

# Chapter I

## Introduction

Drama is a genuine manifestation of artistic expression. It not only encompasses the provision of respectable forms of entertainment, but it also serves the purpose of enlightening the public by highlighting religious beliefs, moral obligations, and philosophical perspectives. Furthermore, it serves as a powerful tool to voice opposition or bring attention to social injustices to effect societal change. This art form has been an integral component of every culture. Drama is deeply intertwined with the inner consciousness of humans. Drama stands apart from other genres due to its unique ability to provide a sensory experience and evoke emotional resonance. William Shakespeare aptly illustrates this in *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, wherein he states, “All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players” (64). This metaphor suggests that life can be likened to a theatrical production, with individuals assuming various roles as they progress through different stages of life, from infancy to old age. This also conveys the idea that drama serves as the ultimate means for exploring the multifaceted nature of human existence in all its diverse expressions and manifestations.

Drama, due to its concise structure and direct interaction with both the audience and the theatre artists, has served as a catalyst for societal reform in various regions across the globe. This art form combines narrative poetry and visual arts elements, making it a comprehensive medium. Within the drama, numerous factors such as the text, author, theatre, performance, production, and audience converge, resulting in a more influential, effective, and potent force for instigating the necessary practical changes within any given society. As noted by Tutun Mukherjee, “Drama is more public and social than other literary arts” (8), eloquently reflecting the intricate dynamics of social relationships.

The origins of Indian drama can be traced back to ancient times, specifically to Sanskrit plays. *Natyashastra*, which is the oldest text on the theory of drama, has preserved the Indian understanding of this art form. According to this text, drama is believed to have a divine origin and is closely linked to the sacred Vedas. Hence, the inception of Indian drama can be attributed to the Vedic period. Notable ancient dramatists include Ashwagosh, Shudraka, Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Harsha, and Vishakhadatta. During the Vedic era, there were remarkable plays such as the tragedy *Urubhanga*, romantic tales like *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, and historical dramas like *Mudrarakshas*. Sanskrit literature can be categorised into two divisions: Drishya (visible) and Sravya (audible). Drama is categorised within the Drishya division. In the context of Sanskrit, it is associated with the expansive notion of 'Rupaka,' which signifies the representation of human existence in its diverse facets and is brought to life by actors on stage.

Despite the existence of a long history of Indian play, Indian English drama did not emerge until the release of Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted* in 1813. This play delved into the social themes and highlighted the clash between the East and the West. However, it was Madhusudan Dutt's *Is this Called Civilization?*, which was published in 1871, that is widely recognised as the true catalyst for Indian English Drama. Dutt's contribution to the genre extended beyond this groundbreaking work, as he also translated his Bengali plays, *Ratnavali* and *Sermista*, into English. This further enriched the development of Indian English Drama. After a significant hiatus of nearly forty years, drama in the early 20th century experienced a resurgence, largely influenced by British dramatists.

In the twentieth century, there was a significant revival in Indian English drama following a period of stagnation. This revival took place during the pre-independent India era, where several influential playwrights emerged. Among these notable figures were

Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, T. P. Kailasam, A. S. P. Ayyar, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, and Bharati Sarabhai. Their literary contributions played a crucial role in the resurgence of Indian English Drama. Tagore, Aurobindo, and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya are widely recognised as the “great triumvirate” (Rao 4090) or the “big three” (Prakash 619) of Indian drama in English.

Rabindranath Tagore, a highly esteemed figure in the realm of literature, was bestowed with the prestigious Nobel Prize. He was widely acknowledged as a representative of India’s profound spiritual legacy. Although he primarily composed his plays in Bengali, Tagore’s literary works were also translated into English. Some of these translations were undertaken by Tagore himself, while others were carried out by Indian and English translators. Noteworthy among his plays are *Chitra* (1913), *Sacrifice* (1917), *The Post Office* (1912), *Muktadhara* (1922), *The Cycle of Spring* (1917), and *The King of the Dark Chambers* (1910), all of which serve as exemplars of Indian philosophy. According to Diana Devlin, “Rabindranath Tagore sets out to unify Indian and Western traditions creating plays which have been described as a mixture of Bengali folk drama and Western medieval mystery plays” (Grace 75). His plays, often referred to as ‘Plays of Ideas,’ delve into the internal conflicts of the soul and are characterised by extensive use of symbolism, which enhances the depth of his dramatic artistry.

Sri Aurobindo, a renowned Indian dramatist who wrote in English, produced a total of five fully developed and six unfinished poetic plays that surpass the limitations of time and place. His completed works include *Perseus the Deliverer* (1955), *Vasavadutta* (1957), *Rodogune* (1958), *The Viziers of Bassora* (1959), *Eric* (1960), and *Savitri* (1950), which exhibits an Elizabethan essence and draws inspiration from the literary works of Bhasa, Kalidasa, and Bhavabhuti. Furthermore, he authored *The Witch of Ilni* (1891), *Achab and Esarhaddon* (1910), *The Maid in the Mill* (1962), *The House of Brut* (1962), *The Birth of*

*Sin* (1909), and *Prince of Edur* (1961), although these remain unfinished. Aurobindo's plays primarily revolve around themes of universal love, brotherhood, heroism, adventure, and mystery, with a profound romantic inclination at their core. His exceptional versatility and profound sense of patriotism greatly influenced his writings.

Harindranath Chattopadhyay, a prominent figure in Indian English drama, is well known for his commitment to addressing social issues and bringing attention to the struggles faced by marginalised individuals. His noteworthy anthology of plays titled *Five Plays* (1937), containing *The Window*, *The Parrot*, *The Coffin*, *Evening Lamps*, and *The Sentry's Lantern*, reflects his socialist beliefs and unwavering dedication to revolution. Chattopadhyaya's plays possess a combination of realism and symbolism, incorporating elements of Western character portrayal and depiction. The playwright consistently emphasises a singular, central theme, intending to present solutions to societal injustices and the consequences of British colonial rule. His works are characterised by their leftist perspectives and revolutionary enthusiasm, offering a fresh and innovative approach to Indian English drama.

A. S. P. Ayyar, a relatively lesser-known playwright, has gained recognition for his efforts in combating societal vices and advocating for causes such as the abolition of widow marriage and child marriage. His theatrical works, including *In the Clutch of The Devil* (1926), *Sita's Choice* (1935), *The Slave of Ideas* (1941), *Mother's Sacrifice* (1937), and *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1942), showcase his adeptness in conveying messages through intricate storytelling and well-developed characters. This has established him as a pioneer in shedding light on and denouncing social injustices. Renowned Indian critic K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly observes, "Ayyar handles the prose medium effectively and he is seen to be a vigorous critic of contemporary life" (Grace 75).

During the pre-independence era, several notable works and playwrights emerged, each contributing to the rich tapestry of Indian theatre. D. M. Borgaonkar's play *Image Breakers* (1938), T. P. Kailasam's plays *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), and *The Purpose* (1944), as well as Bharati Sarabhai's plays *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952), stand out as remarkable examples. These plays, crafted during a time of great social and political upheaval, delved into a variety of themes. They explored social issues, delved into mythical narratives, and drew inspiration from historical events. However, it is important to note that their primary objective was not solely to be performed on stage, but rather to stimulate intellectual engagement.

By addressing pertinent social issues and presenting thought-provoking narratives, these playwrights sought to ignite conversations and challenge prevailing norms. Their works catalysed intellectual discourse, encouraging audiences to critically analyse the world around them. In essence, the plays of D. M. Borgaonkar, T. P. Kailasam, and Bharati Sarabhai from the pre-independence era were not merely meant for entertainment purposes. They were powerful tools that aimed to provoke intellectual engagement and foster a deeper understanding of the society in which they were created.

