Chapter 4: Part II

Critical Study of the Theme of Resistance in the Plays


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Critical Analysis of the Theme of Resistance in the Plays

The subsection scheme of Part II is as follows wherein the following eleven plays are analysed under the categorized subsection captions such as:

a) Resisting and Risking the Politics of Difference and Subalternity
   "Listen Shefali" (Hindi, 1975) by Kusum Kumar
   "Beyond Facades" (Malayalam, 2000) by Catherine Thankamma Joseph
   "Thirst" (Telugu, 2002) by Vinodini

b) Islamic Feminist Theory and Contesting “Seclusion”
   "Woman" (Urdu, 1937) by Rasheed Jahan
   "Purdah" (Urdu, 2002) by Jameela Nishat

c) Feminist Family Studies: Resisting Domestic Domination by Fighting Their Own Battles
   "The Wedding Tangle" (Bengali, 1904) by Swarnakumari Devi
   "Prey" (Marathi, 1947) by Malatibai Bedekar
   "Gamble" (Marathi, 1951) by Muktabai Dikshit
   "The Swing of Desire" (Kannada, 1990) by Mamta G. Sagar

d) Resisting Mutedness: Exploration of Feminist Consciousness-Raising Group
   "The Six of Them" (Telugu, 1995) by Chalam Volga
   "The Journey Within" (Bengali, 2000) by Usha Ganguli
(a) Resisting and Risking the Politics of Difference and Subalternity

Introduction to the Plays “Listen Shefali” (Hindi, 1975) by Kusum Kumar, “Beyond Facades” (Malayalam, 2000) by Catharine Thankamma Joseph and “Thirst” (Telugu, 2002) by Vinodini

The plays “Listen Shefali”, “Beyond Facades” and “Thirst” deal with Dalit question. Their study tries to bring out the notions of “difference”, “subalternity” and “intersectionality” leading to resistance. The plays exhibit the struggling of the subaltern groups against the hierarchical ordering of social, political and economic power. The three concepts have pervaded feminist thinking, both in the sense of women being different from men and in recognising differences among themselves - their experiences, their castes and their positions. The terms include the “multiplicity of voices, meanings, and configurations” that constitute women’s social world and the “multitude of different subject positions which constitute the individual” (Maynard 127).

The concept of “difference” exhibits the ways in which two people or things are not like each other. It signals fundamentally and importantly the history and politics of “becoming” - not of the stable group but the one which is in the making and different from the mainstream group. The term “subaltern . . . is itself defined as a difference from the elite . . . For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference” (Spivak 285). The “difference” among human beings is set between two terms in binary opposition of (1) rich/poor, high-caste/low-caste and male/female with regard to class, caste and gender. (2) It is also based on natural or biological dissimilarities as in case of man versus woman, and Blacks versus Whites; (3) or the long established and deeply rooted varied conditions of separateness or difference as between Hindus versus Muslims, Hindus versus Dalits, Christian versus Jew, Oriental versus European, LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans-sexual) as against heterosexuals leading to the articulations of dominance and subordination.

Depending upon differences of various types the sociologists, psychologists and philosophers have developed a new theory called “intersectionality” which is quickly advancing in feminist circles. The term intersectionality theory was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. It emerged relatively recently when the critical race theorists or the feminists of colour such as C. Moraga, Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks, Yuval-Davis and Patricia Hill Collins used the term while discussing the issues of Black women. Depending upon women’s colour, class and gender, intersectionality places emphasis on
their multiple, intersecting social identities, as well as how the social structures influence the construction of their social identities. These feminists of colour challenged gender as a monolithic category. Instead of viewing gender, race, class, sexuality, society and even nation as separate systems of oppression and privilege, the intersectionality paradigm sees these systems as mutually constructing one another i.e. gender, race, class, among other systems, operate as the matrix of domination that exploits and restricts the rights of women, depending on where they are situated and what they are. The concept of intersectionality argues that women of colour suffer from triple oppression (Yuval-Davis 193-209). The concept holds true to Dalit women in India. Unlike colour/race their area of contention is their caste. In “intersectionality” one and the same individual body and social assemblage identified as “Dalit Woman” gets channelled into several distant streams depending on their caste, class and gender.

In India Ranajit Guha initiated a systematic theoretical study of the subaltern groups which are known by their “difference” and are differentiated by the mainstream group in the society. The term “subaltern” translates roughly as “subordinate” or “dependent” referring to the non-elite social groups. It is an adjective which means “of lower status”. It is derived from Latin word “subalternus”, from Latin “sub” - meaning “next below” + alternus meaning “every other” (Soanes et al. 1434). It means subordinate, of inferior status or rank; hence, of no power and action. In Gramsci’s study it refers to classes such as the peasantry, the working class and other groups who do not posses any power. He declared that the subaltern was the subjected underclass in a society on whom the dominant power exerts hegemonic influence leading to their differences. The subalterns do not have access to any social institution to represent themselves. “Only permanent victory breaks their subordination and that not immediately” (Gramsci 55). Later this term was adopted in the Subaltern Studies collective indicating the general subordination of the oppressed class in South Asian Society.

The early phase of Subaltern Studies under Ranajit Guha attributed the term subaltern to the category of peasants and working class. He defined the “subalterns” as “an identity in differential” (Guha 1982 ii) which Spivak reiterates in her classic essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” According to Guha their difference itself is their identity. The project of the Subaltern Studies under him has been the recovery and the representation of the rebellious consciousness of the underclasses. As a theory, subalternity was extended to “the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office in any other way” (Guha 1982
vii). The category of "subaltern" was intended also to shed light on "the practices of dominance and resistance" (Gopal 2004 141).

The Subaltern Studies does not mean today what it meant in 1982. The change has occurred inside the Subaltern Studies project as the subaltern subjects have been reinvented. The significant social change, opposition to caste oppression and the class struggles by low-caste and untouchable Dalit workers did occur through literary endeavours. The study analysed the localised and personal resistance of ordinary people to the power of elites and states. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak brought gender into the subaltern view. She wrote, "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak. . . . The subaltern as female can not be heard or read" (Spivak 307) because "The Subaltern can not speak" (Spivak 308). She also cites how a critical work can give not only the voice to the subaltern but can clear the space to allow it to speak.

Similarly Rosalind O'Hanlon in her "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia" (1988) echoes Scott's Weapons of the Weak by exhorting historians to look for resistances dispersed in the fields that are conventionally not associated with the political issues. Her ideas were in tune with those of the Subaltern Studies which at the time involved in the studies of everyday struggles where gender assumed special significance though women were then missing in Subaltern Studies as she noted (O'Hanlon 189-122). In 1990s, Subaltern Studies became "a hot topic in academic circles on several continents; a weapon, magnet, target, lightning rod, hitching post, icon, gold mine, and fortress for scholars ranging across disciplines from history to political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies" (Ludden 01). Gyanendra Pandey suggests that the subaltern group also encompasses the unsettled population, immigrants, sexual minorities, conquered indigenous people, blacks and women who are disadvantaged, marginalised, displaced and subordinated. In his Subaltern Citizens Pandey suggests that the foregrounding of differences of gender and the dominant classes has long been a way of organising and naturalising subalternity. Thus "Men are not 'different'; it is women who are. Foreign colonisers are not 'different'; the colonised are. Caste Hindus are not 'different' in India, it is tribals and Dalits who are. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (we should add heterosexual) males are not 'different' in the US; at one time or another, everybody else is. White Australians are not 'different' Vietnamese boat people and Fijian migrants to Australia, and astonishingly, Australian Aboriginals are" (quoted in Pandey 2010 63). Thus men are not different, it is women who are different and Dalit
women are far more different from other women. They are subalterns among the
subalterns. A section of Dalit women who are enlightened, activists and writers are
striving to attain human dignity, restore self-respect, end the feeling of inferiority and get
an opportunity to live like human beings as all these years they have “endured unique
forms of discrimination” (Jones 09). Resultantly, their literature has come as a shock to
the traditional senses - “militant in texture and aggressively blunt in meaning” (Sarangi
85).

Though the terms Dalits and Dalitism have come into currency only in the recent
times they have much longer historical context. Indian society had been divided into
Varnas since the days of Smritis, giving rise to the Shudra community which is at the
lowest stratum of social ladder. The references to the low-caste subjects in the Ramayan
and the Mahabharat are well-known. Dalit literature is revisioning and thereby subverting
these mythical references. Eklavya, Dronacharya, Karna and Shambuka are acquiring
symbolic overtones. During the Mahabharat period, the Shudra protests expressed
themselves in the form of Eklavya and Karna who were not allowed any upward social
mobility within the caste structure as it was a threat to upper-caste dominants. They have
been denied the place they deserved in the system. Dronacharya is represented as the
deceitful guru who deprived Eklavya of his archery. Karna’s story is a saga of
deprivation. ‘Shambuka vadha’ depicts the killing of Dravidian Shambuka as a murder
committed by the Aryan king Rama at the behest of his Aryan Brahmin advisers. These
acts of killing of Shambuka, cutting the thumb of Eklavya and destroying the poetic
creation of Matang in the court of Harshavardhan express the marginalisation of low
born subjects by the high-caste feudal Hindus. This radical attitude towards myths is a
source of continued vitality for Dalit writers. Their response to contemporary events and
their own experiences are coming out poignantly and powerfully through many literary
genres. Several writings by Dalits and also by other writers on Dalits have been appearing
for the past few decades and a significant portion of this has been from Dalit women.
Literature provides a space to Dalit women for resisting these constructions and an effort
to counter the destructive effects of caste hierarchies.

Dalits are the ex-untouchable castes of India. At different stages of Indian social
history they were known as the Shudras, ati-shudras, suta, untouchables, out-castes,
depressed-castes and Harijans. In January 1950, Gandhi and Ambedkar ensured the
constitutional abolition of untouchability in the written document that was adopted in
January 1950. In 1958, a national level conference formally adopted the term “Dalit” as
an "intentionally positive alternative to such pejorative or official terms as 'untouchable'" (Dharwadker 289). In 1972 a group of radical Dalit writers started Dalit Panther movement along the lines of the American Black Panthers and the Indian Naxalites expressing "a new level of pride, militancy, and sophisticated creativity" (Zelliot 267). At present they are given the statutory recognition and are being known as Scheduled Castes after the Government of India Act of 1935 and the Indian Constitution of 1950. They are the legally recognised minority. Article 17 of the Indian Constitution adopted in 1950 abolished untouchability and the Special Marriage Act of 1954 was designed to promote inter-caste marriages.

The statutory statuses accorded to women in general led to the study of women in India. In 1957 came Neera Desai’s *Woman in Modern India* which is the first scholarly feminist history of Indian women. Though it candidly assesses the position of women in India, it does not make a mention of subaltern women. India’s first Women’s Studies Programmes began in 1970s and introduced women as a subject for research. Next in line was a Report which came out in 1974 - *Towards Equality: the Report of the Committee on the Status of Woman in India* which focused on preserving women’s record, making women visible and also documented the lives of non-elite women. It also pointed out that the majority of women did not enjoy “the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the Constitution” (*Towards Equality* 359). According to Vina Mazumdar, the out-spoken Member-Secretary of the Committee and author of a minority report, this document set the agenda for convincing the social science community to include gender as a category of analysis and revive the debate on women’s issues (Mazumdar 42-54).

Empowered by the statutes Dalit women started particularly exploring their status in their writings. The advent of feminism and the growing awareness made them portray their agonies. They are generally erased from the realms of cultural representation. Whenever they were depicted it was only as a stereotype - a sufferer of “a kind of symbolic violence” (Kondo 49). In response they started demanding the rearrangement.

There has been a considerable growth in Dalit writings from the 1970s. Dalit writings came for the first time in Marathi followed by other Indian languages. Although regional in its origin, in the course of its development it has achieved a national dimension, transcending regional boundaries. Chaman Lal has noted, “The term Dalit acquired respectability after establishing itself as a major trend in modern Marathi Literature. Since then the trend is trying to acquire an Indian character by finding place in the rest of Indian languages. Yet after Marathi, it is in Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu, Hindi and
Punjabi literature that it has created a niche for itself” (Lal 2000 79). As a literary movement Dalit women’s writing has possessed a national character and is on the way to fulfil what George Lukacs has called “the great social mission of literature” (quoted in Sreenivasan 46). Not only did Dalit women but also the non-dalit women writers start highlighting the plight of these segregated classes of women. Women writers like Mahasweta Devi, Bama Faustina, P. Sivakami, C. K. Janu, Baby Kamble, Daya Pawar and Urmila Pawar constitute an initial wave of Dalit writings that are decolonialist and feminist in impulse. These writers “saw the faceless existence of their family and community; so when they move up the social ladder they take the cudgel, assert themselves, critique the culture that relegated them to the margins and adopt a rebellious tone. Their anger, protest and memories of injustice are many layered - from the numbness of historical wrongs to the pain of rejected love for being a dalit” (Bande 273).

Despite being feminist in impulse, it becomes difficult for Dalit women writers to align themselves with other mainstream feminism. The cultural, social and political interests of Dalit women are ignored, dismissed or simply taken for granted. There is inequality between Dalit women writers and the mainstream feminist writers who are academically as well as socially privileged. No wonder Dalit women find it difficult to find representation in the mainstream social and literary space. As Audre Lorde puts it, “It is not our difference which separate women but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from ignoring and misnaming of those differences” (Lorde 122). The elite women when they write on women’s issues they forget to include marginalised women in their writings. Geraldine Forbes confesses, “...my Women in Modern India, which drew on the published literature, does not do justice to the history of Muslim women, Christian women and women from other minority communities nor to Dalit or tribal women” (Forbes 08). The issues of women from minority religious communities and non-elite women remain relatively unexplored. These subaltern Dalit women writers therefore came forward to write a more inclusive history that is honest about differences.

