Conclusion

In an illuminating discussion of political performances and attendant scholarship, E.J. Westlake remarks,

Ultimately, the “political” in the performances we study springs from the new constellations of relationships we form; hinges on being able to locate ourselves and our work and our intended audience in a way that highlights our position on a map of political context and political action. The politics of representation is the politics of multiple relationships… Being able to see those relationships, and hopefully the possible consequences of forming them, leads to an opening where political change can take place. (Westlake 8)

The task of this thesis has been to locate such multiple relationships and the openings they create through an in-depth contextual analysis of the different plays of Utpal Dutt, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. The focus has been on the representation of subaltern subjects of different locations through the paradigm of postcolonial subalternization which refers to those subalternizing processes which are either the direct consequences of colonial rule or have emerged through the negotiation of colonial discourse and pre-colonial exploitative practices within the domain of the nation-space of India. The previous chapters have discussed in detail the specific forms of subalterneity and their discursive frameworks, which the three playwrights have explored, and it is important to conceptualize the abiding political significances of such dramatic interventions by relating these plays and their exploration of subaltern subjects and subalternizing processes to the functioning of the ‘public sphere’. Understanding these relations is crucial for a proper estimate of the socio-political relevance of such plays which contribute to the growth of ‘subaltern counterpublics’ that serve to enhance critical reasoning in the public sphere and widen the scope of democratic politics by incorporating the voices of those who are pushed to the peripheries.

In order to understand how this exactly works, it is important to take a brief detour through Habermas’ concept of the ‘public sphere’, its pitfalls and the need for ‘subaltern counterpublics’. Habermas represents the bourgeois public sphere as “the sphere of private people come together as a public” in order to claim
…the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. (Habermas, Structural 27)

This is precisely why Habermas sees the development of the public sphere as an integral feature of gradual democratization since this public sphere was characterized by a sense of “parity of ‘common humanity’” (Habermas, Structural 36), emancipation of the “domain of ‘common concern’” from the monopoly of the Church and the Court and most importantly, the establishment of “the public as in principle inclusive” (Habermas, Structural 37). As Habermas notes, theatre also played a crucial role in the formation of such public spheres as it became delinked from the province of the court and created a space where enactment of issues related to public relevance coalesced with the emergence of a public which was no longer constituted by a parading of ranks. While the situation of the British, French or German societies cannot obviously be associated with the development of the public sphere in colonial and postcolonial India, there is no denying that in India too newspapers, public associations of many kinds and various congregational spaces (for example, the Indian Coffee House in Kolkata) played a crucial role in the development of a public sphere through which issues of ‘common concern’ and general rules of social existence were debated as part of an attempt to contest the power of public authorities, both British and Indian. Theatre in India also played a crucial role in the formation of such a public sphere which is eminently evident from the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 and the wrath of the colonial authorities against certain plays that lampooned both the representatives of colonial authority as well as their native collaborators. Through the plays of Bharatendu Harishchandra or Girish Ghosh, this process, despite the ever-present threat of colonial crackdown continued further, especially since a greater cross-section of urban audiences, including both members of the landed aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie, the English-educated middle class and those without such education, began to participate as spectators during various performances.

However, Habermas’ own conceptualisation has been subjected to a thorough critique by a number of theorists like Joan Landes, Geoff Eley and Mary Ryan who argue that not only have there been multiple competing publics from the very beginning of the
public sphere but that far from being inclusive in principle, the public sphere has always operated on the basis of certain definite patterns of exclusion. As Nancy Fraser explains,

In general, this revisionist historiography suggests a much darker view of the bourgeois public sphere than the one that emerges from Habermas's study. The exclusions and conflicts that appeared as accidental trappings from his perspective, in the revisionists' view become constitutive. The result is a gestalt switch that alters the very meaning of the public sphere. We can no longer assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule. (Fraser 61-62)

This is further reinforced by Geoff Eley’s Gramscian contention that the public sphere further served as an institutional vehicle of consolidating hegemony which was “never defined solely by the struggle against absolutism and traditional authority, but…addressed the problem of popular containment as well” (Fraser 61). This, however, is equally applicable to the domain of Indian politics as well since the nationalist movement as well as the public sphere associated with it was in many ways a process dominated by a bourgeois, Hindu, masculine, upper-caste, heterosexist elite which projected itself as the nation, often at the expense of the other sections. This is exactly why, in consonance with the Gramscian paradigm used by Eley, Partha Chatterjee defined the nationalist movement for independence as a ‘passive revolution’ in which the leadership was in the hands of the educated middle classes who went on to occupy the seats of power left vacant by the colonial administrators without effecting any substantial change either in the sphere of administration or in the sphere of production relations. While discussing the Risorgimento in Italy, Gramsci first refers to the process of ‘passive revolution’, a term originally used by Vincenzo Cuoco, as a concept that “applies not only to Italy but also to those other countries that modernize the state through a series of reforms or national wars without undergoing a political revolution of a radical-Jacobin type” (Gramsci, Prison Notebook 232). While describing such a process in France, Gramsci further refers to:

an era of restoration-revolution in which the needs that found a Jacobin-Napoleonic expression in France were satisfied in small doses, legally, in a reformist manner, thereby managing to safeguard the political and economic positions of the old feudal classes, avoiding agrarian reform
and making especially sure that the popular masses did not go through a period of political experience such as occurred in France in the Jacobin era, in 1831 and in 1848. (Gramsci, Selections 119)

Protecting the rights of the ruling elite and avoiding active mass mobilization therefore become key features of this phenomenon of ‘passive revolution’ through which the dominant bourgeois class manages to retain its power even while providing impetus to certain socio-economic changes. As Domenico Losurdo states:

The category of passive revolution is a category used in the Prison Notebooks in order to denote the persistent capacity of initiative of the bourgeoisie which succeeds, even in the historical phase in which it has ceased to be a properly revolutionary class, to produce socio-political transformations of significance, conserving securely in its own hands power, initiative, and hegemony, and leaving the working classes in their conditions of subalternity. (qtd. in Thomas 147)

As Partha Chatterjee has shown, this is exactly what happened in India as well as a mature and fully developed nationalist discourse, manifested through the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru squarely identified the masses as ‘irrational’ and ‘backward’ entities of India who have to be guided and steered by the educated and scientific elite, aware of the spirit of the age, aware of the spirit of modernity and progress. What this meant was the implementation of a programme of socio-economic development that was based more on the bureaucracy and less on popular mobilization. While there is no denying that such processes did contribute to certain developments and associated economic upliftment, the larger portion of the population still remained grossly marginalized and disempowered as bourgeois nationalism effected a

...‘molecular transformation’ of the old dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc and only a partial appropriation of the masses, in order to create a state as the necessary precondition for the establishment of capitalism as the dominant mode of production. (Chatterjee 30)

The growth of several forms of protest movements, governed by various factors of class, caste and gender which continued to mark the Indian nation-space during the sixties and the seventies of the previous century represent the gradual disillusionment of such subalternized classes and consequent unrest against the nation-state. Such realities also
undermine the liberal assumption that it is possible to organize a democratic form of political life on the basis of socio-economic and socio-sexual structures that generate systemic inequalities. Furthermore, following the arguments of Nancy Fraser, we can also state that such manifestation of widespread dissent also testifies to the need for competing and plural public spheres which better secures the prospects of participatory parity and open access than the notion of an over-arching singular bourgeois sphere. Nancy Fraser therefore states how “members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics”. She identifies these alternative publics as “subaltern counterpublics” which operate as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 66-67). According to her analysis, such counterpublics not only contribute to the “widening of discursive contestation” but also as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” in the face of dominant exclusionary and exploitative practices. However, as Nancy Fraser argues,

It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies. (Fraser 68).

