

## Chapter VII

### Conclusion

In the realm of Indian drama, women are portrayed as mere cardboard cutouts, devoid of agency and space in the narratives. These portrayals aimed to mirror the societal expectations of women as silent, oppressed, and subservient beings. However, a wave of Indian women playwrights emerged to shatter the confines of this silence, articulating the myriad painful experiences and emotions of women that had long been overlooked in Indian literature. By shifting the literary focus from the glorification of male heroic figures to the authentic, lived experiences of all individuals, these playwrights brought to light numerous issues pertaining to women that had been either neglected or intentionally disregarded by the broader society. As an African proverb wisely posits, “Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.” Within the realm of literature, this adage underscores the importance of marginalised voices in reshaping narratives; until the marginalised can share their own stories, the dominant perspectives will continue to prevail. Prominent figures such as Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Anupama Chandrasekhar exemplify this narrative shift, utilising drama as a powerful tool to expose the pervasive brutality faced by women in their daily lives.

The plays chosen from the aforementioned authors, rigorously analysed within the context of this thesis, offer valuable insights into the various forms of violence and atrocities inflicted upon women. They shed light on the underlying causes of such violence and its psychological impact on women. By exploring the theme of violence, these female authors raise important questions. For example, in *Mangalam*, the playwright examines the societal scrutiny faced by women in relation to their virtue and questions why men are not subjected to similar scrutiny. The issues of physical abuse and marital rape lead us to

ponder questions such as the moral implications of achieving greater success than one's spouse, the entitlement of a husband to sexually assault his wife, and whether such acts are deemed acceptable within the institution of marriage. This is exemplified through the character Thangam. In *Free Outgoing*, the playwright questions why society primarily focuses on Deepa, who engages in sexual intercourse, while failing to hold Jeevan accountable for both engaging in intimacy and disparaging Deepa by sharing an intimate video. In the play *Lights Out*, the playwright raises a thought-provoking question through the character Naina, namely, whether individuals engaged in sex work are particularly susceptible to the crime of rape. By raising these crucial questions, these female playwrights bring to spotlight the violence inflicted upon women in their bodies, minds, and spirits, thereby prompting readers to acknowledge the urgent need for further examination of these issues.

As a developing nation, India is actively endeavouring to achieve developed status and has implemented various measures aimed at protecting women from assaults. However, the frequency of crimes against women continues to escalate daily. This disconcerting trend can be attributed to the persistent influence of traditional gender norms that persist among a significant portion of the Indian population. These gender roles perpetuate a substantial power imbalance between men and women, which is inherently connected to the widespread prevalence of violence against women. The National Crime Records Bureau, an agency operating under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, assumes the responsibility of collecting and analysing crime statistics. According to their reports, an astounding 445,256 cases were officially registered in 2022, equating to an average of nearly 51 First Information Reports (FIRs) filed every hour. This data signifies a concerning increase when compared to the figures from 2021 and 2020. The rate of crimes against women per 100,000 population stood at 66.4%, while the rate at which charges

were filed in these cases amounted to 75.8% (*Times of India* 2024). The escalation of violence against women has prompted the researcher to investigate the underlying causes and the profound impact on women's lives, as evidenced through the examination of selected plays by Indian women playwrights.

This dissertation has been divided into six distinct chapters to closely examine the various forms of violence experienced by women at different stages of their lives, as portrayed by Indian women playwrights. Chapter I, Introduction, focuses on the origin and development of women playwrights, highlighting how they utilise theatre as a tool to expose the mistreatment of women and shed light on the realities of Indian women's daily lives. It also includes a review of literature, research objectives, and methodology. Chapter II, Gender and Trauma: Theoretical Framework delves into the theoretical framework underpinning the research. It explores how women writers intricately explore the relationship between gender and power, which are crucial factors contributing to violence against women. Specifically, it examines the sociocultural conditions that shape the male psyche towards violence and women towards victimhood. Beauvoir and Sangari argue that individuals are not inherently born as men or women, but rather, they are moulded into these roles within a patriarchal system of gender classification. This inequality creates a divide between men and women, creating an environment in which men perpetrate mistreatment against women, devaluing their emotional experiences and objectifying their bodies, ultimately reducing women to the status of "Other" (Beauvoir 26). The objectification of women and the exploitation of their bodies have significant psychological repercussions and disrupt their daily lives. This phenomenon is examined through the lenses of objectification theory and trauma theory.

