



## Female representation in the plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Poile Sengupta

Wasnik Vijay Wasudeo<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anushruti<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of English, Kalinga University Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

<sup>2</sup> Department of English, Kalinga University Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66856/academic.2025.10.4.11071>

### Abstract

This research paper takes a closer look at the complex representation of women in the modern Indian English dramas by modern dramatists Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Poile Sengupta who challenges the all-pervasive patriarchy and focuses on the disempowered voices of women. Though traditionally Indian theater performance has restricted female characters to passive roles which are highly stereotyped with domestic ideals and submissiveness, this research project shows that Padmanabhan, Mehta, and Sengupta break down these ideas in a socio-cultural manner. The paper is an exercise of a feminist critical perspective on their multifarious dramaturgical strategies to reveal the systemic oppression, physical violence and psychological trauma experienced by the women in a postcolonial Indian society. His controversial novels, including 'Lights Out' are examined to determine the stark portrayal of gendered violence and the feminisation of the body for commercial value, exposing how apathetic the urban society is. Mehta's dramatic canon such as *Brides Are Not for Burning* is explored for its powerful critique on the dowry system, domestic violence and the repression of contemporary feminist emancipation and the more traditional orthodox values. Besides, the paper focuses on how Poile Sengupta, in her structurally creative works, including *Mangalam*, seeks to explore 'women identity', 'generational trauma', and the 'poisoned waters' of gender discrimination that brews in the 'extended family'. In the end, this comparative reading leads to the recognition that, although the thematic framework and stylistic approaches of these three pioneering dramatists are different, they all collectively have one radically modern vision. They manage to create a space that is simultaneously theatrical and political, one that is not dominated by the male gaze, but by a pointed, independent female protagonist who is an active, resistant, and assertive character with whom to contend in what are equally fraught and fascinating roles of gender, power, and contemporary identity.

**Keywords:** Gender bias, Indian English drama, feminist criticism, female agency, voice and silence, identity formation, representation of women, dramatic narratives, socio-cultural context

### Introduction

The Indian English dramatisation has become a forceful literature which is mirroring the changes in the society, culture and ideology in the modern India. It is a platform of artistic expression as well as a space for critical scrutiny of concepts like gender, identity, power and social justice. The theme of gender bias is one of the most constant and important among the different thematic concerns covered in this genre (Patel, J., 2018) <sup>[1]</sup>. Women's roles have been changing, from being portrayed as passive and submissive in dramas to become agent, resistance and negotiating identity (Singh, A., 2021) <sup>[2]</sup>. Unfortunately, playwrights like Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta, who have written about the complexities of gender relations in various socio-cultural contexts, have been instrumental in this transformation (Das, P., 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>. The present study makes an attempt to analyze aspects of gender bias which is visible in the selected plays of these dramatists and how the women are represented as in the different sets of walls and how they make the negotiation across the gender walls (Chakraborty, A., 2021) <sup>[4]</sup>. The sets the context for the importance of analysing dramatic texts from feminist aspects pointing to a greater understanding of the socio-cultural realities that are made evident in the creation of gender dynamics. The study fits into its context in Indian English theatre, thereby highlighting the importance of drama as a medium of reflection and transformation in addressing current themes such as inequality and empowerment (Malik, S., 2008) <sup>[5]</sup>.

### Background and Context of the Study

The root of this study is in the field of socio-cultural study of Indian English drama and feminist literary criticism that has attracted feminist and literary critical scholarship on the issue of gender representation. Traditionally, authorship was dominated by male perspectives and norms in Indian literature and theatre, thereby media distorting and sidelining women's diverse experiences and perspectives (Singh, A., 2009) <sup>[6]</sup>. Early plays tended to represent women in narrow roles that were supportive of the domesticity, morality and dependence of their role in society. Literature represented women in particular fashion as with the advent of the feminist movement since then however gradually gentler and more critical and diverse portrayals of women have taken shape in the literature (Kumar, R., 1993). This change can be spotted in modern Indian English dramas where the playwrights make an attempt to depict the complexities of women's life and defy the traditional concept of the story line. The plays studied here span a variety of scenarios, from technological and dystopian, to domestic and institutional, that all focus on aspects of gender bias. What defines these contexts are globalization, the process of urbanization, education and the shift in attitude of cultural values, that affect the construction and contestation of gender roles (Rege, S., 2013) <sup>[8]</sup>. In this complex and evolving context, which merges the old with the new and the exotic with the familiar, the study explores tensions between traditional norms and modern aspirations