The plays of Utpal Dutt, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani remain important and relevant because they are able to generate and circulate such emancipatory potential.

Utpal Dutt’s plays are probably the most direct representations of such emancipatory potential. As the discussion in the previous chapters highlight, not only did Dutt write with a specific revolutionary agenda which prompted him to write plays that explored those aspects of Indian history which elite historiography generally ignores, but through such representations he also foregrounded the interests and agency of those sections of the society that generally remained outside the realm of the bourgeois public sphere. For example, as Partha Chatterjee shows in his analysis of Jawaharlal Nehru’s writings, the peasants are acknowledged as a vital presence within the nation space of
India but they are not shown as being capable of charting their own fate or of being a part of the policy-making processes. In contrast to such exclusionary and statist strategies the plays of Dutt always locate agency within the peasant protagonists and represent them as conscious makers of their own destiny on the basis of lived experiences and a series of material determinants. In the process both the contestation of bourgeois discourses and the simultaneous staging of competing publics become possible. For example, in *The Great Rebellion*, the rebellious band of soldiers is actually a group of impoverished former artisans and peasants who constitute an alternate counter-public which even mirrors the concerns of post-independence subalterns who experience a similar ordeal of poverty and starvation. Although the soldiers do initially coalesce with the elite leaders in order to form a united front against the colonial authorities, such unity soon ruptures owing to the collaboration of the native elites with the colonial authorities and consequent clash of interests. Kasturi, the wife of the sepoy leader Heera Singh, therefore states:

> There are two battles raging at the same time – between us and the English and between us and the princes. If you don’t see that, you see nothing. The enemy is before you and behind you. While you fight for freedom the enemy behind stabs you in the back. (*TGR 65*)

Moreover, the conversation between Kasturi and Parantap directly relates the template of the 1857 rebellion to that of post-independence India and emphasises the need for such struggles as would highlight the need for directly challenging bourgeois dominance by forming separate subaltern alliances:

> Kasturi: You cannot fight a battle of freedom with princes and merchants on top of your head. They don’t love the country, only money.

> Parantap: You are right old mother. I think we have lost this time. But the next time we’ll wring their necks before we go to war. (*TGR 66*)

The possibility of such ‘next time’ is integral to Dutt’s dramaturgy where the notion of an unborn egalitarian future is repeatedly foregrounded. Such visions not only foster the hope of an alternate public sphere, free from the exclusionary practices which characterise the bourgeois sphere, but also contribute to the need for envisioning postcolonial futures free from subalternizing processes. What is also interesting to note
here is that the alternate subaltern counterpublic which the sepoys form here is also devoid of those barriers of caste, religion or community which have often characterised the bourgeois sphere in India. Therefore, what the sepoys collectively enact on stage is the emergence of one single proto-nationalist community based on horizontal subaltern alliances which realise on stage those considerations of participatory parity, open access and social equality which Nancy Fraser emphasises. Similarly, Waziran and Kasturi also become included in this community in spite of the patriarchal prejudices of some of the individuals and are eventually accepted as equals. Based on a fictional representation of factual reports, such dramatic representations foster the ideal of both secular and egalitarian public spheres.

This is further emphasised by two of the other plays of Dutt under discussion – *Hunting the Sun* and *Invincible Vietnam*. In *Hunting the Sun*, the focus is of course primarily on mounting a critique against the discourses of Brahmanical Hinduism which target both ‘lower-castes’ and minority communities. But Dutt’s focus on characters like Kalhan, the scientific Buddhist teacher, Indrani, his female Buddhist disciple and the shudra slave Gohil not only serves to articulate subaltern dissent but also contributes to that contestatory spirit which subaltern counterpublics are supposed to generate. More importantly, along with the thrust on class-consciousness which we note in *The Great Rebellion*, such characters also foreground the considerations of caste and gender which are of course vital in the Indian context. Furthermore, discussions on history are important aspects of debates in the public sphere as such debates contribute to public opinions regarding political decisions, identity formation and culture. Since Indian nationalism has often been based upon a generalised glorification of ancient Indian history and attendant celebration of upper-caste achievements, the kind of critique which Dutt’s play offers is crucial in modifying and refashioning the self-image of the nation, especially as more and more subaltern sections start claiming the nation as their own by offering differing versions of past and present. Dutt’s play offers a dramatic enactment of such dissenting perspectives by interrogating ideological pillars of caste-based prejudices and the systematic oppression that constituted the pre-history of the nation. In the process the play creates a discursive space from which dominant discourses are challenged by the foregrounding of hitherto silenced voices. Kalhan’s ashram in fact serves as one of those
sites through which anti-caste counterpublics might evolve and function. Even when the ashram itself is destroyed, through the mother and son duo of Madhukarika, the slave and her son Veerak, the prospect of such counter-hegemonic discourses lives on as he is able to smuggle out of the kingdom the royally proscribed teachings of Kalhan. Significantly, such alternative spaces were indeed coming to the foreground during the 1960’s and 70’s when several anti-caste movements were beginning to gain momentum in different parts of the country. Proliferation of such collectives is crucial for radical democratic politics directed towards alternate futures where discriminations based on neither class, nor caste nor gender should dominate. Herein also lies the special significance of *Invincible Vietnam* which celebrates the triumphant transgressive force of Vietnamese farmers acting as guerrilla combatants against the American invasion. What makes this enactment all the more special is the presence of a number of leading female characters who obviously defy conventional patriarchal norms to actively participate in both decision-making and combat. As the chapter on Dutt itself suggests, such a representation could become possible only because in the contemporary political scenario of Bengal, Vietnam served both as an aspirational model as well as an allegorical representation of agrarian crisis in Bengal. In other words, the public sphere which the peasant combatants constitute not only exemplified an ideal democratic set up where open access and participatory parity indeed becomes possible but contributed to an evolving counter-discourse that did indeed help to set in motion similar subaltern counterpublics all across Bengal, especially in the wake of the Naxalite movement and the associated political mobilization of peasants against landlords, hoarders and other dominant sections. This is also true for many of Dutt’s other plays as well since most of them, especially the political jatras he wrote and directed, were often performed in front of villagers and industrial workers in various corners of Bengal along with proscenium stages in and around Kolkata. As Bibhash Chakraborty explains,

> Whether it was a poster-play or a docu-drama, a classic play or a modern contemporary one, *whether on fields, grounds or streets or in an auditorium*, with or without extravaganza – people went to his plays with the faith that Utpal Dutt’s plays would make them sit tight. His productions excited them, delighted them and stirred them. (Saha 222; emphasis mine)
Through the inclusion of such varied sections of the society within the audience of his plays, Dutt’s plays undoubtedly acted as a civil extension of the political arena where different subaltern collectives were formed and consolidated. Significantly, such processes also generated immense utopian potentialities among a large cross-section of contemporary society by envisioning what Bloch would define as the ‘Heimat’ – the ‘home’ that we have all desired but never experienced, the home where all prevalent socio-political relations are re-configured (Zipes 27).

