

Violence Against Women : A Diagnosis and Prescription

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ABSTRACT

Beyond national, cultural, and economic barriers, violence against women is a serious social and human rights issue. Women are still subjected to a variety of types of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and symbolic, which are rooted in deeply ingrained patriarchal institutions and gender inequalities, notwithstanding constitutional protections and legal frameworks. By examining its sociocultural, economic, and ideological causes—such as gendered power dynamics, social conditioning, institutional indifference, and the normalization of misogyny—this essay provides a methodical diagnosis of violence against women. Using an interdisciplinary methodology influenced by feminist theory, sociological analysis, and literary discourse, the study investigates the overt and covert ways in which violence is sustained in public and private settings. In addition to legal remedies, the article promotes a prescriptive framework that prioritizes prevention, awareness, and structural improvement. It makes the case for gender-sensitive education, successful policy implementation, women's economic independence, and ethical change via literary and cultural involvement. The study emphasizes the need for collective accountability and ongoing intervention to achieve gender justice and social fairness by viewing violence against women as a systemic societal sickness rather than an isolated issue.

Keywords- Violence against Women; Gender Inequality; Patriarchy; Feminist Theory; Human Rights; Social Reform; Gender Justice

India is undoubtedly a country full of striking contradictions. It is a land that practices bride-purning but believes in 'Yatra Naryastu Pujyante' Ramantey Tatra Devata' (i.e., where women are worshipped, there resides god); it is a land that worships Durga as the goddess of power but forces women to live a life of perpetual subordination, wants to keep her helpless, resorts to female foetal infanticides, and longs for a boy in order to perpetuate the male line. Here, a girl is seen as a liability to be eliminated as soon as possible, a burden that causes the parents to suffer. The fact that these medieval horrors coexist with the victorious rise of women in all spheres of life is perplexing. Gender relations and patriarchy, which presumes men are superior to women, are contributing factors to violence against women. Here,

I am sick of being the victim.

Of trends, I reflect

But don't even understand (Wagner: 987:63)

In actuality, the term "violence against women" is a technical word used to collectively refer to acts of violence committed predominantly or solely against women. The victim's gender serves as the main motivation for this kind of violence, which targets a particular group. Violence against women is defined by the United Nations General Assembly as "any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki). Attackers of either gender, family members, or even the state itself could violate the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence. (wikipedia : the free encyclopedia).

In the United Nations special report on "Violence Against Women" from 1995, Radhika Coomaraswamy listed the following types of violence against women: "Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family, including

battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions or elsewhere, trafficking in women, and forced prostitution are all to be included under the general term "violence against women."

In actuality, violence can be verbal or mental in addition to physical. Physical aggressiveness, such as blows of various intensities, burns, etc., and psychological infliction of pain, such as insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats, and control over speech and behavior, are examples of expressions of violence. Death is the outcome under severe but not unknown situations.

It has been noted in Mill's seminal work, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which became the feminist movement's Bible in the later half of the 19th century, that women's subjection is a result of age and long-standing tradition rather than evidence of their inferiority. From an early age, all women are raised to believe that their ideal of character is quite different from that of men: submitting and yielding to the authority of others, rather than self-will and self-control. "All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of man; not self will, and government by self control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that is the duty of women and all the current sentimentalities that, it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete ablegation of themselves and to have no life but in their affections" (Mill : 1970 :36).

This phenomena is by no means exclusive to India. Since the beginning of time, women have been oppressed everywhere, including in developed nations like the United States, Canada, England, and others. Because men and women in India go through separate socialization processes, we can conclude that men adopt stereotypical gender roles of dominance and control, while women adopt those of submission, reliance, and deference to authority. Here, a female youngster always feels vulnerable and in need of protection—economic, social, or physical. The biggest surprise is that, even in so-called "modern" and "advanced" nations, women's conditions are far better. This pessimism leads to her exploitation in nearly every stage of life. 40–70% of women's homicides in the United States of America are caused by "intimate partner violence" (IPV) by their husbands or boyfriends, also referred to as dating violence. Women there are also frequently abused by intimate partners. This type of violence is committed not only in heterosexual partnerships but also in lesbian, mother-daughter, roommate, and other domestic relationships between two women.

In addition to domestic violence, state-sponsored violence has been a significant contributor to women's suffering. For instance, a large number of women were subjected to extrajudicial punishment in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. These days, similar accusations continue to come in from places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and India's Jammu and Kashmir. Increased violence against women is made possible by the unique conditions created by war and militaristic actions. For instance, the Japanese military created Brothers for Shoulders during World War II, taking advantage of women to provide men access and entitlement. Even our empowerment system is susceptible to these kinds of abuses. Survivors feel far less empowered to disclose instances of violence when police officers abuse their authority as state agents to physically and sexually harass and assault women. Despite the victims' repeated requests to leave, police often enter the victims' houses by force. A large number of cases go unreported. As a result, estimating the actual scope of the issue is nearly impossible.