The establishment of the National School of Drama in Delhi in 1954 played a pivotal role in providing instruction for drama enthusiasts. Furthermore, the National Drama Festival, organised by the Sangeet Natak Academy, additionally contributed to the growth of Indian drama production. Under the guidance of the Indian government, Indian English drama has experienced significant advancement. In contrast to the pre-independent Indian English dramas, most Indian English dramas are now composed in prose. These dramas encompass a diverse array of themes, with some still embracing the poetic style of Tagore and Aurobindo. Nevertheless, there has been a shift in the hands of Manjari Isravan, G.V. Desani, Lakhan Dev, and Pritish Nandi, who have brought their

unique perspectives to the Tagore-Aurobindo-Kailasam tradition. Post-independence Indian drama in English primarily concentrates on contemporary issues, including the subjugation of women, poverty, religious orthodoxy, and the partition. Additionally, post-independent dramatists frequently delve into mythological themes while also addressing present-day concerns.

Asif Currimbhoy is a prominent Indian English drama writer recognised for his convincing portrayal of the Naxal movement in Bengal, particularly in Calcutta. His plays, such as *The Tourist Mecca* (1959), *The Doldrummers* (1960), *Goa* (1964), *The Hungry One* (1965), *Monsoon* (1965), *An Experiment With Truth* (1972), *Inquilab* (1971), *The Refugee* (1971), *Sonar Bangla* (1972), *Angkor* (1992), and *The Dissident M.L.A* (1974), explore various themes such as race, class, gender, history, politics, Naxalism, and colonialism. Despite facing criticism for his use of ornate dialogues, unbalanced characterisation, and absence of a structured plot, Currimbhoy's social and political awareness holds great significance. Bayappa Reddy observes, "Among the modern Indian playwrights, none has the international reputation as Asif Currimbhoy whose plays have been staged by dramatic groups of American Universities, repertory companies, and the off-Broadway theatre" (K.S. 12). Nissim Ezekiel's collection of *Three Plays* (1969), which includes *Nalini: A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy*, and *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce*, is widely regarded as a valuable contribution to Indian English drama. Additionally, Ezekiel's *Song of Deprivation* (1969) serves as a noteworthy short play. These plays are highly respected for their well-structured composition and the extensive utilisation of irony. Through his works, Ezekiel adeptly exposes the idiosyncrasies of human life and behaviour, showcasing his acute powers of observation.

In the 1990s, the literary landscape in India experienced a significant metamorphosis with the emergence of contemporary Indian playwrights such as Girish

Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, and Badal Sirkar. These talented individuals revolutionised the field by infusing it with a sense of contemporary and experimental elements, both in terms of themes and techniques. Furthermore, their works also incorporated socio-political perspectives, adding profundity and relevance to their narratives. Through their contributions, these dramatists have left an enduring impact on Indian theatre, shaping its trajectory and paving the way for future generations of playwrights.

Girish Karnad's plays extensively draw upon Indian mythology, folktales, and historical events, among other diverse sources. His works delve into a wide range of themes, including but not limited to, sexuality, violence, discrimination based on caste, religious orthodoxy, socio-political conflicts, and the insatiable pursuit of wealth. Karnad's repertoire encompasses both mythical and historical plays, with notable examples of the latter being *Tughlaq* (1964), *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997), and *Tale-Danda* (1990). On the other hand, his mythical plays include *Yayati* (1961), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *The Fire and the Rain* (1994), and *Bali-The Sacrifices* (2002).

In contrast, Vijay Tendulkar is renowned for his realistic approach to playwriting, where he tackles pressing issues prevalent in our society. These issues encompass the struggles faced by common individuals, gender discrimination, patriarchal structures, complexities within human relationships, the erosion of contemporary culture, gender-related concerns, violence, and the dynamics of power politics. One of Tendulkar's notable works is *Silence! The Court Is in Session* (1967), which adopts the form of a mock trial and is widely regarded as his masterpiece. Other well-known plays by Tendulkar include *The Vultures* (1961), *Kamala* (1981), and several others. Mohan Rakesh, a prominent Indian English dramatist, translated most of his Hindi-written plays into English and other regional languages. His most acclaimed works include *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (1958), *Lahron*

*Ke Rajhans* (1963), and *Adhe Adhure* (1969), which primarily examine the crises faced by contemporary individuals and the threats to their relationships.

The plays of Badal Sircar predominantly explore various themes such as alienation, exploitation of the impoverished and marginalised, guilt and responsibility, the frustrations experienced by ordinary individuals, lovelessness, and the loss of cultural roots. Some of his renowned plays include *Evam Indrajit* (1963), *Pagla Ghoda* (Mad Horse, 1967), *There's No End* (1969), and *Remaining History* (1965). Mahesh Dattani, recognised as the first Indian English playwright to receive the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, primarily focuses on familial relationships in his plays. His works delve into themes such as the generation gap, suppressed desires, subservient mentality, and the socially constructed notions of gender. Dattani's plays encourage the readers to introspect on both their personal and collective consciousness, simultaneously addressing significant issues regarding the status of women in Indian society. Some of his notable works include *Where There is a Will* (1988), *Do the Needful* (1997), *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), and *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991).

Indian playwrights play a crucial role in expanding the horizons of Indian drama; however, the representation of women's voices within this dramatic expression remains limited. The portrayal of women's experiences in a male-dominated world is rarely presented, and it significantly deviates from the female perspective. Tutun Mukherjee effectively illustrates this pragmatic observation, stating that,

Post-independence Indian drama has, through the five decades, grown more varied, rich and diverse both in content and semiotics and draws upon myths, history, folklore, politics, society and quotidian life for material. Yet, in spite of its progress

and contemporarization, there is one aspect of life's experiences that is still largely unexplored in Indian drama: women's experiences. (10)

### **Emergence of Women Playwrights in Indian Theatre:**

The emergence of women playwrights in Indian English drama began during the late 1800s. The domain of theatre was predominantly governed by male performers rather than female performers. Theatre functioned as a discriminatory sphere grounded in gender, permitting only women who were classified as 'public' women, such as courtesans and prostitutes, to participate in performances. Male practitioners were responsible for assigning roles to these female characters, thereby constructing and defining them while entirely disregarding a woman-centred perspective. The representation of women in professions such as writing, directing, and acting has frequently been marginalised by the dominant socio-cultural environment, a phenomenon effectively illustrated by Tutun Mukherjee: "Theatre seems to reflect like other cultural activities, an institutional structure in which artistic and administrative control still remains largely in the hands of men" (4). However, the emergence of female practitioners disrupted the conventional discourse of theatre, giving rise to a new form of theatre that embraced feminist principles. This type of theatre, known as Street Preksha in ancient India, is presently recognised as Feminist Theatre.

Women playwrights utilise theatre as a means of conscientisation, critiquing social disparities, and exploring and expressing themselves. They employ theatre as a tool for empowerment, enabling women to voice their concerns and shed light on the dehumanising acts perpetrated against them. Theatre plays a multifaceted role, encompassing art, activism, and social relevance, and becomes an instrument for effecting real change in women's lives. Feminist theatre delves into women's unique expression,

their distinct form, their language, and modes of communication. Shuchi Sharma asserts that women playwrights are not only altering traditional theatre but also challenging male-dominated norms, using their works as a platform to question patriarchal structures. She conveys this idea in the following lines:

redefining theatrical norms and structures, these playwrights seek to convert the theatre into Brechtian metaspace where art, artist and spectator coalesce to initiate the process of social change. Merging aesthetic imagination with social process their plays choose to question and interrogate those very paradigms which have hitherto remained male preserve under patriarchal hegemony. (qtd. in. Rosha 512)

While many male playwrights addressed women's issues, their presentations lacked the genuine resonance of women's emotions and sentiments. Conversely, women writers exhibited a different approach. In her interview with Mahesh Dattani, published under the title "Dialogue with Dattani," in her book *Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre* (2002), Laxmi Subramanyam inquires about the scarcity of women playwrights in contemporary Indian theatre. Dattani cautiously shares his observation, stating that "women playwrights write about strong feminine concerns or simply write about women for no political reasons (same as male playwrights write about men without really thinking about it)." However, "theatre companies by and large prefer to do plays with a male protagonist," which may account for the "less female representation among visible playwrights" (20). Numerous theatre companies led by men often fail to regard women playwrights with the seriousness they deserve, as they find it challenging to engage with narratives crafted from a female viewpoint. This has had a detrimental impact on women seeking to pursue careers in playwriting.

