Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Norms: A Sociological Study

Dr. Manish Kumar Sahu

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology,

Badri Vishal P.G College, Farrukhabad (Uttar Pradesh)

Abstract:-

Domestic abuse continues to be a painful and everyday reality for millions in India, impacting families of every class, caste, religious identity and region. And in spite of legislation, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and more awareness about rights on the part of the public, multitudes of harm being done behind closed doors is still condoned as "that's how things are" due to embedded patriarchy. This article is a sympathetic sociology of why. Citing the latest such secondary sources—NFHS-5, NCRB 2022 and a variety of sociological studies—it maps out how norms about gender learned in young age, imbalances in power within families, as well as deeper structural inequalities work together to perpetuate domestic abuse. Positioned in feminist, conflict and intersectional approaches, the study locates the lived experiences of individuals, demonstrating that modernisation has not per se dissolved gender hierarchies. Legal remedies are not enough; change must be cultural, communities must offer support for survivors and interventions for those at risk, education is vital, and there need to be economic and social policies that "enable both victims and men in the broader community to have an alternative".

Keywords: violence against Women, patriarchy, gender inequality, lived experiences, feminist theory, India.

Introduction :-

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

Although domestic violence violates human rights at the deepest level and provides a microcosm of large social statuses, it may be seen as an example of larger structural injustices supported by patriarchal societies. According to Isabella Boivin domestic violence in India defines the 'act of being physical, mental and sexual harm or harassment from others in a family member' where the traditional nuclear family is defined as "a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction". For instance: Maura Storey notes that Indian women's movements provide one of the most direct challenges on record addressing rape. The focus of efforts against rape within India has been at creating awareness among people about women; specifically, amongst lower-class communities. Patriarchy, a social system which privileges male authority and power over females in the family and marriage, dominates within the family domain where different forms of violence against women (physical, sexual, psychological) become normalised and even culturally condoned.

As per this evidence,29 around 30% of ever-married women in India have experienced some form of spousal violence from their husbands as captured by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5 SRS 2020–21). This is a sign of the continued problem of domestic violence in our society despite greater awareness and enactment of laws. Moreover, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2022) reported more than 89 000 cases under IPC Section 498A (cruelty by husband or relatives to Hindu wife), further affirming the continued existence of this problem. However, these are probably lower than the actual prevalence because of underreporting which is influenced by fear of retaliation, social stigma, economic dependency and inadequate knowledge about mechanisms available to seek relief.

The continued prevalence of domestic violence, despite higher levels of education, urbanisation and socioeconomic development, refutes the naive tale that progress is automatically linked with gender justice. Instead patriarchy survives by taking on new forms under changed social conditions, by perpetuating gendered violence in and through the low level control of women and other

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

marginalised groups. This emphasises the importance of a multi-dimensional sociological analysis that sees domestic violence as being located within the matrix of patriarchal power relations, cultural values and institutional responses.

This paper seeks to explore the sociological antecedents of domestic violence in India, explain its complicated relationship with patriarchal society, and understand the many difficulties involved in combating it through law enforcement, social policy and grassroots organisation. Intervention Impact: To develop and implement policies that address the root sociocultural causes of their domestic violence, it is crucial to understand these entrenched gender inequalities.

Review of Literature:-

Sociological and feminist studies have enriched our understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence in India. Academics have analyzed how structural hierarchies, cultural practices and institutional prejudices maintain violence against women in the family and community.

Dube (1997) emphasized that patriarchy in India functions as a structural and ideological complex, enforced through kinship alliances, the custom of dowry, and how gender identity is socially constructed. She contended that domestic violence is part of the patriarchal system, which is not only maintained through marriage and family law, but also institutionalised with the husband as a protector or disciplinarian. In the same way, Das (1990) analysed domestic violence as an aspect of everyday life in India: she had shown how silence, tolerance and suffering became part of women's social identity.

Rege (2003), from a framework of intersectional feminist was one of the few studies that underscored experiences of domestic thwarted by caste, class and religion. Bhatia and Sethi (2002) investigated the psycho-social dimensions of wife abuse in urban India and reported that economic dependence, along with deeply ingrained societal expectations, constrains women's ability to leave abusive men. Agnes (1992) criticized the limitations of law reforms "in a legal patriarchal culture where judges,

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

who constitute most of the judiciary and are drawn from high caste men of dominant religious persuasion have worked towards diluting gender justice as well weakening protective legislation while pretending otherwise" .

