

**Special Issue with the *Journal of International Women's Studies***

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**On Docility and Volatility: Uncovering Women's Bodies as Sites of Violence and Resistance in South Asian Literature**

**Special Issue Editor:**

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Violence, a complex, socio-cultural and politically loaded term, alludes to the workings of the power structure of certain social groups on others. The unlawful imposition of physical force broadly conceptualises the notion of a continuum of violence which comprises a wide range of effects, behaviours and actions, ranging from the materialisation of honor killing, rape and murder to verbal acts of racial and sexist abuse. In South Asia, violence is intricately connected with cultural discourses, whether it is caste inflicted violence, terrorism, or violence based on gender discrimination. Sexist abuse of women by men, as well as patriarchal and colonial violence on women by both men and women, have come to public attention in the past two decades in the Indian subcontinent, and this is a phenomenon that needs serious introspection. The culturally accepted superiority of men over women in every spectrum of life has faithfully catered to the violence against women. The validation of male superiority by popular religious practises that are heavily discriminatory against women has further 'normalized' the undue exercise of power over women. At the same time, it has been observed that trans and non-binary women are often subjected to transphobic hate crimes and state violence. The amalgamation of Hindu, Islam, Buddhist and Christian ethics, patriarchal family structure, and Heise's (1998) ecological model of abuse highlighting the socio-political and economic suppression of women exemplify how violence is gendered in the subcontinent. Within the spectrum of this gendered violence, violence is decoded through the problematized network of bolstered masculinity, which works in multifarious domains of the 'social ecology'.

In their struggle to cope with multifaceted violence, South Asian women along with their families often fail to seek justice for themselves because of their reluctance to reveal their horrifying experiences. However, in the last two decades, activists have come forth to break taboos, raise public awareness, expose violence, conduct campaigns, initiate life-skill programmes and engage men and household members in a systematic way to address and resist violence and gender indiscrimination in South Asia. Women writers from South Asia have made an extraordinary effort to depict the symbolic, cultural, and epistemic violence that affects women, and also attempt to break the silence imposed on victims by a biased structural society. With their 'public' discourses on 'private' violence, they challenge the corrupted and dictatorial system, and with their authenticated forms of commonly validated narratives, they dismantle the dichotomous relationship between the private and public worlds.

The 'violence continuum' chooses the female body as the prime site of violence and also the prime medium to delineate the trajectories of the violated bodies in terms of docility, volatility and performativity. By breaking the notion of the fixed body that is colonised under the discursive practises of objectification by the patriarchal system, materialist and Cartesian concepts, feminist theorists attempt to establish the rationality, fluidity, performativity, functionality, and subjectivity of the female body. Michael Foucault places the body in the premise of the power structure and for him, the body is not biologically fixed and pre-given

but is a part of the cultural discourse that encompasses ‘gender performativity’, a term used by Judith Butler. The body under power is docile and also provides the site for resistance. While Frederick Nietzsche’s postulation sees the body as the agent of knowledge and resistance because of the energy and impetus of its forces, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari render the body’s corporeality, radical refiguring of ontology concerning its intensity, desiring machinery, schizophrenia and its rejection of binary opposition described as ‘rhizomatics’. Addressing his ideas of a ‘semiotic society’, Bryan S. Turner depicts how cultural, social and political issues are expressed and fought out by the body. Taking into account all these discourses on the body, feminist theorists evaluate the body beyond the patriarchal representational models in a phallogocentric culture. By viewing the corporeality of the female body, Elizabeth Grosz opines that bodies are volatile because they act and react, function productively and interactively and generate what is unpredictable, new and surprising. Because of their mobility and changeability, racially, sexually, and culturally dominated female bodies resist the ethics and aesthetics of power structures. Taking a cue from Foucauldian ideology of the disciplinary body, Judith Butler and Susan Bordo accentuate the body’s performativity, acts and gestures. Luce Irigaray chooses ‘volume fluidity’ to symbolise how women controllably resist against the masculine and patriarchal fantasy of a female body, and Julia Kristeva showcases the emanations, drives and pulsations of a female body to address its materiality. Simultaneously, South Asian Feminists including Ania Loomba, Ratna Kapoor, Kumari Jayawardena, Vandana Shiva, and Urvashi Butalia contributed to rethinking colonial and postcolonial literature and history, law, society and the nation-state, domestic sphere and family, ethnic and religious orientations, sexualities, fresh perspectives of female agency, patriarchy's workings, and potential ideologies for postcolonial feminism.

So, a female body in an open and constrained way articulates feminist epistemology and adds an emphasis on multifarious forms of embodiment that befuddle normative boundaries and humanist paradigms of the validation of male supremacy. The special issue attempts to explore South Asian women’s bodies as sites for violence, resistance and resilience.

Topics may include, but are not limited to, the ways violence and resistance of women in South Asian literature intersect with:

- Sexuality and Gender Identity
- War, violence and resistance
- Media Representation and Popular Culture
- Rape as a weapon of war
- Female fortitude, resistance, and survival
- Representation of violence and resistance in South Asian women’s writings
- Social dimensions of violence against women in South Asia
- Violence and the Politics of the margins
- Ecofeminism
- Resistance and Transnational activism

- Partition and Violence
- Refugee and women
- Violence and South Asian Feminism
- Colonial Violence and women
- violence, discrimination and trans women
- Resistance and Third World Feminism

### **Timeline:**

Contributors may direct their queries and article abstracts (within 500 words along with their short bio) to [goutamkrmk@gmail.com](mailto:goutamkrmk@gmail.com).

- The last date for the submission of proposals is December 31, 2021.
- Notification of acceptance: January 31, 2022
- Authors will be contacted to submit full papers with first drafts (within 6000 words, excluding works cited and notes), written following APA style sheet of formatting due by April 15, 2022, with accepted final papers due by July 15, 2022.

The *Journal of International Women's Studies* is an on-line, open-access, peer reviewed feminist journal that provides a forum for scholars, activists, and students to explore the relationships among theories of gender and sexuality and various forms of organizing and critical practice. Learn more at <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/>.

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