Chapter III titled “Divested of Innocence: Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma in Dina Mehta’s *Getting Away with Murder*,” examines the pervasive issue of child sexual abuse, which has seen a daily increase in incidence, particularly among female victims. However, a limited number of cases are reported and many incidents go undisclosed due to victims’ fear of negative societal reactions. The cultural and social stigma surrounding sexual matters prevent victims from speaking out, leading to feelings of shame, guilt, and a sense of culpability that often outweigh those of the offenders. The play poignantly illustrates this phenomenon through the character of Sonali, a typical Indian woman who internalises the trauma of her abuse due to adverse reactions from her mother, perpetuating the silence around child sexual abuse. Sonali’s suffering is further exacerbated by threats from her uncle, the perpetrator, resulting in her developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

When parents or caregivers refuse to believe or conceal a child victim’s account of sexual abuse in order to avoid societal humiliation, it intensifies the child’s psychological distress and hinders their access to necessary therapeutic support (Priyabadini). In Sonali’s case, her mother’s neglect worsens her situation, preventing her from seeking assistance for her mental health issues. Parents and guardians must support, assist, and inspire hope in their children and restore their faith in interpersonal relationships. If Sonali’s mother had prioritised her daughter’s well-being, Sonali would likely have been spared extended trauma. Children depend on adults for their survival and well-being. It is the responsibility of adults to protect their children’s rights. Irrespective of their gender, children are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Still, girls encounter a higher rate of sexual victimisation, largely due to gender discrimination within families and the societal taboo surrounding discussions about sexuality. In Sonali’s case, her mother favours her son, Gopal, over her, enabling her uncle to exploit Sonali and simultaneously rendering her feelings invisible.

Had her mother been attentive to her daughter's suffering, Sonali would not have found herself in such a dire predicament.

Due to betrayal from the members of the family and the subsequent erosion of trust, victims may experience significant psychological trauma, which manifests as restlessness and persistent recollection of their past experiences, thereby exacerbating their mental anguish. They often resort to isolating themselves from society. The prevalent taboos surrounding sexuality, coupled with a culture of victim-blaming, engender feelings of guilt and fear that compel victims to maintain silence, thereby hindering their disclosure of such experiences as a means of protecting themselves from additional complications. Families must assume the responsibility of caring for the victims, instilling in them a sense of hope for overcoming their trauma and affirming that they bear no culpability while possessing the right to vocalise their experiences and bring the offenders to justice. The stigma associated with sexuality must be dismantled, as it constitutes a fundamental factor contributing to the widespread occurrence of child sexual abuse. Parents and caregivers must reassure the victims of their unwavering emotional support. In the narrative of *Getting Away with Murder*, Sonali's husband serves as a beacon of hope, restoring her trust and facilitating her disclosure of the entire traumatic experience, which ultimately provides her with a sense of relief.

Chapter IV titled "Trauma Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*," critically examines the violence perpetrated against women within the domestic sphere, particularly in the context of marital relationships. Domestic violence serves as the foundational basis for the myriad forms of violence that women endure in public spaces. As reported by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), domestic violence is classified under the category of "Cruelty by Husband or His

Relatives” (Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code), which accounted for 31.4% of the total crimes against women in 2022. This classification encompassed over 140,000 reported cases. Furthermore, studies indicate that more than 70% of Indian women have encountered some form of domestic violence during their lifetimes; however, many instances remain unreported due to social stigma and fear (Deepala). The phenomenon of domestic violence in India can be attributed to the deeply entrenched patriarchy and the prevailing male sense of superiority. The conventional social framework, which designates men as the dominant authority figures while imposing subservience on women, perpetuates power disparities that facilitate the emergence of abusive relationships. Consequently, this framework serves as a significant contributor to the high incidence of domestic violence within the country.

