

Marital Violence
A Feminist Understanding of Violence in Intimate Relations

Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor Of Philosophy
in
Social Sciences

by

NISHI MITRA

Prof. Chhaya Datar
Research Guide

Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Mumbai
2005

Abstract

Violence in homes, both physical and mental, is an everyday reality for innumerable women. Yet, domestic violence, the subject of this thesis, although a topic that catches people's attention and sympathies has not been a much researched topic in India. The interest in the issue of domestic violence has rather come from an interventionist angle and that too in the wake of dowry deaths and growing incidence of torture of brides brought to public attention in the 1980s by the media.

Since then, despite a lack of rigorous research in the area, feminist writings have played a very important role in 'problematizing' the family and challenging contemporary resilience to issues of violence against women. Moreover, several women's groups, feminist and otherwise have also engaged in small researches on the issue of domestic violence which provide important insights into the phenomena of domestic violence and encourage women to break the culture of silence.

The Concerns

The first chapter titled, 'Introduction: Feminists on Violence towards Women', introduces a range of feminist positions on the subject and reviews the existing studies on domestic violence in India. With this context, I put forward, my reservations about the tenor of feminist and other writings on the issue of domestic violence in India. These relate to the single layered, standardized, monotonous and homogenous accounts of domestic violence as an all or nothing affair wherein men are always violent and women are always victims. This focus causes a certain avoidable fixation. It is my argument that the nature of violence is amorphous as is the case with all human experiences involving human psyche and human emotions, its context is subjective, and its experience is contextual.

Violence may be defined to have several forms including infliction of physical or emotional pain or injury, threat of such injury, the use of some force to coerce/ compel

action and also a milieu of social, political or economic conditions that do damage to the quality of life. This extended definition of violence is not limited by concepts of 'legitimacy' of physical force and is inclusive of force 'literal' and 'metaphorical', and violence that is used by an individual, a group, an institution or even the complete social arrangement. Yet violence is overwhelmingly about awareness, a consciousness and this aspect of violence is very subjective. It is bound to have then the irreconcilable aspect of 'construction' on the basis of subjectivities privileged or prioritized. The fact that most writings on domestic violence against women have focused on rather concrete notions that involve incidence, causes, effects etc has however, produced a body of work that is simplistic at times, at times reducing the phenomena to an all or nothing affair, and reducing women to mere victim hood. Moreover, this produces a lopsided and distorted version that denies women all human agency and spirit and forecloses the possibility of a dialogue for change.

The Method

This research is therefore both a feminist research as well as one that seeks to go beyond traditional feminist understandings. I understand that this makes it from the very beginning of this project a contentious enterprise, fraught with tensions of a fundamental nature with conventional understandings of theory, method and methodology as well as feminism. In Chapter two of this thesis, titled, 'Studying Violence the Feminist Way: Research with a Difference', my attempt has been therefore to explicate feminist understanding on these issues so as to make the nature of this tension clear. Thence moving beyond the tension between the feminist epistemological positions and scientific research traditions in Western thought I elaborate on the research experience on which the understandings of women and violence are based in this work.

Feminist research has developed as a result of two main preoccupations of feminism: the feminist critique of mainstream research and its sexist bias, and the feminist liberation movement and its requirement to analyze the universal subordination of women through use of perspectives inclusive of women's realities. Feminism seeks to

espouse a method that locates and proceeds research from the grounded analysis of 'women's' realities. It provides the grounded realities of the women researched as well as the researcher woman. Today it makes for a deconstructed category 'woman'. Whatever the feminist perspectives informing research, researchers working within the feminist epistemology seek to reinvent research in terms of the questions they ask, attending consciously to issues relating to subjectivity and reflexivity and prioritizing the transformative potential of the research process as well as that of its outcome.

This consciousness is expressed in practical and positive ways in feminist research processes both at the level of behaviour and analysis in terms of relooking the relationship of the researcher and the researched so as to question power between the researcher and researched both in conducting research and in writing it. Also there is a conscious inclusion of feeling and emotion in research experience such that the intellectual autobiography of researchers is made explicit.

