich and affluent are not.

1.3.3.5. Resource Theory

This theory of intra-family violence developed by *W. J. Goode*²⁸ in 1971 was in fact the first theoretical approach applied explicitly to family violence. This theory asserts that violence is one of the resources that "individuals or collectives can use to maintain or advance their interests". He states that all social systems rest to some degree on force or threat. The greater the resources a person can command within a social system, the more force he or she can muster. However, the more resources a person can command, the less the chances are that a person will actually deploy violence. Thus violence is one of the resources that individuals or groups use to advance their interests. But violence is used as a last resort when all other resources are exhausted. Applying this set of assumptions to the family, Goode explains that a husband who wants to be the dominant family member but has little education or income or status may be likely to resort to violence to be the dominant person²⁹. Resource Theory has been revised and has come to be known as Status Inconsistency Theory. This perspective suggests that violence is more likely to occur when an individual's power or status is inconsistent (high in one social setting and low in another) or when norms governing status in the family are ambiguous or changing³⁰.

This theory has also limited application. It cannot be applied to cases of wife-battering, rape, murders and dowry deaths. Empirical research on this theory has also produced inconsistent findings.

1.3.3.6. Patriarchy Theory

This theory of male supremacy was developed by *R.E. Dobash and R. Dobash* in 1979³¹. The authors maintain that throughout history, violence has been systematically directed towards women who are powerless. Economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal social order and family structure. The central argument of the authors of this theory is that patriarchy leads to the supremacy of men and subordination of women and contributes to a historical pattern of systematic violence directed against females.

Patriarchy is perhaps to be blamed for violence to women but *Dobash's* macro-level theory suffers from a major drawback. That is, it offers a single factor explanation of violence towards women and ignores other major factors. Moreover, this theory fails to explain as to why the least powerful member is subjected to violence by the most powerful one, even if their power is not challenged by the subordinate.

1.3.3.7. Social Learning Theory

This theory holds that those who witness violence between parents or who themselves experience abuse as children are likely to resort to violence in adulthood. It refers to the principle of 'intergenerational transmission of violence.' This theory asserts that human aggression and violence are learned conduct. The perpetrators of violence learn about it through direct experience and by observing the behaviour of other individuals. Imitation being natural to man, those with criminal proclivities tends to learn from those who are practising models. "Aggressive behavior patterns learned through modeling and imitation remain part of our repertoire of social responses overtime."

Scholars like *Steele and Pollock*³² (1974) hold that abusive male adults are likely to have been raised in abusive homes. Ill-treated children develop personality disorder which predisposes them to a life pattern of violence.

Like many other theories of family violence, this theory also has its disadvantages and limitations. The notion that violence is transmitted from one generation to the next cannot be fully accepted as the studies which claim to show this are methodologically flawed and base their conclusions on inadequate evidence and unsound interpretation. Also this theory does not take into consideration violence indulged in at the spur of the moment under extreme provocation. Thus accepting the social learning theory would be accepting a relationship in a too simplistic deterministic form.

1.3.3.8. Symbolic interaction theory

This theory specifies the process by which a self-image and identity of a person as "violent" are formed, and the process by which violent acts acquire individual and socially shared meaning³³. This perspective lays emphasis on the return of interaction, the dynamic patterns of social relationship. It attempts to "understand" the action as the participant himself understands it.

The basic idea of symbolic interactionism was advanced by *G.H Mead* in 1931. But this theory is linked more with scholars like *Herbert Blumer, Evertt Hughes, Erving Goffman and Howard Becker*. They are generally inattentive to the importance of "structural" constraints and under-estimate the extent to which choices are effectively fore-close by given social circumstances. Their perspective lacks a convincing account of "Motivation". *Ram Ahuja* is right in asserting that the symbolic interactions view of maximization of "effectiveness" completely ignores the constraints presented by the existing social structures³⁴.