In India today, the level of violence against women has risen to a concerning level. An estimated thirty distinct types of violence are perpetrated against women from the time of pregnancy until their death. Foeticide, infanticide, intentional monitoring of the availability of adequate and nourishing nourishment, and medical neglect are examples of such forms. Because there will be no social action, the violence will not stop. There are laws, rules, and regulations. However, they must be properly implemented with caution and preparedness. Without these, violence is increasingly being used as a tool, a weapon, to keep women from speaking out against crimes. Rape of women has always been used as a means of dehumanizing the enemy in interpersonal conflicts, family disputes, and warfare, blatantly demonstrating the status of women as property. These days, news of these kinds of instances are so common.

"Male supremacy is the oldest most basic form of domination - all others forms of exploitation and oppressions (racism, capitalism, imperialism etc.) are extensions of male supremacy. Man dominate women and few men dominate the rest" (Batty and Roszak: 1969:273)

It is not difficult to find a solution to violence. It exists inside of us. We must completely abandon the animal kingdom, embrace humanity, and treat others with humanity. This is going to be the best battle ever. However, this conflict is not between men and women or between males; rather, it is between good and evil, between a human and another human. Men and women alike will be condemned if we are not prepared to take part in this battle.

Aside from utopia, there must be some concrete measures taken in the near and medium term to stop violence against women. It is necessary to teach law enforcement equipment to be attentive to the problem. Women need to get together and speak out against a system that ignores, if not outright encourages, acts of violence against women. The media and every public-minded individual must work to promote a civilized mindset in society. A concerted effort can undoubtedly generate public opinion and uproar against instances in which women are degraded by public officials or by others with their complicity. Because the more they withdraw into their shells, the more prepared the predators outside are to seal those shells and strangle the very life out of them, women must also be persuaded to become aware of their rights and defend them. Women need to assist themselves.

"Like many other oppressed groups, women must lead the fight for their own liberation, and Mill believed that moral reforms, education, and legal measures can bring about equality between the sexes" (Betty: 1970:36).

We must now consider issues such as whether it is appropriate to condemn a woman to be an eternal "Ahilya," a stone until Ram relieves her of the burden: Is it possible for life to be divided into distinct, watertight compartments for males and females? Do we live in two different worlds? Do such "colored" binoculars make sense? Is it impossible for a guy to see past his own masculinity and gain insight into the female sensibility? Numerous such questions have been brought forward by women's activist movements. To develop an appropriate response, these questions must be properly wrestled with. Women's empowerment, with the full support of men, is the key to the answer. The target might soon be reached with the realization falling on many. That is what we aspire for, what we want, and it is unquestionably necessary if we want to endure, develop, and thrive.

Violence against women must be viewed as a structurally created and culturally maintained reality ingrained in power structures rather than as an isolated social disorder. Violence is normalized by institutions like the family, church, education, the law, and cultural representation, according to feminist theory and literary discourse. According to Michel Foucault (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 135–36), power functions not just through overt force but also through routine practices of monitoring and discipline that mold bodies and subjectivities. In particular, women's bodies become sites of regulation where standards of honor, submission, and modesty justify punishment and control. Women's suffering has historically been aestheticized by literary traditions from many countries, making violence seem morally or culturally inevitable.

The diagnosis is further refined by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which shows how violence serves as a regulatory mechanism to uphold socially acceptable gender norms. Butler argues that gender is a recurring performance created by societal standards rather than a solid identity (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 191–92). Violence appears as a corrective force when women defy norms of chastity, meekness, or obedience. Domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and honor-based violence are examples of acts that function more as disciplinary measures intended to reestablish normative order than as acts of spontaneous aggressiveness. By emphasizing women's bodily experiences and emotional truths, literary voices like Kamala Das and Toni Morrison challenge this logic and undermine patriarchal conceptions of femininity (Das 78–80; Morrison 273–75).

Understanding why violence against women frequently goes unnoticed or is socially accepted requires an understanding of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu, internalized beliefs that make dominance normal and unquestionable are the means by which symbolic violence is used (Bourdieu 1-2). Women are often conditioned to view hardship as fate and perseverance as virtue. Literary narratives where female characters defend their subjugation in the name of cultural tradition or familial duty are clear examples of this internalization. Thus, resistance is challenging and socially costly because violence is sustained not just by physical force but also by psychological assent.