Society’s gender norms dictate that men should embody masculinity and superiority in contrast to women; when men perceive themselves as inferior or fail to achieve supremacy over women, their ego is threatened, leading them to express their frustrations through violent behaviours that inflict physical and sexual harm upon women (Pleck 1995). In the case of Mangalam, Dorai experiences feelings of inferiority due to his wife’s affluent background. Upon discovering that his wife is pregnant before their marriage, he reacts violently, subjecting her to physical harm and rape daily. He externalises his frustration and anger by perpetrating sexual and physical abuse against his wife, Mangalam. He views her as an object over whom he has absolute rights. He exhibits a profound lack of concern for her well-being and consistently behaves with a lack of gentleness towards her. The historical relegation of marital rape to the private sphere, coupled with its protection from recognition as a cognisable criminal offense, is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies that shape societal understandings of marriage. Such ideologies frequently prioritise the maintenance of traditional power dynamics within the

marital unit, perpetuating a cultural milieu where women's autonomy and bodily integrity are subordinated to the preservation of male authority and control within the domestic environment. The systemic marginalisation of women's rights issues evidenced here reflects broader societal attitudes and structures that prioritise male privilege and perpetuate gender inequalities. This, in turn, poses a significant obstacle to achieving legal recognition and protection for victims of marital rape.

Men should not view their wives as mere commodities; rather, they should recognise and acknowledge that women are humans with emotions and feelings. In turn, women should value their bodies and break free from the entrenched patriarchal belief that resisting their husbands constitutes a transgression. There are additional factors that contribute to women's hesitation to disclose and leave abusive partners, including a lack of education, economic independence, and concerns about the well-being of their children, as well as potential negative societal reactions. Women must receive education as it would empower them to achieve economic autonomy and make independent decisions. In the play, if Mangalam's father and her husband, Dorai, permitted their daughters, Mangalam and Usha, respectively, to pursue education, they would attain empowerment and independence, thereby equipping them to confront their abusive partners. The absence of education and empowerment compels them to endure such mistreatment. Within family structures, men and women should be treated equally, and women's participation in decision-making processes should be enabled. Men need to dismantle patriarchal ideologies, while women should avoid internalising harmful gender norms that hinder their progress.

This chapter delves further into the consequences of domestic violence. Women may overcome the immediate physical effects, which include bruises, cuts, broken bones,

or internal injuries; however, the long-lasting impact of emotional and verbal abuse can significantly affect their mental well-being, leading to various health issues. This can escalate to substance abuse, worsening health concerns, and in some cases, women may tragically consider ending their lives as a preferable alternative to enduring such circumstances. In such situations, women need emotional support from loved ones to navigate through the trauma. In this story, Mangalam sadly resorts to suicide due to the absence of emotional support in her struggle against her husband.

Chapter V, titled “Grim Realities: Rape Culture and Apathy in Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out*,” critically examines the gang rape through an analytical exploration of Manjula Padmanabhan’s literary work, *Lights Out*. Padmanabhan’s play illuminates the concept of rape culture, which encompasses an environment where sexual assault is prevalent and normalised within media narratives and popular culture. This culture is perpetuated using misogynistic language, the objectification of women’s bodies, and the glorification of sexual violence. Consequently, it creates a societal framework that trivialises women’s rights and safety. In the play, male witnesses not only romanticise sexual violence but also objectify the victim, disregarding her suffering while deriving pleasure from the act of rape.