While very few other playwrights can claim to have had their plays staged in front of a similarly varied and broad audience, Karnad’s Tale-Danda, among others, also definitely contributes to the formation of subaltern counterpublics in much the same way as Dutt’s plays. Written during a pivotal juncture in Indian political history, the play not only critiques the predominant forms of Brahmanical Hindutva and attendant concepts of some ancient unified glorified past but also explicitly challenges them by foregrounding an episode of Dalit struggle which radically challenged caste-based hierarchies. What makes this challenge all the more significant is that during the time of the composition, Brahmanical Hindutva was alarmingly on the rise due to both the Ramjanmabhumi movement and the upper-caste solidarity forged by the governmental acceptance of Mandal Commission’s recommendations. However, what makes Karnad’s approach different from that of Dutt is that unlike Dutt, whose Marxist belief led to a scientific critique, Karnad offered his critique through an anti-caste egalitarian movement, led by Basavanna and his followers in twelfth century Karnataka, which was decidedly religious. Since religiosity does constitute an important and undeniable aspect of subaltern consciousness, dramatic exploration of such non-conformist religious movements which sought to redress different forms of subalternization, is indeed significant. It also sheds light on similar alternate religious practices, all across the country, and how they have served to create and disseminate different forms of subaltern resistance. In the process history becomes a site through which the present is examined and critiqued. Through Basavanna and his group it is this possibility for an alternate mode of subaltern solidarity that might unitedly resist upper-caste machinations that is

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72 It needs to be remembered, however, that despite various instances of subaltern political initiatives, India has never witnessed a political revolution.
explored. Basavanna’s Anubhav-Mantapa, where all the members are granted an opportunity to speak and share their views, irrespective of their caste, class or gender in fact operates as a prefiguring of an idealised counter-discursive space which does foreground those very issues of participatory parity and equal access which the bourgeois public sphere actually fails to achieve. Much like Dutt’s plays here too we see the blossoming of a ‘revolutionary nostalgia’ (Eagleton, “Saint Oscar” 373) which foregrounds those much needed utopian possibilities which must be integrated within any possible critique of existing subalternizing structures. At the same time, the failure of Basavanna and his followers also warns us about the possible pitfalls, which such expressions of subaltern solidarity must consciously avoid as it attempts to wrest hegemony.

One of these possible pitfalls is the lack of gender equality and inadequate resistance against entrenched patriarchal discourses. Like Dutt, Karnad too has always been aware of this particular element and his plays have persistently critiqued those patriarchal discursive structures which were enmeshed with the rise and development of Indian nationalism and which have contributed to different modes of subalternization which women have had to confront in post-independence India. One of the prominent modes of such subalternization has been the use of a series of mythological figures, such as Sita or Savitri, for creating a patriarchally sanctioned paradigm of female identity which privileged domesticity, submissiveness and the unquestioned acceptance of patriarchal authority. Such stereotypes have further proliferated through textual, televised and cinematic representations which collectively serve to consolidate the power of patriarchal discourses. Karnad’s plays are remarkable because they not only emphasise the subalternization which the perpetuation of such a discourse ensures, but also foreground alternate voices which not only radically critique such discourses but shape resistant discourses of their own. This spirit of contestation, in keeping with the paradigm of subaltern counterpublics, also becomes evident from plays like Yayati and The Fire and the Rain. What links these plays to others like Tale-Danda or Hunting the Sun is the presence of that same critical gaze which exposes the power-relations and attendant exploitation embedded either in traditional historiography or in mythological narratives. Just as the latter foreground the voices of those who were either ignored or silenced in
historical narratives, the former explores those characters and considerations which remained absent from those traditional narratives that buttress patriarchal ideological structures. Together both of these plays represent various forms of subalternization which married women in India continue to experience even now, as evident from several surveys and reports (National Family Health Survey-3: 2006). Especially telling in this regard is Sharmishtha’s following comment: “So here is the foundation of your glorious future, Your Majesty. A woman dead, another gone mad, and a third in danger of her life” (Yayati 68). It is precisely through such assertions that the patriarchal conception of the nation is subjected to polemical subaltern contestation. Especially important in this regard is the character of Chitralekha who is instrumental in exposing the patriarchal violence inherent in the Indian orthodoxy which we often conveniently ignore. Similarly, characters like Nittilai and Visakha in The Fire and The Rain recurrently question the Brahmanical assumptions and practices of characters like Paravasu, Yavakri or Raibhya and serve to create a counter-discourse, from the perspective of subalternized women, which undercuts the glory generally attributed to ancient Indian religion, culture and society. The foregrounding of such historically silenced subaltern voices actually serves to discursively challenge various oppressive processes, based on inherited tradition, which continue to function in the present. What makes these interventions all the more critical is Karnad’s adroit fusion of the issues of caste and gender and the foregrounding of certain regenerative possibilities which primarily emerge through the shudra Nittilai and the outcaste actor Arvasu. Arvasu’s role as an actor and his performance as Vritra also exemplifies the abiding possibility of theatrical performances to radically intervene in the present and mobilize resistant populations. Significantly Karnad’s representation of the radical potentialities of such counterpublics neither attempts any homogenization nor for that matter any essentialistic solution. Instead it remains fully alive to the possibilities of plural and heterogeneous formations.