1.3.3.9. Exchange theory

According to *Richard J. Gelles* the Exchange theory has the advantage of integrating the key elements of the diverse theories of human violence. The Exchange Theory stipulates that interaction or familial relationship is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishment and costs. In addition, an individual who supplies reward services to another obliges him to fulfill an obligation and thus the second individual must furnish benefits to the first. The exchange does not pertain to concrete or tangible things; rather, it involves intangibles such as esteem, liking, assistance and approval. If reciprocal exchange of rewards occurs, the interaction will continue, but if reciprocity is not received, the interaction will be broken off. This theory explains the growth of resentment, anger, hostility and violence when "principle of distributive Justice" is violated. If we apply the principles of the Exchange theory to study wife-battering, rape, kidnapping or dowry-death, we might expect that people will use violence in the family if the costs of being violent do not outweigh the rewards³⁵.

Intra-family relations are more complex than those studied by exchange theorists. A wife cannot break off interaction with her husband and parents cannot break off interaction with their children, even if there is no reciprocity. In applying this theory to intra-family violence, we find some "costs" for being violent. It is possible that the victim might hit back or a violent assault may lead to imprisonment or even to loss of prestige and status. Thus "cost" being greater than the "reward", the Exchange Theory does not satisfactorily explain violence against women. Moreover, this theory does not account for the possibility of any change in familial relationships.

Apart, from these theories, the other theories that have been propounded from time to time so as to explain the causation of domestic violence are as follows:

1.3.4. FEMINIST THEORY

This theoretical perspective emerged during the height of the Women's movement in 1970s. Feminist theory expresses domestic violence as male coercion of women. Giving much stress to gender and power, the theory states that domestic violence reflects the unequal power of men and women in society and also, therefore within their personal relationship. The theory asserts that the etiology of domestic violence lies in the patriarchal structure of society in which men play a dominant role in most social institutions including family. Backed by physical and economic strength they maintain their power in the family. They throw out violence if their dominance is threatened anyway. Feminists argue that a consequence of the social arrangement in which men hold the positions of respect

²⁸ Goode, W.J. "Force and Violence in the Family", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (Nov. 1971), pp.624-636 .

²⁹ Quoted by Ahuja, Ram, op..cit., p.175.

³⁰ Amarjit Mahajan Madhurima, *Family Violence and Abuse in India* (1995), p.22.

³¹ Dobash, R.E. and Dobash, R., *Violence Against Wives*, (New York, 1979), quoted by Ahuja, Ram, op. cit., p. 188.

³² Steele, B. and Pollock, C.B. "A psychiatric study of parents who abuse Infants and small Children", in Helfer and Kempe (eds.) *The Battered Child* (Chicago, 1974), *Supra* note (31).

³³ Ahuja, Ram, op. cit., p.177.

³⁴ Id., at 178.

³⁵ Id., at 179.

and power and nature of both men and women alike devalue the feminine and over-value the masculine also contribute to domestic violence. Also, in the Feminist view, men often resort to violence in the name of disciplining their wives and children³⁶.

This theory is criticized on the ground that it gives much emphasis to patriarchy, power relationship, sexual subordination and leaves no explanation based on individual behavior. The theory predicts that all men in society will be abusive. In short it has focused too narrowly on patriarchy and sexual oppression and has failed to consider class, racial and cultural oppressions.

1.3.5. FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

The theory focuses on domestic violence from a sociological perspective emphasizing family structure as the cause of domestic violence. Family is considered as a system of social relations with unique properties that make it a fertile ground for violence. For instance, family members spend a great deal of time with each other and their involvement with each other is intense, they know each member's vulnerabilities, membership is not voluntary, family matters are generally private and therefore there is a lack of social control of behaviours within the family. All these serve to cloak or hide violence inside home. The theory points out the fact that not one individual but both partners or even members of family contribute to violence each striving to dominate the other. It is the interactions that promote violence³⁷.

The theory stresses the factor of interaction among members rather than pathology of one individual as the cause of violence. It concentrates on solving the problem through adopting treatment involving betterment of communication and conflict resolution skills rather than looking for causes. It criticizes psychological approaches that focus on individual deficiency in the form of low self-esteem, dependence and anger.