All these years Dalit women have been discussed in relation to the male reformers especially Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890) and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) but not as a separate group needing history. It reminds of Hazel Carby who noticed that the new feminist socialist theory developed by the First-World academics failed to take cognisance of the women outside their environment or class. She was prompted to remark
that when white feminists “write their history and call it the story of women but ignore our lives and deny their relation to US, that is the moment in which they are acting within the relations of racism and writing hisstory and not herstory” (quoted by Thillainayagam 42). Bell-Scott et al. note that women’s studies scholars all too often see “scholarship on black and other women of color as narrow and peripheral to understanding women’s experiences generally” (Bell-Scott et al. 284). Dalit women writers have therefore to carefully consider the warning of Audre Lorde that, “… If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others for their use and to our detriment” (Lorde 05). The differences within each sex are definitely more deep rooted than the difference between the two sexes.

Dalit women writers realised that only their own words can adequately and unambiguously voice their resistance. While they started documenting their pain and exploitation, their writings started becoming the “sites of healing, pleasure and resistance . . . a project done in the service of those who have inherited the older legacy as despised, diseased and ugly” (Griffin 521). This literary project of Dalit women can be described, to use Griffin’s words - “textual healing” (Griffin 521). They have become the trumpets of the awakening of a new generation. Their impact has been considered by men as “threatening the canon and the foundations of power indeed” (Kondo 52).

The contributions of the stage plays and the street plays are significant in empowering Dalit women. Theatre and drama have provided them with an opportunity to erase the traces of those scripts that have enclosed them in “still-born postures” (Smith 1992 418). Theatre works “on the premise that gender in a hegemonic system cannot overrule the variables of caste, class, religion, occupation and generational differences in defining itself” (Mangai 1998 02). Dalit women on the stage and street may be considered “bad girls” but certainly they are not “sad girls” (Kondo 44). The stage has definitely helped in changing the reality of their lives as they re-examined their issues, “within the newer challenges to democracy, secularism and minority rights . . . because the same issues affect different women in different ways at different times” (Agnes 148, 151). Their struggle illustrates as Baby Kamble has pointed out very well, “We become conscious that we . . . are human beings” (Kamble 122). The three plays “Listen Shefali”, “Beyond Facades” and “Thirst” have begun the important cultural work of healing one of the most devastating legacies of the high-caste supremacist ventures.

Having been marginalised in the elite women’s movements Dalit women activists are using their “caste identity in order to take their interests beyond the realm of social
activism" (Govinda 187). They are participating in the political process and “creating ways in their experiences which can also be celebrated as political” (Govinda 188). Even though drama has been identified as “an area of neglect” (Dangle 265) within Dalit literature, the critics have identified a substantial body of plays and theatrical enactments that have addressed the concerns of Dalits. Nandi Bhatia is of the opinion that “However, popular forms of women’s dalit theatre such as Lavani have received some scholarly attention, discussions of women in dalit theatre in urban performance as well as in plays by women that address dalit issues are largely absent” (Bhatia 81). Nonetheless, women playwrights have found literary page and the stage as empowering avenues through which they aim at bringing in the consciousness and awareness of their plight and thereby social charges.

Implicit in these Dalit writings is an effort towards social change by destroying the caste system. Kusum Kumar though not Dalit, expresses her concern about her fellow women. Though she is a kayasth, her play “Listen Shefali” gives an insight into the working of caste politics. She selects a Harijan girl to be the protagonist of her play. In “Beyond Facades”, it is Nisha who identifies “a canker” which is “intolerance of difference” (Thankamma Joseph 257). She points out the absence of even a homogenous Hindu consciousness. In “Thirst” Vinodini - herself a Dalit activist - brings out the multiple oppressions suffered by Dalit men as well as women at the hands of upper-caste landlords. The purpose of these playwrights as explicated by Agnihotri is “instead of merely exposing the problem or the establishment” that perpetuates caste subordination, it is to “agitate against it” from the viewpoint of achieving “social and political revolution” (Agnihotri 27). The playwrights provide a critique of the ongoing discrimination that is also practised in urban settings along with villages as depicted in the plays. It can be concluded that these three plays are thus concerned with the sometimes invisible yet violent outcomes of caste prejudices on the everyday lives of Dalit women because of their “difference”, “subalternity” and “intersectionality”. All the three playwrights suggest novel performative techniques through a form in which the low-caste women resist their social exploitation.
Theatre in Hindi has a tradition spanning more than four hundred years. In many ways it represents the continuity of Sanskrit theatre in various spoken dialects of a larger part of northern India. An important aspect of Hindi theatre is the emergence of women playwrights and directors. The emergence of playwrights like Kusum Kumar, Tripurari Sharma, Shanti Mehrotra, Irpinder Puri Bhatia, Mannu Bhandari, Mridula Garg, Mrinal Pande, and directors like Kirti Jain, Anuradha Kapur, Anamika Haksar, Shanta Gandhi, Sheila Bhatia, Vijaya Mehta, Rekha Jain, Veenapani Chawla, Anjana Puri, Maya Rao, Rati Bartholomew, Amal Allana, Nadira Babbar and Joy Michael marks a major advance. These women have encroached upon the male-dominated space of the theatre. According to Ananda Lai, “Among Indian languages, Hindi theatre has possibly the largest number of active women writers and directors. They brought new style and vision with unconventional, evocative visual images and often explored untapped sources for their narrative structures” (Lai 2004 158).

Kusum Kumar is counted one among the well-known Hindi women playwrights. From 1976 onwards she completely dedicated herself to her creative writing for which she left her job from Delhi University College. Kumar (b. 1939) received her doctorate in “Natya Chintan” in 1975 from Punjab University. Her significant contribution is to Hindi drama. Three of her plays have been made into telefilms. Seven full length plays, ten one-act plays and two street-plays are to her credit. Her Suno Shefali was written during Sahitya Akademi Workshop in 1975 in Varanasi and published in 1978. As a creative writer, she primarily focuses on class, caste and gender issues in the social system especially Dalit experience - their exploitation, their search for dignity and selfhood. As a feminist writer she analyses and reconstructs the feminine identity of Shefali - a low-caste Harijan woman and her relationship with the dominant social, economic and political systems. The term Harijan is coined by Gandhi in order to end untouchability in the country. Kumar concentrates on the theme of Shefali’s forthcoming inter-caste marriage to a high-caste Bhramin, rich, influential politician’s son - Bakul. The play highlights the failure of Gandhian reformism which foregrounded the politics of social reconstruction and change which are also drawn on the philosophy of Jyotiba Phule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. “Gandhi baba Gandhi baba aja / Gandhi baba Gandhi baba aja / Aja baba
Gandhi baba!” (197) - this invocation in the play heightens the irony of the situation and satirises the Gandhian programme of “Harijan upliftment” as an answer to their problems. It shows how Shefali is humiliated and frustrated by the upper-caste people who wish to abuse her underprivileged status as a Harijan woman.

Numerous voices have been raised by women to express disappointment and outrage experienced by the low-caste people resulting in what Susan Friedman calls the “scripts of accusation . . . ‘I am not like you’, ‘You can never understand my perspective’” (Friedman 8, 11). Kumar has produced the castes which are socially determined and long-established categories that “shape human differences in certain seemingly predetermined ways” (Seshadri-Crooks 04). Caste belongs to the symbolic order of social structure. Kumar attributes to Shefali - “a Harijan girl from a poor family” (194) a strong voice to demand justice and equal treatment. Shefali’s mother cautioned her often telling, “We are Harijans [. . .] Listen Shefali, you listen carefully” (196) (emphasis mine). Though she is Harijan, “She has self respect” (207). Manan tells her, “You are courageous. Shefali! The kind of self-respect I saw in you, I seldom find in others” (214). She is as she herself tells, “I can not help saying what I feel” (214). Besides she is “an educated, cultured, gentle and fine girl” (219). According to Miss Sahib, “She is a mature girl” (222). Nowhere in the play does Shefali betray an iota of arrogance or immodesty. Sri Sri Satyamev Dikshit - the father of Bakul was of the opinion that, “She was not only pretty but also quite capable” (205). Though pretty, educated and cultured, she is primarily identified as a Harijan girl. She has “a greater awareness of potential identity” of herself and has the “heightened sense of the concrete socio-politico cultural differences between self and other” (Abdul 93). In order to support her family she works as an English teacher to Bakul’s father. Lisa Dodson and Jillian Dickert assume girls’ work as a survival strategy used by low income families to meet family demands i. e. girls become “prime substitute for parents” (Dodson et al. 328).

The main action of the play is in six scenes. Most of the action takes place primarily on the Ghats of the Yamuna river where Shefali and Bakul meet and it is here she befriends Manan the astrologer. The settings of the play move between the Ghats, the Shiv temple and Shefali’s home. Kumar has used the theatrical devices to highlight the socially constructed caste divisions. The Yamuna Ghat is demarcated by a bamboo partition into two parts on either side of which sit Shefali or Manan. This spatial demarcation brings out the extremes of caste separation. Besides, the temple on the river bank where Shefali spends her evenings with Bakul also evokes the practice of caste
exclusion as she is never shown entering it which she does only at the end of the play. Shefali - a Harijan girl and Bakul Dikshit - a Brahmin boy are in love with each other. They have loved each other for the past two years. In Shefali’s love case everything is so unnatural. The boy is god incarnate. He belongs to a rich, politically influential and high-caste Brahmin family. He proposes to her repeatedly but Shefali is in tatters. The complaint of Shefali is that he keeps proposing one moment and withdraws the next moment. Before she consents to marry Bakul she needs first to overcome her inhibitions about her situation and marriage. She thinks that Bakul is doing an accounting. She realises that Bakul and his father are motivated by a forthcoming election that project the father as a social worker. Her conscious rejection of such a marriage constitutes a form of resistance to humiliating caste practices and political selfishness and deception. She is perceived as a means for advancing the political career. But she strongly resists their selfish project of showcasing themselves as serving the national interests through caste integration. Shefali - the working class educated angry young Harijan woman refuses to seek such a reformist solution by marrying an upper-caste man.

The play generates awareness about how caste discrimination enters the domain of personal relationships to produce tension amongst the family members. It shows the difference between two families of Shefali and Bakul who occupy different ideological positions. But unfortunately her resistance has severe implications for her personal relationships. The play brings out this with great sensitivity both through the plot as well as through the title. Though Shefali wanted others also to “listen” to her, it is she who is forced to “listen” to others. Her self-conscious refusal constitutes her resistance to the caste practices and political deception.

The play is a feminist struggle and the questioning of the high-caste patriarchal control by a rebellious woman. Shefali is a rebel with rationalist attitude. Two primary concerns of power and freedom have traditionally been denied to women by placing them in the margins. The play basically reflects on Shefali’s emotional turmoil. Though poor, Shefali is hostile to the generous help provided by the upper-caste people to herself and to her family. By refusing it she asserts her self-respect. She speaks of her experiences of marginalisation. Right from childhood she found generosity surrounding her. She just has to accept it saying “yes sir... we are Harijans” (195). Her question is, “Why should we say that we are Harijans” (195). Their mother would get angry for rejecting the material help they were to receive from the school in terms of books, stationery and uniforms. When Shefali shares with Bakul her humiliating and psychologically oppressive feelings,
he pathologises her sensitivity as a “disease” that “should have been treated during childhood” (195). Her sadness or “Melancholia is not a pathology or a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism, but . . . a mechanism that helps reconstruct identity and take their deed to the various battles they must wage” (Munoz 355-56).

As the mother is unable to educate Shefali, Miss Sahib at whose house her mother is working took all her responsibility till Shefali graduated. Shefali knows that this does not mean that the outlook of society has changed totally towards the low-caste people. Whatever Miss Sahib does is an individual help which does not indicate an overall change in the societal perception of low-caste people. Throughout the play Shefali emphasises her frustrations and the prejudices faced by her because of her caste.

Sri Sri Satyamev Dikshit the father of Bakul is “a Brahmin by birth and social worker by choice” (205). He is as Manan Acharya declares, “You are a Chanakya yourself” (206). He is in an Export business. He paid Shefali a salary of Rs. 101 instead of Rs. 100 as a mark of his generosity and social concern. He wishes to tag along the two lovers with himself and his social service. In the name of service to mankind both Bakul and his father were playing with Shefali’s emotions and feelings. This is what she resists and fails to take decision regarding her marriage with Bakul. In reality for Dikshit it is not so an easy thing to allow his only one son to marry a Harijan girl. But he does so for the sake of popularity. He wanted people to praise his sense of social parity. He accepts it as his right and wishes to announce to the world that he has contributed towards the upliftment of a Harijan girl. Shefali will merely be a means for their self-advertisement. She knows it very well that Dikshit has accepted that marriage out of compulsion and selfishness and she resists such a marriage. She wants to tell that she is something more than just a seeker of their pity and generosity. She does not want to compromise for their favour because she knows, “marriage can become a mere formality for me (Shefali)” (194) where her self-respect gets hurt.

Unfortunately her self-respect is misunderstood by all as her ego and pride. Bakul feels, “Where will you go with such an enormous ego?” (197). Her mother predicts her future and tells, “Shefali, you are a victim of your pride. You will take your pride to your grave” (210). The mother fails to understand what her daughter is and what she wishes. Being the eldest daughter at home she has certain responsibilities. She contemplates “Who would not like to realise the dream one has nurtured for two long years? It is indeed painful when reality hits you and you realise that a selfish sophisticate disguised as a lover has hurt you and brought you to this state” (211). She resists their very intention -
the son comes declaring his love for Shefali and the father comes to bargain for marriage. “All of them are traders of their own happiness” (216). With rage Shefali says, “Cruel, savage, pretentious, like father like son!” (211). She gets another shock when she comes to know through her mother that if Shefali is not interested in marriage, Dikshit is willing to marry Shefali’s sister Kiran to Bakul. As both of them were unable to make any decision his father interferes as he sees his own interest in it. Once he interferes Bakul remains silent about his own marriage. He is under the very thumb of his father. Miss Sahib comments, “Bakul sits with you (his father) like a dead rat” (223). Bakul is of the opinion that those who are in love need to bear many a hurt. Miss Sahib tells him that it should not be “at the cost of one’s self-respect” (223). Bakul is no doubt a polite and generous lover. But he turns out into a bully with cunningness. He has a two-sided personality. Shefali is charged that she has become the victim of her own complexes. When Bakul tells her that it is not a joke to be a wife of Bakul and also to be the daughter-in-law of Sri Sri Satyamev Dikshit it is even more remarkable and she feels hurt with these words. She answers that everyone will then be doubly generous and considerate towards her. She does not want Bakul in generosity. She is forced to listen by each and everyone including her mother to accept generosity.

