

Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Understanding Challenges of Indian Women

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the pressing issue of domestic violence through the framework of patriarchy, focusing specifically on women's experiences in India. It starts by describing the traditional protective roles women fulfill throughout their lives, initially under the control of their fathers and subsequently under that of their husbands. This shift in authority highlights the deeply rooted patriarchal values that govern women's autonomy and decision-making abilities. The paper contends that the concept of honor, predominantly linked to male guardianship, places women in a precarious situation where their value is often assessed based on their compliance with societal norms. The research demonstrates how violence against women is often accepted within the home environment, where it is frequently seen as a legitimate method of enforcing dominance and preserving family honor. Utilizing existing literature, the paper identifies various forms of violence physical, emotional, sexual, and verbal and examines their significant impact on women's mental and physical well-being. It underscores that domestic violence is not just an individual concern but a societal issue that mirrors broader gender disparities. Furthermore, the paper investigates the influence of alcohol use on the escalation of domestic violence, showing how it can intensify aggression and reduce inhibitions, resulting in a higher frequency of abuse. The interplay of cultural practices, economic circumstances, and patriarchal frameworks is scrutinized to comprehend how they jointly contribute to the ongoing violence against women.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Domestic Violence, Women Rights, Societal Norms, Gender Roles

INTRODUCTION

A female, whether a minor or adult, is always under some form of guardianship; while she is single, her guardian is typically her father, or in his absence, other male relatives. After she marries, her husband assumes this role of protector, which continues until his death. Given the strong presence of patriarchy in rural regions, men's control over women remains constant throughout her life. This represents a shift in authority from her father and brother to her husband and son. This ideology centered around guardianship, control, and dependence, no matter how minimal, is perceived as quite alarming. A man's honor is often viewed as being reliant on his ability to exert control over the women in his life. This leads to

women lacking autonomy over their own lives; all decisions regarding their bodies must be dictated by the male family members who are perceived as the defenders of their honor. Violence is closely tied to masculinity, making it an accepted norm rather than an exception. In any event, violence against women within the domestic realm as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers enjoys widespread acceptance and social legitimacy within a patriarchal system (Prem Chowdhry, 2007:16-17). Chowdhry further states that "both men and women embody notions of honor, albeit differently; the woman serves as its repository, while the man is the overseer of that honor. Consequently, the greatest threat to this ideology of honor emanates from women. A commonly repeated saying is: 'A girl's honor is linked to her family's

reputation.’ The honor attributed to a woman is fundamentally connected to her physical being. A woman brings shame to her family through what is perceived as inappropriate physical behavior” (Ibid 2007: 16). “The women perceived that the attitudes of their batterers and fathers towards women were alike; they found their mothers and non-battering men to be more liberal, but less than their own fathers’ views.” It is believed that the control exerted by the batterer compelled the abused women to act in a more traditional manner than they would ideally prefer” (Walker, 2017:12). The patriarchal structure of society enables, and may even incentivize, wife abuse; some men fulfill their violent potential while others do not. A traditional patriarchal organization often upholds rigid gender roles. A traditional husband has heightened expectations of his wife; hence, if she hasn’t prepared dinner for him when he arrives home from work even when she has also been working outside the home he may interpret this as a lack of concern for him. This expectation can also lead to violence. Women often feel that if they do not meet their partner’s demands, they risk violent repercussions. This sense of fear drives them to comply with the men’s requests. Incidents of battering typically begin and conclude at home, often starting in spaces such as the living room, kitchen, or bedroom, and ending in the same location where they commenced (Walker, 2017:53).

Literature Review:

Violence is an exceptionally delicate subject. It involves the use of physical force or power directed towards an individual. Violence is a significant issue in our current society. It occurs everywhere. It is the hostile behavior exhibited by individuals. The World Health Organization (WHO) characterizes violence as the use or threat of physical force or power against oneself. Those who engage in violence portray a disturbing image of both themselves and their partners. Violence is distressing, terrifying, and poses a risk to life. It is a form of aggressive expression. Violence can affect various aspects of human existence. It causes harm not only physically but also emotionally and psychologically. Domestic violence can affect anyone, including men, women, or children (Krantz Gunilla, 2005:818-820). Lenore Walker states that “violence does not stem from the dynamics of the relationship or from the provocation caused by potentially irritating characteristics of the battered women; rather, it originates from the learned

behavioral responses of the abuser” (Walker, 2017: 19).

Violence and Abuse:

Abuse manifests in various forms, with violence being one of them. Violence involves the application of physical force or power against an individual. It serves as a manifestation of abusive behavior. For instance, abusive behavior can occur in different ways, such as through verbal abuse, where one person belittles another, saying things like, “How can you be so stupid?” or “You look so ugly.” This type of abuse employs threats and manipulation among other tactics. Violence is considered a subtype of abuse, specifically as a type of physical abuse. It typically refers to actions that cause harm to another person (Eisikovits, 2000:5). Violence can affect anyone, but my focus will be on domestic violence against women.