While feminists see good research in terms of it being un-alienated, it must be acknowledged that there are risks associated with adopting this position. Firstly, it makes the researcher professionally vulnerable because the feminist perspectives and tradition is not seen in the larger academic circles as serious and distinguished enough. Secondly, it is easier by far for scholars to dismiss such research as 'ad feminam' or ad hominem, irrespective of its methodological strengths. My research I think has the same kind of strength and weakness.

More specifically this work can be broadly defined as the study of the complexity of women's experience of violence in the marital home, its forms and its effects. To understand the meaning of marital violence for women I used participant observation, in-depth interviews and introspection as techniques of data collection. In my research work, my perspective draws from and oscillates between standpoint feminist positions and post modernist understandings. In attempting to understand the common experience of violence against the backdrop of my own experience of it, I write on violence without the objectivity of feminist empiricists. Thus while I emphasize the differences in the standpoints of women, I attempt through personal illustration, an interpretation of

women's behaviour as an expression of their complex and particular social-psychological context. In doing thus I attempt to marry postmodernist concerns with that of standpoint theory.

The data and processes on which this research is partially based came out while doing field work for a year long period in two counseling cells in Mumbai.

The Findings

Nature of marital violence

One of the important questions to begin with is how serious is marital violence as a social problem and what constitutes marital violence. The issue relates to understanding the 'domestic' locale of violence and also the particular and specific acts of, control, coercion or threat that need to be recognized as 'violence' therein. In the third chapter titled, 'The Nature and Patterns of Marital Violence I explore the spaces within the normative map of 'home' where violence is regularly enacted and re-enacted. From the data collected while sitting in two counseling cells where I heard women speaking of their problems and pains, I have selected ten cases from the many I came to hear as illustrations of what women defined as assaults, hurts, and pains, physical and mental to their 'personhood'. These cases give significant insights into the processes and meanings of violence and abuse, as how women experience it, and in so doing reflect on the nature and patterns of domestic violence. For most women who continue to live in abusive relationships, naming and defining the experiences with their husbands and other family members as violence is not a straightforward or a simple process.

Family violence is still considered as a rare phenomenon. However these cases are illustrations of everyday lives of common women which are replete with violence of all kinds and defy the myth of nurturing and safe family. In themselves these cases illustrate how violence in homes is experienced different from the way one experiences violence from strangers. In 'stranger violence', an isolated episode involving infliction of physical or emotional pain or injury or the threat of such injury is objectionable and open to social intervention. Marital violence when reported is more ambiguous, comes

with a history of violent episodes and even then it is its painful and traumatic impact that is expressed in sadness, rage humiliation or despair rather than a singular episode of injury or threat of injury.

Marital violence exists side by side with love and complicates women's reactions to it for as these cases illustrate family and familial relations have different and complex meanings for women's identity as women and as mothers and women often minimise personal pain and abuse when it comes from intimate relations which they would perhaps not do in case of stranger violence. Marital Violence is therefore hidden violence.

Context of the family

Family relationships remain one of the most important aspects of women's lives. These cases provide a glimpse into the various aspects of the family life wherein male violence against women has its crucial hinge on men's control over their women's bodies, their sexuality, mobility, their labour, earnings, their relations with friends and kin groups and even their children.

There is a basic difference in the manner in which men and women understand marital violence. Men use force on their women as an aspect of their manhood which derives from a complex sense of their familial, economic and social roles, responsibilities and their status. They carry an image of themselves as men and as husbands and it is not easy for them to accept the force they use on their women as violence for the force or violence is hidden as it is embedded in the language of managing, controlling, loving, possessing, protecting and desiring their women and families. Instead the responsibility for violence is shifted to women and their inadequacies, for home is hailed as a woman's responsibility and it is her failure to keep it in peace and order that is said to warrant strict behaviour from men. Women may themselves carry similar notions of propriety and wear the guilt of being unsuccessful women. This is of course due to a naturalization of the dominant norms of masculinity and femininity.