It is probably in acknowledgment of that same spirit that he also directs his attention to various vernacular folklores from where he derives the plot of plays like Hayavadana and Nagamandala. Through plays such as these the notion of the ‘counterpublic’ becomes intrinsically associated with the Bakhtinian conception of the sphere of folk festivities and attendant modes of expressions which, either through
carnivalesque modes or through differing forms of double-voiced discourse, serve to critique, resist and ridicule the dominant discourses and practices. As has already been mentioned in previous chapters, the nationalist discourse, in collusion with patriarchy, created a binary of ‘home’ and ‘world’ that reinforced the confinement of women to the domestic sphere and also projected an image of ideal womanhood that was conditioned by patriarchal desires and scriptural dictates of one kind or another. This also meant a patriarchal usurpation of the public sphere which left little room for the articulation of female desires. While certain issues, such as women’s right to education and jobs, have become acceptable, the dominant discourses are still reluctant to incorporate certain other issues, especially if they are related to women’s sexuality and expression of sexual desire. Instead, these are precisely the issues around which conservative constructs of feminine identity are woven, disseminated and consolidated. On the other hand, inability to conform to these patriarchal constructs also results in discrimination and violence. One of the major functions of feminist collectives therefore is to reclaim women’s body as their own in order to facilitate autonomous expression of desire. Herein lies the special significance of characters like Padmini and Rani. Both of them are shown to be sexually transgressive characters and it is through their carnivalesque energy that the plays serve to subvert dominant discourses and foreground the contestatory spirit of a vigorous feminist self-fashioning, compatible with postcolonial futures. Karnad’s utilisation of these folk-narratives for his plays thus serves to open new horizons for the explorations of subaltern consciousness. What is also significant here is that Karnard’s dramaturgy remains free from either the dehistoricised structuralism one often encounters in anthropological analysis or from the Orientalist vision of some magical, timeless India. Instead, the critical gaze that animates either his exploration of history or mythology in other plays, also endows his dramatization of folk-narratives with a dynamic energy that makes these plays relevant even now. It is in this sense that the plays serve to create female counterpublics, perhaps best exemplified by the conversation of female flames in Nagamandala, that operate outside and beyond patriarchal injunctions and thus create the possibility of those modes of fulfilment which are either ignored or denied within patriarchal discourses.
The same spirit is manifested through the female characters of Dattani’s plays as well. Although, unlike Karnad, Dattani never ventures into myth, folktales or history, his characters, generally belonging to urban middle class domains do continue with that same struggle to carve out a space of their own where they can fashion their identities independently and in defiance of the shackles of patriarchy which keep on subalternizing them in one way or another. Such subalternization, in fact, is vividly portrayed in his plays through the physical, sexual, psychological and economic subjugation which the women persistently face and attempt to resist. Whether it is *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara* or *Thirty Days in September* – in all of these plays what comes to the foreground is the sheer vulnerability of women owing to the pervasive nature of the patriarchal discourse which continues to subjugate women across generations. What makes these representations so significant is that they serve to defamiliarize the rhetoric of progress generally associated with the educated middle classes and serve to expose the dark underside of ongoing exploitation which often remains hidden owing to the typical considerations of respectability and reputation. Such representations become all the more authentic and nuanced because of Dattani’s recurrent representation of female characters who, instead of resisting these exploitative structures, tolerate or even consolidate them, as interpellated agents of the dominant discourse. Dattani’s success lies in his ability to include these issues within the domain of public discussion in a powerful and incisive manner which fosters dissent and possible reconfiguration of prevalent power-relations. It is the acknowledgment of such crises that becomes evident from the following conversation between Hardika and her granddaughter Smita:

Hardika: I hope you have the same freedom in your own house, as you have here.
Smita: I think one can create one’s own freedom wherever one may be.
Hardika: You are also very foolish.
Smita: Foolish?
Hardika: To think you can create your freedom.
Smita: Well, I suppose they could beat me up and lock me in a room…
Hardika: Yes. They could. (Dattani: 1, 220)

Such statements seem to corroborate Habermas’s assertion that “the exclusion of women has been constitutive for the political public sphere not merely in that the latter
has been dominated by men as a matter of contingency but also in that its structure and relation to the private sphere has been determined in a gender-specific fashion” (Habermas: 1992, 428). It is precisely this realisation that necessitates the formation of alternative public spheres which too are glimpsed by Dattani on certain occasions. For example, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, when Dolly, Alka and Lalitha listen to Naina Devi’s songs and move into their world of sexual and affective fantasy we do notice the tentative emergence of a set of desires and demands which generally remain unarticulated within conventional orthodox public spheres. The trope/motif of art as self-expression does play a significant role in this context as a similar prototypical counterpublic is also suggested by the meetings and practice sessions of Ratna and Chenni Amma in *Dance like a Man*. While the nation-state can forge a self-image through dance genres like the Bharatnatyam which are elevated to the level of national heritage, the same patriarchal nation-state also marginalises the devadasis, like Chenni Amma, who were the original exponents of this genre, on account of the stigma of sexual promiscuity attributed to them by the contemporary patriarchal authorities. Through Dattani’s plays such structures of hypocrisy, exclusion and marginalisation are scrupulously exposed and such critique indeed constitutes one of the constituent elements of subaltern counterpublics.

Similar alternative spaces are also staged in other plays like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* where the play revolves around the conversations and relations of a group of queer Indians whose discussions foreground the many processes of abjection, isolation and humiliation which members of queer communities experienced and continue to experience within the predominantly heteronormative nation-space of India where alternate sexualities are still subjected to manifold forms of subalternization. Written during the late 80’s or the early 90’s, most of Dattani’s plays, dealing with queer individuals, were pioneering texts which sought to dramatise what he termed ‘invisible issues’ since most of these topics were considered taboo and were therefore subjected to stringent erasure. By presenting to his readers and audience concerns that were rarely addressed till then Dattani helped to add new dimensions to contemporary public debates and thus paved the path for the emergence of counterpublics focusing on and comprising sexual subalterns from various social strata. His insistence on such issues is perfectly in keeping with Fraser’s arguments about subaltern counterpublics as she categorically
mentions that “In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out” (Fraser 67). Especially notable in this regard is the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* which focuses on eunuchs or transsexual individuals who are victims of both wretched poverty and sexual subjugation of different kinds. Such individuals are generally ignored altogether by dominant public spheres and the dominant discourses generally represent them, if at all, as objects of ridicule or revulsion. The conversations of eunuchs like Anarkali and Champa with the sociological researcher Uma serve to unravel the extent of administrative, financial and sexual subjugation which eunuchs or hijras regularly face and these insights are complemented by the foregrounding of those desires which govern their lives – desires which are neither recognised nor accepted by the dominant heteronormative and patriarchal discourse. That universalisation of civil rights which is generally supposed to be the basis of public spheres, cannot really therefore be applied to these sexual subalterns. Dattani’s plays are critical in this respect as they serve to suggest an expansion of the public sphere where these individuals ought to be included as full citizens. Not only does this set up the possibility of polycentric public spheres but also sets in motion “a critical process of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it” (Habermas, *Structural* 232). Theatre thus becomes, in Jean Cohen’s words, one of those institutions of “public reasoning and argument among equal citizens” that establishes “a framework for free public deliberation” (Habermas, ‘Further Reflections’ 446-447) which is essential for an inclusive and functioning democracy.

However, it is not as if the subaltern counterpublics that emerge through these plays are homogenous in their nature, scope and character. Written during vastly different historical contexts, by authors with quite varied perspectives regarding the purpose and utility of theatre, the plays of Dutt, Karnad and Dattani create different forms of dissent and contestation. For example, in case of Utpal Dutt’s plays we recurrently witness on stage the surge of actively rebellious masses, inspired largely by Soviet theatre, from different periods of national and international history and it is these subaltern collectivities, who vociferously discuss on stage, with varying degrees of intensity, understanding and consciousness, material and cultural realities of their existence, that are instrumental in the creation of subaltern counterpublics in Dutt’s plays. What
distinguishes these collectives and the rebellious masses which constitute them is the overarching paradigm of class-antagonism as seen from a decidedly Marxist perspective alongside the evolution of militant class-consciousness. This is obviously in keeping with Dutt’s stated purpose of inspiring the subalternized masses of contemporary Bengal and India to launch powerful collective struggles against the dominant classes and the political order which protected the interests of those elite classes. He sought to achieve this purpose through the dissemination of what he identified as “socialist consciousness” (Saha 116) based on the interaction of the various characters on stage. For example, in *The Great Rebellion* all the sepoys who join in the rebellion are subaltern agents, drawn from the ranks from peasants and artisans and their evolving class-consciousness is supposed to be an allegorical representation of a similar evolution taking place among the subaltern classes in front whom Dutt’s plays were often staged. This becomes even more evident in *Invincible Vietnam* where the peasants who also operate as guerrilla combatants incisively analyse issues related to class-antagonism and popular resistance against imperial dominance. Despite being set in drastically different historical contexts, both plays are based on visions of radical political change brought about by militant visions of collective armed struggles based on the primacy of class-antagonisms as the driving force of history.