The mother’s concern in Bakul is that he is an eligible bachelor, young and of high caste. Further she wanted to see her two other daughters married off. She sees the marriage as a strategic move that will provide a way out of the family’s abject misery. The mother is worried that her daughter is going to ruin the rest her life “seeking equality” (210). But Shefali proclaims, “I am equal” (210). The social structure does not allow her to think that she is something more than just a seeker of others’ pity. In mother’s estimation Shefali’s marriage with Bakul will release her from the caste constraints to some extent. Hence she convinces Kiran - the younger sister of Shefali to marry Bakul. In spite of being aware of Shefali’s reasons for refusing the marriage, Kiran marries Bakul. It speaks of the inability not only of the upper castes to understand Shefali’s position as a Harijan woman but also that of her family members. Even though oppressed, this action defines how the Harijans submit themselves to patriarchal structures. And Kiran is the representative of such a ready to succumb group. Ironically Kiran becomes the handmaid and accepts the suppression of her own self by her own mother and the high-caste people.

Though the mother is not a proverbial bad mother, in the absence of her husband’s support she feels burdened. Besides, her decision to get Kiran married to Bakul speaks of
the invisible pressures of the society on a poor mother who has the responsibility of looking after three daughters and the ailing husband. For a moment Shefali doubts this mother-daughter relationship and exclaims, "Shall we become each other's support? Then everyone will change their hearts" (212). The mother-daughter relationship is crucial to the meaning of this play. It expresses the concern of a poor helpless mother to see her daughters married off. "Women discover the variety of values and opinions among themselves despite their shared gender" (Kitch 166). When Shefali delays in giving consent to the marriage, the mother sends her to Kanpur to her aunt Suman's house and in her absence gets Kiran married off to Bakul who also wanted to marry as early as possible in view of the forthcoming elections. At this juncture the image of motherhood as a protective feminine principle is also under attack from several directions. The primary bond between mother and children gets distorted by the pressures of caste and class oppressions. This has resulted in the mother's lack of empathy. But, it can also be assumed that being a mother of three grown up daughters and Harijan mother she does what suits her motherly responsibilities. Her rude behaviour can be connected to her own frustration that emanated from her economic deprivation and the responsibility of looking after the family and also the caste inequities which frame her behaviour within an exclusively socio-economic constraint and places her desires within the context and confines of the social world of caste-segregation.

Bakul could not consider Shefali's two long years' love for himself but under the pressure of forthcoming election and in order to win over the people and their votes he marries Kiran. Seeing her sister Kiran in bridal wear holding Bakul's hand, Shefali closes her eyes with anger and pain. She tries to swallow the pain. She feels humiliated by her own sister, mother and Bakul. Manan moves close to Shefali and says, "Listen Shefali [. . .]" (227) (emphasis mine). The playwright comments, "Thus written are the chronicles of cowards each day" (227) at the cost of the self-respect of poor women.

Feminism has engaged in larger ideological constructions. The selfhood of women is one among them. Shefali wants to assert her selfhood irrespective of her being Harijan. Her resistance stems from her desire to be considered equal and to assert her identity. Her "self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire . . . asking to be considered" (Fanon 128). Feminism has also forced reconsideration of the nature of the fate of the doubly marginalised women in the society. The play enquires into the psychological violence that is committed by the high-caste masters. In the play the processes of self-analysis by Shefali are used to gain a clearer understanding of the complex processes of
the formation of the selfhood of the protagonist. But the social reality does not permit Shefali to be on her own. Women, specifically Harijan women have very limited freedom and even less control over the constituents of the self - body, mind, intellect and emotions. The system does not allow her to dream, to relate her self and even to marry on her own accord. With her defiance of social norms she loses Bakul once for all to her sister Kiran and this is the price she has to pay. The use of the term “Harijan” by Kumar suggests the critique of Gandhian ideology of social reformation. In an attempt to uplift their status, he encouraged marriages of Hindu girls with Harijan boys. Kumar points out how such marriages were exploited for personal gains.

While discussing modern Hindi drama, Jaidev Taneja admires Kumar for sketching Shefali with “extreme sensitivity and skill . . . Shefali is a strong and self-respecting Harijan woman who possesses the courage to fight against the powerful and corrupt social forces, the capitalists and the public servants”. He further eulogises her for “challenging hypocritical leaders like Satyamev Dikshit and his spineless son Bakul” (Taneja 87). Shefali is not represented as the archetypal woman silently suffering and sacrificing for the family and for the society at large. She is aware that, “Marriage is a sacred institution. But marriages are made for political and economic reasons - love is not essential” (Harris et al. 868). Through Shefali, the playwright has let afloat the idea of woman’s desire to take decision and not to marry whenever a man wishes to. She is self-imposing and aware of her separate individuality and of her status in society. It can be said that Kumar has presented a “new modern woman” - educated, independent, having free will and a rebel with rationalist attitude.

The play is a stern analysis of the false image of the ideal politician and his son as contrasted with an aspiring, modernist, self aware, equality-seeking Harijan woman. She is depicted as one in control of her life; a person with strong and clear views. She insists that she can not be taken for granted. Her narrative throws light on the double-facedness of the society which theoretically worships the woman but practically dumps her as non-existent. The play speaks constantly about this rampant hypocrisy. The liberalised woman, the questioning woman or the woman in search of self-actualisation is always pulled back from the brink at the crucial moment of self-discovery. Thus the play highlights that in this newly emergent aesthetics woman’s personal identity is inextricably tied up with her social life.
The southern state of Kerala claims an ancient theatrical heritage, though the dramatic literature in Malayalam is of recent origin. Its oldest extant genre, Kutiyattam, fully established by “the ninth century, may well represent the longest-surviving continuous theatrical tradition in the world” (Lai 2004 244). The theatre was and is widely accepted as a normal means of expressing spiritual concepts and devotion. Christians too evolved a composite art called Chavittunatakam by combining elements of the native and the European traditions. Ananda Lai claims that “two important developments in drama took place in the 1940s: realistic writing modelled after Ibsen, and drama protesting against social evils to bring about changes in social customs and structures” (Lai 2004 246). The plays highlighting the problems of Nambudiri women and the landlord’s exploitations of tenants and petty wage earners are first of their kind. In 1980s, street plays stole the show. They were used as the effective medium to popularise adult literacy, science, environment protection and women’s liberation among the masses.

Catharine Thankamma Joseph has always been interested in theatre. She as an actor-director has won prizes at a number of Theatre Festivals. She taught English in Kerala and Delhi Universities. She continues to participate in the critical debate on the Indian theatre and performance aesthetics. At present she is based in Kochi, Kerala. Her significant approach to drama is to discover the inherent aesthetic qualities and creative potential of traditional elements and adapt them to the requirements of contemporary times as well as the theatre. She translated her own play Poimukhangalkkappuram into English as “Beyond Facades”. A simpler and shorter version of the present play was performed as a street play at Hansraj Theatre Festival 2000 and bagged the first prize. One of the meanings of the word “Façade” - /faˈsaːd/ is “the way that somebody/something appears to be, which is different from the way somebody/something really is” (Hornby 448). “Façade” is an appearance used to hide the reality. It suggests whatever is visible is exactly the reverse of the reality. The play accordingly unmasks the prejudices faced by the urban educated Dalits. It tries to provide the reader/audience with “multiple perspectives and alternate realities” (Thankamma 252) of the existing social and religio-political situations. The play is resistance to all social evils emanated from religion, politics and discrimination leading to differences. She has the potential
fundamentally to lay bare the world one views it and presents it as it is. She focuses on the loss of cultural meanings attached to religious practices and writes rather provocatively. The play has a capacious title because in it several interesting questions come up for discussion on female foeticide, pangs of Partition, the question of Dalits and the intolerance of difference, feelings of the sectarian divides, religious practices, Hindu culture and the distinctions among the Christians.

The play is more than a woman-question. It discusses the universally applicable themes. The questions that are raised are multifarious. The playwright stresses on characters' inner awareness and realisations. She depicts not only the changing status of women in the light of Kerala tradition and the subsequent cross-cultural transitions but also the influence of Christianity, modernism and globalisation. All these have been highlighted through different characters of the play - each representing a class or religion. The play portrays the conflicts between the high-caste and low-caste people. The social and religious life in Kerala has also been vividly depicted. The Scene 1 of the play starts with the entry of Mahabali and Ravan on the occasion of Onam celebration symbolically depicting the culture and tradition of original Kerala. The introduction of Ravan is symbolic of good and evil that co-exist side by side in the society. The introduction of Mahabali and Ravan provides an insight into class struggle. While Brahmanical nationalism was privileging the Ramayan and the Mahabharat and talking about establishing “Ram Rajya” which picked up the momentum with Gandhi; Mahatma Phule examined the Shudra, ati-Shudra and Charvaka traditions and constructed the anti-Ram Rajya alternative in his notion of “Bali Rajya” representing Dalits. He chose Bali as an alternative because he was a Shudra ruler who established just rule without allowing caste distinctions to operate. The Brahmanical Aryans killed Bali through the conspiracy of Vamanavatara. According to Phule, Vaman was the creation of the caste conspiracy. It is also essential to examine the Dravida nationalist anti-British discourses that E. V. Ramaswamy (EVR) constructed in the South. The Dravida nationalism was strongly rooted in Dravida or non-Aryan cultural history. EVR built a notion of “Ravan Rajya” as against the notion of “Ram Rajya” of Gandhiji. He publicly denounced the Hindu gods. As against the celebration of “Ram Leela” festivals in north India, the Dravida Kazhagam movement used to organise “Ravana Leela” festivals. Of course, it built its discourses more as an anti-British rather than anti-caste discourse. In the play the introduction of Mahabali is towards a just society with equality and Ravan represents the presence of good and evil in the society.
With this introduction, the play transforms from mythology into a realistic depiction of the present day contemporary life. At the beginning of the play the representation of doctors in the form of dogs clearly highlights the heinous crime of female foeticides committed by them. All other characters in the play represent a caste, a religion or a combination of some. Each of these characters narrates her/his customs and traditions thereby depicting the status of women in the culture. They also bring out the deteriorating status of women in Kerala irrespective of the social factors. Some characters highlight the influence of globalisation - that is migrating to Middle-East countries for the sake of jobs, introduction of purdah, caste-wise shops and so on.

The Scene 2 of the play presents the vibrant intellectual community of students. They try to explore answers to the questions related to gender, class and caste and discrimination. They are drawn from diverse communities. They focus their attention on the identity of a person and social orientation thereby speaking about their unique experiences. They are all aware of the deeply ingrained social character of their personal experiences and of a wider social reality as well as of the communal and political objectives of differential treatment of the subjects. They implicitly critique the caste-system that created these restrictions and reflect their socially moulded images. Even as they express their resistance, they also conform to conventional caste hierarchies as they are “already framed and constituted by a broader society” (Ahmed 31).

The six characters of the play represent six different communities and castes. Pradeep is “a half-and-half. Hindu-Ezhava father and Latin Christian mother. Both come under backward class categories but his paternal grandmother believed like the pigs in Animal Farm that some are more equal” (259). He himself is not an exception. He does not know and can not stand Dalit students of his class. He did not even think of protesting his grandmother who was vindictive and unforgiving towards his mother who was a Christian. The grandmother always mentioned her as “that yakshi your mother” (259). The grandmother was like a person with two masks. She loved her grandson but the sight of her Christian daughter-in-law would make her “bitter, vindictive, unforgiving” (259). It is “oppression by the oppressed . . . practised by those who were at the bottom of the scale themselves” (Sundar xviii). He questioned, “Is this what religion does to you? Snuff out the kindness and generosity that makes you human. If so, religion is all ego - human ego. It has nothing to do with God or spirituality” (259-260). The resisting nature of the playwright identifies such problems. Casteism has taken precedence over other alliances.
overshadowing the bonding between the people. The playwright reveals the shocking insensitivity of others to the plight of low-caste people.

Irfan says, "We Muslims are called fanatic, retrograde, anti-modern" (257). Being a Christian, Vivek regrets that the missionaries though do a lot of good work among Dalits, they encourage conversions. Kannan is a blind Dalit. The play has two female characters in Janaki and Nisha. Janaki belongs to a Shudra community and hence is looked down upon. She is even disregarded by the beggar who thinks it sin to eat alms provided by her. It highlights how irretrievably even a beggar of high-caste has been disciplined to hate the low-caste people. Nisha is a thekkathi, a Thiruvithankoor Nair. Her community is known as crooked opportunist community. The playwright makes clear the very purpose of her play through the character of Nisha. She attempts "to give voice to that nebulous thing that surrounds us these days - fear, fear to relate" (255). In doing so the playwright has gone against the conventional mode of staging the play and the well-worn track of a familiar script.

Nisha accepts the reality by telling, "We don't really accept the Ravi's (Dalits) of our college as legitimate entrants, do we? Try to recall the way we react to the questions the Dalit students ask in our classes? We sit wherever we please [. . .] here today, there tomorrow. It is not so with them. They occupy two rows - girls in one, boys in the other - hemmed in by caste and gender, preordained" (256). Dalits are unwelcome to ask questions in their classes and denied assimilation because of the built in impediments of caste as well as class differences. But it is not that they are insensitive but it is a kind of fear to react. No doubt it is easier for everybody to joke, banter around each other and skirt issues. But they say, "We are scared to scratch the surface of our friendship for fear of what we might unearth" (256). The differential treatment of Dalits is taken for granted as "stray incidents" (257). The playwright has identified the canker that is eating away the society. It is "intolerance of difference" (257) which she tries to acknowledge and expose.