Feminist theatre played a crucial role in dismantling the stereotypical portrayals of women constructed by men in the early stages of theatre. It provided a platform for unheard voices, reconstructing traditional images of women and presenting them on stage. These plays aim to highlight sensitive issues concerning women to shed light on the feminist concerns of contemporary India. Anita Singh, in her article titled “Aesthetics of Indian Feminist Theatre,” asserts that “feminist theatre thrived in cities and towns in India primarily in non-commercial spaces. Jan Natya Manch of Safdar Hashmi (People’s Theatre Front, formed in 1973) performed an agitprop street play *Aurat* (Woman, 1979) which dealt openly with issues like bride burning, dowry, and wife battering” (153).

The entry of women into the realm of theatre can be attributed to the rise of the feminist movement in Indian theatre. One of the reasons why women were absent from the theatre scene was the deliberate exclusion by society, as a theatre was considered a public space. Women were viewed as objects, obstacles, and objectives, thus positioning them in an oppressed state of subjectivity, where they were not seen as subjects but rather as objects of femininity. They were categorised as the ‘other.’ However, the emergence of women’s theatre provided a platform for women to express themselves and transform into speaking subjects. These speakers transcended the divide between public and private domains, gaining awareness and autonomy in their decision-making processes. The empowered women prioritised their own needs and stopped relying on the opposite sex for support.

In 1943, The Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) played a crucial role in addressing issues related to women within the theatrical domain. As a result, there was a rise in the number of theatre festivals, workshops, and groups focused on advocating for women’s rights. Notable examples include Akka, the National Women’s Theatre Festival in Mysore, Yavanika’s National Workshop on Women, and the Festival of Asian Women.

Institutions such as the National School of Drama, ICCR, and Natarang Pratishthan actively staged plays that focused on women and used theatre to bring about social change. This movement also paved the way for a surge in plays written by women, with renowned playwrights like Poile Sengupta, Varsha Adalja, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, Tripurari Sharma, Kusum Kumar, Gitanjali Shree, Rupinder Bhatia, Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry, Binodini, B. Jayashree, Shaoli Mitra, Usha Ganguli, Shanta Gandhi, Sushma Deshpande, Veenapani Chawla, and Qudisia Zaidie making significant contributions. Furthermore, major theatre journals such as *Theatre India*, *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, *Rang Prasang*, *Bharat Rang*, and *Natarang* have begun to publish feminist theatre criticism, history, and theory.

Uma Parameswaran, hailing from Madras, India, is a versatile writer who excels in poetry, playwriting, and short-story writing. She pursued her academic journey in American Literature at Indiana University and further obtained her Ph.D. in English from Michigan State University. Parameswaran's primary focus lies in delving into the lives of South Asian women residing in Canada. Her play *Sons Must Die* (1962) specifically explores the significant event of the 1947 partition. Additionally, she showcases her artistic prowess through dance dramas such as *Meera and Sita's Promise*, which draw inspiration from the ancient Indian epics, the Puranas, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. These performances skilfully blend elements of modernity with the Canadian experience, incorporating myth and dance. In her work *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* (1987), Parameswaran delves into the experiences of the new generation of Indo-Canadians, who are the offspring of immigrants raised in Canada. Through her writings, Parameswaran effectively sheds light on the South Asian experience and the universal human experiences that connect us all.

Gowri Ramnarayan, a renowned playwright and theatre director hailing from Chennai, has gained recognition for her contributions to comparative aesthetics and her role as Deputy Editor at *The Hindu*. In 2005, she established the esteemed Just Us Theatre Repertory, which has since presented numerous noteworthy productions, such as *Dark Horse* and *Rural Phantasy*. Notably, *Dark Horse* received two national awards and was even nominated for the prestigious Edinburgh Evening News Award. In 2012, Ramnarayan unveiled two new plays, namely *Yashodhara* and *Night's End*. *Yashodhara* delves into the intricacies of human relationships, exploring profound themes of art as a form of protest, prophecy, transcendence, and solitude. On the other hand, *Dark Horse* draws inspiration from ten poems penned by Arun Kolatkar, delving into weighty subjects like genocide, warfare, social disparities, gender issues, human greed, afforestation, and the environmental challenges faced by Indigenous races. Lastly, *Night's End* commences and concludes with a sloka from the Mahabharata, centring around the protection of tigers and narrating the tale of Krishnan Nair, a forest guard stationed in a tiger sanctuary. Through a tapestry of soliloquies and satire, the playwright skilfully illuminates the intricate relationship between art and emotion.

Mallika Sarabhai, an activist and performer from Gujarat, has gained recognition for her involvement in various artistic mediums such as theatre, television, film, writing, and publishing. Notably, she portrayed the character of Draupadi in Peter Brook's renowned play, *The Mahabharata* (1989), and served as the director of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad. In 1989, Sarabhai presented a solo theatrical piece titled *In Search of the Goddess* (1999), which offers a fresh perspective on the mythological figures Draupadi and Savitri. Through this work, she critically examines the societal tendency to stereotype women as either goddesses or subservient beings and how this categorisation restricts their roles in society. The play delves into the concept of Shakti

(the divine feminine energy) and explores Draupadi's significance in the epic Mahabharata. Sarabhai's production challenges the traditional portrayal of Savitri and redefines the concept of 'sati,' advocating for women to embrace their inherent power (Shakti) and contribute to the creation of a democratic world. Additionally, she has created a one-woman dance-drama called *Sita's Daughters* (1991), which presents a feminist reinterpretation of the medieval character Sita, transforming her into a modern figure. This performance utilises feminist gestures to construct alternative narratives, shedding light on the injustices faced by women, particularly in Rama's suspicion and his demand for proof of Sita's fidelity.

Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, and Manjula Padmanabhan are renowned Indian playwrights who have made significant contributions to social transformation through their theatrical works. These playwrights, who happen to be women, have received considerable attention in the print media, with their development as artists being well-documented. Their plays have been published in anthologies such as *Women Centre Stage and Body Blows: Women, Violence and Survival* (2000), further solidifying their impact on the dramatic landscape. Their plays challenge social taboos surrounding women's desires, sexuality, and sensitive issues such as rape and domestic violence. These works are regarded as forms of resistance against the inequality and injustices that women face in society.

With multifaceted personalities and numerous prestigious awards to their names, these playwrights have undoubtedly added an intriguing dimension to Indian drama. They possess a remarkable ability to weave captivating narratives, utilising drama as a powerful medium to convey non-verbal emotions and depict the intricate ebb and flow of human experiences. Their extensive repertoire includes over twenty plays, ranging from full-length productions to skits, each offering a thought-provoking and compelling portrayal of

society through their relevant themes. Through their works, these playwrights demonstrate their enlightened perspectives and rationality, showcasing a deep understanding of the contemporary world. Their artistic vision and innovative storytelling techniques place them at the forefront of dramatic development in India.