and their presence in dramatic works. The study aims to explore the themes of gender bias in a specific socio-cultural context and their reinforcement and/or contestation in literature representation of these plays (Naikar, B., 2007) <sup>[9]</sup>. The sensitivity to context thus presented will serve as a platform for a deeper understanding of the general aspects of gender sensitivity in Indian English theatre and also participate in an on-going conversation on feminism, identity and social change.

### Rationale and Significance of the Study

There has been abundant literature devoted to these playwrights, but little focus on the question of gender discrimination in the portrayal of females in the theatrical works. It doesn't want to go through one thousand ways in which the work might be subjective, but most, if not all the reviewers seem to be stuck on repeating the themes or the feminist critique of the work (Devika, S., 2012) <sup>[10]</sup>. The aim of this research is to fill that vacuum in knowledge by analysing the writers from the feminist and post-colonial perspective. In their lives and works, these three playwrights all have feminist and postcolonial critique, yet are different enough to bring the perspectives of technological dystopia, domestic realism and legal-psychological drama to the fore, so that we can witness gender bias in all its guises (Iyer, N., 2007) <sup>[11]</sup>. Covering such areas such as the objectification of women's body, marital oppression, sexual assault, incompetence of judiciary, woman's defensiveness, the writers go into depths of the various topics. In this study, several playwrights have been used and contrasted to examine how they all depict the role of women. It offers a means of identifying similarities and differences with respect to their relationships.

### Objectives of Study

- To critically examine the characterization of female characters in selected plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta focusing on their agency, voice and their role in the society.
- To highlight and explore examples of gender bias - this could be overt or subtle - in the structures, dialogue and interactions of the characters in these plays.
- To highlight similarities and differences between the three plays in terms of their gendered treatment of inequality, and their approach to feminist themes/dramatic elements.
- To analyze the way in which cultural, social and historical contexts affect the portrayal of women in these plays: to analyze how these dramatists do not assume or uphold existing patriarchy ideas.

### Literature Review

Dharwadker, A. (2018) <sup>[12]</sup> modern Indian English drama has focussed on the importance of gender issues in the examinations of plays such as Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta. Some critics argue that the fusion of capitalism and patriarchy views women's bodies as a market which can be exploited by using women's bodies in his future works will allow him to prove that. Women-who are the theme of Sengupta's works, according to reviewers-are being broken and dominated. The reviewers study these works of Mehta as a form of domesticity embodied in the realistic style, with a slight indirectness, un-patriarchy of action in it. In the end, the reviewers of these playwrights

share the same thinking and feeling about the social theory of the world; that these playwrights produce an image of the world of the dominated and the marginalized in theatre. Limited number of playwrights, their social world theories are limited and seem to restrict to 'gender' in the theatricality.

Chaudhuri, A. (2005) <sup>[13]</sup> the gaps in discussion on gender inequality in the Indian theatre studies can be tackled with postcolonial and feminist analysis. In evident opposition to the techno-patriarchy as its incarnations, for example in the form of Padmanabhan. The society is 'techno patriarchal': a capitalist regime led by a patriarchal elite with a monopoly on power. In other works like *Brides Are Not for Burning* and *Mehta*, the socio-economic situation of women is explored and evokes the pain inflicted on women by means of Dowry system and domestic violence respectively. Mangalam's most well-known books discuss how schools can be a place of sexual abuse and the impact of institutional silence on student survivors. Mangalam is criticized by feminist critics for the depiction of women and girls as being fully aware and so capable of agency, and thus no victim. As much as the realm of literature may be diverse and have different styles of writing, in the end, what is represented in psychological realism and dystopia is the core of a violent system of oppression that is gendered. Secondly, gender inequalities have contradictory expressions in the literature. So for such a question, one must approach it in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