Through the character of Irfan the playwright brings the picture of the state of Muslims - a very substantial population that had state power in many places. Irfan criticises some features of Muslim culture and exposes a discreet rebellion against them. Though he does not defend the use of their white caps and burqas he accepts it as a symbol which works in multiple ways. Irfan asks, "Do you know when this burqa business began in Kerala? Just about twenty years ago [. . .]. That was the time when many Malayalis - not just Muslims - went to work in the Gulf countries" (257). He also highlights the general fear regarding Muslims - "One must be wary of these Muslims . . .
They don’t practice family planning and now they are rich. They’ll soon outnumber us Hindus. Savdhan! Jagrata!” (257-258). Irfan’s contention is that he is not allowed to share the cultural space of the Hindus. Nisha then tells that there is no such thing as “a homogenous Hindu consciousness” (258). Among Hindus some claim a cultural superiority which is denied to others. The marriage alliances are shunned among these sections of Hindus. The playwright questions, “So where is the homogeneous Hindu Culture?” (258). She highlights the nature of difference within the same Hindu cultural constructs which is based not only on religion but also on languages they speak. As Arun Mukherjee puts it, “Among ourselves we are Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayali, Punjabi, Bengali, Goan, Parsi, Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Christian, etc. . . . But specifications do not stop here. For Hindus are divided among castes and subcastes and Muslim among sects” (Mukherjee x-xi). The same distinctions exist among the Christians too like Syrian Latin, Marthomite and Jacobite. Vivek says, “I hate organised religion [. . .] religion should be personal, not manipulated and sold” (259). The play also represents the ill-treatment meted out to Dalit Christian converts by the well-to-do orthodox Christians and missionaries in Kerala. The characters decide to expose the double standards of the society by staging a play. “This is a play and our findings have a voice and a form” (260).

Kannan is “a puny, dark-skinned sightless creature” (261) whose potent Dalit identity is constant in all the references. He says, “It transcends everything else, even my blindness” (260). Kannan is an “outsider within” (Collins 11). The term can be referred to the status of Dalits in the Indian society. They are no doubt within the Indian society but are outside the network of conversation and social associations. Hence Kannan gets a unique perspective of his class fellows as well as his own subordination. He is of the opinion that physical violence, irrational hatred and feelings of rejection are enough to destroy a Dalit who bears the burden of being discriminated against.

The Constitution of India contains a special provision for the promotion of Dalits in education, employment and political representation. But recent surveys and research have clearly shown that only the periphery of the vast Dalit community has been benefited by it. They do not “even scratch the surface of the problem” (Nayak 19). This situation has been highlighted by the playwright through Kannan. “National legislations and Constitution protections serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below the poverty line” (Maurya 78). Kannan though intelligent, is not recognised by anyone because of his “double reservation” (260) - he is a
handicapped Dalit - therefore he got 70% of marks in examination - i.e. 35% for being blind and another 35% for being handicap. They did not acknowledge Kannan's intelligence. Dalit subjects and the "prospect of assimilation ... is fraught with potential failure, shame and humiliation, not to mention the threatening indictments of self-denial and self-beratement" (Cheng 69). Kannan gives vent to his hidden grief. Once he along with his other Dalit friends was sitting in his room. Manikantan played a tune on his harmonium. Murali and Kannan sang. Suddenly they heard a roar. The door was kicked open. They were asked to shut up as it was not a Dalit hut. Though he could not tell what exactly happened there, one could easily imagine the events. The SP made them promise not to divulge what happened that night because "it would whip up communal feelings, lead to riots" (261). His concern was "genuine enough" (261). His is a politicised decision that reflects the power politics. He uses the oppressive hegemonic tactics to suppress the event. The victims' story is thus "systematically submerged, ignored, mistrusted or superseded" (Holloway 516). Thus the raw reality of everyday life is exposed bluntly by the playwright who wishes to treat Dalits as persons in their own right outside their caste roles. Kannan expresses his concern for the public. But tutored into a submissive role by society, his silence is in keeping with the minority roles accorded by the social pattern. Kannan and others discover to their dismay that they are ultimately exploited for promoting the political agendas of self-serving groups.

The playwright has strived to put the traumatic experiences of Dalit community into language. Dalits are denied the position of speaking subjects. They are deprived of the distinguishing mark of human being - the language and self-expression. The play gestures to the "under represented" history of Dalits who are "history's absences" (Anderson 137) and calls attention to the historic truth of the limitations of Dalit roles. They are required to compromise and quite often to lose their self. It implicitly critiques the caste system that created these restrictions. Gautam Bhadra discusses certain features of "subaltern mentality." It is a known fact that defiance, resistance or open disobedience are not the only typical qualities of the subaltern classes. "Submissiveness to authority in one context is as frequent as defiance in another. It is these two elements that together constitute subaltern mentality" (Bhadra 63). Because of this mentality the poor and the oppressed have, time and again, and in different histories, made voluntary sacrifices in favour of the rich and the dominant.

Kannan's mild self-castigating tune changes into assertive one. He says firmly, "I'm Kannan, not Dhritarashtra ..." (261). He puts into words how it feels to be effaced
as a human being of no worth. His crisis is the "crisis of subjectivity" (Morgenstern 114) suffered by all Dalits. He exhibits the experiences of Dalits and their social, religious and legal barriers against access to basic resources but Kannan's words operate to resist the essentialising identification of himself as a Dalit and handicap. His words "I won't blind myself further by refusing to recognise the reality around me . . ." (261) suggest his first step of self recognition, without which defiance is impossible.

The play does not work through a central character. The enactment is taken over by several equally important characters and their reflections. There are occasions when the heightened intense emotions and the outbursts of their inner selves are exhibited. But the playwright does not allow for any hysteries and melodrama. In fact, whatever she portrays through her characters, their social constraints, religious fervour and caste structure is a reflection of the contemporary Indian society which is uneven and unequal. She is able to highlight that all the characters share a common history of constraints and discrimination. She has included friendship and other support structures not necessarily based of kinship and goes on to highlight the barriers of religion. "In short, cross-racial representation is a risky business. It is never innocent; it can reinscribe stereotypes, subvert good intentions reenact forms of oppression. It can also open the way towards coalition, towards thematising the urgent dilemmas that now animate our lives. It can be one step towards subverting dominant conceptions . . ." (Kondo 63). The play exhibits the technical experimentation in portraying the experiences of the lowest and repressed sections of the society. One recurrent motif of this play is its questions which lead to the positive contribution to the awakening of social consciousness. It is hoped that those who "shared a marginal positionality" (Smith 1992 412) will definitely find something in the academy, above all others and the play throughout manifests what Georges Gusdorf describes as the "conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" (Gusdorf 29). The resisting nature of the playwright tries to provide an alternative to look for solution. It is not the "Ostrich syndrome" (258) of the playwright. She exposes the reality of the society, unmasks the appearances, exposes the facts and reflects on the historic truth experienced by all who are required to compromise forgetting their own selves, calling attention to the limitations of social and religious roles of the people.
x. Thirst

_Daaham_ (Telugu, 2002)

Vinodini

Trans: Sunitha Rani

The Telugu theatre has a long surviving history. "Evidence from sculpture and inscriptions indicates that theatrical activities flourished in the present south-eastern state of Andhra Pradesh as early as the second century B.C." (Lal 2004 476). In Telugu literature Vinodini has a unique place. She took a cue from the realistic drama which had started a new chapter in theatre history. The urgent social problems came to the fore in her writings where "class struggle, economic inequality, conflicts between landlords and labourers became the themes. Theatre turned a crusader for social justice" (Lal 2004 480) for her. Vinodini - a social worker, activist and herself a Dalit, devotes her writings to uplift her class-fellows - the Dalits. She in her writings responds with sensitivity to the needs of Dalits and records the painful discrimination that Dalits have suffered for centuries. She can be called a Dalit feminist. Her story "Black Ink" exposes with dramatic power how even a small girl of high-caste has been trained to dislike Dalits.

Vinodini wrote her play _Daaham_ as a street play in 2002. It was enacted by Dalits and has been a phenomenal success. She eloquently brings out the "multiple disadvantages" (Deulkar 255) suffered by Dalit women and projects generations of Dalit women’s oppressions of various magnitudes and the identity of Dalit women as against the upper-caste women. She can be called a Dalit womanist writer as she focuses on the oppressions underwent by Dalit women. Her approach to Dalit subject can be called the womanist approach. The term womanist was coined in 1979 by the novelist Alice Walker. In 1983, in her famous book _In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose_, she defined womanist as "a black feminist or feminist of color" (Walker 1983 xii). From the mid-1980s onwards, women from a host of disciplines adopted the term and used it to represent their concern for their fellow women. A womanist approach affirms the oppressions in the experiences of women of colour similar to those of Dalit women. It provides language and perspective that more closely approximates Dalit women’s daily social reality in the Indian context. As a womanist, Vinodini devotes her attention, energy and her writings for the upliftment of the socially underprivileged Dalits. Like Vinodini, there are many who wanted to bring transformation in the plight of these Dalits through their writings. It is called Dalit literature which has emerged as a distinct genre and has
taken its birth out of the excruciating experiences of caste discrimination, humiliation, exploitation, abuse and abject poverty undergone by the marginalised segments of the Indian society therefore "it is neither a pleasure giving literature of the fine sentiments and refined gestures" (Rose 116). Yet Dalit literature is purposive, aiming at bringing to light the way the life led by Dalits.

Vinodini's empathy for her people coupled with intense anger against their exploitation has made her a committed Dalit activist writer. She is with the downtrodden and therefore the suppressed, the exploited and the persecuted find their voice in her works. She believes that every writer is answerable to the people and therefore it is her responsibility to create awareness among people about the misery of Dalits who are the least privileged and highly dispossessed. Her play "Thirst" is marked by spontaneity of utterance and depth of feeling. It expresses resistance against oppressive caste system, and craving for justice, freedom and passionate faith in the ideals of humanism. One recurrent motif of the play is its questioning and the subversive attitude towards the high-caste Reddys. The play conveys a powerful message of equal-treatment to all irrespective of class and caste distinctions. Vinodini's is the clarion call to stop the unjust dominion over and the exploitation and the suppression of Dalits. She sincerely desires to return the dignity of life for Dalits and their share of land resources. Her role-model activist writings have voiced the subaltern not without anger and sentimentalism. By staging Dalit play "Thirst" Vinodoni has put the caste at the centre. The play takes for its theme the everyday life involved in the struggle for survival.

Thirst is an everyday experience that refers to one of the primary requirements of the body. The play exhibits India's unique social context where caste acts as a source and mechanism of exclusion for Dalits. In the play they are the "Malas" and stay in Malapalli where they have been pushed by the Reddys - the rich high-caste landlords. The act of pushing them to the fringes of village settlement leads to their multiple disadvantages and deprivation. Belonging to the lowest rung of the caste-system for many centuries in the past, their perpetual deprivation has acted as a powerful force in the construction of their essentialist identity as low-caste people with many appellations and Dalit being one among them. The play represents a conscious effort of the Malas to possess their own social and political space by demanding a separate pulley for their own people on the common-well dug by them. These "Marginalized and Nonhegemonic Masculinities" (Ishii-Kuntz 198) assert and organise themselves into a solidarity and unity which aims at their mobilisation towards consolidating themselves into a single group. Vinodini
recognises a "shared democratization of oppression" (Sandoval 33). Their exploitation is primarily political in character. According to Connell the hegemonic masculinities reflect the dominant position of men and the subordination of women, and furthermore, the dominant position of certain men over other men. Connell defines such marginalisation as "the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups" (Connell 80-81). In the play all Dalit men are abused by the Reddys. The caste system organises the society spatially which severely limits the mobility of low-caste people confining them to the ghettos. In the play though Dalits are the original inhabitants of the lands, they were pushed to the fringes of village settlements by the Reddys. This politics of difference, displacement and separation does not allow them to inhabit and share a common space. They could not enter the village without permission because it is alleged that they spread pollution. The awakened younger generation of Dalits does not want to just accept the verdicts of the Reddys. They do revolt against their hegemonic authority and also those from among their own caste who submitted themselves to the unjust power politics.

Dalit literature tries to enlighten Dalits and break their century-old shackles. It is a literature of commitment. As it is a revolutionary and transformational literature, it uses a powerful, sharp and biting language of resistance. It has its own linguistic peculiarities and aesthetics. The corpus of the play is centrally concerned with exploring Dalit anguish and exposing the innards of Dalit community. Here resistance is brought out through the pungent language used by Dalits. A number of writers have employed a wide variety of literary forms and devices as weapons of resistance. For Dalits it is their language which is a powerful weapon to resist. Their language contains contemptible swear words which they hurl at their oppressors.

Dasu is the son of a Dalit couple - Narasaiah and Souramma. He has a Tata - a grandfather and a brother who is married to Ganga. The play opens with Dasu entering the house. He realises that his mother has gone to fetch water from the village-well in the morning itself and has not yet returned even though it is afternoon. There is not a drop of water in the house. Gangi has gone to Reddy’s house to feed Reddy’s child leaving her own child crying behind. She has been going there for many days now. Dasu resists the very notion of going to Reddy’s house who exploits them so much. Pedda Reddy’s daughter-in-law does not have milk. They asked Gangi to come to feed her child as long as the child longed for mother’s milk. The child did not drink milk from anybody except Gangi. Gangi breast fed the child for the past many days. It is paradoxical that though all
Dalits are kept at distance, they allow Gangi the untouchable to feed their child. Dalit women are not only socially and economically exploited but also physiologically. Their bodies become "their essential and enslaving identity" (Butler 133) and are considered the property of high-caste people.

It is Gangi who successfully breaks through the female embodiment of pity, nurturing and sustenance thereby helping achieve the desired goal of her fellow beings. At the critical juncture Gangi takes recourse to save the interests of her community. Hers is an open revolt though not with trumpets and banners. Visibly, loudly and publicly she denies feeding Reddy's child. Gangi a victim, however timid, comes to regard herself as an object of exploitation. She steps into a role of a saviour of her people who are victimised. Slowly but assertively she tells Reddy's, "If you admit your mistake, I will feed the child" (511). She realises survival with dignity requires ruthlessness. Besides Gangi, Vinodini has created other strong female characters in Souramana, Punnamma, Pushpamma and Rosamavva. They are "icons of female strength" (Kondo 53) genuinely attempting to be supportive. Privileged as a powerful writer, Vinodini inscribes the solidarity and sisterhood of Dalit women. Naples writes of the women's solidarity as "powerful resources for promoting resistance strategies, especially for those most marginalised" (Naples 231).