Poile Sengupta, originally named Ambika Gopalakrishnan and born in 1948, is a distinguished contemporary English playwright in India, as well as an acclaimed author of children's literature. She earned her undergraduate and Master's degree in English Literature from Delhi University and later pursued a course in Children's Literature at Carleton University, Ottawa. Throughout her career, she has engaged in teaching at both the primary and secondary education levels, served as a consultant in the fields of education, communications, market research, and language skills, and has established herself as a prominent figure in the domain of theatre. Additionally, she is an accomplished actress and has founded her own theatre group, known as the Theatre Club, in Bangalore. She has actively participated in various theatrical productions as well as the critically acclaimed film *The Outhouse* (1985). Furthermore, she has contributed columns for children in prestigious publications such as *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, *The Times of India*, Bangalore, and *Midday*, Mumbai. Her works from the Deccan Herald have been published in two volumes, namely *Role Call* and *Role Call Again* (2003). She began her humorous column "A Letter to You," for the children's magazine a humorous column for the children's magazine *Children's* in 1968, which ran for nearly thirty years. Her children's narratives have appeared in notable anthologies published by Puffin, Tulika, and Target. Additionally, her poetry collection titled *A Woman Speaks* (1991) was released by Writers Workshop in Calcutta. She has also authored several plays, including *Keats was a Tuber* (1996), *Collages* (1998), *Samara's Song* (1999), *Alipha* (2001), *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha*, *So Said Shakuni* (2001). Her husband, Abhijit Sengupta, has directed most

of her theatrical works. Several of her plays, such as *Mangalam* (1993), *Thus Spoke Shoorpanakha*, *So Said Shakuni*, and *Alipha*, have been directed by Joy Michael for Yatrik on the Delhi stage. Notably, in 2008, *Samara's Song* was shortlisted for the Hindu MetroPlus Playwright Award.

As an accomplished playwright, her debut full-length play, *Mangalam*, received recognition for its socially pertinent theme in the 1993 The Hindu-Madras Players play scripts competition and was later included in anthologies such as *Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play* and *Body Blows*. Furthermore, her work *Keats was a Tuber* received a special mention at the 1996 British Council International New Playwriting Competition. In 1999-2000, she was honoured with a Senior Fellowship from the Department of Culture, Government of India, to write plays specifically for children. Her collection of one-act plays for children, *Good Heavens!* was published by Puffin in 2006. Additionally, she has authored a full-length children's musical titled "Yavamajakka!" (2000), which takes place in an imaginary village called Yavamajakka, inspired by a four-line Jataka story. She firmly believes that children should be introduced to theatre at an early age, as drama serves as both a teaching tool and a therapeutic outlet. Apart from *Mangalam*, some of her notable plays include *Inner Laws* (1994) and *A Pretty Business* (1995).

The play *Mangalam* (1993) was initially performed by Playpen at Guru Nanak Bhavan in Bangalore. The play addresses the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse of young girls. In *Mangalam*, Sengupta employs the technique of play within a play, which serves as a compelling narrative device that enhances the exploration of themes and character dynamics. This technique facilitates character examination of their identities and relationships through a meta-theatrical lens. The play is structured in two acts; the characters who engage in discussions about the play in Act I subsequently become the

primary characters encountered in Act II. Both acts address the same situation, effectively blurring the boundaries between theatre and reality. Furthermore, the consistent use of the same characters across both acts underscores the persistence of oppression against women from 1960 to the present day.

Sengupta's subsequent work, *Inner Laws*, light-heartedly explores the dynamics between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, a relationship frequently viewed as contentious in the Indian cultural context. The play abounds with symbolic references to nomenclature, drawing allusions from significant characters in great Indian epics such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavatam. While these references may not be pivotal to the unfolding drama, they do add a certain poignancy to the situations when connections are unconsciously formed.

The play *Keats Was a Tuber*, directed by Bhaskar Ghose and presented by Yatrik, made its debut at the India International Centre. The play serves as a vehement critique of the prevailing Anglophilic framework of English education in India. Sengupta's play *Samara's Song*, directed by Ashish Sen and produced by Theatre Club, has been characterised by a reviewer in *The Hindu* as a "powerful play on politics" that tackles a range of contemporary issues (Re-Drawing Boundaries 12-13). Central to its narrative is an examination of the perilous duality inherent in politics, alongside the biased and prejudiced documentation of history. The play intricately weaves the politics of language into its storyline, highlighting the chasm between the powerful and the powerless. The main characters are named after various cities and towns worldwide, such as Arrah, Mati, Samara, and Ashti, symbolising the fragmentation caused by colonization, the colonized, the State, the Stateless, and the notions of home and homelessness. While Sengupta's plays exhibit their unique qualities, a consistent theme regarding women's issues – spanning family, society, political structures, and culture – pervades her plays. As an

accomplished actor, Poile Sengupta is attuned to the requirements of the stage, enabling her to craft plays that are exceptionally well-suited for theatrical presentation.

Manjula Padmanabhan, born in 1953, is a highly esteemed playwright in India, renowned for her realistic and sensational works. She is not only a playwright but also an artist, cartoonist, illustrator, novelist, journalist, and author of children's books. Her formative years were spent in Europe and Asia, and she returned to India during her teenage years. In 1997, her play *Harvest* received the Onassis Award for Theatre in Greece. Other noteworthy plays by her include *Lights Out* (1986) and *The Mating Game Show* (2004). In addition to her plays, she has written books such as *Unprincess!* (2005), *Getting There* (2001), and *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015). Currently, she resides in the United States while also maintaining a home in New Delhi. Anuradha Roy, a notable writer, aptly describes "Manjula Padmanabhan apart from all of us is the effervescent accuracy of her storytelling. she can make a spoonful of soft-boiled egg "a mound of undercooked bird embryo" fascinating. she can analyse the quotidian entertainingly, illuminating it with wit and perspectiveness."

Furthermore, Manjula Padmanabhan has illustrated a total of twenty-four children's books, including *Mouse Attack* (2003) and *Mouse Invaders* (2019). Beyond her contributions to newspaper columns, she has developed comic strips and had a long-standing cartoon series called Suki, which features an Indian female comic character. This strip was serialised in the Sunday Observer (Bombay, 1982-86) and later in the Pioneers (New Delhi, 1991-97). Her literary works encompass *Hot Death, Cold Soup* (Kali for Women, 1996), *Getting There* (1999), a semi-autobiographical novel depicting the life of a young woman illustrator in Bombay. Additionally, she has written a compilation of short stories titled *Kleptomania* (2004). Her latest work, published in 2008, is a novel titled *Escape*. Her subsequent plays, such as *Hidden Fires* (2003), consist of a collection of

monologues that explore the theme of communal violence and the consequent loss of life. Other notable works include *The Artist's Model* (1995) and *Sextet* (1996), which consist of six brief skits. Notably, her play *Harvest* (2003) was selected from 1470 submissions across 76 nations to receive the prestigious Onassis Prize for Theatre in 1997. This futuristic play focuses on the contractual exchange of human organs from donors in developing countries to American customers, specifically focusing on the character of Ginni. The play tackles various pressing issues faced by underdeveloped nations, such as poverty and illness. In an article titled "Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: Global Technoscapes and the International Trade in Human Body Organs," Helen Gilbert argues that:

the global spread of late capitalist technology poses significant risks even as it promises to improve health, alleviate poverty and raise general standards of living. The play I will discuss here, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, locates these risks as intensely intimate and yet thoroughly social through a chilling drama about transnational flows in two distinct but related areas: biomedical technology and digital technology, including virtual reality. (123)

The narrative revolves around a young man named Om, who enters a contract with the organ-trafficking corporation InterPlanta to provide financial assistance to his destitute family. However, he soon realises that both his and his family's lives will be irrevocably changed, as they are subjected to the control and surveillance of an all-American woman named Ginni. The narrative explores Om and his family's efforts to preserve their identity and mental well-being against a futuristic technological landscape marked by dehumanisation, orientalism, capitalism, post-colonialism, and globalisation, ultimately leading to a dystopian society where humans constantly face the threat of robotic panopticism.