Das, B. (2008) <sup>[14]</sup> Analyse playwrights using representation theory and how the framing of the playwrights can affect the framing of the 'said' gender. For example, in a lot of Padmanabhan's plays, the body is something that's given for granted, and then acts as violence, or is manipulated as an object of violence and exploitation; the whole play is premised on the patriarchal tensions between them. Mehta's dramaturgical work is on the nature of the character's tensions and the spaces that are neighboring each other as the internalized "other." Ethical theatre as a tool is important in understanding Sengupta's plays as it shows possibilities of the tension between the moralities of the characters and the contrasts between the right and the wrong, which makes a collusive system. Gendered biases can be nonexistent or directly implied, but nearly all theorists believe there are instances of understatement of gendered expressions, subtle forms of everyday gender discrimination, and the lack of gendered characters. Some critics claim that these playwrights avoid simple binary treats and that the more complex relationships of the exercise of power across generations, classes and spaces offer the greatest diversity of characters created. As far as I can tell, there is no empirical evidence relevant to the ideas they're interested in working with, at least not any of the isolated concepts they focus on, but they are missing in the example of system focus on broader themes that are forms of political subversion in a he-man-maintained society.

Abodunrin, F., et. al. (2003) <sup>[15]</sup> Postcolonial feminists find the origins of literary and cultural gender injustices. It is believed that this shows India as it is now, in which laws would have changed, but patriarchy as of now. The local world in globalization is manifesting what postcolonial feminist theory terms "commodification of bodies" In this, others have thought that Mehta had constructed her notion of domesticity based on her experiences of patriarchal and

violent oppression in her life. The structures put up by Sengupta embody old colonial violence, as well as new and present day ones. The broad topics of women discussed by these playwrights do not establish an uniform image of Indian women as scholars say there will always be some criticism that elucidates contextual, textual and theatrical implications, there is injustice of gender that is to be explored.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is of qualitative and interpretive type which is used for the critical evaluation of genderism present in the selected plays by Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta. The theoretical foundation of the research is the feminist literary criticism which reflects at the first level the reading/writing attitudes of feminist literary critics, and at a second level, their analysis of how women are represented, gender identities are constructed and how the patriarchy works in the Indian English Drama. The study is not based on an empirical measurement since textual interpretation is the location of interest; it does not use quantitative tools but instead relies on depth, nuance, and the ability to understand the text in its context. This allows for that a complete analysis of the representation and critique of socio-cultural realities in dramatic texts to be explored.

### **1. Research Design**

The research type used is analytic, interpretive and qualitative. It outlines a structure for examining the ways in which gender roles can be seen as part of a narrative and they can be communicated and expressed through language, symbols, character development and the form of the play itself. The study adopts a cultural perspective and the drama is not looked at only as a literary product, but is examined as a socio-political discourse, which is reflective and is the conduit to shaping the social norms. From this point-of-view, the researcher can study the connection between literature and lived world from a various prospective, especially in connection with gender inequality. Multiple feminist theoretic frameworks are included in the design for a multidimensional approach. Postcolonial feminism is applied to set the texts against the backdrop of the socially and culturally unique scenario of India, with a focus on the colonial history and the native patriarchy. Judith Butler's idea of the performative Let's Talk about Gender offers understanding into the creation and activation of gender identities in various contexts, through recurrent social practice. Also, there is Simone de Beauvoir's idea of woman as "the other", used to decipher the role of female characters in relation to a dominant male role. The use of these theoretical viewpoints interweaves to include the complexities and tensions of portraying women in modern Indian drama.

Close reading of the text is at the heart of the design. Analysis of dialogue, imagery and dramatic development in detail which includes plot. Competential aspect like silence, space and symbol are the aspects that usually receive special focus on the extent to which power relations are reflected in the text and on how they are shown in these aspects of performance. The design also ensures integrity in analyzing and analysing the complete concept, text interpreting and performing interpreting.