Since the Malas are untouchables, it is considered that their touch, even their shadow is capable of polluting the water of the well therefore they should not go close to the well used by upper-caste people. That day Souramma waited and waited at the village-well and not a single upper-caste woman could pour water to her. When it was afternoon, she felt dizzy. Seeing no one around, she went to the well and put the rope to her pot. The very moment all women of upper-caste attack her by abusing her, breaking her pitcher and calling bad names to her. She too calls them bitches since they did not allow her to have water from the well. She is not a meek, submissive woman. Pedda Reddy says, "Souramma is not a simple woman . . . if we don’t say anything she’ll think we are a bunch of eunuchs" (498). The very deed of hers shocks her husband Narasaiah and her father-in-law. But she does not feel a cringe. She is of the opinion that the village is not anybody's private property. According to her all including Dalits are the equal sharers of the entire village property. She questions, "Yes. What else could I do! . . . How long could I wait?" (493). Souramma's father-in-law is shocked to hear that she tied the rope. All feel agitated. But it is Dasu her son who comes forward to punish the upper-
caste people. He does not want to keep quiet when she is beaten up so badly and abused indecently by upper-caste women.

Dasu’s uncle fought to have a separate pulley of their own but was killed and his body was hung from the tree. Since then nobody has dared asking for separate pulley on the village-well, which they had dug. It is Rosammavva who dares and resists the power of Reddys. She was bold enough to resist the wrath of landlords and put the rope on the pulley. She criticised the villagers for their inaction. She was brave enough to go to Pedda Reddy’s house and accuse him for having killed and hung their boy from the tree. But Reddy broke her legs. Even after getting her legs broken her anger did not subside. Though helpless she resisted them through her words and curses. “One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them. Yet this fear is best sustained by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples” (West 1993 122). The upper-caste supremacist ideology is thus based first and foremost on the degradation, humiliation and mutilation of Dalit bodies in order to control them. Vinodini presents a startling picture of the crippling effects of social exclusion, untouchability, poverty and misery on the minds of the long-suffering and long-silenced Dalit women. Next is Pushpamma who narrates the story of murder - it is past thirty years that Dasu’s uncle claimed their share in common village-well water but was killed. When Subba Reddy, the father of Pedda Reddy, requested Dalits to dig a well, Dasu’s uncle had demanded a fifth pulley exclusively for Dalits. If anyone used derogatory words for his people before him, he would not tolerate it. “If you talk like that again, we may have to talk the same way” (501) he would say. But he was hung from the tree for asking justice. The high-caste people did not want low-caste people to go as equals with them. Therefore they had played a serious deception. They had conspired to deny Dalits their share of water. According to Narasaiah it has been happening and whether Dalits agree or not, whatever they say is the rule, the final judgement.

Another Dalit woman named Punnamma too resists and hates sitting quiet. She sees no use in keeping quiet then after so many years. The village women, including the younger generation boys do not want to live as the elders have done, and degrade themselves like beggars to take water that someone pours into their vessels out of charity. They want it as their right. They are ready to face the consequences. Pushpamma comes forward first to offer her assistance in their endeavour. When Dalits are charged that if at all they touch the well, the well goes dry, Pushpamma resists their claim by asking,
“What, will the well go dry if we go to fill water... Who dug the well in the first place? You, your father or your upper caste people?” (507-508). It is she who narrates at length the tale of treachery of the Reddys’ and how they cheated them. She implies that it is Dalits who are needed by upper-caste people. Dalits’ resistance to suppression and their criticism is powerfully brought out by their language and angry retort. They at this juncture use words as weapons to defend their cause. Indirectly they teach and educate all Dalits not to be afraid of the upper-caste landlords. Their words suggest they should never fear another person without reason. The language used by Souramma, her son Dasu and other Dalits sound unpleasant and unrefined, but as they are brought up in such surrounding that they utter those words without any qualm. It has been their way of life. Raju - a young Dalit speaks irritatedly, “How should we talk then? Should we talk bending and saluting to you? Otherwise should we talk urinating?” (505). Their language includes rude nicknames, obscene and abusive words and unrefined gestures. Laughter, ridicule, sarcasm, lampoon, humour, jokes and indignant gestures are powerful weapons which have their own aesthetic values in Dalit literature. The playwright has handled some of these very skillfully to resist the oppression meted out to her own community people. She introduces a new generation Dalits who resist oppression through powerful words, gestures and actions.

The height of resistance is brought out when the landlord speaks of shaving Souramma’s head and parading naked around the village for her mistake. Bursting with anger Dasu shouts, “Did he say [ . . ] unclothe [ . . ] whom [ . . ] my amma! [ . . ] Will I leave that fellow alive when he has said so much against my mother?” (499). Thereby Dasu has got a number of questions to ask the upper-caste people, “Who has decided what the custom should be? Who has decided the amount of money to be paid as fine? Who has given you the right to do this?” (506). He makes it clear that he and all of them are not the slaves of landlord. Gone are the days when Dalits cringed before the landlords and paid homage to them. The present youth dare to hurl at the landlords the volleys of powerful words of resistance and disrespect. The conversation of Dalits reveals their awareness about their own rights, their indomitable spirit, courage and sarcasm.

Vinodini inevitably reinscribes the stereotypes of miserable elderly Dalits who are “often complicit in maintaining standards that oppress them” (Griffin 521). But she has also portrayed the enlightened, assertive Dalits inclusive of both men and women who behave contrary to the submissive role of elders. Dasu is not ready to go to meet Pedda Reddy. He asks, “They are at fault, they started the quarrel [ . . ] why should we go?”
(496). When the elderly members of the Dalit community go to meet the landlord Pedda Reddy, he accuses Narasaiah, “Your wife (Souramma) has given birth to four children like a pig [. . .] She still does not know? . . . It seems that they have forgotten the old stories” (497). According to him, Souramma’s is a serious matter because it has involved the women of Reddys. The landlord is so worried that that if he forgives them they may take more liberty. The landlords have been crushing Dalits to the depths and they wish to do so now also. Caste system could be maintained only through a structure of subordination of the low-caste body.

The reversal of fortune is well exemplified at the end of the play. It is the climax of the play. Dalits are scared neither of the landlord nor his money. Now they have a chance to humble the Reddys. In the assembly which was called to punish Souramma, they demand their own pulley on the common well. Pedda Reddy’s daughter-in-law and his wife Yashodamma come to the village-assembly and request Ganga to feed the child but Ganga stands expressionless. Ganga’s husband too tells that till the assembly is finalised, Ganga will not feed the child. Ganga at that juncture tells that whether they give the fifth pulley to the village-well or not, they will put the pulley and draw water anyway. “We haven’t come only for the pulley . . . That’s not why we come to the assembly today. We want that for beating my mother-in-law . . . for abusing our whole caste as pigs [ . . . ] you admit your mistake” (511). Accordingly it is only when the upper-caste women ask forgiveness holding their ears and touching their cheeks that Ganga sits down with their child in her lap. Ganga is assertive enough to have her right. Her resistance to the oppressive caste-system is seen in her assertion and reaction to the moment. It is powerfully brought out by her words and actions.

Words are indeed the powerful weapons of resistance for the oppressed. Unless they hit back, the oppressor would continue to subjugate them. Vinodini’s writing is raw, earthy and natural. Their resistance is significant and effective in the long run. Abusive words which are everyday forms of resistance make no headline. These are forms of struggle that are entirely indigenous to the village sphere. It is heartening to see the exploited, humiliated, suppressed, ill-treated, marginalised and dehumanised Dalits resisting subjugation by uniting themselves into a solid group.

The kinds of experience and resistance that are staged in Dalit plays have had no models before. One of the first things that strike readers of this play is the dehumanising impact of caste oppression. This play documents their struggles against poverty, deprivation, discrimination and caste-violence. They experience their ordinary selves in a
constant state of conflict with the power structure ordained by caste-system. As one sees the concern of Dasu and his uncle for the people of his caste, it can be discerned that a sense of resistance is internalised. That is what turns them into activists. The discourse of the play is anchored in the context of resistance and affirmation. It is women in majority who raise their voices. Whereas Dasu’s grandfather is scared of the consequences.

It can be concluded here that through such staging of confrontation Dalit plays question nationalist discourses of integration and homogeneity. They also clearly indicate how Dalits have been left out of the nationalist project. The way the village-assembly deliberates upon matters incurs the wrath of low-caste people. The judgement of the assembly is final and binding on every Dalit. The assembly obviously is a patriarchal institution. The absolute loyalty demanded by its authority sets Dalit youth and women to resistance despite the fact that if they are excommunicated they have nowhere to go. The caste identity is the only identity they have. The resistance by all Dalit women is an act of asserting their individuality. Yet “Thirst” is a powerful aesthetics of Dalit life, pain and resistance. The strength of collaborative action is not only a prime strategy of resistance, but it keeps them going on and reaffirms their commitment to social change.
(b) Islamic Feminist Theory and Contesting "Seclusion"

Introduction to the plays “Woman” (Urdu, 1937) by Rasheed Jahan and “Purdah” (Urdu, 2002) by Jameela Nishat

Islamic Feminist Theory:

Islamic feminism comes under Feminist Theology which, as a movement reconsiders the religious traditions and scriptures from a feminist perspective. Some of the goals of feminist theology include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities; reinterpreting male dominated imagery and languages about God; determining women’s place in relation to career and motherhood; and studying the images of women in scriptures. The branches of feminist theology are Christian feminism, Islamic feminism, Jewish feminism, and Secular and Atheist feminism. Islamic feminism advocates women’s rights, gender equality and social justice grounded within the Islamic framework. The advocates seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Quran and encourage the questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Quran (the holy text), hadith (sayings of Muhammad) and Sharia (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society. The pioneers of the movement have also utilised Secular and Western feminist discourses and recognised the role of Islamic feminism as part of an integrated global feminist movement.

The very recent phenomenon called Islamic feminism is basically a discourse whose strategy is primarily script related. The theory of Islamic feminism continues to be grounded in tafsir that is “the Quranic interpretation”. The parallel word for feminism in Arabic that has been used by Arabic speaking feminists is nisa’iyyah. For Islamic feminists, Islam contains within it the impetus to challenge oppressive social structures in whichever form they come, including oppressive patriarchal structures. Muslim women are moving beyond passive knowledge of religion by engaging in ijtihad that is “the independent investigation and interpretatin of religious sources”. They are also moving beyond patriarchal protection and re-figuring obedience. Islamic feminist tafsir elaborates the compelling explanation of equality of all human beings, male and female alike, while at the same time recognising gender difference. The new Islamic feminist theorists and interpreters who are becoming new authorities include: Asma Barlas (Pakistani), Riffat Hassan (Pakistani), Amina Wadud Muhsin (African-American), Ziba Mir-Hosseini (Iranian), Qudsiya Mirza (Iranian) and Aziza al-Hibri (Lebanese).
A concise definition of Islamic feminism has been provided by Margot Badran. To her “it is a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminism is both highly contested and firmly embraced. There has been much misunderstanding, misrepresentation and mischief concerning Islamic feminism” (Badran 17). In short, Islamic feminism points out that Islam as a religion does not discriminate women but rather it is the patriarchal system that has been established on the basis of a highly selective interpretation of the normative sources especially the Qur'an. Islamic feminism strives to benefit Muslims of both sexes everywhere.

Islamic feminism is a global phenomenon. It began to be visible in the 1990s in various global locations. It is from the writings of Muslims that the term is discovered. Already by the mid-1990s, there was growing evidence of Islamic feminism as a term created and circulated by Muslims in far-flung corners of the globe. It is also growing in Muslim Diaspora and convert-communities in the West. The new gender-sensitive or what can be called "feminist hermeneutics" (Badran 21) renders confirmation of gender equality in the Qur'an. Islamic feminism helps these women untangle patriarchy and religion. It gives them the ways of understanding gender equality, societal opportunity and their own potential. The discourse of Islamic feminism is thus based on the interpretation of the scriptural sources from the perspective of gender justice.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini in her “Muslim Women’s Quest for Equality” tells that because of its radical approach, Islamic feminism has been considered the unwanted child of political Islam (Mir-Hosseini 629-645). Along with deconstructing the notion of female dependency and male protection, Islamic feminists elaborate the idea of mutual support and protection of males and females specifically citing the two genders - “The believers, male and female, are protectors of one another.” (Quran 9:71). The Quran reproached those who believed woman to be inferior to men (16:57-59) and repeatedly gives expression to the need for treating men and women with equity (2:228, 231; 4:19). Therefore, if Muslim women experience discrimination at any place or time, they are not to lay the blame on Islam but on the un-Islamic nature of the societies and the failure to fulfil its directives.

Thus the basic assumption of Islamic feminism is that the Quran affirms the principle of equality of all human beings but that the practice of equality of women and men has been impeded by patriarchal ideology and practices. "Islamic jurisprudence,
fiqh, consolidated in its classical form in the 9th century, was itself heavily saturated with the patriarchal thinking and behaviours of the day. It is this patriarchally-inflected jurisprudence that has informed the various contemporary formulations of the Shari’a. The hadith, the reported, but not always authentic, sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohamed, have also been often used to shore up patriarchal ideas and practices. Sometimes the hadiths, as just suggested, are of questionable provenance or reliability, and sometimes they are used out of context. Thus a priority of Islamic feminism is to go straight to Islam’s fundamental and central holy text, the Qur’an, in an effort to recuperate its egalitarian message. Some women focus exclusively on the Qur’an (Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan, Saudi Arabian Fatima Naseef); others apply their rereading of the Qur’an to their examination of the various formulations of the Shari’a (Lebanese Aziza al-Hibri, Pakistani Shaheen Sardar Ali); while others focus on re-examining the hadith (Moroccan Fatima Mernissi, Turkish Hidayet Tuksal)” (Badran 21).

