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## Normalization of Domestic Violence: A Gramscian Analysis of Normalization in the Maniktala Slum Area, Kolkata<sup>1</sup>

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Domestic violence remains an extensive yet often normalized form of gender-based oppression in all over the world, as well as in India. This article examines how this kind of violence becomes “normal” in everyday family life using Antonio Gramsci’s concept of normalization under cultural hegemony. based on both quantitative and qualitative data from 90 respondents (45 male and 45 female) in the Maniktala slum area of Kolkata, the study examines how individuals interpret and involve in the acts of domestic violence in their family. Using survey and focus group discussion methods, the findings reveal that 57.78% of respondents consider domestic violence and intolerance in the family as “not a big deal” or a normal or a private matter. Both male and female participants normalize violence and rationalize it as a product of economic vulnerabilities, alcoholism, emotional tension, and cultural expectations of endurance and privacy. The study argues that the normalization as an expression of hegemonic ideology that sustain domestic violence through social consent rather than oppression. The findings highlighted the need for some critical interventions to challenge this hegemonic “common sense” and promote alternative narratives of equality and non-violence.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, normalization, Gramsci, hegemony, cultural consent, gender ideology.

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The problem of domestic violence in India remains an endless and complex social issue which challenges gender equality and justice across the class, cast etc. though some legal framework like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) exists in India, the practice of domestic violence continues and even normalized within familial and community settings. According to National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21), 32% married women aged 18 to 45 experience physical, sexual or emotional violence from their spouse in India. 29% of ever married women experienced spousal physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. One fourth of these women suffered from physical injuries like burn or broken bones. Though this trend has been decreased from NFHS-4, but this scenario is still in the alarming situation. Shockingly only 14% of women who experienced domestic violence they sought help either from family or police or other institutions, but 77% of suffered women never told anybody about their experience. This reflects the situation across India. NFHS-5 also provided data on domestic violence particularly in West Bengal. This report shows that 29.7% of married women experienced any kind of spousal emotional, sexual or physical violence in West Bengal. It means 3 of 10 married women in West Bengal experienced spousal violence. Another report published by WHO (2021) on the prevalence of violence against women shows that India's national lifetime prevalence is approximately 30% to 33%. In past 12 months the prevalence is approximately 20% among ever married women aged 15 to 49 years. It means, 1 in 3 women in India experienced physical or sexual or emotional violence from their husbands or intimate partners.

All the reports are repeatedly showing that the condition of married women in India is not always good due to the dreadfulness of the domestic violence. Though there are several sources of protection of women against domestic violence exist in India, reports showed that only few women seek help from these sources or share their horrible experiences of domestic violence. One of the main causes of this non-sharing is the process of normalization of domestic violence. Some cultural beliefs and values which prioritize family unity over individual rights, along with economic

dependency, lack of education and social stigma, contribute to the tolerance of violence in the familial sphere. The report of NFHS-5 (2019-21) stated that many men and women in India still believe a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances. This is a clear indication of normalization of violence. Almost 45% of women and 44% of men agreed that husband's beating to his wife is justified for some reasons, such as: if she goes out without him, if she neglects her children, if she argues or refuses to sex or if she fails to cook food properly etc. According to them, these are the fault of women and in these situations, beating is a very normal and justified.

To find the actual scenario of domestic violence in slum areas of Kolkata, a study on the Domestic Violence was held in Maniktala slum area of Kolkata by activism Foundation. The result shows that here also domestic violence often appears as an imminent part of everyday life. sometimes perceptions like "family matters should remain private" strengthen the patriarchal hegemony and discourage any kind of external or institutional intervention.

This study examines how domestic violence particularly in Maniktala Slum area of Kolkata becomes normalized through cultural and ideological processes on the basis of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The research explores how men and women accept dominant patriarchal values, converting constrain into consent, and how these beliefs shape their everyday understanding of domestic violence and intolerance.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Many research on domestic violence in India identified that it is not only an individual act of aggression, it is a structural and cultural manifestation of patriarchy. Dobash and Dobash (1992) argue that domestic violence is not entirely an interpersonal aggression, it is an institutionalized form of gendered control, which is legitimised by social norms. They also argue that violence against women is deeply rooted in