### **2. Sources of Data**

To make the study and academic work deep and rigorous, information sources used are primary and secondary. The main topic of research is being selected the materials of dramas. Here are the titles of some films that have been shot: harvest (Manjula Padmanabhan), Bravely fought the Queen (Dina Mehta) and Inner Laws (Poile Sengupta). These plays are selected in this manner, because they address ideas of gender politics, domestic power relations, bodily autonomy, identity formation and resistance to patriarchal norms. All three plays have much for exploring gender bias in a variety of socio-cultural contexts but are different in style and thematic content. Secondary data consist of scholarly books, journal articles, critical essays and theoretical works on feminist criticism and Indian English drama. Eschware databases like JSTOR and Project MUSE are used to find legitimate and scholarly sources. The accompanying materials give the needed theoretical background and critical insights that are used to analyse the primary texts. The following are consulted: reviews, interviews and critical commentaries to provide a wider knowledge of the playwrights' intentions and the response of their works.

### **3. Method of Data Collection**

Data collection method is mostly using archival and documentary method. Selected plays studied in original (published) texts, avoiding alterations that might change meaning or even cause differences in language. The research is purely literature based and does not include fieldwork, survey or interviews. All pertinent data is collected from published texts and from academic sources available through a library, e.g., databases and via digital repositories. This is to make sure that the analysis is based on the importance of the text as well as the theory at hand. The research is credible and free of subjective bias because it is based on existing academic sources. Documentary method can further arrange data as systematic so that patterns, themes and recurring motifs of gender bias content can be detected easily. Moreover, this approach also allows one to investigate the texts in a critical manner, where one investigates the text to reach further into it and discover not only content but also hidden or secondary meanings that may be found in a text.

### **4. Method of Data Analysis**

A combination of feminist critical tools and literary analysis technique is being employed in the data analysis. The major technique used for analysis is theming, where important themes of oppression, autonomy, domestic confinement, and control over the body, identity and resistance are picked up and analysed. These themes are examined in the context of the socio-cultural fabric of the plays focussing on the impact of these themes on issues of gender inequality. The other crucial element of the methodology is character analysis. The behaviour and actions of women characters are explored as well as how they relate to men characters. The agency, psychological characterisation and relationships of the female characters are analyzed. The analysis is based on the women's representation, their deviation from or adherence to traditional roles and the influence of social structures on women's identities. The relationships of characters are also examined, in order to grasp how power is enacted and the way patriarchal normativity works.

The analysis of language, of silence and of dramatic form is done through the method of dialogic and structural analysis. Dialogue is broken down and its tensions and ideological conflicts explored, and silences are deemed another integral part, a powerful symbol that can represent oppression and resistance alike. Playing structure (narrator or spatial organisation) is explored and analysed to gain insight into the construction and maintenance of power relations. Through comparative analysis similarities and differences are identified, among the three playwrights. This includes analysis of their topic, story approach and their ideologies. Through a scrutiny of their works the study reveals different ways of dealing with gender bias and how it can offer a wider field of view of the Indian English drama. This too will assist in spotting patterns, variations and changes in the portrayal of women in various texts. The use of these analytical techniques make a complex understanding of the plays possible. The book uses feminist theoretical analysis to reveal the more subtle levels of meaning that are temporarily "deflected" within the texts and illustrate the complexities of the social rather than just surface-level meanings. In sum, this epochal research methodology becomes a relevant tool for feminist literary studies and Indian English drama as it provides a critical and nuanced insights into the gender bias and its depiction in modern drama.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Female Agency, Voice, and Identity: Analytical Findings**

The image of woman in Indian English drama has been changing, evinced by the analysis of the female agency, voice and identity used in the plays written by Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta. These play writers are breaking away from the stereotype of women as 'soft' and giving women a different voice, one that represents a woman as an active agent who is struggling to find autonomy and selfhood in conservative and inhibited socio-cultural contexts. The effects of female agency are, instead of being unchanging and uniform, a process that is very fluid and dependent on the situation; an agency imposed externally and emerging internally; a force which is in conflict with inward, determined drives. It can be very subtle that is through small actions resisting and working out issues without rebellion because the concept of empowerment is multi layered. Voice is an important element in shaping the agency and sense of identity. The capacity to communicate ideas, dissension has a strong relationship with the phenomenon of selfhood, but voice assimilation is often characterised by the dynamic of power structures and who is able to talk and how. So the same word of silence is made of as much import. While it is a sign of oppression that has to do with the internalization of the social norms, it may also be a form of resistance that helps to explore one's identity, isolate and find alternative ways to express it. This split is evidence of the difficulty of communication in gendered situations. In these plays identity formation is illustrated as a process that is continuous, and sometimes even at conflict, shaped by class, family, institutions and culture. Women characters have divided and/or mixed identities, as they are expected to live multiple lives and roles. Identities are not static but dynamic (and even performative) and are influenced by a continuous negotiation between people's wishes and societal demands.