Different Forms of Violence:

Mental Violence:

Mental abuse represents a form of violence that impacts the mind, often leaving the victim feeling devalued and powerless. This can include threats, fear, intimidation regarding children, isolation from loved ones, loss of social connections, ongoing criticism, invasion of privacy, verbal abuse, deprivation of sleep, financial control, restriction on clothing, going out, and use of communication devices, as well as terror and intimidation.

Physical Violence:

Physical violence includes aggressive actions such as throwing objects, kicking, slapping, hitting, pushing, shoving, grabbing, choking, strangling, suffocating, use of weapons, causing bruises, breaking bones, inflicting cuts or scratches, biting, burning, scalding, causing unconsciousness, triggering miscarriages due to violence, and even resulting in death. Women often suffer serious injuries from physical violence, and in some instances, it can be fatal. Studies from various regions reveal that between 10% and 60% of women have experienced physical harm or assault by their male partners (Garcia Moreno, 2005).

Sexual Violence:

This type of violence occurs when women are victimized by their male partners. Sexual violence can take place in any setting. Male partners may coerce their wives into having sexual relations, leading to acts of rape,

sexual assault, and humiliation, all categorized under this form of violence.

Verbal Violence:

Verbal violence occurs when “one individual employs words or body language to improperly criticize another individual,” noted Patricelli (Abrahams, 2007:18). This type of abuse is categorized as mental mistreatment because the perpetrator will ridicule the victim, leading her to feel unloved and undeserving of respect. Engaging in verbal abuse is painful and harmful, significantly impacting a woman’s life. During verbal abuse, individuals often feel frightened and powerless. Instances of verbal abuse can include name-calling, belittling, disregarding one’s opinions, insulting, blaming, and mocking.

Emotional Violence:

Emotional violence represents a form of abuse where one person manipulates another’s emotions. There are numerous methods by which a partner may control and influence your feelings. Emotional violence can involve yelling or cursing, name-calling, insults, and deliberate ignoring. This form of abuse can be challenging to define, such as when a husband forces his wife to engage in sexual activity.

Additional forms of violence include damage to personal belongings, theft, threats and violence against pets, and obstructing access to employment. Domestic violence occurs within intimate relationships, defined as abusive actions where one partner exerts control over the other. It can take place between current partners, whether boyfriend and girlfriend or among men and women across all religions and races, with women frequently being the primary victims. Violence represents a significant issue within our society today, with alcohol often playing a crucial role in these acts. Consequently, one could argue that violent behavior parallels drinking behavior, as violence manifests both physically and psychologically. Violence against women is increasingly recognized as a major public health issue. Emotional, sexual, and physical violence by an intimate male partner is one of the most prevalent forms it takes. In India, where family structures are patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal, women are especially at risk for violence.

In modern households, male-dominated hierarchies dictate decision-making authority across various domestic areas: economic, social, and sexual. Alcohol consumption is connected to intimate partner and sexual violence

through several channels. It can amplify aggression and intensify emotional reactions, potentially leading to increased inter-gender violence. Domestic violence encompasses abuse against any household member, with this paper primarily focusing on violence experienced by married women in their marital homes. Husbands perpetrate violence against women. Many men believe they are superior to women and possess the right to control their behavior. This belief in violence extends to the notion that men have the right to dictate women’s actions, and such violence adversely affects women’s health, safety, and quality of life, whether in mental or physical realms. It can manifest through physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse.

In many traditional societies, particularly in developing countries, the act of beating a wife is seen as a right of the husband, with some women themselves subscribing to the belief that men possess the authority to physically discipline their wives. In Indian culture, there is also an acceptance of men controlling women’s actions. For instance, a saying from North India states, “If it is a significant mistake, a husband has the right to beat his wife. Why not? A cow will not obey without some punishment.” Research conducted in both industrialized and developing nations has revealed a range of triggers that lead to violence against women, often tied to their perceived disobedience. Situations such as women not serving food on schedule, questioning their partners about finances and friendships, going out without obtaining permission, or denying sexual relations with their husbands are often cited as causes (Buchbindereli, 2000:16-17). Multiple factors contribute to domestic violence, including youth, lower levels of education, a background of physical abuse in the family, experiences of sexual abuse during childhood, mental health issues such as depression, socioeconomic challenges, and alcohol-related problems among one or both partners. Culture significantly influences abusive relationships, as socialization dictates the expected behaviors of girls and boys. Society prescribes fixed roles, suggesting that males are inherently more aggressive than females. Overall, women are generally perceived to be subordinate to men, with the belief that men take active roles while women remain passive.