Also the fact that families provide a base for protection from external violence, makes it that much more difficult to see and also to subvert familial violence. Families do provide women with their closest, most tender and supportive relations and in addressing their need for love create ambivalence in women's feelings. These contrasts and contradictions in women's experiences in family explain why women are unable to extricate themselves from situations of violence.

Violence and children

The experience of motherhood for instance comes out to be a complex and contradictory one for women alongside their womanhood. While motherhood often challenges and changes women's relationships with their men and their families and affects their occupational and domestic arrangements, women report that their husbands regularly use their own children, to torture, humiliate and manipulate them. Violence or threatened violence to one's child is one of the means by which women are controlled.

A romantic and idealized view of motherhood clouds men's and women's minds where a mother is so full of love and selflessness that she must forgive and forget all personal dissatisfactions, assaults to her ego and person so as not to affect negatively her children's future and disappoint their need for a stable family. These expectations from mothers force women to often bear their oppression silently so as not to be perceived by themselves as well as by their children to have failed in their central role.

There is another dimension to the issue of motherhood and violence and this relates to women as abusers rather than as victims. Mothers may be powerful and mothers may abuse their power especially when they are mothers of married sons. Complex sets of power relations that work in the Indian joint families confer this power to some women who abuse it on their daughters-in-law.

Victims, survivors or perpetrators

The projection of women as victims of male violence may be a strategic means of getting public attention on to men's responsibility as violators as well as a powerful tool to enable women to live a life of dignity despite the violence in their lives. Politically,

using the language of victim also enabled the feminists to demand attention of the legal discourse such that domestic violence or wife beating got recognition as injustice and crime. However the term victim is inadequate to fully represent the realities of women who experience violence. One of the most interesting revelations to me while sitting in the counselling cells has been that the cases have tremendous scope for understanding the nonlinear and multifaceted nature of human psyche. Women themselves alternate in their projection of their identities as victims, as survivors and even as perpetrators of violence. This is a matter both of their consciousness and their strategic choice. Thus to speak of women as merely victims in effect robs them of this human agency and consciousness of responsibility that dictates the many roles they play vs. others in the homes. Women do not hold themselves as 'mere' victims of violence and neither do they define their men solely as 'batterers', 'exploiters' and 'oppressors'. To do so ourselves is then to tell only half of the story. To tell the full story we need to acknowledge the centrality of relations and 'connectedness' in women's lives. This comes out again and again in women's stories. We also need to acknowledge the centrality of power and individualism in that of men's lives and its implications for women for violence is finally this difference between men and women.

Effects of violence

Since domestic violence continues over a considerably long period in relationships that are private, the meaning of acts of violence for the victims is to be seen in the deep impact that violence has on women's lives and that of the children who are witness to it. Emotional isolation is one of the very frequently reported impacts on women. Since women remain silent about the violence and abuse they go through sometimes on a daily basis, due to reasons of shame, embarrassment, fear and guilt, they very soon start experiencing a sense of loneliness and isolation that leads to their losing a sense of self and dignity. Women reported that they started disconnecting from the world around them or withdrawing from friends and relatives. Loosing of confidence in oneself and one's decisions, negative self esteem and an over dependence on assertive and aggressive husbands so much so that making extra attempts to get husband's approval

and attention are some important impacts of violence reported by women in this research.

These cases reveal that for understanding violence against women in homes, we need to focus on the processes and their context-specific meanings including the relationship between verbal, psychological and physical aggression and their interpretation by the abused. These processes show the need to widen the definition of abuse to include non-physical acts and to lump together both acts of omission and commission in the same definition of violence for women experience violence as a continuum. Also, given the context and long term nature of marital violence, mental injury and negligent treatment must come under the purview of abuse even when they may not produce a diagnosable injury.