In approaching the Qur’an, women bring to their readings their own experiences and questions as women. They point out that much of the interpretation was based on men’s experiences and male-centred questions. In re-examining the Qur’an, Sharia and hadith, Islamic feminists are making appropriate arguments that Islam does not condone violence against women. They promote the notion that violence against women is indeed anti-Islamic. The Malaysian group “Sisters of Islam” is one among many that have decried violence against women perpetrated in the name of Islam in a pamphlet they distributed widely. South African Saadiya Sheikh has also completed a study on the subject and is currently looking at the notions of sexuality in Islamic religious texts. According to Margot Badran Islamic feminism is more radical than Muslims’ Secular feminisms have been. Islamic feminism insists on full equality of women and men across the public as well as the private sphere. It argues that women may be heads of state, leaders of congregational prayer, judges and muftis. In some Muslim majority countries, Muslim women function as judges, prime ministers and the heads of state. The Muslim majority countries produced several female heads of states and prime ministers: Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Mame Madior Boye of Senegal, Tansu Ciller of Turkey and Kaqusha Jashari of Kosovo. Bangladesh is the second country in the world (after Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth I in 16th century England) to have one female head of state follow another, those two being Khalida Zia and Sheikh Hasina.
The distinction between Secular feminist discourse and Islamic feminist discourse is that the latter gets articulated within a more exclusively Islamic paradigm. Secular feminism refers to feminist movements in the Muslim world which have drawn their inspiration from the Western model. Secular feminists call for reforms outside the religious paradigm. They try to promote a secularised version which allows for equality of men and women. There is a third category of feminism in Islam which is called Muslim feminism. It adopts a worldview in which Islam can be reinterpreted in order to promote concept of equality between men and women and for whom freedom of choice plays an important part in the expression of faith. The central focus of all these feminisms remains the explanation of gender equality in Islam.

There is an increased evidence of the application of Islamic feminist theory in practice. The terms Islamic feminism and Islamic feminists are now more widely accepted. Islamic feminism is also the part of the philosophy and the politics of the movement of Progressive Islam. The term Progressive Islam appeared for the first time in South Africa in the 1990s. Thereby the Progressive Muslim Union was formed in the United States and the Progressive British Muslims Group was launched in London at the House of Commons. The first international conference on Islamic feminism was held in Barcelona for three days (October 27-29, 2005). Over 400 delegates assembled in Barcelona with the intention of internationally disseminating the emergent movement of Muslim women for human rights known as the “gender jihad”. Islamic feminists demanded gender equality or “gender jihad” - a term coined by a progressive Imam A. Rashid Omar in South Africa in July 2005 - within the Muslim community. It is possible to view Islamic feminism as a specialised branch of the jihad against social injustice. Another priority of the Conference was to initiate collaboration between Muslim women and the global feminist movement. During the course of the meeting, it became clear that Islamic feminism is a reality in many countries with the majority Muslim population. There was a particularly moving moment when the feminist scholar Amina Wadud, lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Commonwealth University of Virginia (USA), rendered the Friday khutba (sermon to be delivered prior to every Friday, Ramzaan and Bakrid Namaaz/prayers) and led the mixed male and female audience in prayer. The Conference concluded that Islamic feminism is an emergent reality which must be seen as an alternative to the dominant sexist readings; this form of feminism derives from the Quranic revelation and is based on the conviction that the Quran does not justify patriarchy; and Islam can liberate women and change their current status.
Even earlier to the advent of Islamic feminism there were many Muslim women who strived for elaborating and living a gender-egalitarian Islam which they understood to be at the very core of the religion. In the pre-modern era, Nana Asma’u Fodio (1793-1864) championed women’s rights through the “Yan Taru”, a women disciplines’ movement. She was a princess, poet and teacher. She remains a revered figure in northern Nigeria. “Asma’u’s role as a teacher in a society torn apart by warfare was to unify diverse peoples through a religious philosophy that emphasised in its precepts the obligation to practice generous social welfare as well as to educate every soul, regardless of gender or social position” (Mack and Boyd 12). Another pre-modern feminist was Persian poet and martyr Tahirih. Martha L. Root in her *Tahirih the Pure* (2000) writes about Tahirih who proclaimed “you can kill me as soon as you like but you can not stop the emancipation of women”. She undertook Quranic exegesis and openly denounced polygyny, the wearing of the veil and other restraints put upon women. In 1852, Tahirih was strangled to death for her cause. Recently Islamic feminists have begun advocating for equality in the mosque and equality in prayer. Aisha Abd al-Rahman also undertook Quranic exegesis and began publishing her popular books in 1959. The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi is one of the earliest to articulate Islamic feminism without taking on an Islamic feminist identity. Her major work *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* is regarded as a classic book in the US.

The central argument of Indian Islamic feminists is that the *Quran* guarantees a number of rights to women which are constantly denied to them as a consequence of prevailing patriarchal interpretations. “These new Muslim actors in local, national, and transnational spaces argue that believing Muslims do not depend on religious authorities in order to understand the Koran, but that they can rather and should indeed read and interpret the Koran for themselves” (Schneider 57). The historians like Barbara Metcalf (1990), Gail Minault (1998) and Azra Asghar Ali (2000) have shown that Muslim women and men alike have constantly strived for new or re-definitions of existing women’s rights since the second half of the 19th century. Jameela Nishat in her Urdu play *Purdah* (2002) makes a mention of Mushaira that was held in Hyderabad in the 1930s. The socially committed poets like Sogra Humayun Mirza, Nausaba Khatoon, Basheerunnisa Begum, Sara Begum Sara, Soghra Begum, Safiya Begum, Qamar, Zainab Begum and Jamalunnaisa Begum Salma took part. Zainab Begum questions, “Kis shariat mein likha hai pardah e hiswa ka hukm / Ehad mein hazrat ke thi ghar ghar azaad auratey” (In which Shariat is written the tenet of purdah for women; in the time of the
Prophet the women were as free as men) (quoted in Nishat 548). Writing about Muslim women in the grand narratives or making them more visible as social actors is being undertaken by many writers such as Ismat Chughtai, Quarratulain Hyder, Intiaz Dharker and Jilani Bano who have pointed out that Islam as a religion does not discriminate women but it is the established patriarchal system that has led to the male domination.

At present, the poetic voices and socio-political actions of Tamil author and poet Salma, Telugu poet Shajahana and Urdu poet and activist Jameela Nishat, among others, are getting some attention on an international level. In the Indian context, Nigar Ataulla, editor of magazine *Islamic Voice* (Bangalore) puts it, whenever one talks of the status of Muslim women, the focus invariably falls on the question of polygamy, the veil and triple talaq. She calls this essentialist perception of Muslim woman a "dangerous triangle" (Ataulla 2006) and her observation is confirmed by a study on the perception of the Muslim minority in India.

The Indian state has always been actively involved in the definition and construction of the family and private sphere. This can be best exemplified by post-colonial interventions of the Indian state in Muslim Personal Law (Chhachhi 144-175). Many of the articles are highlighting the activities of the Muslim Women's Organisations. By increasingly going public and questioning the established religious authorities and their knowledge production, these new Muslim actors are facing a lot of opposition and hostility, not only in India or South Asia, but also on a global level (Zaman 2002).

Islamic organisations like Jammat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) have created the precondition for Islamic feminism. Nasira Khanum, the president of this sub-organisation quoted: "Islam advocates protection of women rights but men-dominated society hides the facts. Women themselves should know about their rights and learn to snatch them if denied" (Khanum 2006). Irfan Ahmad uses the concept of Islamic feminism as an analytical category for what he calls a transformative movement within Islamist groups in India (Ahmad 549-575).

When observed the activities of the large number of women writers, it can be concluded that literature especially the genre of drama provides these women with a public space for articulation of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic principles by male religious authorities. In this regard Rasheed Jahan (1905-1952) a doctor by profession has contributed extraordinarily towards women empowerment. She was a dedicated social reformer, activist and prolific writer. She focused on women's issues and dared to challenge the patriarchy with more honesty. In her plays women's issues have received
the attention they deserve. Her play *Aurat* published in 1937 is a bold attempt to lay bare many of the cruelties imposed upon women with the sanction of society and religion. It has been produced repeatedly over the years with resounding success. A founding member of the Progressive Writer’s Association (PWA) she used the literary-critical possibilities that PWA provided her with and went on articulating her concerns in her writings. Even her name became *Angarewali* (The Angry Woman Rasheed Jahan). She helped to found the Indian Progressive Writers Movement (IPWM) and was the only woman writer in the first anthology produced by IPWM. In the play *Aurat* Rasheed Jahan expresses her understanding of the Shariat. In India, thus the writings by women “in many cases precede the emergence of Islamic feminism in the 1990s” (Schneider 67). Jameela Nishat in her play *Purdah* discusses the Shariat. These plays focus on the enormous potential and the emergence of new female subjectivities in India.

It can hardly be ignored any longer that Muslim women have an increasingly audible voice in the newly emerging Muslim public sphere. Like many of their male counterparts, they encourage believing Muslims to read and to interpret the *Quran* for themselves and to find new ways to bring their religious belief in accordance with the prerequisites of today’s life. And perhaps even more pronounced, Muslim women argue that the modernisation and the future of the Muslim women depend on the achievement of gender equality within the community.

**Contesting “Seclusion”**

The term “seclusion” means the state of being private and away from and of having little contact with other people. It is a derivative of “seclude” which means “to keep (someone) away from the other people”. The word which is originally from Middle English is used in the sense of “obstruct access to”. It is derived from Latin word *secludere*, from *se* “apart” + *cludere* “to shut” (Soanes et al. 1299). “Seclusion” generally means seclusion of women from public observation by means of concealing-clothing and also the walled enclosures as well as screens and curtains within the home. “Seclusion” by clothing refers to various modes of shielding women from the sight primarily of men other than their husbands or men of their natal family. It takes two forms - physical segregation of women from men and the requirement for women to cover their bodies and conceal themselves with clothing. It has many subtle forms and the dress, especially purdah is the most superficial and the most visible of these. The concept of purdah covers a wide interpretation of behaviour and garments. Meredith Borthwick writes, “*Purdah*
was a form of social control by men over women's behaviour which implied a view of women as simultaneously sexually vulnerable and in need of protection; and sexually aggressive and in need of control” (Borthwick 228). Purdah is a visible mode of seclusion which can be explained as a system of gender segregation.

According to Concise Oxford English Dictionary purdah means “the practice in certain Muslim and Hindu societies of screening women from men or strangers by means of a curtain or all-enveloping clothes” (Soanes et al. 1166). It exists in different ways and has different implications in two religious structures. The different caste groups and communities have different types of purdah with different names. The limits imposed by these practices vary accordingly. Generally women belonging to upper class practise all aspects of seclusion since they can afford not going out of the house for earning livelihood. Seclusion produces spaces of their own for women in the houses and outside the house in distinct ways. The social practice of purdah is not just a form of dress or a custom but a form of social system. It is a broad term used in Hindu and Muslim culture. The practice of seclusion is not just wearing the veil over the head covering the face or the dress which covers the body from top to ankles but it is seclusion as a whole. Much of the focus regarding the evaluation of and the criticism on “Seclusion” have tended to be on the practices of purdah among Muslims as well as Hindus. Comparatively the physical seclusion and veiling practices among the Hindus have been the neglected areas in the social science and also literature.

The word purdah is derived from Urdu and Persian “parda” which means veil or curtain. Purdah, as a part of Muslim culture and tradition, is the practice of completely covering a woman’s body by wearing a loose body-covering robe called the burqua and a covering for head and eyes called hijab and naqab respectively. Purdah in Indian Muslim culture keeps sexually mature women, married as well as unmarried, apart from society outside their families. The Quran does state that both men and women should be dressed modestly (33:59-60, 24:30-31). It however does not use the words veil, hijab, burqa, chadar or abaya. It uses the words jilbab meaning cloak and khumur meaning shawl. These do not cover the face, hands or feet. The whole body covering with the burqa, chadar, and other items of clothing is a tradition and cultural manifest from a conservative reading of the Quran.

Among the Hindus the practice of veiling is called “ghunghat” which means a married woman makes it sure that her head is properly covered. Hindu women especially from North India cover their faces till their chin with the help of the pallu of their sarees.
Thus the practices of Hindu and Muslim veiling are referred to as ghunghat and purdah respectively. The first principle of veiling of Hindu women especially in North India is that only married women practice ghunghat which may range from covering the head or till chin. The married women observe ghunghat in their husband’s house - in front of older male and female relatives to their husbands, and it sometimes extends to not being seen at all.

Shaheeda Lateef writes, “There has been and continues to be considerable discussion on the origins of the custom of seclusion of women in India. This discussion has varied from those who ascribe it entirely to the advent of Muslim rule in India to conceding that some form of seclusion existed before Muslim rule attributing it to social structures which have reinforced the system” (quoted in Jain 1996 252). Gandhiji in his “The Purdah” opines that “I am of the opinion that the purdah in India is a recent institution and was adopted during the period of Hindu decline. In the age when proud Draupadi and spotless Sita lived, there could be no purdah. Gargi could not have held her discourses from behind the purdah. Nor is the purdah universal in India. It is unknown in the Deccan, Gujarat and the Punjab. It is unknown among the peasantry, and one does not hear of any untoward consequences of the comparative freedom which women in these provinces and among the peasantry enjoy. Nor will it be just to say that the women or men in the other parts of the world are less moral because of the absence of the purdah system” (Gandhi 96). With the spread of missionary activity by the mid-19th century, the missionary critiques condemning “restrictions on women’s education, early marriage and gender segregation (i. e. pardah and zenana)” concluded that “the further one goes in India from South to North the stronger and the more insurmountable does the great barrier wall is erected about the weaker sex become: it is strongest of all in those districts where the influence of religion and law that were seen as responsible for the low position of women: the missionaries led a campaign to ‘proselytise among women’ ” (Moaddel 113). Mahatma Gandhiji expresses the same opinion in his “Tear Down The Purdah” when he says, “Whenever I have gone to Bengal, Bihar or the United Provinces, I have observed the purdah system more strictly followed than in the other provinces” (Gandhi 94).