Patriarchy: The Common Factor

Patriarchy is a significant factor in domestic violence. Violence occurs as a result of patriarchal

structures. The term patriarchy originates from Greek, meaning the role of the father, in a male-dominated society. According to radical feminists, “It is an analysis of gender inequality where men, as a collective, dominate women, and are the primary beneficiaries of women’s subordination. This form of domination is referred to as patriarchy” (Walby Sylvia, 1986:3). Sylvia argues that patriarchy creates a system of control and order. She also connects patriarchy with capitalism, asserting that both systems are present and crucial in shaping contemporary gender relations. Capitalism and patriarchy are interlinked, where patriarchy facilitates control and order, while capitalism enables economic profit pursuits (Ibid: 5). Dolphy states that “housewives represent one class and husbands another. Their relationship is characterized by economic disparity and social inequality; she contends that housewives are the producing class engaged in domestic work, while husbands form the non-producing class that appropriates the labor of their wives” (Walby cited in Dolphy, 1986:11). Patriarchy functions as a social structure and practice through which men oppress and exploit women. Women often perform daily labor without monetary compensation, such as preparing food and cleaning, while also raising the next generation of workers (Ibid: 21). In her book, Gerda Lerner discusses patriarchy, explaining that the concept of ‘exchange of women’ illustrates how women have historically been viewed as property rather than human beings. Men typically perceive benefits in this system regarding marriage and sexual services. For example, in Mesopotamian cultures, impoverished families would sell their daughters into marriage or prostitution for financial gain. Lerner argues that male dominance over women is not a natural or biological condition but rather originated in ancient times. The patriarchal system relies on the complicity of women, manifested through educational barriers, gender bias, discrimination, and denial of political power (Lerner, 211-213).

According to Aristotle, males are seen as the active principle, while females are viewed as passive; he also regarded females as diminished males, lacking a soul. He considered males to be superior and females to be inferior, believing that men are meant to govern and women to be subservient. In a patriarchal society, various forms of violence manifest. Feminists argue that violence against women is not only widespread but also systemic within patriarchal structures (Kamla Bhasin, 2000:10). Girls are expected to adhere to certain behavioral norms.

In India, a patriarchal framework exists, where society is predominantly male-dominated, and violence is perpetrated by men. India is diverse, with varying cultural norms influencing caste and gender roles that relate to domestic violence. Some feminists point out that domestic violence can also be linked to the dowry system, where young wives may face physical abuse and harassment in pursuit of additional dowry from their families.

The rise in violence against women can also be attributed to alcohol consumption. Women often endure violence from husbands who have a tendency to drink excessively. This problematic drinking is closely tied to domestic violence. The 1991 National Criminal Victimization Survey indicated that over a quarter of violent crimes involved individuals under the influence of alcohol (Robert and Kathleen, 1998:293). Numerous studies have drawn connections between violence and alcohol use. A study conducted in Brazil found that alcohol consumption contributes to aggressive behavior, often amplifying a person’s anger. In many recorded instances of domestic violence in Brazil, it was found that the aggressor was intoxicated during the incident. Increased alcohol consumption escalates violent tendencies, as alcohol can impair physical coordination, diminish self-control, and hinder judgment, making it harder to perceive potential threats. The effects of alcoholism extend to family members and children who are affected by the fallout of alcoholic behavior. Numerous domestic violence incidents are intensified by jealousy when one spouse suspects infidelity from the other. Research from Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa, and the United States indicates that 40-70% of female homicide victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends (Buchbinder, 2000:93).

According to the United Nations Population Fund Report, “approximately two-thirds of married women in India aged 15 to 49 have experienced beating, rape, or forced sexual activities. In India, over 55 per cent of women endure Domestic Violence, particularly in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and other northern regions” (Pahuja, 2011:3).

Alcoholism and Domestic Violence:

Alcoholism primarily affects individuals, but it creates a stressful environment within families. Life is particularly difficult for spouses dealing with alcoholism, as they must manage their own stress while caring for someone physically impacted by the addiction. When one family

member struggles with alcohol dependency, it inevitably impacts the entire household. Alcohol not only has a detrimental effect on the mental health of the family but also compromises their physical well-being. The health of an individual battling alcoholism is often poor. In ancient texts, women were depicted as wives who held a status equal to that of their husbands, seen as half of a man and his closest companion.