By emphasizing intersectionality, Indian feminist scholarship expands on this diagnosis. Uma Chakravarti shows how caste systems, in which women's bodies are used to uphold social order, are inextricably linked to gender-based violence (Chakravarti 45–47). In a same vein, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid stress that rather than destroying patriarchy, colonial and postcolonial power institutions have reconfigured it (Sangari and Vaid 12–15). This connection is vividly depicted in Mahasweta Devi's work, which shows how violence against marginalized women is both gendered and political. Devi challenges prevailing narratives that reduce women to helpless victims by transforming the violated female body into a site of resistance in *Breast Stories* (Devi 67–69).

Even with the growth of legal frameworks that address violence against women, patriarchal presumptions frequently continue to undermine institutional practices. According to feminist legal critiques, masculine epistemologies that prioritize reason and evidence above firsthand experience have shaped law itself. Survivors are often the targets of scrutiny, skepticism, and moral condemnation, which perpetuates violence in legal settings. Legal mechanisms may serve as instruments of regulation rather than emancipation, as explained by Foucault's critique of institutional authority (*History of Sexuality* 92–94). On the other hand, alternative modes of reality that emphasize pain, memory, and ethical urgency are provided by literature and testimonial tales.

Therefore, a multifaceted approach is required to counter violence against women. By challenging prevailing epistemologies and elevating disadvantaged perspectives, feminist education has a transformative effect at the pedagogical level. According to Butler, challenging normative frameworks is crucial to destroying systems that justify violence (*Undoing Gender* 28–30). Incorporating feminist literary texts into curricula cultivates ethical empathy and critical consciousness, allowing students to see violence as a systemic injustice rather than an anomaly. Another important component of the prescription is cultural transformation. Feminist reinterpretation is necessary to demolish patriarchal narratives that justify male dominance and romanticize female suffering. Understanding cultural inequality still revolves around Simone de Beauvoir's claim that women are historically formed as the "Other" (de Beauvoir 26–27). Feminist interpretations of myths, religious texts, and literary classics upend long-standing interpretations and create room for new, autonomous, and agency-based depictions of female.

Since financial dependence frequently keeps women in abusive cycles, economic empowerment is still essential. Empowerment, however, runs the risk of escalating patriarchal backlash in the absence of intellectual transformation.

Bourdieu cautions that unless symbolic systems are also changed, structural inequality will continue (Bourdieu 117–18). Therefore, it is crucial to include men as allies in feminist discourse. Gender relations can be reshaped and entitlement-based authority challenged through literary depictions of introspective and non-dominant masculinities. Violence against women is morally a sign of a lack of shared accountability. Relational accountability and moral engagement are prioritized over detached law in feminist ethics of care. Complicity takes the guise of apathy and silence. Apathy is disrupted and social introspection is prompted by literature's ability to arouse empathy and moral contemplation. Violence against women is a violation of fundamental human rights and human dignity, according to the United Nations.

In conclusion, a theory-based diagnosis and a culturally grounded treatment are necessary for violence against women. Together, feminist theory and literature show that systems of representation, power, and belief—rather than just individual acts—are what sustain violence. It requires a persistent dedication to structural reform, moral responsibility, and creative reimagining. Society won't be able to start writing a future based on justice, equality, and dignity until it learns to read violence critically in texts, institutions, and daily activities. In literary cultures, this kind of critical reading also calls for a reconsideration of authorship, readership, and interpretative duty. Interpretation itself becomes an ethical act if violence is sustained by inherited narratives and accepted discourses. The reader is now an active participant in the creation and dissemination of meaning rather than a passive recipient.

In order to read violence critically, one must reject neutrality and recognize that interpretive decisions have the potential to either uphold or undermine prevailing power systems. In this way, critical literacy serves as a kind of ethical and cultural praxis in the interventionist field of English studies. Furthermore, the focus on creative re-visioning highlights literature's ability to imagine moral alternatives outside of current social structures. Literary works challenge linear conceptions of development that frequently mask systematic gendered violence through fractured narratives, interrupted chronologies, and counter-histories. By creating discursive space for historically underrepresented or silenced voices, these formal and thematic disruptions enable pain, resistance, and survival to be represented on their own terms. Such works require the reader to maintain ethical engagement rather than provide narrative completion.

Sustained engagement with violence against women forces English studies to critically examine its own canons, methods, and underlying presumptions on a larger disciplinary level. Incorporating women's perspectives is not only an additive endeavor; it is a transformative one that necessitates challenging the epistemic frameworks that have traditionally dictated literary authority and worth. Literary scholarship maintains its relevance to current intellectual and social discussions by embarking on this mission. Thus, the fight against violence, expressed via critical reading and writing, becomes a transformational scholarly practice—one that reshapes cultural consciousness and demands that justice is a narrative and ethical responsibility in addition to a legal or social imperative.

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