Such visions were largely brought about by a historical juncture, still buoyed by the spirit of the revolutions of Vietnam and Cuba, the revolutionary sparks of France of 1968, movements against racism in the U.S and umpteen nationalist and anti-colonial struggles in different corners of the world. All of these created an intellectual and political framework within which radical change brought about collective popular action was both imaginable and plausible. However, such visions obviously receded further and further into the background as the twentieth century progressed and for playwrights not armed with the kind of political conviction that Dutt had, it was far more suitable to delve into other spaces and other kinds of subaltern counterpublics than those which had become characteristic of Dutt’s dramaturgy. The plays of Girish Karnad do serve as excellent examples of such differing focus even though, as has already been mentioned, his *Tale-Danda* does share quite a few common features with Dutt’s dramaturgy. But even in *Tale-Danda*, the considerations of class are largely subdued in favour of caste
which serves as the driving force of the play. More importantly, the issues of class-
antagonism and the visions of an egalitarian future brought about by collective
insurrection are displaced onto metaphysical and spiritual planes as Basavanna’s anti-
caste movement is also a non-violent movement which is ultimately concerned with
salvation and sanctification of the soul. While the historical failure of Basavanna’s vision
of caste-less society may perhaps be attributed to inadequate consideration of material
realities, what is even more important to note is that such religious and spiritual visions
do form an intrinsic aspect of subaltern existence which remain vital for us even today,
especially in the wake of renewed religious fundamentalism. Incidentally, such
fundamentalism also means the possibility of growing ideological and material
subalternization of women. It is but natural therefore that Karnad, in most of his plays
should move towards a domestic space which still functions as the most significant site of
female subalternization. In the process he also abandons the historicized world of Dutt’s
plays to move into a mythopoetic realm conditioned by myths and folktales. Despite the
individual differences which we note among these plays, one common feature is the
stress on female characters and their attempted self-fashioning, especially on the basis of
an emancipated sexual desire that consistently defies the bounds set by patriarchy. Quite
naturally in these plays we rarely witness the kind of collective enterprise which Dutt’s
plays are notable for. Instead, in Karnad’s plays subaltern agency primarily functions
through resistant individual actions located within the domestic space which primarily
serves the purpose of ideological subversion, as opposed to the representation of any
paradigm of direct political challenge through overt actions.

This is not to say, however, that Karnad refrains entirely from representing
collective actions of any kind. As has already been mentioned, Tale-Danda obviously
dramatizes resistant collective action through Basavanna and his sharanas. Similarly, The
Fire and the Rain also culminates in a vision of collective action as the defiant
carnivalesque energy of Arvasu’s performance as Vritra spreads to the commoners who
then go on to ransack the ceremonial structures and usurp the offerings meant for gods.
Here we see one of the rare occasions during which individual agency merges with
collective action to create an opportunity of radical refashioning through carnivalesque
energies. In fact, the utilization of such carnivalesque energy is one of the prominent
features of Karnad’s dramaturgy and this is also evident from plays like *Hayavadana* or *Nagamandala* which are based on folk-tales. However, such moments of transgressive or resistant action, individual or otherwise, almost never operates in Karnad’s plays with any glimpse of a teleological trajectory – the actions, unlike in Dutt’s plays, never seem to be inspired by any definite vision of an alternate world order. This is as much down to the fact that unlike Dutt, Karnad never writes with a stated political programme as it is to differences in authorial approach to texts and readers. Just as the flames, at the end of *Nagamandala*, offer two different possible endings, thereby emphasising the fluidity and plurality of texts and interpretations, Karnad too seems to leave the task of imagining any possible alternative order to his readers and viewers instead of offering his own vision. Therefore, apart from Basavanna’s Anubhav-Mantapa, we do not see in Karnad’s plays any example of what Bloch defined as a “concrete utopia” (Bloch 42), a coherent and holistic vision of alternate socio-political orders, as imagined by subaltern collectives of one kind or another. The peasant community in Dutt’s *Invincible Vietnam* would be a prime example of such a utopia which Dutt also foregrounded through several of his other plays. And it is hardly a coincidence that Karnad comes close to such utopianism in the one play where he shifts the focus from the domestic sphere of the individual to a broader political space of collective action. While there is no denying the importance of interrogating the domestic sphere and the related representation of the individual as a locus of change, it is perhaps worth noting the changes in content and dimension that emerge in consequence of such a shift. The ‘heimat’ that becomes palpable in Dutt, thus remains remote in Karnad, due, primarily to that combination of individual agency and domestic space which he most prefers.

The same combination of individual agency and domesticity can be seen in Dattani’s dramatic explorations which are generally set in urban metropolitan locations which wear the façade of progress and sophistication. In plays like *Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen* or *Thirty Days in September*, all of which focus on the subalternization of women, Dattani repeatedly defamiliarizes the domestic sphere of the home as a site of physical, sexual and psychological abuse and thus serves to undercut the veneer of progress conventionally associated with urban metropolitan spaces. However, unlike Karnad this exploration of the domestic sphere never refers to either myths or folktales or
even historical episodes but remains focused on the present while using the modality of realism. While such a dramaturgical choice may not seem suitably avant-garde or experimental to some, it is possibly because of such orientation that he is much more concerned with material details which recurrently impinge on the lives of the characters and shapes their course than playwrights associated with ‘theatre of roots’ such as Karnad. For example one of the primary reasons behind the subjugation of Dolly and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen* is their absolute financial dependence on their husbands who can therefore repeatedly threaten them with expulsion from the house. Similarly, in *Tara* an entrenched network of patriarchal chauvinism and commercial interests collude to ensure Tara’s literally crippled status and she is even left without any inheritance by her grandfather. Likewise in *Dance like a Man*, due to the hypocrisy and elitism of the nationalist discourse the Bharatnatyam exponent Chenni Amma languishes in miserable poverty while the appropriation of her art makes it possible for middle-class practitioners like Ratna and Jayaraj to ascend to national celebrity. However, as Dattani shows in *Thirty Days in September*, financial independence does not necessarily ensure end of exploitation as Mala is made to bear the scars of the trauma of sexual abuse in childhood well into her adulthood. Similarly the homosexual characters of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, despite belonging to middle-class society, remain constricted, ostracized and alienated by the dominant heteronormative social structures. In all of these plays, however, the crisis remains generally confined to either the individual or to family or to a close group of friends and the prospect of collective action of one form or another remains entirely absent. Even in *Final Solutions*, where collective actions are enacted on stage, collectivities only serve to disseminate communal violence and hatred and do not create the possibility of any substantial emancipatory action by subaltern agents. The only other play by Dattani where subaltern collective action does come to the foreground is *Seven Steps around the Fire* where the final dramatic intervention of Champa, Anarkali and their fellow eunuchs during the minister’s son’s wedding does manage to uncover the truth behind Kamala’s murder. However, even in this play, the single performative intervention by the eunuchs is shown to be utterly incapable of producing any substantial change as evidences are hushed up and doctored reports are circulated through the media so as to erase the subaltern out of the elite archives. As opposed to the historical failures
represented by Dutt, which always looked forward to a future of fulfillment, Dattani and Karnad’s portrayals generally operate on a discursive level and project a scenario where either resistance is restricted within individual domains or a grim situation where resistance by subaltern agents is far too weak and isolated to make significant differences.