1.3.6. PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

The theory focuses on individual problems and holds that personality disorders or early experiences of trauma predispose some individuals to domestic violence. For example, being physically abused by parents, rejection, failure to meet a child's dependence needs and the like may create problems. People with such underlying problems or disorder may choose partners with whom they can re-enact the dysfunctional relationship they had with their parents³⁸.

The theory is criticized on the ground that it tries to answer the evil of domestic violence by resorting to psychological problems and ignores the element of dominance and power relationship. The theory tries to justify such inhuman behavior by overemphasizing one's early experiences of trauma. It fails to give a specific reply as to what can be done to prevent this violent behaviour. That means until such psychological problem is resolved they will continue inflicting violence on others. It gives much emphasizes on individual and personality factors.

1.3.7. PHYSIOLOGICAL THEORY

The theory focuses on evolution and genetic characteristics that predispose men to violence. It emphasizes the factors such as brain structure, chemical imbalance, dietary deficiency and hormonal factors as the root cause of violent behaviour³⁹.

The main defect of the theory is that it plays down both individual responsibility and the influence of structural factors for violence.

1.3.8. MULTI- FACTOR THEORY

The Indian sociologist *Ram Ahuja* who conducted empirical study on crime against women in 1986 thinks that any acceptable theory on family violence should be comprehensive enough to include both the psychological and the social aspects of the problem. Accordingly he prepares an integrated model which takes into consideration both innate and acquired behaviours⁴⁰. This model assumes the role of four factors:

- (i) Social norms and social organizations which socialize the individual,
- (ii) The personal characteristics of offenders and victims (Psychiatric view) like emotional disturbances or aggressive impulses,
- (iii) The inter-personal characteristics of offenders (socio-psychological view) such as the failure to get praise, appreciation or affection from others and
- (iv) The ecological factors, for it is within ecological boundaries that personal dispositions to commit crime are developed and crime-evoking situations arise.

Further *Ram Ahuja's* integrated model concentrates on the sociological analysis of social-structural conditions. The important conditions which lead a person to women's victimization are: status frustrations, life stresses, career crisis, and structural opportunities. This view focuses attention not only on the aggressive act itself but also on the person who uses aggression and the person against whom aggression is used. The man who assaults a woman, physically or mentally, is often the man who either feels at a disadvantage with a woman or who feels at an advantageous position in demanding a specific thing from a woman.

The study of domestic or family violence is a very complex scholarly pursuit. So, from the analysis of various theories it is clear that not one theory can fully explain causes for domestic violence. It varies with the nature and forms of domestic violence. For this one has to understand the nature and forms of domestic violence. Rather than a single factor theory a Multifactor Theoretical Approach provides a comprehensive framework to understand the nature and causes of domestic violence in India. This approach will view the cause of domestic violence from more than one perspective. The crux is that socio-cultural, psychological and physiological, economical and environmental stresses pave way to a particular form of domestic violence. One cannot resort only to single approach to substantiate the causes for a form of domestic violence but when all the theories combined together it will surely reflect the etiology of domestic violence.

Further, Newspaper reports, investigative journalism, police records and researches conducted by social organization and feminist groups provide ample material which throw light on the changing perspective of family crimes in India. If we study the various aspects of the, Naina Sahini's brutal murder allegedly committed by her husband, Sushil Sharma, it becomes clear that most of the theories of violence partially explain the motives and modes of the crime and yet much is left for us to reflect on. There are situations in family violence which defy current theories. Perhaps in our modern world, ideas and theories grow in arithmetical progression but crimes multiply in geometric progression. Yet research must go on to unravel the felonies of human behaviour which find expression in atrocities on weaker and oppressed members of the family, especially women.

³⁶ Supra note 14, pp. 122-123.

³⁷ Mishra, Preeti, *Domestic Violence Against Women (Legal Control and Judicial Response)*, Ed. 2007, pp. 230-232.

³⁸ Id., pp.232-233, Christine Werkle, *The Violence and Addiction Equation-Theoretical and Clinical Issues in Substance Abuse And Relationship Violence*(2002), p.376.

³⁹ Id., at p.234.

⁴⁰ Ahuja, Ram, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-186.

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