Therefore, what we refer to as marital violence encompasses within it a whole spectrum of abuse and discrimination, physical, mental, emotional, sexual and financial that can be said to be interrelated, particularly in terms of the impact it has on women and their lives. Marital conflict and disharmony assume new significance when we expand the definition of violence from its focus on extreme, gross and public forms such as dowry related harassment and dowry deaths to the more regular and routine use of threat or force used in the family settings for compelling and constraining women to behave or not to behave in particular ways.

Sex and violence

Marriages are about socially legitimized sex. Marriages are about disguised, legitimized sexual violence. Marital violence has manifestations in sexual relationships of husbands and wives and therefore an understanding of sexuality: male and female, is central to the understanding of male violence in marriages. However this is a difficult if not an impossible task. There are both conceptual and methodological problems inherent in such a project. Conceptually, to understand sexual violence we need to define what is sexual, what is or what constitutes male and female sexuality, and what is 'normal' sexuality. A notion of normalcy must precede what we define as deviant or violent.

The fourth Chapter titled, 'Violence Disguised as Sex: Issues of Sexuality in Marital Violence', is about how women come to live and experience violence as an integral part of their sexed bodies and their sexual relationship with their men. While most women who come to the cells for help are hesitant to talk of their sense of self as it relates to their sexual relations with their husbands, I found one woman's personal diary telling and therefore in this chapter have based my discussion on violence and sexuality primarily on interviews with her, her daughter and excerpts from this diary. However, it needs to be mentioned that any inferences made are not merely from the singular pursuit of one woman's case. Instances of sexual control and violence came up again and again during my interviews with women complainants who reported that men assumed rights of sexual access to their wives despite their involvement with other women, despite their aggression and wife's refusal, despite wife's illness or lack of interest in sex, making sexual access to their women a matter of their right. Women's leisure, their reproductive concerns, the multiple demands on them regarding time and children, all had to be kept aside when husband demanded sex. Women reported that their men regularly controlled their access to and use of contraception, abortion or sterilization making for a complete control of their fertility. Often these were denied by suspicious husbands so as to ensure that the woman does not get the freedom to have sexual relations outside of the marriage.

Women recounted stories that showed how men regard women's sexuality as their private property. Denial of any kind is punished by rape or violence. Injury, sometimes serious ones regarding medical intervention, even injuries to the delicate anal and vaginal region, unwanted pregnancies, debilitating effects of repeated pregnancies, miscarriages and still births, infection from venereal diseases, a host of mental problems including depression, fearfulness of sexual activity, loss of appetite, negativism, sleep problems, attempts to suicide, and sexual dysfunction are some of the costs women pay silently for their men's sexuality.

The research locates this violence on women's sexed bodies specifically in terms of patriarchal definitions of women that construct their domesticity and sexuality as nothing, as passive, and as essentially maternal. Male rage in sexual matters is

naturalized as an extension of his greater appetite for sex and feminine sufferance on this account as her destiny that rests on a more passive disposition that cannot match male requirements of lust and passion. Thus while male sexuality is overemphasized, female sexuality has imposed around it the 'triple edict of taboo; nonexistence, and silence.

A detailed analysis of the narrative affords insights into some of the processes and structures that not only circumscribe the full expression of female sexuality but also mould it essentially for male pleasure. Violence plays an important part in controlling and directing women towards this end as sexuality is a dimension of male power. The narrative shows how little control women have on sexual encounters with their husbands. It shows how women experience double standards of sexual conduct which favours their men and reduces them to being objects and accomplices in their own objectification.

One of the important reasons for this complicity lies in the fact that men and women share a sense of erotic which gives primacy to male pleasure and male rights over a women's body and passivity in women is not merely a virtue, women too understand it as that which makes men excited and sexually interested, thus makes their men love them more. Men have power over women's bodies and their minds and this makes women silent accomplices in their own violations, of body and spirit. Violence gets legitimacy for it is embedded in men and women's ideas and beliefs regarding what are 'legitimate' forms of love and desire. Women's marital lives traverse along a continuum of pleasure and danger, the pleasure of interacting with men and the danger in doing so. Sexuality and violence lie united on this continuum. Sexuality in fact becomes one of the primary means by which men control women and exercise their power over women in marriage.