Ideologically seclusion is the oldest form of colonisation, of domination and of control. In the Ramayan, Lakshman Rekha indicates towards seclusion. Besides, when Sita encounters Ravan, she places a piece of straw between them prior to speaking. The commentators are in general agreement that the interposition of the straw is done to avoid
the impropriety on Sita’s part of speaking directly to a man other than her husband. Evidently it is symbolic of screening and excluding women from the gaze of unrelated men (Richman 393).

While the terms ghunghat and purdah are used specifically for the covering of the body, they also - as Janaki Abraham finds out in her case study on veiling in North India - imply the effacement of woman also through the veiling of the eyes and the voice - ankha ka purdah (the purdah of the eyes) and awaz ka purdah (the purdah of voice) (Abraham 200). While a veiled woman speaks in a hushed voice with her mother-in-law, she cannot speak directly to her father-in-law at all. She cannot make eye contact and also the sounds like laughing. Veiling also symbolises the deference and respect. Sylvia Vatuk makes this point in relation to ghunghat in Meerut, North India. She brings out the point that, “within the extended family this form of avoidance . . . is said be primarily a way of preventing disrespect by a young wife to male elders” (Vatuk 113). Veiling is a way in which familial hierarchy is enforced. As Ursula Sharma says, “Ghunghat is a means of rendering a woman socially invisible” (Sharma 223). It is linked to the expression of her subordination in her marital home and among her relatives. Ursula Sharma also argues that ghunghat is best understood as a “means of controlling the behaviour of in-marrying women” (Sharma 219). It is both a manifestation and a symbol of power relationships.

The practice of seclusion extends to the idea of the “modesty” of women and in turn the “honour” of not only the family but also the community. The ideas of maintaining “honour” do not allow girls to go to schools and women to work outside the house. It is also important to recognise that these girls and women learn how to produce “respectability” (Phadke 2007). Hence, the ghunghat through covering of the head communicates respect for others. In fact it is a “double seclusion” (Jain 1996 248) for the daughter-in-law. She not only is disassociated from her parental family and childhood friends but also restrained from forming any new associations. According to Dagmer Engels, “Purdah was not just the veil with which women covered their hair and their faces, but a complex of norms involving sexual modesty and a generally demure behaviour towards men and senior women. Strict purdah kept women hidden in separate quarters but the rules which regulated life within the household were equally important. They limited a woman’s communications with male and female elders, restricted her access to food, and allocated social space according to her ranking in the household . . . Demure behaviour served to keep the male and female hierarchies
apart” (Engels 18, 19). Janaki Abraham conducted interviews with women observing purdah. Her question to them was - how women experience the practices of ghunghat and in turn experience different spaces. Many of the women she interviewed used the term “ghutan” (suffocation) to describe the experience of the ghunghat in their sasural (affinal, in-laws’ house). However, the word ghutan is sometimes used more generally for the space of the sasural - the place where a woman has to veil and where she is constrained and subordinated (Abraham 206).

Purdah has a religious sanction among the Muslims. “Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient that they should be known (As such) and not molested. And God is oft-forgiving, Most merciful” (33:59). These verses from the Quran were meant for all Muslim women, those of the Prophet’s household and also for other women. Those were the times of insecurity and they were asked to cover themselves with outer garments when walking abroad. It was never ever contemplated that women should be confined to their houses like prisoners. The translator Yusuf Ali summarises, “The object was not to restrict the liberty of women, but to protect them from harm and molestation under the conditions then existing in Medina. In the East and in the West a distinctive public dress of some sort or another has always been a badge of honour or distinction, both among men and women . . . The verse also states that this rule was not absolute: if for any reason it could not be observed, - God is oft-Returning. Most merciful” (Yusuf Ali 1127). It must be admitted that in the Quran there is no prohibition against going outside the house when it is absolutely necessary. In such circumstances she has to wear a veil so that her beauty is not displayed.

In an interview Ismat Chugtai a faithful Muslim clarified the distinction between ideology and custom. She said, “I believe that Islam is a great religion. It believes in the welfare of women. But now Muslims have snatched away everything from Muslim women.” Chugtai used the same arguments to denounce purdah, saying it was indigenous to the subcontinent and that the Quran demanded women’s modesty, not their seclusion (Chugtai 2005). As time went by the laws associated with purdah became more severe. The relative insecurity of social life due to invasions can be put forward as responsible for the practice. Women led extremely restricted social lives on account of the hostile and strange environment. During the British domination in India, the observance of purdah was strictly adhered to and widespread among the Muslims.
The seclusion is usually seen as a sign of the oppression of women. It entails the effacing of the self in other way. Some critics see seclusion as an evil influence that has suffocated the rights of women, perpetuated male domination, deprived women of economic independence and forced them to produce dominating boys and submissive girls. "Purdah reinforces the idea of female subordination inbuilt in patriarchal societies, it also defines family and political structures and constitutes the basis of gender ideology" (Jain 1996 243). Whereas the believers in Islam see purdah as a very positive and respectful practice as it brings about an aura of respect. According to them when a woman covers herself she places herself on a higher level and allows men to see and respect her for her faith and intellect and not for her physical beauty.

Historically speaking various social conditions and living styles have been modified and changed to accommodate purdah or to alter its practice, though not completely but at least marginally to provide some extra space to the female sex. But throughout the world the girls and women are forced to wear hijab. If they do not, the millions of them worldwide are threatened. The substantial numbers of them are killed, assaulted and maimed. According to many Reports hundreds of women have been blinded and maimed when acid was thrown on their unveiled faces by male fanatics who considered them improperly dressed. Attacks or threats of acid attacks on women who failed to wear hijab or were otherwise dressed have been reported in many other countries as well. Acid attacks are a form of violence primarily targeted at women. Jameela Nishat emphasises this as certainly un-Islamic in her play Purdah. Similarly, a Muslim woman, feminist academic and family therapist Manijeh Daneshpour feels piqued at this and says, "... the theoretical foundation of Islamic feminism continues to be grounded in Qur’anic interpretations of gender equality. Therefore, as a devout Muslim, I am deeply troubled by inequalities and injustices perpetrated in the name of my religion by patriarchal ideas (ideology) and practices" (Daneshpour 341-342).

Whatever may be the origins and the practices of seclusion, the truth of the situation is that seclusion is based on discrimination and has a long tradition in India irrespective of religious belief. The role of purdah all over the world has become more controversial since the rise of the Women’s Liberation Movements and the advent of Islamic feminism. Purdah has almost disappeared among the Hindus and it is practised to greater and lesser degrees in many of the Islamic countries. In this respect Gandhiji said, "I thought of the wrong being done by men to the women of India by clinging to a barbarous custom which, whatever use it might have had when it was first introduced,
had now become totally useless and is doing incalculable harm to the country... I note that the purdah is being retained even in educated households not because the educated men believe in it themselves but because they will not manfully resist the brutal custom and sweep it away at a stroke... nothing better is to be expected so long as they are caged and confined in their houses and little courtyards” (Gandhi 95). It can be concluded that the practice of purdah, looked at whether in a negative or positive light, remains an integral part of everyday life for many people and marks a part of their culture. Doing away with seclusion calls for a total change in the ideas of socialising in the family relationship and in the manner in which women view themselves. Changes are envisaged in the fields of education, marriageable age, girl-child’s upbringing, attitude towards women and customs based on superstitions. It is argued that legislation is ineffective without social changes. Most writers also agree that economic upliftment must be an integral part of social change. Underlying the problem of seclusion is the basic need for freedom.
Rasheed Jahan (1905-1952) has contributed extraordinarily towards the development of Urdu drama. She was a doctor by profession, dedicated social reformer, activist and prolific writer. She focused on women's issues with more honesty and dared to challenge the patriarchy. She involved herself in a number of activities for improving women’s rights and autonomy. Much before Islamic feminism she had sought to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the religion by questioning the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teachings through the Sharia towards the creation of a more equal and just life for women. She criticises some of the practices prevalent in the society, such as polygyny and purdah i.e. sex segregation in Islam. Her house is remembered as a centre for debate and discussion on women's issues. Disturbed by the lives of women who “could keep track of time only by pregnancy and childbirth” Jahan organised her fellow medical students to help run literacy classes and free medical clinics (Tharu and Lalita 1993 117-18). She is critically acclaimed as the important writer of Urdu fiction with a feminist consciousness. She wrote one-act plays on topics that largely dealt with middle-class women’s lives in domestic spaces. Her protagonists far from being passive are strong willed, argumentative and they confront social attitudes that affect their lives.

Because of her affiliations with Progressive Writer’s Association (PWA), her work has been considered radical. Priyamvada Gopal attributes Jahan’s radicalism along with other progressive women including Ismat Chugatai to their “shaping contribution to cultural debates on nation, gender and the question of social transformation” (Gopal 2005 10) and their articulation of “transformative moral and political visions that are germane to radical literary and political projects in the present day” (Gopal 2005 147). Jahan contributed stories to Angare (Embers) - a collection of short-stories by Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmad Ali, Maham-ud-Zafer and herself. For her involvement with PWA and the publication of Angare she became the specific target of attack. According to Gopal, “The religious zealots were unable to stomach the fact that it was a Muslim woman who was rebelling against them and writing about the woman’s body and the oppression she had to endure. Jahan was threatened with having her “nose cut off” and “acid thrown on her face”. Even her name became “Angarewali” (Gopal 2005 32). But these did not deter her from addressing taboo subjects in her plays as she was committed to bring about
social change. She circulated her writings through journals and initiated a journal with Mahamud-uz-Zafar in 1938 titled “Chingari”.

In 1931 Jahan graduated herself from medical college and in 1934 she married the writer Mahamud-uz-Zafar who was the Vice-Principal of a college in Amritsar. Jahan’s thirty short-stories and fifteen plays have become classics. Her writings ignited the flames of controversy by confronting issues of social and economic injustice and gender discrimination. Her writings are considered provocative and volatile as she dealt with sexuality and society’s treatment of women. Several writers, including Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Ismat Chughtai have acknowledged Jahan’s influence on their lives. In 1986, Ismat Chughtai in an interview said, “Rasheed Jahan shook me up. I stored up her work like pearls . . . The handsome heroes and pretty heroines of my stories, the candle-like fingers, the lime blossoms and the crimson outfits all vanished into thin air. The earthy Rasheed Jahan simply shattered all my ivory idols to piece . . . Life stark naked, stood before me” (Tharu and Lalita 1993 118). She added that many of her heroines were modelled on Jahan’s.

Though Jahan is better known in the late twentieth century as a writer of short fiction, she herself considered drama a more forceful medium and was among those who laid the foundation of the Progressive Theatre Movement. She wrote and directed several plays, including adaptations of works by Anton Chekhov, Munshi Premchand and James Joyce. “She moved back to fiction only when failing health and lack of time restricted her involvement in the theatre” (Tharu and Lalita 1993 119). According to Hamida Saiduzzafar, she “produced some of her plays for radio as well as for the stage . . . Her stage adaptation of Premchand’s “Kafan” (Shroud) was produced several times and it always had a terrific impact on the audience” (quoted in Kazim 102). Her play Aurat published in 1937 is translated into English as “Woman”. It is a bold attempt to lay bare the cruelties imposed upon women with the sanction of society and religion. It has been produced repeatedly over the years with resounding success. In the play she speaks about taboo subjects, infidelity of husbands, men marrying many wives, venereal diseases and the internally damaged bodies as the result of frequent pregnancies. She also raises the issue of property rights for women. Though the play exhibits the domination of husband over his wife, there are moments when the protagonist asserts herself.

The translation of Jahan’s Urdu play Aurat into English as “Woman” appropriates the English language and expresses the religious culture. Language has a dual character. It helps not only to communicate with others but it is also a carrier of culture. The
language here depicts the society and the religion to which the characters belong. The play speaks of the customs of Islamic religion, norms and manners of their community and the purdah system and as such the dialogues are steeped in them. When Aziz - the son of Fatima’s aunt Mamani - comes to the house of Fatima, his mother tells him to wait as purdah will be observed. Similarly when Aziz’s brother Khadeer comes, Aziz tells him to come in as the scene is clear (528-529) meaning no stranger woman is present. Such dialogues in English suggest their religious connotations and social practices.

The play succeeds in universalising the particular facts of the husband-wife relationship. Jahan has focused on the ill-treatment of wives. “Keeping in view the importance of husband-wife relationship in the family as well as the distinctive nature of quality of interaction between them, it would be most appropriate to investigate the nature, extent and precipitating factors which lead to conflict and violence in the conjugal relationship” (Madhurima 18). The play is set in the house of a Maulvi called Atiullah. His wife is Fatima. The setting on the stage helps to evoke the cultural milieu in which the action of the play takes place. The dialogues in the play open a complete world of Islamic practices for the reader/audience to understand it. The play has an immense sociological importance too as it explores the basic cultural practices and patterns. The play is principally concerned with the treatment of sexual diseases. It discusses the tyranny of husbands who threaten to reject their wives for their own faults by putting it on their wives. Jahan discusses her views on social reforms for women by raising issues of domestic abuse which are justified through cultural practices. In the play Maulvi in his forties wants to marry second time because all the children by his first wife - Fatima have died. The real reason for the death of his children is infection from venereal diseases.

Jahan also focuses on many other issues - Maulvi’s refusal to go for English medicines which he sees as the corrupting influences of Westernisation; the hypocrisy of Maulvi who has infected his wife with venereal disease leading to the death of their children; his enthusiasm to marry a much younger girl; about adopted clothing practices; property rights of women; the ill-effects of excessive child-bearing and its effect on health and psyche of women.

The play gives an insight into the conditions of a Muslim society. Fatima is being exploited and suppressed in a double bondage of the religious and patriarchal system. But she realises her own strength and mobilises it. The play focuses on the encounter between husband and wife. It shows how while countering the imposing force of the husband, the
wife redefines her self and seeks her identity as a strong woman with convictions. Atiqullah being a Maulvi administers treatment to the patients by giving amulets. But he is a hypocrite. He wants to marry second time as he wanted children to continue his descent. It highlights the fact that a man values sons more because a son belongs to his own lineage and carries it forward after his death. "To strengthen this continuity a man preferred to marry more than one wife and hence polygamy was valued" (Weinrich 48).