An empirical study by Kaur and Garg (2008) refutes the belief that modernization and education would definitely ensure gender equalities, since it shows that highly educated women are victims of domestic violence as well. Recent analyses by Bhattacharyya (2018) and Menon (2020) have also argued that combating domestic violence necessitates a challenge to structural inequality in employment, property rights, and reproductive autonomy.

Globally, seminal texts including those by Dobash&Dobash (1979) and Heise (1998) constructed intimate partner violence as a sociocultural and structural rather than individual problem. In the Indian context, scholarship has further nuanced this perspective through an examination of domestic violence within India's particular socio-cultural environment of caste hierarchies, kinship obligations and patriarchal family systems.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that domestic violence in India (and elsewhere) is not an individualised, isolated act of aggression but a consequence of systemic systems of oppression comprising deeply-entrenched patriarchal structures which condition and maintain gendered power relations and the subordination of women.

Theoretical Framework:-

Feminist Theory :-

Feminist theory understands domestic violence as a representation of male domination inscribed at the social, cultural and institutional levels. Radical feminist views contend that patriarchy codifies male power and legitimates violence as a way to maintain control of women. In the Indian context,

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

some feminists (Kishwar 1998; Agness 1992) illustrates how marriage, family and motherhood act as tools of patriarchal repression. The home, frequently lauded as a private and apolitical site of idealism, here is the site on which political patriarchal authority is established having women's autonomy systematically denied. Greenan This framework places domestic violence in the larger context of gender hierarchies and power relations, as opposed to 'a single act' or 'all too common event".

Conflict Theory :-

According to conflict theory, domestic violence is a representation of general social inequalities and the inequities in power between men and women. Based on a Marxian analysis, this view regards the family as a small scale reflection of larger relations of class and of power. Within this context, men (as dominant agents) exert power so as to maintain the position of privilege and control within the home. Economic dependence of women and their lack of control over property, income and resources contribute to their subordination, which leave them more vulnerable to coercion and violence.savetxt DV is therefore conceived of as a strategy for the reproduction and maintenance of an already gendered economic hierarchy.

Intersectional Feminism :-

Intersectionality, originated by Crenshaw (1989), is the concept that violence against women can not be understood without understanding other dimensions of inequality like caste, class, religion and ethnicity. This method shows how interlocking systems of domination exacerbate women's marginalization and the experience of violence. Rege's (2006) study in the Indian context supports this point, and shows that Dalit and Adivasi women face convergent patriarchal, caste-based, and economic oppression. Intersectional approach is therefore crucial to grasp the varying trajectories, determinants and debris of violence within different social groups in India. It broadens the analytical focus beyond gender and highlights the importance of an awareness of context and structure in discussions of domestic violence.

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

Objectives and Hypotheses

Objectives:-

1. To analyze the role of patriarchal norms in perpetuating domestic violence in India.

2. To understand how socio-economic and cultural factors shape women's vulnerability to domestic violence.

3. To examine the effectiveness of legal and institutional mechanisms in preventing and addressing domestic violence.

4. To explore the dynamic interaction between modernization, education, empowerment, and patriarchal control in Indian society.

Hypotheses:-

1. Patriarchal ideology constitutes the central structural cause of domestic violence in India.

2. Women's economic and educational empowerment mitigates vulnerability but does not entirely eliminate domestic violence.

3. Legal and institutional mechanisms, in isolation, are inadequate to dismantle domestic violence without parallel transformation in social norms and cultural beliefs.

Research Methodology:-

This study employs a qualitative and analytical research design based primarily on secondary data. The methodology integrates theoretical frameworks from sociology and gender studies with empirical

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

findings from national and international reports to interpret the structural linkages between patriarchy and domestic violence in India.

The core data sources include:

- National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2020–21)

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2022)

- Reports from UN Women and the World Health Organisation (2020)

- Scholarly works by Indian sociologists and feminist theorists

- Research articles published in reputed journals such as Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), Indian Journal of Gender Studies, and Sociological Bulletin.

The study follows a descriptive and interpretative approach to analyse the persistence of patriarchal control and its influence on patterns of domestic violence. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how structural, cultural, and institutional factors collectively sustain gender-based violence in contemporary India.

Analysis and Discussion:-

6.1 Prevalence and Patterns: -

NFHS-5 showed that 30% of women in the age group of 18–49 have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence. The rate is 32% for rural areas and 25% for urban.

Data from the NCRB (2022) indicates an upward one in reported cases of domestic violence but underreporting is still a major issue, with social disgrace and family dishonour being much feared.