The following Chapter titled, 'Feminist Consciousness and the Personal Interpretation of Violence', develops further the theme of a fluid victim-survivor-victimizer identity. I draw on my personal experiences of family and marital life to bring to the forefront my arguments about the dialectical processes of interpretation that give different

meanings to the twin experience of love and violence and that a more complex understanding of these meanings is required in domestic violence research.

The personal space, say the feminists is the space that has been marginalized in research, it needs to be reclaimed, brought center stage, for the 'personal is political.' Since feminism is both a politics of the personal and the social, this chapter marks a critical stage in my analysis of male violence for from hereon I turn on the personal in an attempt to form a bridge between feminism as politics of the social and feminism as politics of the personal.

Feminist consciousness and individual interpretation

The slogan 'personal is political' heralded a feminist consciousness of the part that oppression of women plays in maintenance of social reality as it is experienced by women. However I take the position that there is no 'one' objective feminist consciousness. Aside from being patronizing and essentially contrary to feminist principles, this position is no longer tenable in a postmodernist world. Our constructions of our situations and our oppressions are based on the meanings we draw from our unique experiences of our realities. Thus there can be no 'one' feminist consciousness. Particular women interpret meanings based on their own situations and understandings and these are themselves functions of time and history.

The personal beyond the political

The important questions for me in this study have been why do women not fight the violence in their lives? Why do women love their abusers? Are women essentially masochistic? The concept of an evolving consciousness or 'consciousness as a process' opens up for me the possibility of re looking at the issue of violence and resistance to it with new eyes. It offers to me explanations as to why women look at the very real violence in their lives differently and distinctly at different periods of their own lives, why they react to violence in so many different ways. It makes me understand why women sometimes explain away violence on their bodies and their souls, why some of them continue to live in violence on an everyday basis. It makes it understandable why some women oppose violence more visibly, fight against their own loved ones while

others choose to continue to live in the bonds of the family, with sometimes abusive, sometimes loving husbands, enjoying the comforts and the relative safety of a home with their children, nevertheless struggling against violence and fighting it on an everyday basis. How to chart this continuous struggle against violence and an evolving consciousness that I became aware of while doing my data collection? I found that I needed to look within to understand and explicate what holds women to violent homes and violent relationships. This chapter is thus in a sense the final frontier of my struggle to understand violence in intimate relations. By focusing on my self I locate my understandings more specifically, I illustrate them with self knowledge and also I hope make clearer my hidden assumptions, my subjective positions and thus contextualize my research findings. The soul less anonymity of the traditional writings on violence is not for me. I therefore chalk out in this chapter my individuation process and its different consciousness at various points in my life.

In the final analysis becoming individuated is about becoming one with one's Self, unified, undifferentiated, indivisible, one's own individual. I attempt this exercise on oneself with the belief that violence whatever its form is ultimately experienced as a fracture in one's unified, undifferentiated and indivisible self. Analysis of the evolving self opens us to the many manifestations of the self that are neither coherent, nor unified, nor undifferentiated. Yet we seek to confer coherence on an incoherent reality and experience for that is the nature of analytical self. To this extent I found in the concept of individuation a space that provides me with vocabulary to analyze my understandings of violence. My personal story or myth illustrates the process of individuation while portraying the role of violence in shaping the course of my life first as a child and subsequently as a woman. The process, illustrates how we come to attach certain meanings to our lives. These meanings are purely subjective, based as these are our beliefs and feelings and these change with time and experience.