Rape fundamentally undermines women’s autonomy and cultivates a pervasive atmosphere of fear, thereby facilitating patriarchal dominance over women. Rape culture and victim-blaming predominantly attribute responsibility to victims rather than to the perpetrators. Thus, victims often face accusations of provoking their own violations based on their behaviour, clothing choices, and other superficial factors. These unjust blame assignments stem from socialisation processes that lead both males and females to internalise the acceptability of women as targets of sexual violence. In the narrative,

Mohan and Bhasker suggest that only promiscuous women are susceptible to rape due to the nature of their profession involving sexual activity. However, offenders have no right to exploit women's bodies, regardless of their occupation. If an offender coerces a sex worker or any woman into sexual acts against her will, it constitutes rape. The prevailing perception of women as sexual objects necessitates a significant transformation. A victim's sobriety, attire, and sexuality are irrelevant in determining their vulnerability to rape. Instead, it is crucial to challenge the idea that men and boys must assert power through violence and examine the notion that sex is an entitlement. Active bystander intervention should be embraced instead of passive observance. If Bhasker and the entire community had raised their voices against the offenders and reported them to law enforcement, it would have greatly benefited the victim and contributed to the prevention of the crime. The silence and passive behaviour exhibited by the community provide a tacit approval for the perpetrators to persist in their nefarious actions.

The playwright has discussed the biased depiction of the media. Media institutions often sensationalise specific aspects of sexual assault incidents to attract more viewers, leading to a distortion of the seriousness of the offense. Such practices can trivialise the experiences of survivors and reduce significant cases to mere forms of entertainment. In this play, Mohan suggests filming a gang rape and even proposes selling the footage to print media for a substantial sum of money. This serves as an illustration of how male characters attempt to profit from the exploitation of the victim's image. At the same time, the media seeks to benefit from the objectification of women, thereby diminishing the gravity of the crime and transforming it into mere entertainment. The media plays a vital role in promoting awareness about sexual assault, as it can effectively reach a broad audience. The information it disseminates should be free from sexism, prejudice, and stereotypes. This chapter also explores the impact of rape on women through Leela's

testimony. The trauma of sexual assault significantly impairs women's autonomy, inhibiting their ability to navigate the world freely, extending beyond mere physical injuries. In Leela's case, she avoids leaving her home, constantly haunted by the fear of potential harm. She perceives the world as inherently unsafe. To recover from the trauma, women require the support of their families and therapists. It becomes the responsibility of loved ones to restore the trust that has been irreparably damaged. In Leela's case, her husband Bhasker fails to comprehend the extent of her suffering and even criticises her, which exacerbates her trauma rather than alleviating it.

Chapter VI, titled "Cyber Violence: Sexual Harassment, Cyberspace and Trauma in Anupama Chandrasekhar's *Free Outgoing*," explores the utilisation of cyberspace as a tool for humiliation, blackmail, and harm to women in the digital era. The primary objective of revenge pornography closely aligns with other forms of violence, as it seeks to exert control and establish dominance over women. Similar to instances of rape, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and harassment, the dissemination of a woman's private content without her consent consistently results in the victim being blamed and subjected to slut-shaming, while the perpetrator remains unscathed within society. In many cases, the victim experiences social exclusion even from her own family and acquaintances, leading to isolation from the outside world and potentially even self-harm. In the case of Deepa, the focus is not on scrutinising the actions of Jeevan, but instead the community, along with family and friends, engages in slut-shaming Deepa. This serves as a clear manifestation of the prevalent societal double standards surrounding sexuality. Mitigating the phenomenon of revenge pornography necessitates a transformation in society's perception of women. Additionally, individuals need to demonstrate respect towards women concerning consensual acts. The failure to accord respect to a woman for her autonomous or consensual actions implies that women in our society lack the agency

to provide consent concerning matters about their bodies (Rajmohan). Both Jeevan and Deepa engage in consensual sex, yet societal condemnation exclusively targets Deepa, thereby revealing the deeply entrenched double standard regarding sexuality and the denial of women's rights to self-determination.

Preventing revenge pornography necessitates that women adopt specific digital precautions; however, it is imperative that there is a cultural and societal transformation regarding the perception of women's sexuality. The dismantling of societal double standards must be achieved through education, legal reform, and media accountability, ensuring that women are not unjustly judged or blamed when their privacy is infringed upon. Empowering victims, holding perpetrators accountable, and cultivating a culture of respect for privacy and consent are essential components of this necessary change.