This is not to suggest, however, that the plays are bereft of emancipatory potentialities. Just as Karnad includes in his plays various expressions of subversive carnivalesque energies, as in *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala* or moments of inclusive regeneration, such as the conclusion of *The Fire and the Rain*, Dattani also succeeds in creating through his texts a number of powerful dramatic moments through which the spectators come face to face with their own prejudices which create the opportunity for bridging that gap between the self and the other which is at the root of many discourses of discrimination and victimization. For example, in *Seven Steps around the Fire* we have a dramatic representation of the moment of Subbu’s marriage with Kamala the eunuch, dressed as a bride with wedding garments and jewelry, when both of them passionately embrace each other. Not only does such a scene help to visualize a union which the public sphere is unwilling to acknowledge but it forces the spectators to confront their own biases and thus help to open the space for discursive expansion through which their presence as equal citizens might be facilitated. Similarly the curtained space in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* which serves as Kamlesh’s bedroom and also by extension his entire apartment, where the play unfolds, operates as a site for the emergence of a queer counterpublic. More importantly, the various representations of queer relationships on stage serve as reminders of the otherizing principles at work within us which prompt us to view many from a dehumanized perspective which contributes to their victimization. It is these very possibilities of challenging, clarifying, amending or re-shaping dominant attitudes and behavioural patterns which contribute to the creation of counterpublics. Furthermore, since Dattani presents before us a number of varied characters, the plays convey a sense of undeniable plurality which obviously serves to negate the vilifying stereotypes through which dominant discourses generally perceive sexual subalterns. It is this same sensitivity towards heterogeneity that also prompts Dattani to create uniquely individualized characters in all of his other plays without ever creating a monochromatic mould for any particular social section. This is evident from a play like *Final Solutions*
where Bobby and Javed, despite operating as representatives of subalternized religious minorities, virtually function as each other’s foil and their individual voices are also complemented by the cluster of voices which together make up the chorus. Similarly in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the characters of Dolly and Alka are pointedly different from those of Baa or Lalitha and even the sisters have rather different approaches to the same crisis within which they find themselves. However, their shared fantasy, involving the fictive liaison with ‘Kanhaiya’, himself a fusion of both the mortal and the divine, does generate a transitory utopia of affective plentitude which they despairingly yearn for.

What is even more significant is that all of these playwrights represent the subaltern characters without ever succumbing to any kind of romantic temptation of showcasing them as essentialized characters, marked either by perpetual victimization or by unblemished heroism. Instead, all of them are acutely aware of the fact that subalterneity is fluid and a person who acts as the subaltern in one context may well become the dominant character in a separate context. For example, in all of Utpal Dutt’s plays there is generally an acknowledgment of the tendency of many subalterns to blindly follow the dictates of an oppressive authority, on account of entrenched interpellation, as well as several forms of discriminatory practices in which subaltern characters themselves may be involved. This was of course a result of his own dialectical thinking which made him decry, on the one hand, the vogue of “fictitious Good Men” (*Towards 18*) as heroes and acknowledge, on the other hand, that within the subaltern section too there will be “a multiplicity of ideas and struggles for ascendancy” (*On Theatre* 45). Similar nuances may also be seen in the plays of Karnad. Despite the fact that his plays generally revolve around the subalternization of women within patriarchal discourses, we also note the presence of female characters who either abet patriarchal authority or remain fissured by considerations of caste. Likewise, in *Tale-Danda* we notice how the sharanas, despite all of their rebelliousness, remain rather indifferent to their wives and ensure their subjugation within the domestic sphere. Perhaps this is most evident in Dattani’s plays where the men and women often oscillate between positions of dominance and subalterneity. For example, despite their own subalterneity, Dolly and Alka are equally dismissive and contemptuous towards the beggar woman who frequents their house, without being concerned about their shared subjugation by the same
patriarchal discourses. Even homosexual characters like Ed/Prakash or Kamlesh, despite their own role as sexual subalterns, are entirely unconcerned about the victimization faced by Kamlesh’s sister Kiran. Likewise, someone like Baa, despite herself being a victim of patriarchal oppression, also operates as an agent of patriarchal subjugation. These scrupulous representations of heterogeneous and fluid subjectivities lends to the plays of these playwrights that combination of authenticity and plurality which prevents them from falling into the trap of essentialised moulds, which Rushdie scoffs at as the process of “new-behalfism” (*Step Across 60*).

Thus all three playwrights use their individual and varied approaches to investigate the representation of subalterneity in India and together they not only refer to the various aspects of subalterneity but also the diverse facets of subaltern consciousness which come to the foreground through their foregrounding of subaltern characters. One pattern which generally emerges through such successive representation is the gradual fading of possibilities of collective radical struggle and the simultaneous shift to the individual spheres of body and psyche. To a certain extent, these changes are indicative of the changing political situation in India and the attendant withering of emancipatory visions and constructive collective actions which may help to sustain those visions. For example, the alternative visions of Dutt’s plays were fostered by Marxist ideology and the ascendant political thrust of various leftist organizations. However, not only did such leftist politics remain confined to a few corners of India but they also failed to successfully build upon the political mobilization and momentum which brought them to power in different states. While reasons and expressions of discontent have been extensive, they have never really been able to crystallize into powerful challenges, especially on a national scale. Instead resistance has been limited to sporadic local manifestations which have either sought legalistic routes that function within the existing system or have been restricted to demands with exclusive local relevance or have suffered repression and extinction. In a rather postmodern turn of events, due to the absence of emancipatory macronarratives, politics has been marked by the presence of a series of resistant micronarratives which, however, do not show any sign of crystallizing into a politics of praxis that will effect a convergence without any compulsory uniformity. Such an absence invariably creates a compromising situation for the
development of an inclusive political system which is not only democratic in name but in functioning as well. Since literature, and especially theatre, is invariably conditioned, in one way or another, by the matrix of socio-political circumstances from which it is born, the plays of authors like Karnad and Dattani are rather reticent, compared to Dutt, about those paradigms of subaltern agency through which holistic, radical change may become possible even though their plays unquestionably register a need for such changes.