### **1.1 Patterns of Agency and Resistance in Selected Plays**

Patterns of agency vary, across the plays. In technologically imposed spaces as depicted in the narratives of Padmanabhan, agency is connected to the autonomy of the body and the struggle for a means of subsistence, in which women characters employ nonconformist means of resistance against the feminization and control of the female body. Such resistance is not a guarantee of liberation but makes visible the power structures, and affords a chance to critique. Instead, Mehta's plays tend to be domestic, and the power dynamics emerge in the context of the family and society. Resistance here is covert and psychological, ALL of which is done through dialogue, emotion proclamation and redefined relationships. In these limited but present actions, there is more than passive acceptance, it is, on the contrary, a sense of self-awareness. Sengupta's work explores the institutional world from the fields of education, law and other fields where agency boundaries exist. Her characters hold steadfast to the ideals of justice and courage in the midst of an inequitable and oppressive society. It is a resistance that contains nothing but accountability and social change, and not rebellion. Agency is seen across all three playwrights as the capacity to move around within limitations and to stand out as an individual within them, countering binary definitions of empowerment.

### **1.2 Voice, Silence, and Identity Formation across Contexts**

Voice and silence play a significant role in identity construction for different contexts. Voice is frequently muted in dystopian contexts, as a sign of individual erasure. However, characters play different notes to hint at the presence, alluding to coping with the containment. Non-publicly: Voice in domestic context is influenced by cultural values/climate that encourage obedience which results in self-censorship. The first time a woman starts to voice her voice, it is an important milestone to self-definition. Dialogue creates a negotiating surface and a space for the building of identity; Silence can express fragility or strength. Voice belongs to a politics in institutional contexts. Speaking out is resistance and when it comes to injustice it is very important to speak. Sengupta's oeuvre illustrates the dangers of such a, for many people, critical choice, where characters suffer social and professional repercussions. The importance of agency and bravery for identifying oneself in sub-dominant places.

### **2. Gender Bias and Patriarchal Structures: Key Findings**

To illustrate the issue of gender bias and patriarchy, the plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Poile Sengupta are analysed and it is found that there's a strong aspect of patriarchy in both intra and extra personal life of the women. The challenge of gender bias is more than just about discrimination; it is about current practices, structures and narratives. These plays illustrate how patriarchy continues to be normalized and gender inequalities become natural and inevitable. This process is useful in blinding people from the reality of structural inequality and makes it more difficult to evoke change. Women are often placed in systems that give the power to the male and restrict women's autonomy, power and expression. One of the important discovery is that private sphere connects to public sphere in establishing gender bias. Within the house and in



institutions, a system of patriarchy is in place, generating a chain of inequalities. Domestic environments, usually seen in the positive light as a space where we can live our lives with care, can at the same time, be viewed as a space of control, with roles for women limited to that of a family member, thus limiting the sphere of women's growth. At the same time, systemic barriers to inclusion, such as in education, the legal system and workplaces silence women's voice and experiences. The listing of the overlapping and linked aspects of patriarchy alludes to the pervasiveness of patriarchy, making a holistic perspective crucial.

### **2.1 Domestic and Institutional Patriarchy in Dramatic Narratives**

The plays show that there is a strong relationship and reinforcement between domestic and institutional patriarchy. At the domestic level, patriarchy is manifested in the strict division of labour according to gender and its attendant 'labour' of caring, with women's jobs centred on emotional labour. Such positions of authority and dominance are frequently described as "nature", concealing the power dynamic. Thus, domestic spaces are said to be emotional and as confining, or joining to confinement. Domestic spaces are then places present in anemically polar ways – spaces that are emotionally charged and space of restriction – places of 'joining' and 'restriction'. Women are less educated than men, movement and activity of women is channeled in ways seen in the family role and women lack much in the resisting ability. Well, institutional patriarchy runs parallel to those of public spaces. Equal opportunities in neutral environments, such as the Education or the professional sector may be a result of discriminatory practice and reinforce inequalities. The three mentioned below—from the legal system, educational institutions, and workplaces—are some of the contexts in which the legal system can completely ignore the needs of women, reputation can override their needs, and women's progress may be an obstacle. The buildings limit the opportunities and influence their views regarding the place of women in the society. This mutual commitment on the part of the university and the community works simultaneously. But the plays also represent instances of defiance and the confrontation of norms and contradictions, hinting at the possibility for change.