The selected playwrights analyse the challenges faced by women who become victims of various forms of violence, aiming to shed light on how socio-cultural practices related to gender norms oppress women and make them more susceptible to violence. One particular focus of the authors is sexual assault on women. While in most cases of crime, only the perpetrators are held responsible, victims of sexual assault often bear the burden of accountability, experiencing feelings of shame and guilt. This phenomenon can be attributed to societal practices of victim-blaming and prevailing attitudes towards women. Society frequently questions and blames victims, asking why they were out late at night or why they wore provocative clothing. Additionally, society may engage in character assassination, suggesting that a victim may have been a prostitute, implying that her assault was justified, or scrutinising her past sexual history, assuming that any previous consensual encounters imply consent to the assault. These acts of character assassination

and stereotypical comments inflict psychological trauma and stigmatisation on victims, silencing them about their experiences.

In *Getting Away with Murder*, Sonali chooses not to disclose her ordeal out of fear of shame. She internalises the belief that society will vilify her as a “bad girl” if she reveals the atrocities committed by her uncle. Similarly, in *Mangalam*, both Mangalam’s father and sister hide her experiences of sexual abuse to protect their social standing and avoid societal condemnation. This situation leads Mangalam to wrongly blame herself for the assault by her brother-in-law, causing her to keep the incident hidden from her husband. Likewise, in *Lights Out*, the rape victim is subjected to character assassination by witnesses who question her family background, suggesting that she may not come from a ‘decent’ family. In *Free Outgoing*, the entire community blames Deepa for engaging in a sexual relationship with Deepak, while the offender is not held accountable or accused of betraying her trust. Instead, she is derogatorily labelled as a ‘bitch.’ These negative reactions from both the public and family circles discourage victims from speaking out, leading to feelings of guilt and shame. The pervasive attitude of victim-blaming hinders the progress of women, instils fear among them, and contributes to the perpetuation of sexual assault, as blame consistently falls on the victims rather than the perpetrators.

The necessity for a cultural transformation is crucial in eradicating the widespread violence against women. It is essential to eliminate the objectification of women, their portrayal as mere objects or subordinate beings, and the perception of them as ‘others.’ Only through such measures can a genuine respect for women be established. The deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies that position men as superior and women as inferior must be eliminated, and this can only be achieved through comprehensive education. Justice Ramachandran emphasised the importance of teaching children from a young age, both at

home and in school, to respect individuals of the opposite gender. He highlighted the significance of instilling the belief that “real men do not bully women - it is not a display of masculinity, but rather its opposite. It is the weak individuals who resort to dominating and harassing women - this message should be conveyed clearly” (Mandhani). He calls for a shift from academic results to character building, emphasising good behaviour and etiquette from the primary class level. Boys should understand that ‘No’ means ‘No.’ Additionally, comprehensive support systems, including shelters, counselling services, and economic empowerment programs, are crucial to empower victims and prevent recurrence.

While the legal framework can impose strict penalties to mitigate violence against women and create a climate of fear among potential offenders, the primary objective should be to instil a recognition of the moral wrongness of their actions. This can be accomplished by educating men to uphold respect for and provide equitable treatment to women. While instilling fear in men who adhere to androcentric beliefs may temporarily curb their behaviour, it fails to address the underlying misconceptions that regard women as subordinate or objectified. It is crucial to shed light on how gender norms, perpetuated by patriarchal societies, contribute to the degradation of women, thus facilitating a transformative shift in their perceptions. Such a transformation will allow society to witness a gradual evolution from an androcentric paradigm to one characterised by gender equity.