Padmanabhan's renowned play *Lights Out!*, initially performed in 1986 by the Sol Theatre Company at Prithvi Theatre in Bombay, delves into the brutal gang rape of a woman from a slum. The play sheds light on the voyeuristic pleasure derived by the upper middle class, who witness the rape but fail to intervene, instead engaging in a detached discussion over tea. An ongoing discourse reveals the urban indifference towards sexual violence and the resulting dehumanisation. The term 'rape' is never explicitly mentioned in the play, but rather conveyed through subtle hints and unsettling sounds, such as 'screaming,' 'high-pitched,' 'hysterical,' 'horrid and gurgle,' and 'rasping.' In the initial scenes, characters Leela, Bhaskar, and Mohan evade confrontation with the issue of gang rape, leading to their indecision and inaction. The conflicting dialogues and mounting anxiety contribute to the overall crisis depicted in the play. The playwright successfully creates an atmosphere of tension and dilemma, underscoring the fear and communal apathy that allow gang rape and violence to persist.

Dina Mehta, born in 1938, is a renowned Parsi novelist and playwright. Her acclaimed play, *Brides are Not for Burning* (1993), gained international acclaim after winning a BBC award in 1979. Her other notable plays include *Getting Away with Murder* (2000). These plays delve into the complexities of modern life, portraying characters with intricate lives due to traumatic childhoods, workplace gender disparities, infertility, amniocentesis, female feticide, dowry-related deaths, and more. *Getting Away with Murder* examines the dynamics and experiences of three women, centring on the personal dangers they confront, particularly the harrowing unspoken trauma of Sonali's sexual abuse in her youth. The narrative commences with Sonali's pregnancy and her determination to undergo amniocentesis to ascertain the embryo's sex. The play's climax unveils and addresses the conflicts within these women's lives. In *Brides are Not for Burning*, the play opens with the news of Laxmi's death, illustrating how women silently

endure torture and humiliation to protect the honour and dignity (known as ‘izzat’ or ‘samman’) of their families. Following marriage, they encounter derision and scorn from their in-laws due to their perceived failures to meet expectations. Nevertheless, both plays utilise deus ex machina through human intervention to present convenient resolutions, culminating in a happy ending for the female protagonists, with their inequalities and challenges effectively addressed.

In the twenty-first century, an increasing number of young playwrights are dedicating themselves to the field of theatre, striving to bring a sense of immediacy and relevance to their work. In 2003, Rage Productions partnered with the British Council to enhance the capacity for playwriting in India. This collaboration has resulted in the discovery of 32 new playwrights who have produced 32 contemporary plays. The British Council, in conjunction with the Royal Court Theatre in the UK and Rage Productions, is responsible for sourcing and training these playwrights, as well as organising theatre festivals.

Ninaz Khodaiji, a promising Parsi dramatist, has made significant contributions to the field. She has written three plays, directed eight professional productions, and acted in 18 theatrical works. Khodaiji received her training from esteemed figures such as Pandit Satyadev Dubey and Pearl Padamsee. Her debut play, *Insomnia* (2005), was developed through the Royal Court Theatre and published by Samuel French. Additionally, her third play, *Strangers* (2006), was created during her tenure as Writer in Residence at Oval House Theatre in London, where she served from July 2005 to March 2006.

Annie Zaidi, a versatile writer proficient in both English and Hindi, has showcased her talent through various forms of writing. She has delved into poetry, essays, fiction, and scripts for both stage and screen. Zaidi’s first full-length script in English, *Name, Place,*

*Animal, Thing* (2018), was shortlisted for The Hindu MetroPlus Playwright Award in 2009. Her debut Hindi play, *Jaal*, premiered at Prithvi Theatre in 2012, exploring themes of political gain and moral responsibility. Another notable work by Zaidi is *So Many Socks* (2012), which narrates the struggles faced by a Tibetan family in exile across three generations, shedding light on the challenges experienced by families forced to leave their homeland.

In the realm of Indian theatre, Ayesha Menon has garnered numerous accolades for her remarkable adaptations of *Q&A* and *The Cairo Trilogy*. Not only has she demonstrated her prowess as a playwright, but she has also showcased her acting skills on stage. Additionally, Menon has delved into social commentary by crafting plays centred around the demise of a bakery in Bandra, drawing inspiration from a newspaper article that examines the lives of tenants residing in a century-old *chawl*. On the other hand, Irawati Karnik, a multifaceted artist, has been invited to participate in the esteemed Writer's Bloc workshops in India. Karnik's artistic journey encompasses her roles as a playwright, theatre director, and actor. Having acted in eight plays, directed an eclectic assortment of five productions, and written four plays, Karnik's contributions to the theatrical landscape are undeniably noteworthy.

Another notable figure in the theatre world is Deepika Arwind, who directed the compelling production *Nobody Sleeps Alone* (2012). Arwind's association with the Theatre of Relativity spans two years, during which she has showcased her acting prowess in renowned plays such as David Hare's *The Blue Room* (1998), Marivaux's *The Dispute* (1744), and a devised play titled *The Rise of the Wild Hunt* (2015). Furthermore, Arwind has collaborated with Prashant Prakash to co-author the play *Skeleton Woman*, which garnered the prestigious MetroPlus Playwright Award in 2009.

Anupama Chandrasekhar is a distinguished playwright from Chennai, South India. Born in 1973, her theatrical works have been showcased in various countries, including India, Europe, Canada, and the United States. One of her notable plays, titled *Free Outgoing* (2007), was directed by Indhu Rubasingham and made its premiere at the prestigious Royal Court Theatre in London in the year 2007. The play gained additional acclaim following its revival at the main stage of the Royal Court in the summer of 2008 and then performed at the Traverse Theatre for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that same year. *Free Outgoing* garnered acclaim as a finalist for both the Whiting Award in the United Kingdom and the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in the United States, making it the first play authored by an Indian playwright to achieve nominations for these esteemed accolades. This thought-provoking play delves into the societal obsession with media in India. Through a series of concise scenes, the narrative revolves around Malini, a widowed mother from the middle-class, who discovers that her fifteen-year-old daughter, Deepa, has been recorded engaging in a sexual act with a fellow student on a cell phone camera. The explicit images are subsequently disseminated on the internet, causing an immediate and overwhelming media frenzy that disrupts the lives of Malini, Deepa, and their brother, as they endure the wrath of an enraged mob outside their modest residence in Chennai. Certain characters within the play attribute the rapid moral changes in society to the influence of Western ideals.

*Disconnect* (2010), another play by Chandrasekhar, had its premiere at the Royal Court Theatre and has subsequently been translated and performed in Czech and German. Later, in 2013, it debuted on the American and West Coast stages at the San Jose Repertory Theatre and the Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago, respectively. The play revolves around a group of young individuals working at a call centre, who adopt different personas and accents while working night shifts and sleeping during the day. This play

explores themes of identity in modern India, globalisation, and the interconnectedness of our lives and economies. It offers a scathing comedic commentary on Indians emulating Americans within a call centre environment where they are compelled to persecute individuals burdened with credit card debt. Chandrashekar's play *Bay-Sea-Ocean* is set in the southernmost part of the country, where a bay, sea, and ocean converge. This play tackles the issue of elderly abandonment, raising the question of what happens when a culture that traditionally prioritises the reverence of parents even above deities becomes rapidly integrated into a consumerist economy, leading to the breakdown of the traditional family structure. Ultimately, the play probes into the matter of who bears the responsibility of caring for the elderly in such a scenario.