### **2.2 Representation of Female Body, Trauma, and Objectification**

The woman's body is now presidentially recalled as an arena of attention to the issue of gender bias. The analysis shows that it is felt to be controlled, supervised and objectified in many cases that is a part of the bigger social culture. Women are also frequently de-femalized, and objectified as an object or a symbol and this contributes to their definition as "passive." This "persistence" has been objectified – the rule of women by males continues. Trauma is another big one; there the systemic injustice and mental / sexual abuse is manifested in physical assault. These experiences can't exist in isolation and are symptomatic of bigger structural inequalities. Silence, stigma and indifference within institutions exacerbates and deepens the trauma experienced by women and make it harder for women to seek justice and consolidate their position at the margins. During this period, plays definitively turn the tables on conceptions of the feminine body as the object of agency. Female roles take

over control of their bodies in expressing themselves and showing resistance. This change is indicative of changing feminist attitudes, as the body is seen as at once weak and strong. From this, the plays reveal that this change is multifaceted and occurs on a contested terms, facing entrenched cultural norms and the opportunity for empowerment.

### **3. Comparative Feminist Strategies and Narrative Techniques**

The three plays (Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta) studied and compared here demonstrate the difference in the feminist strategies used and the narrative techniques employed to tackle gender issues in the Indian English drama. All three playwrights meditate on issues of patriarchy and identity and resistance, but their approaches vary by ideology and/or dramatic approach. The articulation of the feminists in these works: critical and confrontative, depends on the different socio-cultural context and creativity. This diversity helps to enrich feminist discussion, providing a variety of new interpretations around women/men relations and where there is room for change. One of the things that do resonate is the variety of which some of the stories are represented and that that the emphasis is on the feminist issues. The complexities of gender-bias are made apparent through devices of realism, symbolism, fragmentation, and irony. These methods then develop and form the structure of the plays, and how participants interpret them to watching audience. A story line is fractured, fragmented and characters women's personae is displaced in reference to other women; average dialogue reflects mundanity of oppression. In this relationship between form and content, the author can break the routine of the commonly accepted narrative, which could also be patriarchal.

### **3.1 Divergent Feminist Sensibilities and Ideological Orientations**

Collectively, the work on feminist sensibilities of the three playwrights reveals the multi-facetedness of feminist thought. By his works, Padmanabhan depending both addresses issues of globalisation and technology, they are also strange visions of dystopia where even the values of control and commodisation further gender inequality. She can be a metaphor from the hierarchy of society and a critical commentary on today's political system, in her work that deals with the theme of autonomy of the body and technological domination. Mehta's analysis is on the empowerment issues, as well as new interpersonal, domestic relations and the psychological dimensions of gender bias. Through her plays, her subjects are the gradual process of self-discovery over the victimization of the patriarchal norm in three-dimensional wish families that focus on growth rather than simply rebellion. This inside-out perspective on change can be convoluted and even multiply confusing. Sengupta's oeuvre is both critical of society and answers the call of morality, focussing on institutional oppression and disempowerment. So, many of her stories are reflections of social issues, such as education and law, and expose systemic inequality. Her drama is dedicated to and demands accountability, equality and responsibility to authority. The two distinct discourses provide us a glimpse of the multi-layered and multi-faceted aspects of feminist discourse in Indian English Drama.