The victims of sexual violence experience profound trauma, which is aggravated by negative societal and familial responses. Their reluctance to disclose their experiences often arises from a pervasive lack of trust and hope. Social stigma, fear, shame, and feelings of betrayal from family and acquaintances further isolate them from engaging

with society. These circumstances foster feelings of inferiority, hopelessness, and reduced self-esteem, significantly impairing their ability to live normal, socially interactive lives. To address this, families and loved ones of victims must provide hope, trust, and affirmation, reinforcing the notion that victims bear no responsibility for the violence inflicted upon them. This support is crucial in encouraging victims to disclose their assaults, thereby facilitating the healing process. In *Getting Away with Murder*, Sonali's husband, Anil, offers her the necessary space and strives to understand her psychological state, working towards restoring the hope she has lost. His emotional support plays a crucial role in assisting Sonali in navigating her trauma. Similarly, in the play *Free Outgoing*, Deepa's brother demonstrates unwavering trust in his sister amidst societal accusations, instilling hope in Deepa and empowering her to confront the world as the narrative concludes. In *Mangalam*, Sumati derives significant support from her family during her experience of sexual abuse by her fiancé, which strengthens her mental resilience. Conversely, *Mangalam's* lack of familial support drives her to suicide, while in the play *Lights Out*, Leela's experiences are compounded by the absence of support from her husband, exacerbating her trauma.

The legislation of India endeavours to improve the status of women and reduce crimes against them. Recommendations presented by the Justice Verma Committee led to amendments in the Indian Penal Code, 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. This legal framework has intensified punishments and implemented various measures to minimise and eliminate violence against women. For instance, the definition of rape has been broadened to encompass oral sex and non-penetrative sex, with aggravated forms now including rape by armed forces personnel in conflict zones, during communal or

sectarian unrest, or involving a woman incapable of consenting (The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018).

The widely publicised gang rape case in Delhi in December had a profound impact on public perceptions regarding the Juvenile Justice Act, particularly due to one of the accused being slightly under 18 years old and thus tried as a juvenile. Meneka Gandhi advocated for a revised Juvenile Justice Bill, which was introduced to parliament on 12 August 2014 and subsequently passed in the Lok Sabha in 2015. This bill enables individuals aged 16 to 18 who commit serious sexual offenses to be tried as adults. Despite legislative efforts to combat violence, perpetrators exploit legal loopholes to evade punishment. Therefore, it is imperative to fortify and diligently enforce legislation to ensure the accountability of offenders.

A societal shift is crucial in eliminating the pervasive inequality between men and women, and achieving this requires a strong educational foundation. The emotional support provided by family and relatives plays a critical role in the healing process, enabling women victims to confront societal challenges with renewed courage.

### **Limitation**

This study employs the concept of objectification and trauma theory to enhance the substantive content and analytical framework. It examines the various factors contributing to violence against women and investigates the profound impact of such violence. However, the research intentionally omits an examination of the socioeconomic status of women and refrains from differentiating between urban and rural contexts to maintain a focused analysis of the central themes.

**Scope for further studies:**

The study can extend to explore “Silence, Communication, and Family Dynamics in Select Plays.” Silence often symbolises repression, unspoken tensions, or emotional distance, while communication, or lack thereof, shapes familial relationships. Analysing these plays shows that silence serves as a defense mechanism, affecting family cohesion and revealing deeper psychological issues. Furthermore, the research can examine “Women’s Struggles for Autonomy and Identity in Select Plays.” Women face societal pressures that challenge identity, with their pursuit of autonomy becoming a significant conflict against traditional roles. These narratives delve into the tension between personal desires and societal expectations, illustrating broader feminist themes related to independence in restrictive contexts.

Additionally, the research can analyse “The Correlation Between Socioeconomic Status and the Violence Experienced by Women” in these plays. It highlights the intensified violence faced by women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The narratives reveal how economic dependency and social marginalisation exacerbate vulnerability, elucidating the systemic nature of violence and its multifaceted contributors. Furthermore, the study addresses the stigmatisation of women in the chosen plays. This component focuses on the social stigmatisation of women, particularly how characters in these plays are marginalised due to societal norms, victim-blaming, and stereotypes. The research examines the impact of stigmatisation on women’s lives, especially concerning their agency, self-perception, and public identity. It also investigates how these playwrights critique the role of institutions such as religion, family, and legal systems in perpetuating stigma.