patriarchal social structures which sustain male dominance and control over women within families and intimate relationships. According to them domestic violence is not an individual or psychological problem, it is a systematic issue related to gender inequality and traditional norms of male authority. According to Connell (1987) gender is not a simple individual trait or biological difference, it is constructed through social practice on the basis of three major dimensions: Power relation, Production system and Emotional relation. In the South Asian context, Niaz (2003) argues that violence against women is a widespread and multifaceted problem, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, economic dependency, and discriminatory practices. She analysed violence against women in several categories including domestic violence. she also explored how cultural beliefs often justify or normalize such violence, showing that it as a private or family matter rather than a criminal or human rights issue. This justification resulted mental health impact on the victims. She also criticised the legal and institutional responses to violence against women in her article. Kumar (2012) showed how violence exists in the name of family privacy and male authority. She also stated that how contemporary women's movements triggered by issues like dowry deaths, rape, domestic violence, and workplace discrimination. These movements challenged state institutions and patriarchal norms. Recent studies by Sen and Dasgupta (2018) explore how domestic violence in India becomes normalized and culturally justified, rather than being considered as a violation of rights or a form of abuse. They showed that patriarchal values, social expectations, and cultural scripts construct violence as a legitimate or even necessary part of maintaining marital and familial order. This cultural normalization of violence means that abuse is often dismissed as a "private matter," a form of discipline, or an expression of love and care. They highlighted that both men and women participate to justify this logic through everyday language, rituals, and community norms. Bhattacharyya (2019), in her paper showed that Indian society often portrays women facing domestic abuse solely as victims, which overlooks their agency, resilience, and everyday strategies of survival. Bhattacharyya stresses that women are not always passive sufferers—they often negotiate, resist, and adapt within patriarchal and socio-economic constraints.

she also argued about the limitation of legal approaches. According to the author many women either cannot access legal remedies or choose not to, due to social stigma, economic dependency, or family pressures. For these reasons she calls for a reframing of domestic violence which will move beyond legal framework and generate a new perspective that includes agency, intersectionality, and social context. Shrimoyee, Roychowdhury and Dhamija (2025) analysed women's attitude towards physical intimate partner violence on the basis of several rounds of National family Health Survey data and found that over the years fewer women accepted physical violence by their intimate partner in any circumstances, which means women are gradually declining the acceptance of physical violence. Despite the decline, a considerable proportion of women still believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife for certain reasons like, neglecting children, arguing, refusing sex, or going out without permission. These studies also showed that how cultural beliefs and moral virtues transform violence into an accepted aspect of marital life.

From a theoretical aspect, Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony provides critical understanding of normalization. According to Gramsci, hegemony works when dominant values are accepted as "common sense," producing consent rather than resistance. In patriarchal systems, through this consent, gender inequality and the domestic violence become morally justified and socially accepted. This empirical research examines how hegemonic ideology shapes interpretations of domestic violence in the Maniktala slum area of Kolkata. Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony provides a critical understanding to interpret the normalization of domestic violence. Gramsci (1971) argued that domination is maintained not only through coercive force but through the acceptance of dominant ideologies, which society considers as "natural" or "moral."

To build on this theoretical foundation, Yang's (2025) article Antonio Gramsci's Political Philosophy on Culture argues that hegemonic power is produced and reproduced through cultural institutions like family, religion, education, and media. Yang's analysis backs up this study's observation that domestic violence in the

Maniktala slum is often seen as normal due to shared cultural beliefs, where patriarchal norms become accepted as common sense. Mayo (2020) works through socialization and learning instead of coercion. Mayo's work illustrates how daily experiences and informal education influence how people accept dominant ideologies. This view fits with the study's finding that lower education levels are linked to higher acceptance of domestic violence. Respondents may not have the awareness needed to question dominant norms. Leśniak (2012) highlights how dominant ideology changes structural control into moral legitimacy. Leśniak's analysis shows why both men and women may help maintain patriarchal norms that portray domestic violence as acceptable or natural. This supports the study's argument that dominant consent, rather than direct force, drives the acceptance of violence.

Within patriarchal structures, this manifests as the belief that assailant's aggression is legitimate and the silence of victim is normal, because domestic violence is absolutely a private matter and a routine matter of everyday life. It reflects the success of Gramsci's hegemonic ideology: where any kind of force becomes unnecessary because according to the victim, domestic violence is an inevitable part of everyday life and for that reason, is very "common" and "normal".

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted by the Activism Foundation in the Maniktala slum area of Kolkata, characterized by dense population, limited economic opportunities, poor infrastructure and established patriarchal family systems, which contribute gender inequality, violence and intolerance. To explore every dimension of the domestic violence in their everyday life, a mixed-method approach was applied in this study. For in-depth understanding, both the quantitative and qualitative methods were used to capture participant's understandings and the process of normalization of violence within family relationships. A total of 90 respondents (45 male and 45 female) were selected by quota sampling. Participants represented from various educational, marital, and caste backgrounds, including married, unmarried, widowed, and divorced individuals. The quota sampling for data collection was selected because through a

pilot survey we noticed that both male and female are victimised by domestic violence. On the other hand, both the genders are playing active role to initiate domestic violence in that particular area. Activism tried to find the actual trend and the strategies to combat their everyday sufferings from domestic violence in Maniktala slum area, Kolkata through their study.