In this soliloquy I sought to deconstruct my world and to show how my world 'out there' was really dependent on the way I constructed the 'I', my 'self'. Violence becomes fluid and unreal in this ontological maze where the deconstruction of the self opens up exploration of the nature and location of violence from without to within. Violence as

one facet of a human personality, not exclusively male, opened up doors to a spiritual and growth oriented perspective for me wherein I could introspect on the violence in my life and see the possibility of transcending it. Violence seen in this fluid form may become an opportunity, an ally, and the door to self-realization and thence no more negative, no more violent to the process of growing. However this is a personal process and is merely illustrative of subtleties of individual experience that gets lost in the focus on the political. It does not and must not be taken to imply that the political positions are unnecessary or redundant. One must be cautious that the insights I gained have meaning and relevance to my context and consciousness. An ambiguous understanding of violence can be dangerous particularly to women for on the one hand there is an infinite possibility to regress when consciousness reflects on itself, on the other there is every possibility for men to further women's oppression and violence by shirking all responsibility for the violence they inflict on women. I am very aware of the tremendous danger in this for such lone indulgence in identity as disembodied and perennially 'reconstitutable' reality makes for a slide into, a search for an elusive identification that leaves one lonely and unrelated. The only way to get out of this infinite regress is to posit on a pre reflective consciousness and that is what I do as I discuss the social responsibility of violence.

The personal that is political

Since I have used my personal biography to show how nebulous the issue of responsibility of violence can be in individual terms it is important to clarify that the problem of privatization of the personal has been there with conventional knowledge and my exposition should not be understood to be in conflict with my feminist consciousness of the patriarchal system of violence and abuse of women. Women's suffering and oppression when treated as matters of personal life histories where there are elements of choice and responsibility and possibility to transform through awareness and analytical understanding have the problem of isolating as an individual problem what is general and pervasive. Psychoanalysis and development psychology for instance have faith in the reversibility of the suffering and oppression by the woman's active and conscious agency alone. Such positions by putting the entire responsibility of any

problem on the individual alone deny the fact of the suffering of women being a necessary condition of the politics of patriarchy.

Deconstructing violating masculinity and violated femininity

In Chapter 6 titled, 'The Violence of Difference: It is Masculine to Violate, it is Feminine to be Violated', I continue on the theme and discuss how femininity or female sexed bodies is discursively constructed and how this construction is itself a preparation for its violation. Social and cultural ideas of appropriate femininity and masculinity form part of individual psyche and are played out by both men and women, making for a generalized culture of acceptance for masculine to violate and feminine to absorb the violation. In fact, in the manner of blaming the victim, femininity is constructed as rather desiring violence, desiring masculine assertion and aggressiveness, and thus is made, the most persuasive argument for man's masculine aggression and violence.

While feminists have been critical of male violence and social structures that make for the possibility of violence they have not been able to adequately deal with the fact that violence is part of the erotic of male and female relations and that it has a sort of an appeal for women and men. This appeal makes women very often willingly bear violence in their role of wives and sexual partners and males to engage in it without guilt or need for redemption. Violence in intimate relations does not exist outside of its realization in discourse on love in intimate relations. It is important for feminists to explore this aspect of violence which implies that we move into subtler realms of male, female power relations and do not restrict ourselves to merely the obvious forms of marital violence that is seen in wife battering and abuse. It is only in such shift that we can hope to understand the ambiguities, the contradictions and the dissatisfactions that cannot always be expressed openly but that form an essential part of women's experience of violence in their relations with men.

It has been my attempt to demonstrate what is in the discursive construction of love that violates even while it gratifies men, what form of violence is in it that also satisfies a woman so that in a manner of Kristeva's writing, 'a commonality of sexes is set up,

beyond and in spite of their glaring incompatibility and permanent warfare.” Violence of husband on his wife in the context of the ‘two person universe’ that forms part of a woman’s consciousness has every possibility of it being constructed as a symbol of their sexual intimacy for even when he victimizes her, he gives her the power for instance of being his ‘wife’, his close one, the mother of his children, the one who can incite him thus, the one who despite his enagement and violence cannot be made to submit till she wants, the one who holds the key to his sexuality or his moods and so on and it is through these forms of ‘power’ that women experience a heightened awareness of the importance of their sexual self, a ‘power’, in a state of powerlessness. Women live in an illusion of this power that patriarchy gives them till their consciousness is jolted, most often when a man’s oppressively domineering masculinity grows to an intolerable extent to threaten the chimera of security that man’s power had previously bestowed on her or a woman realizes finally how trivial and false her sense of femininity has actually been.