The need for such radical change becomes all the more paramount when we take into account the multiple factors which are responsible for the ongoing subalternization of various sections of the Indian society, as evident from several official reports emerging out different surveys conducted on a national scale. For example only 36.3% women across the country are in some way employed as opposed to the 84.5% of the men. Furthermore, only one in every six women has any say over how her earning is used. Also more than one third of all Indian women have experienced physical violence of one form or another and around 37% of all married women have been exposed to physical or sexual violence (National Family Health Survey-3: 2006). Similarly, over the past forty years there has also been an exponential 800% increase in rape cases in India. These can be complemented by several other statistics such as how Dalits are still not allowed to enter temples or non-Dalit household or share food with non-Dalit persons in more than 50 percent of Indian villages or how more than 65% of religious minorities in India still live in huts or temporary shelters (Human Rights Status Report: 2012). In addition there is also the appalling reality of India being ranked 137, out of 187 countries, in the human development index (Dreze and Sen, 2013). These information are vital to understand the ongoing processes of subalternization in India which are precisely what make the plays of Dutt, Karnad or Dattani so relevant even now. It is especially important to constantly keep such material realities in mind because many of these plays, which have been written over a period of four decades, may often be accused of datedness and obsolescence. This is probably most important for Utpal Dutt whose plays were mostly written during the four decades after independence and the three plays under discussion were all written between 1966 and 1972. However, the fundamental issue of class-antagonism rooted in village-dynamics revolving around impoverished peasants and their elite oppressors is not really something which has disappeared into the domains of the
past. Concerted peasant agitation against industrial land-acquisition in West Bengal, peasant agitations in Rajasthan for irrigation and better price for crops, suicides of farmers and weavers in vast areas of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh and such other facts amply illustrate how the previous models of class antagonism still persist under the guise of different modalities involving both state and private enterprises. In fact, as Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen show, not only was there very little growth in agricultural wages between 1994-2006, but that the absence of other facilities such as proper healthcare and an efficient public distribution system has also led to a gradually worsening socio-economic crisis which problematizes the very notion of democratic Indian progress. Quite naturally therefore, the focus on peasant communities and the need for militant struggles against clusters of elite oppressors like landlords, hoarders and usurers, foregrounded in Dutt’s plays, still remains starkly relevant even though the nature of exploitation has become much more diverse and multifaceted. The growing menace of the so-called ‘Maoist’ insurgency in several states of India, (chiefly, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh) further corroborates this truth as much of such violence, however unjustified, has emerged in response to ongoing modes of exploitation which have not been redressed in any way. In fact, in keeping with Dutt’s own arguments that “every incident of heroism of the masses is material for drama”, irrespective of the party-line (Saha 115), it may even be asserted that these plays may still serve to create the need for collective agrarian struggles in search of a more equitable future at a time when the gulf between the privileged and the dispossessed is becoming wider everyday.

Obviously, caste remains a major factor of such widespread inequality, as attested by several reports and it is these factors that ensure the continued relevance of plays like Dutt’s Hunting the Sun or Karnad’s Tale – Danda, both which offer stringent critique of casteist Brahmanical oppression and attendant victimization. A similar source of subalternization is the predominance of the force of communal violence which recurrently raises its spectre in different corners of the country with alarming frequency. The play Final Solutions, although written specifically in response to the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the destruction of the Babri Masjid, therefore remains hauntingly relevant even now, especially in the wake of homegrown terrorist
organizations which feed on the hatred and brutality associated with such phenomena as the Gujarat genocide of 2002. This relevance is further amplified by the riots of Kandhmal in 2008 as well as the riots in U.P. in 2013. What makes the Kandhmal riots particularly significant, is that here the victims were mostly the members of local Christian communities, most of whom were members of scheduled castes and tribes living in dire poverty. Such events emphasise the strange intersection of class, caste and religion for effecting not just subalternization but sheer destruction of lives. The massacre of the sharanas, especially those who were arranging a marriage between a converted Brahman and a converted outcaste in *Tale-Danda* ia obviously emblematic of this threat which continues to ravage the nation-space of India in one form or another. The recent spate of honor-killings where couples have been killed owing to their decision to either fall in love with or marry spouses from other castes or creeds is also especially relevant in this context. Such phenomena, which hauntingly stress the continuation of ancient prejudices and bigotry, obviously clarify why plays like those written by the likes of Dutt, Karnad or Dattani are still vitally relevant and serve to enhance awareness and sensitivity among spectators whose silence, indifference or tacit support often foster these forces of majoritarian brutality which need to be eliminated for both social justice and the preservation of a secular polity. This becomes possible because these plays not only offer a broad historicised critique of various forms of majoritarian fundamentalism, but also foreground idealised visions of harmonious, secular relationships that serve to foster those bonds of horizontal comradeship which a cohesive nation-space invariably requires. Therefore, while figures of Samudragupta and his Brahman priests in *Hunting the Sun* or Sovideva and his associates in *Tale-Danda* serve to emblematize on stage the innate and entrenched violence associated with casteist Brahmanical doctrines of Hinduism, within a historical context, the chorus of *Final Solutions* serves to highlight that collective, hysterical violence which grips communities during moments of ideologically engendered communal frenzy. However, literature serves to both caution and console. Therefore, alongside such manifestations of menacing violence, we also witness in these plays several moments of bonding during which the self-other binary on which communal discourses are premised is smoothly transcended in order to envision utopian possibilities that help to heal. The playful interactions between Bobby, Javed and Smita
or Hardika’s recollection of how she and Zarina would sing and dance to Noor Jehan’s songs operate precisely as such moments, which might function as incantations of sanity amidst the conflicts that singe us.

Such relevance may also be attributed to many of the others plays under discussion such as Dattani’s exploration of alternate sexuality. However, here again, questions may be raised with regard to the extent of subalternization which queer communities continue to face, even though as a result of the Supreme Court’s recent verdict on Article 377, homosexuality is still identified as a crime. Yet, queer characters have also featured significantly in a number of recent cinematic representations which have enhanced the acceptance and visibility of queer communities. This is also complemented by a growing number of news items which also focus on a number of concerns associated with queer communities as evident from the coverage of LGBT pride parades or the alienation and ostracisation they have to face. In light of these recent developments again, some of Dattani’s dramatic ventures seem rather dated. However, one again has to remember that Dattani began writing these plays at a time when homosexuality was a tabooed topic and there was hardly any representation of the material and psychological conditions of queer individuals. Moreover, despite the fact that homosexuality is no longer a crime, queer people are still subjected to discrimination, contempt and social exclusion. Naturally therefore, the plays still seem to be remarkably relevant. What makes his representations all the more authentic, is his ability to critically explore the various facets of queer lives without concealing its hierarchies and contradictions. Therefore, while he remains firmly focused on urban metropolitan scenario his plays remain illuminated by diverse insights that either go beyond the confines of urban middle class or highlight the collusion between homosexuality and patriarchy. As the preceding discussion of plays like On a Muggy Night in Mumbai or Bravely Fought the Queen has already demonstrated, Dattani is acutely conscious of those considerations of class which often fissure queer communities and thus problematise possible modes of solidarity against heteronormative discrimination.
It is this panoramic representation of multiple forms of subalternization and attendant formation of fluid subaltern subjectivities which renders these plays so vital. Their fundamental significance lies in their ability to emotively and incisively convey to us the diverse processes of subalternization which terrorize our everyday existence of which we are either unaware or unconcerned. As the preceding chapters have already demonstrated, subalternization operates on the basis of both material and discursive considerations. Even if the plays are not always able to offer alternate visions of collective change, their representative characters still serve to effectively critique through their experiences and actions the dominant ideological paradigms through which several forms of subalternization are carried out. Such critique not only helps to thwart the continuation of existing predicaments but also implies the need for unborn futures capable of transcending such subalternizing processes which would obviously mean a radical redefinition of the nation-space of India. It is useful to recall in this context the remarks of Terry Eagleton, who while talking about the need for socialist ideas at a time when socialist politics seems to be on the decline, declared that