The data were collected by two different tools:

- **Survey:** Semi structured questionnaires were used to explore participant's understanding of domestic violence, personal experiences, everyday sufferings, playing active or passive role to initiate or combat domestic violence and views on domestic violence whether it is acceptable or "normal".
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Separate discussions with men and women were conducted explored their understandings, perceptions, everyday experiences, justifications, and responses to the domestic violence.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify major trends in perception and behaviour of domestic violence, and qualitative data were thematically analysed to explore their responses to domestic violence and common ideological patterns of normalization.

### **Quantitative Findings**

57.78% of respondents considered domestic violence as "not a big deal" or "normal" part of family life. It indicates how domestic violence deeply being normalized within the community. Men (30%) were slightly more likely than women (27.78%) accepted violence as normal. It indicates that normalization is not only imposed by men, it shared across genders. Normalization became the part of cultural norms and social values. Verbal abuse (32.22%) and physical acts such as laying hands (11.12%), beating (11.11%) were most normalized, on the other hand, forced sex (16%) and social isolation were less recognized as violence. Illiterate and primary-educated respondents showed the highest levels of acceptance towards domestic violence. It identifies the

strong correlation between literacy and resistance to the violence. Normalization was highest among married participants (39%) than unmarried or separated participants, it reflects the tendency to follow the patriarchal social norms among the people live in the Maniktala Slum Area of Kolkata.

The findings show that economic hardship and alcoholism significantly influence the acceptance of domestic violence in the Maniktala slum area. The data indicates that financial issues are a primary source of family conflict. Nearly 51.11% of respondents said their families often experience conflicts related to money problems. Alcoholism complicates this issue. While most respondents, about 67.78%, said conflicts due to alcoholism never happen, a notable proportion, around 22.22%, reported that these conflicts occur frequently, occasionally, or mostly within their families.

The way that alcoholism and economic hardship contribute to the normalization of domestic violence in the Maniktala slum area is greatly influenced by education. Respondents with lower levels of education—especially men and women with only a primary education and illiteracy—report higher rates of conflict pertaining to both economic issues and alcoholism. Alcohol-related disputes are more likely to be viewed by illiterate and primary-educated respondents as commonplace disruptions rather than severe forms of abuse, and financial stress is commonly mentioned as a justifiable cause of rage and aggression. Higher secondary and graduate-level educated respondents, on the other hand, overwhelmingly state that such conflicts "never" occur, indicating a greater ability to critically assess and oppose the normalization of violence.

### **Qualitative Insights**

Some qualitative data revealed the understanding and responses to domestic violence of participants. Both men and women have accepted their everyday experience of domestic violence. But a major number of respondents justify or normalized such violences with some statements like "When many people live together, conflict is natural", or "Violence happens in every family; it's not serious."

Not only that, a number of female respondents answered that the tendency of alcohol consumption of the male members of the family is too high, this is one of the major causes of conflict and violence within the family and this tendency is very common at their place. Some of them also said that violence occurs due to the financial crisis and this is a valid reason for anger and conflict among members and finally it resulted violence within the family. Some other responses we got which established that violence is normal and justified. Some of the female respondents said that verbal abuse and physical violence both are accepted if they failed to fulfil their familial duty properly (e.g., if they do not cook properly, if they neglect their children etc.). we also get some responses from both the male and female respondents like conflict or violence within the family is absolutely a private matter and maintaining privacy is a virtue, for that reason many victims of that area did not share or sought help from anybody or institution. These statements reflect not only the normalization of violence but also the justification of sustaining the patriarchal structure in the family as well as in that particular community. both men and women rationalize violence as functional, response to stress or poverty or the means of family harmony, rather than the abuse of power.

Yes, this is right that a major section of respondents accepted and justified domestic violences in several ways, but still few respondents, both male and female aged 30-39 refused to normalize domestic violence in any manner. Though they declined normalization, but still no data shows where they raised their voice against such violences. Most of the time they remain silent or try to cope up with the situation to avoid conflict within family and also they opposed any external intervention in family affairs, reflecting how hegemonic norms shape commonsense beliefs, rooted in Gramsci's notion of Cultural Hegemony that domestic violence constitutes a private matter rather than a social concern.

## **Discussion**

The study's findings proved that how domestic violence is being normalized through hegemonic ideology. In Gramsci's words, the moral and cultural order of patriarchy

operates as a form of consensual domination—violence exists, because it is accepted as common sense.