### **3.2 Language, Dialogue, and Dramatic Structures as Tools of Resistance**

Language and Dramatic structure are used as two main weapons in feminist resistance. Dialogue offers a space between conflicting power negotiations and simultaneously allows tensions, 'below the radar' phenomena and unspoken pre-suppositions to emerge and there to be space for difference. The language used in the dialogue is in the vernacular and the contexts are realistic, showing that female injustice is disappearing and is becoming easier to accept. In this process, at times, there is also symbolic or heightened language of a different kind, that interferes with familiness and highlights other layers of the conflict of ideas. It is also important that only silence is, it is the means of suppression, is an instrument of resistance. May be a symptom of silencing women's voices, may be a symptom of women's voices being assertive with conscious speaking up. This "double role" poses a difficulty in the agency representation. Structural innovation is an added push for the expression of a feminist. The techniques such as fragmentary narrative, non-linearity and symbolization of staging, interrupt with respect to the conventional literate knowledge of the dramatic forms and create free interpretations. Themes of power and gender are supported by the uses of stage elements such as lighting and visual imagery. Overall these strategies illuminate how the narrative form can be used as an active text in the questioning of the patriarchy and critical engagement.

### **4. Contextual and Socio-Cultural Interpretations**

This socio-cultural analysis of the three plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta demonstrates the need to be grounded in the context and the larger history of a particular text in order to appreciate its representation of gender. This socio-cultural analysis of the three plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta illustrates that understanding the gender representation in Indian English plays would require a broader historical and cultural context. The plays express the conflict between tradition and modernity, between aspirations and expectations of society, between continuity and change in Indian society. Patriarchy is not the only determinant of gender bias, also class, age, institutional power and socio-economic factors. This makes some female experiences seem varied and context dependent, giving an insight to the complexity on how identities can develop. In the plays, the socio-cultural context is illustrated in which regional values are combined with contemporary opportunities. Women's role in society has been widened by the movements in education, urbanization, and globalization but their behaviors are still controlled by traditional cultural norms. This establishes a room for negotiation in which the characters/females have to impose alternate expectations and in some instances encounter internal and external conflicts. The dramatists effectively portray this critical period in which changes in gender relations in society are dynamic and constantly evolving instead of static.

### **4.1 Intersectionality: Class, Age, and Social Hierarchies**

It points up the fact that gender is not the only determinant in questioning class, age and social hierarchy. The situation of women varies with their social-economic status. While women in the middle class may be under pressure to conform to the norm of respectable behavior and conform to

social expectations, women tend to have less resources, and they may be under increased pressure to maintain economic dependency. This variant highlights the significance of gender approach not as a coherent phenomenon but as a multicultural one. The presence of age also affects gender issues; differences between the generations bring forth conflicts between traditional and contemporary views. Younger characters are more apt at challenging what has been done, whereas older characters are more apt at preserving what has been done. The interactions show that social change is a complex process, and that there is a resonance in its effect for women- who are caught between old and new expectations when it comes to their identity. Family and institution-based power differences are also exacerbated by social class differences. Opportunities and agency are moulded and constrained through overt governance and subliminal dynamics of authority. The plays are also works of resistance however, as characters pose questions to these hierarchies there are moments for transformation. This inter-sectoral approach gives new depth to the understanding of gender bias, by recognising more than one gender influencing factor.

### **4.2 Technology, Modernity, and Changing Gender Discourses**

The plays are greatly affected by gender-based concepts of technology and modernity. Rapid change, in terms of urbanization, globalization and advances in digital technologies have given women new opportunities to learn, work and to express themselves. Simultaneously, the work trends put in motion by these developments re-create new inequalities—including inequalities of surveillance, inequalities of commodification, and new inequalities of work pressure. In a technologically oriented or dystopian world, the body and the identity can be the locus of control in modern systems of oppression. These depictions imply that developing is not necessarily emancipatory and needs to be examined, as they do not reflect positive differences. The modern also restructures cultural attitudes with new gender discourses, such as the concerns of workplace discrimination, the negotiation of identity in a wider global context. But conventional norms do make an impact, with disconnects in the current social fabric. These plays show the importance of this tension: new possibilities emerge and equality and recognition is still an ongoing process.