Walter Benjamin wisely observed that revolution wasn't a runaway train; it was the application of the emergency brake. The role of socialist ideas is, in this sense, to protect the as-yet unborn future: to offer, not a storm, but a place of shelter in the tempest that is contemporary history. ('Shelter', 2002)

The socio-politically committed and responsible plays of Dutt, Karnad and Dattani, in a similar manner, through their critique and vision, offer a shelter by looking forward to that same “as-yet unborn future” that Eagleton speaks of. This again is associated with Bloch’s notion of “anticipatory illumination” (Bloch 141) which endows artistic and literary representations with that utopian quality which makes them contribute constructively to both present and future. Based on the insights of Herbert Marcuse and Ernst Bloch we may define utopia, not as form or genre, but rather as a symbolic expression of the hope of a better future, either in some concrete future or within fictional or spiritual realms. Fredric Jameson therefore asserts that “The Utopian idea… keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is” (Jameson 110-11). Such visions are not centred on any particular geographical space or corporeal location, but rather on Ernst Bloch’s
aforementioned notioned ‘heimat’ or ‘home’ which functions as the imagining of a better future. Based on the discussion carried out in the preceding chapters it is possible to argue that the plays of Dutt, Karnad and Dattani also contribute to this notion of postcolonial utopia both by tentatively hinting at alternate worlds and by representing a stubborn negation of the world as it is. It is this dual function which endows these plays with the emancipatory and transformative potential for which they need to be treasured.

This is all the more so because the various forms of popular media which now exist in India often seem blithely unaware or dismissive of these stark realities of Indian society which are often eclipsed behind a self-congratulatory rhetoric of a India that has ‘emerged’, a India marked by dazzling skyscrapers, corporate brands and sprawling consumerist heterotopias, embodied in the form of luxury resorts and glitzy malls. While it is indeed true that responsible journalism, whether in print or in television continues to focus on various forms of injustices and systemic deprivations plaguing different corners of India, it cannot also be denied, especially in the wake of the recent controversies involving paid news and lobbying, that newspapers or news channels are also circumscribed by corporate interests in one way or another which obviously means the occlusion of certain kinds of information and simultaneous dissemination of certain other kinds for the sake of consolidating corporate interests. As Dreze and Sen point out,

The media itself certainly shares a big responsibility for the bias in the coverage of news and analyses, especially since it can play a large role in leading, and not merely following, public curiosity and concern. But the problem extends to a lack of interest and engagement from the relatively privileged parts of society on matters of social inequality and deprivation, since the media tends to be shaped substantially by the need to cater to them…It is quite common, for instance, for thousands of poor people to gather in New Delhi from all over the country to voice demands related to minimum wages, forced displacement, land rights, or caste discrimination without much notice being taken of them by the mainstream media or political parties. (267-69)

Likewise, unlike the 50’s or the 60’s when popular cinema indeed served as a platform for voicing popular critique of different forms of social maladies, contemporary cinema, because of the same corporate interests remains more or less bound by either a pervasive vision of metropolitan India or an even more glamorous world of privileged Diasporic communities. All of this only substantiates the failure of public reasoning regarding the
abysmal gulf between the dominant and the subaltern and the inability of the communicational sphere to address such concerns. In the light of these developments, theatre remains one of those few modes of extant popular media through which socio-political maladies may be emotively discussed in a concrete form that contributes to the growth of critical reasoning within the public domain and it is such critical reasoning that gives rise to the subaltern counterpublics previously discussed. Theatre in this context has the capacity to generate a much-needed impatience regarding the various forms of ongoing injustices which must feature prominently in critical discussions and thereby expand the reach of democratic politics which alone may overhaul the systemic deprivations that continue to plague the Indian society. The multidimensional inequality faced by India requires precisely the kind of multidimensional critical exploration which the plays of Dutt, Karnad and Dattani offer and the incisive critique they foreground obviously contributes to the formation of a robust public reasoning through which fundamental forms of subalternization may be addressed. Following the words of B.R. Ambedkar, it may be argued that such plays may serve to “educate, agitate and organize” people of various sections of our society and thereby strengthen that process of “informed and reasoned public engagement” (Dreze and Sen 16) which must be the basis of an alternate Indian future.

Incidentally, the IPTA had begun its theatrical journey with a similar faith in the emancipatory and transformative potential of plays. The plays of these three playwrights of course signal a continuation of that legacy through a number of different avenues in accordance with the evolving requirements of post-independence India. The ability to make such contributions obviously remains one of the vital aspects of theatre as a whole and Indian playwrights, in various languages, have been performing the same task for decades. Apart from the three playwrights under discussion, several other playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, H.S. Shivprakash, Tripurari Sharma, Manjula Padmanabhan or Mahashweta Devi have also focused on several forms of subalternization in one form or another. Collectively they contribute to a remarkably powerful tradition of socio-politically relevant plays which continues to engage with the evolving material and discursive realities with incisive insights. Together, they definitely form one of the vital currents of modern Indian theatre tradition. Alongside the extensive discussion of formal
experiments and the search for specifically ‘Indian’ theatrical paradigms, these plays should also be subjected to rigorous critical analysis with relevant contextual grounding. Together, such plays and criticism can contribute to a growing discourse of committed theatre that would remain loyal to the responsibility of intellectuals to represent truth to people, especially by resisting what Harold Pinter called the “tapestry of lies” which are recurrently woven the machinery of the state. Pinter went on to add:

I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the real truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. (Pinter, 2005)

The plays of Utpal Dutt, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani are embodiments of that mandatory obligation which artists feel as they try to uphold and restore that hackneyed but ever-valid humanist notion which, after all, weaves the fabric of civilization – the dignity of man.

It is this conviction which has motivated the conceptualisation and completion of this dissertation and it is hoped that it would operate as a substantial addition to the existing corpus of criticism. As was mentioned in the Introduction, the range of existing scholarly work on Indian plays and playwrights is still rather limited and much of existing criticism also remain hampered by inadequate focus on relevant material details which constitute the socio-political context out of which the texts emerge. It is hoped that this dissertation would not only serve to redress some of the existing lacunae but would provide a necessary example of the kind of contextual analysis which need to be more widely practiced to ascertain the value and significance of individual works. Furthermore, it is unlikely that any other critical text has thus focused on the representation of subalterns and subalterneity as one of the defining strands of Indian drama during the post-independence period. In the process this dissertation has also sought to fruitfully utilise the insights of postcolonial theory and subaltern studies for an analysis of three stalwarts of Indian theatre, in a manner hitherto unseen. In fact, the multidimensional nature of the three playwrights and their dramatic works has also necessitated a multidimensional theoretical analysis, matched by a wealth of material details, which may serve to expand the horizons of critical explorations, involving a number of other
Indian authors. It would perhaps not be inappropriate to hope that such insights would make this dissertation a helpful point of reference for future scholars of Indian drama and literature as a whole.

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