Personal meaning and its interrelations with social value are of great importance in understanding subjectivities of men and women involved in a violent relationship. We need a theorization that has a base in subjectivity and that can explain what conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions lie behind male oppression and violence against women and female acceptance or negation of it. This I hope will make not only for a better understanding of the relationship between the individual and the social but also suggest scope of changing structures through challenging ideologies and practices at a personal level. The continuity of patriarchal structures and ideologies gives one a sense of their non destructibility and also a sense of ones helplessness, however there is scope for individual agency to challenge these structures and ideologies and resist the power relations they generate.

I discuss a range of arguments on women’s subjectivity/ies and peg on the feminist understanding that women have little or no access to the symbolic order; they have even little access to language and its meaning. It is disquiet with this appropriation of the symbolic by Man that propels me to make language the site for contestation of meaning of man, woman, violence, resistance and power. In this kind of engagement feminists

use both deconstruction and reconstruction of language and meaning in the interest of feminist goals.

In this theoretical background I introduce my own understanding of how women experience and also resist and subvert the predominant patriarchal definition that 'It is masculine to violate and feminine to be violated.' The central thesis of my argument is that violence is often projected as uncontrolled and not thought of eruption or explosion. In feminist literature it is seen as a patriarchal means of control of women. In either of these perspectives, it is projected as the antithesis of love (peace). This understanding does not seem to me to be correct. So long as violence and love are seen as two poles of the naturalized self, theoretical explanations will seek to understand the reasons for it or in other words as to why it happens, what causes it. But if we take the position that the contrast of violence with love is itself problematic, we change our quest from causes to how it happens. What counts as violence and what does not cannot be known a priori before one enters a space of love. What is domestic violence and what does not merit that allegation will always be subject to the politics of gender relations. My conclusion is that the idiom of love and the predominant concepts of masculinity are mismatched. Either masculine definitions of love are overwhelmingly weighed with violence such that love itself is reflected through violence or love itself gets constructed as feminine. This makes for tremendous insecurity in men who desire to love and to also experience their masculinity. Masculinity gets distorted and so does love. Femininity itself is painfully affected and transformed. Violence is an expression of this mismatch; actually it becomes only natural in the given circumstances. This is a violence that affects both men and women. There is a desperate urge in men and women to overcome it, yet the concepts of masculinity and femininity trap them.

Violence and resistance

While the fact of the patriarchal context of definitions of masculinity makes for women's general powerlessness is valid one must not lose account of the fact that individuals who are largely shaped by social institutions are themselves also agents of change and that they can author personal scripts in a manner either to continue patriarchal interests or challenge existing power relations and make for changes in

power relations of everyday life. There are several conflicting accounts of femininity even in the patriarchal discourse and though the dominant account which informs men and women is that it is masculine to violate and feminine to be violated, given the context women can be driven to privilege their subjectivity in more active and aggressive modes and men are then forced to accept or adapt to these challenging subjectivities. There is no biological basis to female passivity to violence or to what has been called female masochism.

Interviews with women experiencing violence in marriage reveal that they do not just take violence passively. They resist it in their sometimes quiet, sometimes more assertive ways. Refusing to cook, refusing sex or giving and accepting of sexual pleasure, going away frequently or for long duration to mother's home, becoming silent, depressed or uninvolved in household matters, alternatively shouting, shrieking, getting angry with children and others, talking back, not caring of husband's dependent parents, pretending sickness or actually showing symptoms of it, seeking work outside home against or in spite of husband's disapproval, not reporting for work, uncaring of household expenditure that they otherwise shoulder are some of the ways by which women show their disapproval of husband's aggression and violence. Women resist and subvert male claims of power of masculinity by their own claims to the moral power that their femininity affords them. Thus female resistance to violence in intimate relations is to be seen beyond an active separation and divorce from abusive men, and to the realization of their power in what is sometimes seen too superficially as their abject powerlessness.