Despite the prevailing gender imbalance within the theatre industry, a notable trend has emerged in the twenty-first century, with an increasing number of writer-directors making their mark. This trend is particularly evident in major metropolitan cities of India, where talented women have made impressive debuts, signifying a turning point in the development of young female authors who are aware of the enormous potential of Indian theatre. This shift signifies that theatre, as an art form, is uniquely suited to explore the complexities of our contemporary world. However, it is disheartening to note that the representation of female playwrights on Indian stages remains disproportionately low compared to their male counterparts.

### **Narrative Styles and Techniques in Select Plays**

The dramatic techniques employed by contemporary Indian women playwrights, including Poile Sengupta, Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Anupama Chandrasekar, effectively convey and emphasise the central theme of their works: the widespread and complex nature of violence against women. By employing dialogue,

monologue, stage directions, and intricate character development, these playwrights create rich narratives that highlight the personal and societal struggles faced by women. Dramatic techniques like irony, symbolism, and sustained tension are skillfully integrated into their writings to amplify the emotional and intellectual resonance of their themes. These components not only influence the structure and tone of the plays but also promote a deeper comprehension of the theme of violence against women, uncovering its psychological, cultural, and systemic aspects. Consequently, they are essential in supporting the development of a thesis, enabling an in-depth exploration of how theatrical art can address and challenge gender-based oppression.

Mehta's play *Getting Away with Murder* employs a realist technique, centring on the daily experiences of its characters within a simple restaurant setting. The dialogue is informal and lifelike, mirroring their personal conflicts and external obstacles. Monologues are utilised to unveil the characters' inner thoughts and the enduring consequences of their traumas. Symbolic elements are strategically employed to convey deeper themes; for instance, the protagonist paints her uncle in red, symbolising danger. The non-linear narrative, featuring flashbacks and fragmented timelines, reflects the chaotic nature of trauma, enabling the characters to reconstruct their histories and comprehend their experiences. The play underscores the ongoing and repetitive influence of trauma on the characters' lives.

In the play *Mangalam*, Poile Sengupta employs the well-known theatrical device of a play within a play to highlight the persistent brutality faced by women in domestic settings. She maintains the same cast of characters across both acts of the play. The first act unfolds in a rural context, where the actors perform their designated roles. In contrast, the second act transitions to an urban environment, where the actors step out of their assigned roles to portray their true identities, using their actual names. Through these

contrasting settings and the interplay between fiction and reality, the playwright underscores the unchanged plight of women. Additionally, she incorporates a chorus to illustrate the evolution of women's roles. The voice-over of women in the play conveys themes of freedom and empowerment, despite their ongoing struggles against various adversities. The characters' use of the Tamil language adds authenticity to their portrayals.

*Lights Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan is set within a middle-class Indian family. It employs a subtle, realist narrative style enriched with stark contrasts and symbolism to provide a sharp critique of urban indifference and gender-based violence. The title itself serves as a metaphor for the characters' deliberate ignorance towards external violence, with darkness symbolising both ignorance and denial. This narrative technique compels the audience to adopt the role of silent observers, reflecting the characters' passivity, thereby engaging them in the ethical dilemmas presented in the play. The dialogue, characterised by interruptions and pauses, underscores the emotional turmoil and societal apathy surrounding gender violence. The fragmented speech and dismissive reactions of the characters further illuminate the psychological impact of witnessing persistent violence.

Anupama Chandrasekhar's *Free Outgoing* is a realist drama set in a middle-class apartment in Chennai, centering on the consequences of a teenage girl's viral video. The narrative delves into the extensive effects of technology on individual lives and societal standards, employing dramatic techniques such as the protagonist Deepa's absence and the role of technology as a driving force. The play underscores the swift dissemination of information and the erosion of privacy in the digital era, offering a critique of the unregulated influence of technology on public opinion. Additionally, the metaphor of water scarcity in Chennai symbolises the family's diminishing resources and societal pressures. The media's invasion of the family's private sphere is portrayed as a factor that

intensifies their distress, raising questions about ethics and accountability in journalism. Ultimately, the play critiques the unbridled power of technology in shaping societal perceptions.

Except for *Getting Away with Murder*, the other three plays, *Mangalam*, *Lights Out*, and *Free Outgoing*, are left open-ended. These works intentionally avoid resolution or catharsis, finishing without a definitive conclusion or justice for the victims, which leaves the audience in a state of discomfort. This open-endedness is a deliberate narrative choice that compels reflection and self-examination rather than providing closure. In these three plays, the victims are notably absent, a technique employed by the playwrights to redirect attention from the individual to societal responses. This approach highlights how women are frequently discussed, judged, and penalised in their absence, effectively silencing them within both familial and public discourse.

### **Review of Literature:**

In her thesis titled “Mapping Sexual Violence against Women: Rethinking Indian Public Sphere through Select Novels,” Sakshi Singh delves into the persistent rise of sexual violence against women in India, despite government reforms and activist protests. The thesis identifies various factors such as patriarchy, poverty, caste, impunity, and gender norms that contribute to this crime. However, it argues that the rhetoric in the Indian public sphere plays a crucial role in perpetuating this violence, as both the public and counter-public spheres are constructed through rhetoric. This dialectical construction hinders the implementation of counter-public discourse, particularly in cases of sexual violence against women. The study explores how rhetoric and different agencies work together to exclude discussions on sexual violence from the mainstream public sphere.

To comprehend the evolution and functioning of the Indian public sphere, the study adopts Habermas’ concept of the public sphere. It sheds light on the disparities between

the European and Indian public spheres, highlighting gender biases and the marginalisation of women. Employing qualitative analysis of fictional texts, the study constructs a discursive narrative that supports victims of sexual violence. Its objective is to present diverse perspectives that foster collective consciousness and facilitate the formation of counter-publics, ultimately leading to the successful implementation of measures against sexual violence.

In her thesis titled “Violence Against Women and Women Against Violence: A Study of Selected Indian Novels in English by Women Writers,” G. Kavitha explores the portrayal of violence against women in novels written by Indian women writers. The thesis emphasises that violence poses a threat to women’s identity and physical integrity, ultimately dehumanising them. While gender-based violence is not a new phenomenon, it has been perpetuated through traditional customs and cultural laws. In India, acts such as rape, kidnapping, and assault are employed as means to control and terrorise women. Despite claims of progress in women’s status, Indian society remains the fourth most dangerous place for women. The study aims to evaluate the impact of physical, psychological, and honour-based violence on women and their responses to such violence. Through a comprehensive analysis, it seeks to shed light on the issue and contribute to the discourse surrounding violence against women in India.

The thesis titled “Women as Centre of Stage: Exploring the Female Psyche Through Socio, Political and Psychological Context in the Plays of Poile (Ambika) Sengupta” by Radhakrishnan K. S. scrutinises the influence wielded by social institutions, politics, and psychological aspects on the lives of women. Additionally, the research investigates the repercussions of politics on relationships, governance, and personal connections. The psychological facets of women are also analysed, shedding light on their challenges and selfless acts. The research titled “The Plays of Manjula Padmanabhan and

Poile Sengupta: A Study in Spatial and Gender Perspectives” by Rachana Pandey aims to investigate the various patterns of social spaces that significantly influence the positioning of genders within these societies. It seeks to problematise the socio-political aspects involved in creating gendered spaces and comprehend the dynamic role of space in shaping human practices and vice versa.