In the Indian context, marriage is considered a sacred bond. Globally, marriage is regarded as one of the most personal and socially acknowledged relationships. In this system, two individuals share their lives together, including their past and future. The couple has a range of responsibilities—legal, emotional, financial, and otherwise—towards each other. Traditionally, women have been responsible for providing and ensuring a comfortable home, making their husbands happy and satisfied. This implies that women were often expected to fulfill both sexual and domestic roles (J. Jeffrey's: 1990). Alcohol impacts those who consume it. Numerous studies indicate that heavy drinking and related issues vary by age and gender. Young men are at the highest risk, with young adults compared to other age groups also facing greater dangers. Based on the National Alcohol and Family Violence Survey (NAFVS) 1992, empirical studies demonstrate that the relationship between alcohol consumption and domestic abuse is not limited to low-income ethnic minorities. The association between alcohol consumption and domestic violence is recognized as a significant public health issue. Both domestic violence and alcohol consumption have biological, psychological, and sociological dimensions. Alcohol use is identified as the third leading risk factor for illness and disability on a global scale (WHO). The effects of alcohol consumption can harm individual health through accidents, addiction, liver cancer, and injuries. Additionally, alcohol use can negatively impact the well-being of family members and others. Situations involving drinking and driving can lead to work absenteeism.

Domestic violence represents a significant public health issue. It has profound effects on the health, psychological well-being, and social development of individuals. Domestic violence encompasses physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Within families, violence can occur among interpersonal relationships that include children, adolescents, men, women, and the elderly. Factors contributing to domestic violence include youth, a background of physical harm within the family, lower

education levels, depression, adverse socioeconomic conditions, and a history of childhood sexual abuse.

“There is a strong connection between alcohol consumption and violence against intimate partners. Research indicates that alcohol exacerbates violence. Alcohol use directly impacts physical capabilities, diminishing self-control. The WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence findings indicate that between 15% (Japan) and 71% (Ethiopia) of women reported experiencing physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner throughout their lives, with incidences ranging from 3.8% (Japan) to 53% (Ethiopia) in the past year. In a survey involving 24000 men and women in Canada, 7% of women and 6% of men reported being victims of intimate partner violence in the last five years. There is a prevalent belief that alcohol instigates aggression and promotes violent behavior in situations involving drinking. Children often witness either violence or the threat of violence between their parents.” (WHO, Alcohol and Violence: 4). The use of drugs and alcohol is heightening human predisposition to aggression. The direct impacts of alcohol and drugs significantly contribute to domestic violence.

For victims, health consequences include physical injuries and emotional issues leading to depression and suicide. Around 11% of all homicides between 1976 and 2002 were perpetrated by a partner in an intimate relationship, which also affects family dynamics. The model connecting alcohol consumption and domestic violence, along with women's abuse, is anchored in men's desire for power (Gondola, 1995). The increasing unpredictability of a man's behavior under the influence of alcohol or drugs over time raises the likelihood that a woman may conform to his wishes due to fear for her safety. Some men's violence against women is not necessarily driven by a need to express anger or frustration during family disputes, but rather by a desire for control; however, such violence can indicate not just domination but also significant personal insecurity (Connell, 1995:84). Many men who assault their partners do so out of fear that their control is slipping away (Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol, WHO, 2005:6).

A woman suffers abuse from a man. A couple lives in a cycle of violence, yet they remain together, perceiving themselves as a unit. Domestic violence shatters a woman's emotional and social landscape. It typically occurs behind closed doors and flourishes in environments of isolation. For a woman enduring domestic violence,

the toll personal, social, economic, and emotional is immense. For any woman in a violent relationship, seeking to escape or find the strength to rebuild her life requires not just practical assistance but also emotional support.

Discussion and Conclusion:

This research highlights the significant relationship between patriarchy and domestic violence, particularly in the context of Indian women. The findings indicate that patriarchal structures deeply influence women's lives, often limiting their autonomy and subjecting them to various forms of violence. The traditional roles assigned to women, where they are seen as dependents under the control of male guardians, create an environment where violence is normalized and accepted.

The concept of honor plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Women are often viewed as the bearers of family honor, and any perceived failure to conform to societal expectations can lead to violence. This expectation places immense pressure on women, making them vulnerable to abuse. The research shows that domestic violence is not just a personal issue but a societal problem that reflects broader gender inequalities. It is essential to recognize that violence against women is rooted in cultural norms and practices that uphold patriarchal values.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the role of alcohol in exacerbating domestic violence. Alcohol consumption can increase aggression and lower inhibitions, leading to a higher likelihood of violent incidents. This connection highlights the need for addressing substance abuse as part of efforts to combat domestic violence.

In conclusion, addressing domestic violence against women in India requires a multifaceted approach. It is crucial to challenge and change the patriarchal norms that perpetuate violence and control over women. Education and awareness programs can help shift societal attitudes towards gender roles and promote equality. Additionally, support systems for victims of domestic violence must be strengthened to provide them with the resources and assistance they need to escape abusive

situations. By tackling the root causes of domestic violence and promoting gender equality, we can work towards creating a safer and more equitable society for all women.

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