Responsibility of violence

In the last chapter, titled, 'On the Responsibility of Violence', I revisit the issues raised in the first chapter. Whilst exploring the various perspectives on violence I look into the ideas on justifiability of violence of men on women. And then look at how to address the issue of the responsibility of violence. The contemporary focus on women in general and on the issue of violence against them in particular has in some quarters made men hold a mounting sense of grievance, a sense moreover of being victimized. Men seek to put the responsibility of violence on the modern woman who is stereotypically defined

in terms of one who shirks tradition, responsibility, children and old people, and embraces independence, career and sexual freedom. There is no question that the structure of contemporary family in India is undergoing change and the relations between the sexes and the generations have undergone realignments. Women's education and employment have been important factors in making for these changes and this has implications on the divisions between men and women in all areas of life as well as power and its distribution in the family. While these realignments have meant more stress for middle class women who have to combine their traditional roles of homemakers with the new roles of bread earners, they have increasingly made men more enraged as they face challenges to the domestic ideology that rested on male supremacy and assumed inferiority of women. Men have replied with insults, anger or contempt as a shift has come about in women's lives, a shift that is defined as from living for others to having big or small hopes for a life of one's own. While the larger context of patriarchy is there it is true that the problematic also lies in idealization, in passions of men and women and in their fantasies of appropriate and normal behaviour.

In contemporary times the issue of violence against women has got focus as a women's rights issue yet violence against women, whatever its form, has been existent across time and space and has been a cause of social concern for centuries. The question, 'Who is responsible for violence' therefore needs to deliberate on the responsibility of violence beyond the individual.

With this basic understanding I have devoted much of the chapter to a survey of the different perspectives on violence in sociology, psychology, law and in religion and philosophy. From this survey of various perspectives on violence two main issues emerged. These relate to (a) justifiability of violence and (b) responsibility of violence. Though interrelated they are not one and the same. While feminists have taken the position that no violence against women is justifiable, arguments from across the other discourses seek to explain and understand violence. The justifications for violence, discussed are universal in scope(not just limited to women) in ascertaining actions and their rightness or wrong, yet they form a very interesting backdrop to any discussion on

violence against women for they point to the single most important issue, that of, what is fair and reasonable action and what must be held as violent.

Regarding the issue of responsibility of violence, in much of feminist research and ideological writings, the responsibility of violence is squarely put on men and male defined systems of patriarchy. While not making individual men responsible, feminists point out that it is men who benefit from subordinating and exploiting women and violation on women is meted out whenever there is threat to this advantage. Thus it is men and their systems that require revolutionary change. While feminists have dealt with the shortcomings of the sociological and psychological discourses on the issue of legitimacy and responsibility of violence, they have steered clear by and large of the philosophical discourse. I found however that the philosophical position on the responsibility of violence cannot rightfully be ignored if we are to understand what all violence means to women. Philosophy ‘warns’ the violator that violence will harm his/her own soul. Also there is the philosophical position that ‘violence breeds violence’. This makes for the chicken and egg dilemma for who violated who can never be accurately defined. Along with all the reasons that explain violence, it becomes even more difficult if not impossible, to locate ‘the’ violator. This makes the issue of responsibility very tricky and very subjective. I have introduced at this point the responsibility to be of two kinds: juridical and existential and have shown my preference for the latter.

Although it is difficult to accept this position within a movement that seeks to bring women’s subordination and oppression by men centre stage, however, if feminists have to deal with violence as a phenomenon and not limit themselves to violence as an idea, then they need to go beyond the location of violence in men. We cannot steer clear of looking within. Feminist analysis of violence has been unable to either explain or deal with the vast majority of women who continue to seek love and fulfillment in their relationships with men despite their experiences of pain and violence. Nor have feminists been able to confront violence in lesbian relationships. What feminist perspectives on the issue can benefit from is the understanding that the dynamic of

self, its varying desires, its multiple subjectivities, its desire for self fulfillment as well as its desire to sacrifice for the other- all make for a self that is beyond rationality and beyond grasp of singular explanations.