### **Discussion**

In the discussion of the findings, things begin to unfold as people realize that there are multiple layers of agency, structure and socio-cultural context wherein Manjula Padmanabhan's selected work Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta displays representations of gender bias and feminisms. The analysis reveals that empowerment of female characters can be seen as incomplete and agency women can't be equal empowerment because women's agency is always mediated and limited through patriarchal systems in the context of family system, institutional system or ideology system; while power becomes a critical tool in articulating some women's identity at least as mediation can be known as resistance to marginalization, either in dialogue or in lack of it or intonation. While along these lines, the persistence of patriarchy norms from a long time back indicates the deep and ready foundations of this gender inequality, and the absence of change in social

circumstances is an underlying rationale for its staying. These three playwrights discover an uncanny difference, both when it comes to criticism of dystopian technologies of control, and in, say, their own intimate explorations of domestic lives and their critiques of other institutions. They, however, are united in their opposition to absconding power structures and their disruptions of the gender normativity. Further consideration is given to the fluid nature of identity, understanding its multiple aspects of class, age and social position. Negotiating, resisting and asserting oneself ethically, often within a limited space of autonomy, these complexities are portrayed in the lives of women characters.

### Conclusion

Overall, the oeuvres of the three oram can be seen as a turning point in modern Indian English theatre, which is distinctively rethinking the norms of a female role on the stage. The first two of these pioneering playwrights have methodically challenged the entrenched patriarchy that has invariably kept women as a silent, subservient subject in the margins until now. On the contrary, they put forth female experiences in the limelight – and on the audience's radar – to highlight uncomfortable truths around gendered violence, systemic oppression, and socio-cultural hypocrisy in today's Indian reality. Displaying the body's commodification and urban apathy, Mehta recounts the tale of domestic tyranny and the harmful dowry system while Sengupta charts generational trauma and microaggressions within the family unit, all of them lending to a vibrant feminist critique. Though the stylistic range of the work is very wide, from Padmanabhan's realism to Sengupta's innovations, the common demand of all the plays is to restore agency to the women. These render the Theatre space as a socio-political mode of opposition and subversion of ideology. Women characters are not simply victims in their works: they are a complex and strong personality who continually question, interrogate and defy the stifling current of a male world. On the whole, it is in questions of gender equality and justice that Padmanabhan, Mehta and Sengupta are sparking an important conversation about the social issue. Their lasting impact lies in their capacity to pierce the patriarchal haze and thereby give voice to the hitherto ignored, overlooked or disregarded female, so that her voice isn't just out there in recognizable unapologetic clarity, but one of the necessary, potent and constantly changing elements of Indian dramatic literature.

### References

1. Patel JJ. Voices of Indian Women as Playwrights in Wider Perspective. *Bharatiya Manyaprad*, 2018, 6(1).
2. Singh A. Staging feminisms: gender, violence and performance in contemporary India. *Taylor & Francis*, 2021.
3. Das PR. A Theatre of Their Own: Indian Women Playwrights in Perspective. *Partridge Publishing*, 2021.
4. Chakraborty AR. Representation of Violence and Quest for Emancipation: A Reading of Dina Mehta's *getting Away with Murder*, 2021.
5. Malik S. Injustice, Resistance, and Subversion: A Study of Selected Plays by Indian Women Playwrights. *South Asian Review*, 2008;29(1):103-114.
6. Singh A. Aesthetics of Indian Feminist Theatre. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 2009;1(2):150-170.
7. Kumar R. The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of the Movement for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800–1900. *Kali for Women*, 1993.
8. Rege S. Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios. *Zubaan Publication*, 2013.
9. Naikar BS, Ed. *Indian English Literature (Vol. 7)*. Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2007.
10. Devika S. The Voice of Protest: Burning Issues in Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 2012;2(2):302-308.
11. Iyer NS. Musings on Indian Writing in English: Drama (Vol. 3). *Sarup & Sons*, 2007.
12. Dharwadker AB, Ed. A poetics of modernity: Indian theatre theory, 1850 to the present. *Oxford University Press*, 2018.
13. Chaudhuri AK. Mahesh Dattani: An Introduction. *Foundation Books*, 2005.
14. Das BK. Form and meaning in Mahesh Dattani's plays. *Atlantic Publishers & Dist*, 2008.
15. Abodunrin F, Henderson I, Brennan B, Lane R, Mills CSH, Bery A, et al. *XVII New Literatures*, 2003.