6.2 Patriarchal Conditioning:-

Patriarchal socialisation starts in childhood: boys are brought up to command and girls to obey. This internalisation of the rank structure as it applies to gender results in a culture where controlling

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

womens' bodies and behaviour is acceptable. The acceptance of domestic violence as a matter of "discipline" or "correction," as always, is symptomatic of deep patriarchy training.

6.3 Economic and Cultural Determinants: -

Economic dependence is a major factor in women's lack of options to resist or leave abusives relationships. Yet despite more women becoming literate and employed, wage discrimination and no property rights remain. Societal norms and "pati parmeshwar" (husband is god) keep the hope of obedience alive, thus making resistance socially inappropriate.

6.4 Intersectional Dimensions :-

Dalit and tribal women are often victims of violence at home as well as in the public space. The violence at the intersection of caste based discrimination and domestic violence has been highlighted by scholars like Sharmila Rege (2006)and Anandhi (2018), exposing the complex layers of vulnerability that never get addressed under mainstream policy.

6.5 Legal and Institutional Response:-

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) was a milestone in the reform process which widened the understanding of domestic violence from just physical abuse to mental, economic and sexual violence. However, enforcement remains weak. The insensitivity of the police, their victim blaming and protracted court processes work against women seeking justice. Without legal personnel gender sensitization. the law is little more than a symbol un The Symbolic as Stone and Law In she has cast up a wall, but only over her own grave in Utopia.

Findings:-

1.Domestic violence is strongly built into patriarchal systems and societal values.

2.The economic and educational advances of women have raised awareness without fully transforming gender hierarchies.

www.rmsgpublication.in   © 2025 RMSG PUBLICATION | Volume 1, Issue 4 January, 2026 | ISSN: 3049-4109

RMSG (Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt) PUBLICATION
ISSN:3049-4109
INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE-PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY E-RESEARCH JOURNAL

3.The control of patriarchy appears in different forms across caste and class lines; a "one size fits all" approach is not going to work.

4.There are laws, but they become meaningless due to societal taboos and institutional indifference.

5.Legal, educational and cultural interventions are necessary for preventing domestic violence.

Conclusion and Policy Suggestions:-

Domestic violence in India is a construct that patriarchy built, and sustains due to social conditioning. While there is formal protection (though no effective protection in practice) available under the various pieces of legislation, like Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), laws cannot break down centuries of social conditioning without creating larger change around them.

Policy Recommendations:-

A female-authored curriculum at schools and colleges to counteract patriarchy.

Economic initiatives targeting women, such as microcredit programmes, land tenure reform and vocational training.

Sensitization of police, judiciary and social workers about the gender issue so that proper dealing may be made.

Community level awareness raising for men and religious/community leaders.

Intersectional approach in policymaking acknowledging the specific vulnerabilities of Dalit, Adivasi and minority women.

On a sociological level, confronting domestic violence shouldn't just focus on punishment—it should seek to change social values, transform definitions of masculinity and foster more egalitarian models of family life.

Reference:-

Agnes, F. (1992). Protecting women against violence? Review of a decade of laws 1980-89. Economic and Political Weekly, 27(17), WS19–WS33.

Agnes, F. (2019). Law, justice and gender: Family law and constitutional giveaways in India. Oxford University Press.

Anandhi, S. (2018). Women, caste & reform in India : some historical processes. Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 25(1), 1–25.

Bhattacharyya, R. (2018). Understanding gender violence in contemporary India: Issues and responses. Journal of Gender Studies, 27(4), 398–412.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139–167.

Das, V. (1990). Violence, gender, and subjectivity. In V. Das (Ed.), Mirrors of violence: Communities, riots and survivors in South Asia (pp. 1–26). Oxford University Press.

Dube, L. (1997). Women and kinship: Comparative perspectives on gender in South and South-east Asia. United Nations University Press.

Heise, L. (1998). Violence against women: A methodological and theoretical critique of the literature. Violence Against Women, 4(3), 262–290.

Jejeebhoy, S. J., & Cook, R. J. (1997). State accountability of wife-beating: Indian challenge. The Lancet, 349(9052), 10–12.

Kaur, R., & Garg, S. (2008). Ending violence against women: included and connected. Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 33(2), 73-76.

Kishwar, M. (1998). Women's rights and the Hindu code bill dispute. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 14(3), 137–158.

Menon, N. (2020). Seeing like a feminist. Penguin Books.

National Crime Records Bureau. (2022). Crime in India 2022: Statistics. Ministry of Home Affairs,(Government of India).

National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). (2021). India fact sheet. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.

Rege, S. (2006). Scripting caste, scripting gender: Reading Dalit women's testimonies. Zubaan.

UN Women. (2020). The shadow pandemic: How lockdown has affected domestic violence. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women