The thesis “Representation of Gender Bias: A Study of Three Indian English Women Playwrights” by Megha Jain analyses plays by Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta, and Dina Mehta. It investigates gender through Western and indigenous feminist theories. The research highlights the psychological and social conditions of Indian middle-class women in Mehta’s works. Additionally, it addresses socio-political themes and dramatic techniques in Sengupta’s plays. Padmanabhan’s works critically analyse the perception and conflicts experienced by female characters within the patriarchal society. This thesis significantly contributes to the re-evaluation of tradition in Indian English drama.

The thesis titled “The Shift in Consciousness of Women in the Select Plays of Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, and Manjula Padmanabhan” by Poomathi P. explores three conceptual frameworks: stereotyping, institutional hierarchy, and social and cultural practices, as depicted in the works of these three Indian women dramatists. “Perspectives on Contemporary Indian Women Playwrights: A Study with Special Reference to the Plays of Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, and Manjula Padmanabhan” by Vipul Keshavlal Bhavsar analyses the contributions of these prominent playwrights, emphasising their representation of women, cultural commentary, literary techniques, and their impact on Indian theatre. The study also examines their unique contributions and engages in a comparative analysis within the broader context of Indian literature and drama.

The research work, “Performing Violence: Representation of Women and Violence in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Dina Mehta” by Sarmah, Saurabhi investigates the cultural, social, and political factors that influence the representation of women and violence in these plays. It further explores the roles and agency of female characters within the context of violence and compares the approaches of these playwrights concerning broader societal issues. Warwantkar Anita Madhavrao’s research titled “Women and Protest: A Study of Select Plays of Mahasweta Devi, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Dina Mehta,” critically examines the theme of protest within the works of Indian English women playwrights, Mahasweta Devi, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Dina Mehta. These playwrights, who are frequently marginalised within the sphere of Indian theatre, employ their theatrical works as a medium to challenge patriarchal structures and to illuminate the anger, frustration, and violence faced by women. Their plays underscore the significance of women’s voices and the imperative for societal transformation, thereby revealing a concealed tradition of women’s potential and the necessity for societal rejuvenation.

In the article titled “Exploring the Victimization of Women in Dina Mehta’s *Getting Away with Murder*,” Wafa Aqueel and Shahnaz Begum delve into the intra-household structures that perpetuate asymmetrical power dynamics, gender disparity, and ultimately create an environment conducive to terror and violence. The primary focus of their analysis is to examine the play through the lens of victimisation and subjugation. Anindita Ganguly echoes these sentiments in their article titled “Unveiling the Subdued Echoes of Violence and Terror in Dina Mehta’s *Getting Away with Murder* and *Brides Are Not for Burning*.”

L. Jeevitha and G. Subramanian, in their article titled “Empowering Women in Dina Mehta’s *Getting Away with Murder*,” emphasise the importance of women mustering

the courage to make their own decisions, breaking free from societal and familial limitations, and emancipating themselves from patriarchal ideologies. They draw inspiration from the characters Mallika, Sonali, and Raziya in the play. N. Gnanaselvi's paper, "Unveiling Marginalization in Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder*," delves into the denial of women's agency and livelihood, as they are forced to depend on men. K.V. Rosha, in her article titled "Resisting Conformity: A Study of Resistance in Dina Mehta's Plays *Brides Are Not for Burning* and *Getting Away with Murder*," explores how the female characters in the plays challenge age-old beliefs and traditions prevalent in Indian society.

Trupti Ratnaparkhi's article, "Questioning the Notion of 'Family': An Analysis of Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*," articulates how patriarchal ideologies shape the structure of the family, granting power to men and subordinating women. The family, considered the foundation of society, becomes a breeding ground where men learn to dehumanise women. Parul Nagpal and Dr. Tanu Gupta, in their article titled "Deconstructing Femininity in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*," examine how the family constructs femininity among women, subjecting them to endure violence as an inherent part of their existence. The paper titled "Never Free is Woman's Life: A Study of Objectification of Women in Poile Sengupta's '*Mangalam*'" by Ajay Sahebrao Deshmukh examines the objectification of women within male-dominated societies, highlighting the feminine predicament in the play.

The article by Bhawna Singh and Sohaib Alam, titled "Moral Policing and Gender-based Violence: Portrayal of Honour and Shame in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*," emphasises the effects of moral policing through the constructs of honour and shame, arguing that the family, as a microcosm of patriarchy, serves as a primary site of violence against women. Nitisha Kajal's study, "Staging Subjugation: An Exploration of Women's

Voices and Resistance in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*," reveals the intricate ways in which Sengupta articulates the silent struggles and enduring spirit of resistance among women. Additionally, Krishna Priya R's research article, "Sexual/Textual Politics in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*," critically analyses the representation of the female body as a passive entity subjected to gender inscriptions, aiming to contest the pervasive patriarchal ideologies embedded within the text.

The article titled "The Theme of Woman Subjugation and Gender Inequality in Manjula Padmanabhan's Play *Lights Out*" by P. Sujeetha Rao articulates how woman is exploited and violated by men through the viewpoint of gender inequality. Bathina Rajesh Kumar in his article titled "Feminine Sensibility" in the Select Play of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*" explores the feminine psyche and sensibility of the women characters in the play. In their research article titled "Exploring Female Coping Mechanisms in Manjula Padmanabhan's '*Lights Out*'", Sarah Ahmed Fawzy and Ismaiel El-Karashily delve into the examination of Leela's response to trauma, specifically focusing on her experiences of emotional neglect and witnessing physical abuse.

Tapashree Ghosh's "Gang-Rape and Apathy towards Rape Victim: An Analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*" mainly focuses on the trauma of gang rape and the apathy of people towards rape victims. It critically studies the excuses put forward by the characters that range from branding the victim as a whore to even using the discourse of the Nation to defer action to an indefinite future. G Vasishta Bhargavi's article "The Marxist analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan's '*Lights Out*'" articulates that women are failed to disclose rape cases due to the fear of stigmatisation. The researcher has applied a Marxist approach to analyse Manjula Padmanabhan's literary work, *Lights Out*, to address women's vulnerability and discrimination, focusing on issues such as gender discrimination, injustice, fear of the law, and judicial apathy.

Pandurang Ananda Kirdat et al., in their article titled “Dehumanization and Physical Violence in Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out*,” critically examine the dehumanising act of rape, alongside physical violence and the marginalisation of women, while also addressing the complexity of human relationships. The article “Rape & Body Politics: Gender Violence in Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out*” articulates the physical vulnerability of women and emphasises the pressing need to confront the subjugation and subordination of women. A plethora of scholarly articles delve into the themes and techniques of the play, particularly in relation to women’s subjugation, male chauvinism, and societal apathy towards victims of sexual assault.

Elaine Aston’s research article, “Unmasking the Face of Gendered Citizenship: Anupama Chandrasekhar’s *Acid* and *Free Outgoing*,” delves into the complex issue of women’s citizenship within a society dominated by violent patriarchy. The article specifically highlights the importance of cultural resources in challenging the prevailing masculinist hegemony in India. By closely examining two feminist plays by Anupama Chandrasekhar, namely *Acid* (2004) and *Free Outgoing* (2007), Aston argues for the recognition of women’s “right to risk” as a crucial element of their agency. This insistence on the right to take risks serves as a powerful resistance against heightened patriarchal surveillance and protectionism.