In the context of Maniktala slum area high acceptance among married respondents illustrates how marital ideology hardens 'common sense' (hegemony), even when harm is recognized. On the other hand, assailant's aggression is justified as stress related matter or anger issues or impact of economical vulnerability or the result of alcohol consumption or the lack of facilities in the slum area. Both perspectives indicate the function of cultural consent, where gender inequality power relation is sustained through moral reasoning rather than compulsion. With the help of Gramsci's idea, it can be said that hegemony is persist through everyday practices and beliefs. Domestic violence thus becomes a cultural discipline or norm rather than an act perceived as force or oppression. This process of normalization discourages any kind of resistance and external intervention. The previously mentioned studies also demonstrated how this kind of hegemonic norms and beliefs justify and normalize domestic violence as a private familial issue rather than a broader social threat, thereby reinforcing a commonsense understanding of marital values that marginalizes structural power relations. In slum areas like Maniktala slum area characterized by lack of access to education, insufficient facilities and economic vulnerabilities, these hegemonic ideologies can more easily rationalize ambiguous marital values as moral virtues, thereby reinforcing unequal power relations within the household.

Though marital values and moral virtues play a crucial role to normalize the domestic violence, other "common sense" regarding domestic violence also influence the normalization process- like, alcoholism and economic problems in Maniktala slum area. This pattern is especially noticeable among married men and women, indicating that household tensions are exacerbated by marital responsibilities, unstable income, unemployment, and everyday survival pressures. However, these conflicts are frequently morally justified and normalized rather than seen as a structural issue with roots in poverty and inequality. Economic stress-related violence is often

interpreted by both male and female respondents as a "natural" emotional reaction, which turns structural vulnerability into personal guilt and justifies family violence. It is commonly acknowledged that consumption of alcohol can lead to violence, but it is also accepted as a justification for abusive conduct. Alcohol-related violence is frequently written off as temporary, unintentional, or immoral, further ingraining it into "common sense." According to Gramscian theory, this illustrates how cultural hegemony operates, with alcoholism and financial hardship serving as hegemonic justifications that transform coercion into consent. By normalizing violence as an inevitable result of poverty, stress, and male frustration rather than opposing it, these explanations uphold patriarchal power relations through moral reasoning as opposed to coercion.

In Maniktala Slum area education is playing a crucial role to promote this hegemonic common sense. Because lower educational attainment restricts access to critical awareness, dominant patriarchal ideologies are able to portray violence resulting from poverty or alcohol consumption as normal, inevitable, or morally acceptable. Alcoholism and economic stress serve as hegemonic justifications in these situations, transforming structural injustices into personalized explanations and maintaining consent to violence. However, by encouraging a greater understanding of violence as unacceptable rather than inevitable, higher education seems to undermine this hegemonic logic. As a result, education becomes more than just a sociodemographic factor; it also becomes a crucial site of ideological conflict that affects whether domestic violence is viewed as a social injustice or accepted as normal family behavior..

To counter these hegemonic ideologies, the commonsense understanding of domestic violence must be disrupted through counter hegemony. Drawing on Gramsci's notion of "good sense", a more critical and reflective understanding of domestic violence should emerge through heightened social consciousness, enabling individuals and communities to challenge the dominant ideology that normalizes such violence.

## **Conclusion**

The study in Maniktala slum area powerfully demonstrates that how the cultural hegemony works through the normalization of violence. This study experienced that both men and women participate to sustain the patriarchal system through their cultural norms, social values and reproducing the belief that domestic violence is a normal part of family life, which is a clear example of the success of cultural hegemony, where domination persists through consent.

To counter this, only the legal interventions or legal protection are not sufficient. Though these interventions are essential but through the transformation of consciousness and culture this process of normalization can be changed. Only through the appropriate education, the belief of “private matter” or “familial matter” can be challenged. Gramsci’s notion of “good sense” can play a positive role to challenge these vague patriarchal values and develop a critical understanding of domestic violence. Once “common sense” regarding domestic violence changes by the “good sense”, the beliefs and conceptions that normalize it will automatically change as well and it will definitely be considered as a broader social threat.

In conclusion, the normalization of domestic violence in the Maniktala slum area of Kolkata reflects a complex interplay of socio-economic challenges, gender inequality and systemic barriers that silence victims and allow abusive behavior to persist. While this study contributes many important observations, it is limited by a relatively small sample size, time constraints, and the use of self-reported narratives that may be influenced by fear, stigma, or social desirability. Additionally, the findings represent only one urban slum community and may not fully observed the varied realities of other marginalized neighbourhoods across Kolkata or West Bengal. Future research should focus on ethnographic follow-ups that enable deeper, long-term immersion within the community. Such continuous interaction can help capture significant shifts in gender dynamics, power relations, and community responses to violence over time. Further investigation into preventive interventions and the role of local support networks can also offer valuable pathways toward sustainable social

transformation. Ultimately, dismantling the normalization of domestic violence in informal settlements demands ongoing scholarly attention, empathetic community collaboration, and strengthened institutional efforts to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all individuals.

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