Shahbun Nisha’s article, “Gender, Perception and Punishment in Anupama Chandrasekhar’s *Free Outgoing*,” explores the societal apprehension towards a young girl’s sexual identity, which has been significantly impacted by the advent of globalisation and technology. The act of making outgoing calls catalyses highlighting the prevailing conflicts surrounding gender and sexuality, which have been greatly influenced by the internet and smartphones. Furthermore, it reveals how the notorious ‘MMS Scandal’ triggered extensive debates concerning the girl’s personal life, sexual orientation,

upbringing, and moral values, encompassing discussions within her family, political circles, and the media. The scholarly publication titled “Sexual Freedom and Media Hype in Anupama Chandrasekhar’s *Free Outgoing*,” by Sunalini Kondapally, delves into the conflict that arises from the coexistence of contemporary technology and conventional Indian society. It accentuates the consequences that ensue when a video recording of sexual intercourse gains ubiquitous prevalence on the World Wide Web.

### **Research Gap:**

Through a comprehensive review of existing research articles and theses, it becomes evident that the selected plays by female playwrights predominantly explore themes such as narrative techniques, sexual assault against women in the public sphere, and the socio-political dimensions associated with the creation of gendered spaces. Furthermore, these works investigate how playwrights employ theatre as a medium to challenge patriarchal systems. Although some studies have addressed the causes of violence against women, there is a noticeable absence of exploration into the repercussions of such violence on women’s mental and emotional well-being. This research endeavours to address this gap by focusing not only on the causes of violence against women but also on its profound impact on the psyche of women.

### **Research Methodology:**

The current study utilises qualitative methods within an interpretive framework to analyse a selection of literary works, namely Poile Sengupta’s *Mangalam*, Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out*, Dina Mehta’s *Getting Away with Murder*, and Anupama Chandrasekhar’s *Free Outgoing*. The qualitative framework employed in this research involves gathering data and information from non-numerical sources such as biographies, case studies, research articles and literary texts. This method is widely accepted and

commonly used as a literary technique for analysing texts. The researcher has adhered to the **ninth edition** of the MLA Style for documentation purposes.

**Thesis statement:**

The research examines the different forms of violence against women, delves into the underlying factors contributing to such violence, and explores how women navigate trauma and its profound impact on their lives.

**Objectives:**

The objectives of the thesis are:

- To examine the diverse forms of violence against women as depicted in select plays of Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta and Anupama Chandrasekhar
- To analyse how the victims of violence, especially women, navigate the trauma in their lives
- To elucidate domestic violence and its impact on the victim's psyche
- To expound on the consequences of child sexual abuse and its lasting impact on the victim
- To explore how rape disrupts women's lives and its lasting impact on them
- To investigate how revenge pornography ravages the lives of women and their families

**Structure of the Thesis:**

The thesis is organised into six chapters, including the Introduction and Conclusion. Below is a succinct outline that offers an overview of the focus and content of each chapter:

Chapter II: Gender and Trauma: Theoretical Framework

Chapter III: Divested of Innocence: Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma in Dina Mehta's  
*Getting Away with Murder*

Chapter IV: Trauma Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in Poile Sengupta's  
*Mangalam*

Chapter V: Grim Realities: Rape Culture and Apathy in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights  
Out*

Chapter VI: Cyber Violence: Sexual Harassment, Cyberscape and Trauma in Anupama  
Chandrasekhar's *Free Outgoing*

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

The first chapter examines the significance of Indian English drama, highlighting the key distinctions between Western and Indian theatre, while also assessing the profound influence of Western theatre on the development of modern Indian theatre. It further explores the rise of Indian women playwrights and their distinctive contributions to the theatrical landscape, positioning their work in contrast to that of their male counterparts. In addition, the chapter provides a detailed examination of the biographical backgrounds and their theatrical works of selected playwrights, illustrating their impact on audiences and their pivotal role in shaping Indian theatre. The chapter also outlines the research gap, objectives, and research statement, offering a clear insight into the study's aims. This is followed by a comprehensive review of literature, which traces the discourse surrounding violence against women, effectively identifying the research gap and reinforcing the central argument.

## **Chapter II: Gender and Trauma: Theoretical Framework**

Chapter II explores the application of objectification theory to examine how women are dehumanised and reduced to mere objects in societal and cultural contexts. It further investigates how offenders sexually objectify women, exploiting their bodies for personal gain and perpetuating harmful power dynamics. Furthermore, the study incorporates trauma theory to explore the psychological state of the victims. Trauma, characterised by significant events that exceed individuals' coping mechanisms, often encompasses threats to life or physical well-being. This can result in heightened brain stimulation and arousal, subsequently leading to psychological numbness or emotional repression.

## **Chapter III: Divested of Innocence: Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma in Dina**

### ***Mehta's Getting Away with Murder***

Chapter III explores the intricate issue of child sexual abuse and the consequent trauma that arises. This chapter systematically analyses the underlying power dynamics between adults and children, elucidating how perpetrators exploit their position of authority to perpetrate acts of sexual abuse, particularly against young girls. Additionally, it highlights the entrenched gender disparity within society, which exacerbates the incidence of sexual abuse against girls. This disparity is poignantly illustrated through the character of Sonali. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the impact of such abuse on the victims and investigates the strategies they employ to navigate their traumatic experiences. Violence against girls continues beyond childhood into later developmental stages. It disrupts their sense of safety and stability, substituting tranquillity with fear and trauma. Such experiences can profoundly affect their mental health, self-esteem, and capacity to establish healthy interpersonal relationships.

**Chapter IV: Trauma Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in Poile Sengupta's  
*Mangalam***

Chapter IV examines the complex interplay between power dynamics, gender bias, and the mistreatment of women within the domestic sphere. Through the depiction of female characters in the play, this chapter elucidates how women are objectified and subjected to mistreatment by their family members. These women are reduced to mere commodities; their agency and capacity to voice their opinions and make decisions are systematically undermined due to the prevalence of stereotypical beliefs and patriarchal ideologies. Furthermore, the chapter conducts a comprehensive analysis of the psychological ramifications that domestic violence imposes on women, as well as an exploration of the various coping strategies employed by these women to navigate and survive the profoundly traumatic experiences that often characterise their lives.

**Chapter V: Grim Realities: Rape Culture and Apathy in Manjula Padmanabhan's  
*Lights Out***

Chapter V elucidates the disconcerting reality of gang rape, bringing attention to the objectification and violation of women's bodies perpetrated by the perpetrators. Such degrading actions instil fear within women, underscoring the profound ramifications they inflict upon their existence. Additionally, the chapter exposes the apathy and voyeurism displayed by male characters who derive pleasure from the act of rape instead of intervening to rescue the victim. Furthermore, it explores the negative coping mechanisms employed by the character Leela, who serves as a witness to the traumatic event.

## **Chapter VI: Cyber Violence: Sexual Harassment, Cyberscape and Trauma in Anupama Chandrasekhar's *Free Outgoing***

Chapter VI delves into the harrowing realities faced by women in cyberspace. It sheds light on the detrimental consequences that revenge pornography inflicts upon its victims and their families, effectively shattering their future prospects. The profound impact of this heinous act is unravelled through the character of Deepa, who becomes a helpless victim of revenge pornography within the play. Furthermore, this chapter serves as a poignant exposé, revealing society's alarming inclination toward perpetuating gender bias.

## **Chapter VII: Conclusion**

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the thesis, examining how the playwrights illuminate the disparities in gender and power that subjugate women and render them vulnerable to violence within their works. The playwrights critically analyse social attitudes towards women who are victims of various forms of violence, particularly sexual violence, and demonstrate the profound impact such violence has on the victims' psychological well-being. A societal shift is essential to eradicate violence against women, achievable through education that underscores the constructed nature of gender norms and emphasises the necessity for men to respect women and their feelings. Additionally, families and acquaintances must offer steadfast support to victims, providing the emotional resources necessary for them to navigate trauma and find their voices.