His wife Fatima had "given birth to ten - twelve children, live or dead" (518). But either they died immediately after their birth or were still-born. Fatima does not allow him for second marriage and even if he marries his new wife, she says should not enter "her" house. Fatima is a strong lady and she resists her husband’s wish strongly. She raises her voice every time he tells her of his second marriage. She is of the opinion that she should not be blamed alone for her dead children. He too is equally responsible for it. She questions if the babies of his second wife die too, what he will do. He is of the opinion that children are the support of their old age and that is what the Shariat has ordered that when a woman is found to be barren or if her children are not alive then the man should marry again. Fatima expresses her surprise to hear it. She says, "This is the first time I’ve heard the Shariat law about children not being alive. It’s enough if you don’t start making Shariat laws of your own. God forbid, I’m not barren" (518). These words of Fatima elaborate the Islamic feminist ijtihad (interpretation and investigation of religious sources) by Jahan. It also presents the compelling explanation of the equality of all human beings, male and female alike.

For Jahan, trained as a medical doctor, the topic of health became a particularly important issue. She discusses the benefits of science for women. Doctor by profession, she through her plays, tries to bring about the consciousness among women regarding their health and the importance of taking care of their bodies. She discusses various aspects of women’s lives through the domestic space and uses the house as space strategically to emphasise the house as “enclosed on all sides, with separate parts for the men and the women, so that purdah can be observed” (Jahan 1995 34). Such an arrangement of the domestic is critical where, in Priyamvada Gopal’s words, “Women can not fully unleash their powers” (Gopal 59). Joe Andrew says that this is because women are perceived in literature as “partial creations, stereotypes, projections static rather than dynamic images” (Andrew 07). Even then in that limited space they strive to attain a better life. In the play a woman who comes to consult Atiq, says “We have no way to convince the men” (519). It reflects the pivotal role played by a supportive
network of women as they journey through the process of suppression. But Fatima does find out a way to convince her husband what a woman can do. She is ready to fight him at length to retain her claim on her husband and her own house. If need be, she is prepared to approach the courts of law. Fatima knows it very well that her husband fools the people with hypocrisy. He tries to fool her also by talking about the Shariat.

Rebecca Smith offers her definition of the new women who “encounter the attempts of society to force them into stereotypical roles...the path of least resistance and rebellion; but finally they attempt to live in the world on their own terms, and move through suffering to a new authentic human role” (Smith 1977 127). When Fatima’s aunt - Mamani and her grown up sons are to come to Fatima’s house Atiq tells her to observe “purdah” with them. But Fatima resists it by asking why she should. “Why must I observe purdah with them?” (520). It also defines her strong opposition to certain religious sanctions prevalent in the society. She asks when she does not observe purdah with Atiq’s friends who are not treated as outsiders, why her cousins Khadeer and Aziz be treated as outsiders. She asks him to explain that to her. Like any husband, Atiq tells that it is the duty of a wife to obey what her husband says without question. He is of the opinion that she always argues with him no matter what he says.

The play presents Fatima as a person particularly suited to deal with the themes of self-definition and self-affirmation. Fatima is a strong and resilient woman and traces her resistance to her husband’s charges against her and his wish to marry second time. She is not going to be entrapped by her husband’s words and his decision. Thus the disintegration of their marriage is presented. Fatima is not presented as a stereotypical woman. She chooses to have equal rights in the marriage and achieve self-actualisation through resistance. Her arguments with her husband and her denial to follow his orders are traced. In Fatima, Jahan has depicted a self-defined woman with a positive self-image and commitment. She resists continually against her husband’s second marriage. These exhibit her as a strong woman.

Jahan raises the issue of property rights for women. When Atiq expresses his wish to accommodate his second wife in the upstairs of their house and that he would ask the tenants upstairs to vacate the house, Fatima indignantly responds by saying, “Why, this is my house. They pay me the rent on time...I don’t want them to leave” (523). Her assertion and self-confidence suggests the importance of property rights and what power it can render to women. She says, “This is my father’s house that he gifted to me. Why only you, not even your jinns can make my tenants leave” (525) and pronounces that his
“new wife will never be allowed to enter this house” (525). Jahan highlights that the right to property empowers women. Mamani too emphasises the ownership by telling, “This is your house, gifted to you by your father. What right has he to bring his second wife into this house? If he wishes to marry again, then he should take his new wife elsewhere” (528-529). Under Islamic law women are given inheritance rights in a patriarchal society. They could inherit the property from the father and retain it as part of their personal property. They have the right to administer the wealth they bring into the family. The rights of property ownership and inheritance provide women with certain basic safeguards.

In the play Jahan also highlights how certain choices and practices get constructed in the society irrespective of religion. Atiq considers the clothing practices of Mamani and Khadeer as corrupting influences on Muslims. He comments, “The sons behave like kristaans . . . In her old age, your Mamani has started to wrap the sari . . . Is it decent to abandon the Islamic dress . . . ? Not only the mother, those two fellows, her sons, showing off in English dress, what do they mean?” (520-521). His views regarding the clothing highlight the cultural divide. Jahan through Atiq seems to reject this religious and male conservatism. In contrast to Atiq’s views, Fatima’s views are all the more significant. She asks, “No, not in her old age, Mamani has always worn the sari . . . And what is wrong in wearing a sari?” (520). Her defence suggests her personal opinions and views regarding women’s freedom, seclusion and religious tolerance. She defends Mamani’s wearing sari as Mamani has “many Hindu friends” (520). Her sharp and angry retorts express Jahan’s pleas for the achievement of gender equality through religious harmony and cultural acceptance.

Fatima contrasts with the stereotypical images of obedient, devoted and adoring wife. No doubt she is a concerned wife. She is worried about the health of her husband. When Atiq starts eating the sweets she tells “Look here, you’ve not been well and now you are eating these rich sweets. Then this evening you’ll eat the food from the wedding dinner. Won’t you fall ill?” (524). But at the same time she argues with her husband if at all he is wrong. According to her he is “spinning like a top” for the second marriage. She says angrily, “No one looks at one’s own fault!” (521). He says, “You argue about everything and want to go against my wishes all the time” (523). It is not going against his wish but claiming of her self and rights.

Atiq is of the opinion that it is the lot of women to live with “soutens” - co-wives. She screams, “Then listen to me. I shall turn all your hypocrisy of being a maulvi, your
big show and prestige, into ashes" (525). At this he slaps her and turns to go. She trembles with rage and tells him to listen carefully that his new wife will never be allowed to enter her house. She is so much disgusted with her husband that she tells emotionally, “May God rid us of such cheats” (526), “Whatever happens, I shall revenge myself for this slap and this second marriage. Is it also my fault that all my children died?” (527). “Yet one reason why violence against women is so difficult to eradicate is precisely because it is socially sanctioned to some degree... It is a way of maintaining control, approved by societal norms” (Kudchedkar et al. 01-02). “Studies report that wife beating occurs in more societies around the world than any other type of family violence... husbands use violence against wives to reinforce their dominant position because use of coercive methods by the husbands has tacit societal approval. The studies further indicate that husbands resort to this behaviour pattern because they are physically more strong. It was seen by husband, often as a manifestation of his power over his wife, a right which most husbands did not omit to exercise” (Madurima 19).

The Qur'an says, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For God is Most High, great (above you all)” (4.34). This verse has been used to justify wife-beating, but many Islamic feminists claim it was never meant to do so. In 2007 Laleh Bhaktiar published a translation of the Qur'an in which she substitutes “go away” for “beat” (they are the same word in Classical Arabic). Her translation of the verse reads: “Men are supporters of wives because God has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend of their wealth. So the ones who are in accord with morality are the ones who are morally obligated, the ones who guard the unseen of what God has kept safe. But those whose resistance you fear, then admonish them and abandon them in their sleeping place, then go away from them; and if they obey you, surely look not for any way against them; truly God is Lofty, Great.” Bhaktiar says, “Consequently, in the introduction and translation, I address a main criticism of Islam in regard to the inferiority of women, namely, that a husband can beat his wife (4:34) after two stages of trying to discipline her” (Bhaktiar 2007). Clearly the
intention of the *Quran* is to see men and women as complements of one another, not as oppressor-oppressed or superior-inferior.

As back as in 1470 G. M. Trevelynn in his history of England commented on the position of women and writes that wife beating was a recognised right of man and was practised without shame by high as well as low (Trevelynn 109). Even in the eighteenth century women were regarded “as a chattel under the authority first to her father and then of her husband” (Spencer 12). In the late nineteenth century, women’s roles were central to “the household economy and as transmitters of culture” and they were forced to follow “household customs and rituals of Pardah and of Islamic law as it pertained to women” (Minault 05). The things have not changed much since then.

When Aziz tells that Atiq has no right to marry second time his mother tells that his right is that he is a man. Nobody can stop him as the code of life in Islam is laid down in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. Mamani who emphatically asserts Fatima’s right in property ownership, expresses the difference between legal rights and customary patriarchal behaviour. When her son questions, “When the first wife is alive, what right has he to marry the second time?” (529), Mamani says, “His right is that he is a man. Who can stop him? Almighty God, the Noble Prophet, the laws of the Shariat, and the community give him that right. Why just one, he can take three more wives. It is the women’s lot to be miserable . . . They (men) think that by providing food and clothes, they have done enough and that their duty is over . . . But it must always be the fate of women to suffer in silence. When Allah himself has made men superior to women . . .” (529). This is established by the *Quran* - “… Marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice” (4:3). This practice of polygyny i. e. taking of plural wives by a man is probably the Islamic tradition most misunderstood and vehemently condemned. However Muslims view polygyny as an institution which is to be called into use only under extraordinary circumstances.

The injustice of Atiq is immediately resisted by Fatima who responds by saying, “All those books that talk about women’s roles have been written by men. The propagators of all these rules were men. They wrote to suit their needs. What did they know of the heart of women? Had they been women, they would have understood what we have to suffer” (529). Though Fatima feels helpless in the absence of any guardian or a son, she is ready to face her husband all on her own. Fatima has prepared herself to
approach courts of law to get justice in order to stop her husband from bringing the new wife into her house. Jahan raises the need for action by approaching the courts of law. Fatima says with force, “If he brings her here then I promise in the name of God that I shall do everything to stop him” (532). When her medical tests reveal that she has a venereal disease she accuses her husband telling him that she has the illness that he has infected her with. It is he who has killed all her children and he is a murderer. She has had enough of his orders. She decides to go for treatment whenever and wherever she wants.

The play ends on a note where, instead of weeping and feeling helpless, Fatima resists Atiq and advances towards him threateningly when he once again raises his hand to hit her. She faces him in an angry stance and says, “Be careful and sit down. If you want to keep your self-respect intact, then take care. I warn you, if you try to hit me again, be ready to face the consequences.” She taunts him sarcastically and says scornfully, “He pretends to be a man . . . wants to marry a second time!” (538). She walks away towards the inner door. He thought it was all right to hit his wife as he had to have the upper hand at all times and had to be the controlling figure in the relationship. But Fatima uses “aggressive self-defence” (Lloyd et al. 268). Her walking away is an act of defiance and a gesture through which Fatima’s rejection of the patriarchal behaviour is conveyed not necessarily through spoken words but performed by the body itself. “To cast victims as agents can be interpreted as minimizing the effects of the forces arrayed against them” (Dunn 23).

Fatima is being forced to occupy a secondary place in relation to her souten, though she is the owner of the house. The secondary position is imposed on women by strong forces of social tradition under the control of men. This results in the general failure of women to take a dignified place as free and independent being. In the play Fatima does not want to fail in asserting her rights. She uses all the strategies of resistance by enforcing her agency as T. C. West has noted while writing on resistance ethics. According to West (1999) strategies of resistance are: engaging in subtle and silent strategies, standing up to the partner’s attempts at control, fighting back vigorously, holding one’s ground, and refusing to be dominated. Fatima eventually experiences a paradigmatic shift, wherein she moves from trying to maintain the relationship to actively creating an agenda for leaving.

Jahan emphasises how women act within and against systems of constraint to create new and unfamiliar paths. She describes how Fatima uses a surge of emotion as resource to push herself outward and break free from abuse. Her expressions of intense
feelings of anger and rage provided her with energy for self-preservation. The actions taken by Fatima to preserve her self and to regain control, and the processes of disentanglement can be read as resistance/subversion of the performance of gender.

The play points out that women are capable of exerting their strength of mind and intellect to lead their own living and assert themselves of all round developments where physical strength is no longer a criterion. Women not necessarily have to depend on men as their maintainers. They also need not accept the authority of men at the cost of their independence. Once women took charge of their lives, new debates on purdah, pronouncements against polygyny and related reforms in Islamic law become prominent.

The play laid open the question of gender politics and domestic relations. Through argument, dialogue and debate permitted by the conversational mode of plays, Jahan comments, reflects and attempts to bring out an understanding of the physical and psychological effects of patriarchal attitudes and their paradoxical outcomes. In spite of the inequalities, it must, however be admitted that the Islamic code regarding inheritance introduces a radical reform in making a woman a co-sharer with the male, even though less share compared to men. In conclusion it would be appropriate to emphasise the fact that there is a strong opposition against the non-egalitarian principles, rules or code. The aim of women’s strife is to move forward towards a progressive world.
xii. Purdah

Purdah (Urdu, 2002)

Jameela Nishat
Trans: Tutun Mukherjee and Ali Zaheer

Jameela Nishat (b. 1958) is a feminist activist poet of considerable significance on the Urdu literary scene in Andhra Pradesh. She lives and works in Hyderabad. In 2008 Nishat’s collection of poems in My Life-Giving Ganges translated by Hoshang Merchant is published by the Sahitya Akademi. The choice of becoming a creative writer constituted a difficult struggle for her. The daughter of a painter and artist belonging to the Muslim community, Nishat has had to go through modernity as well as tradition in the course of her life. In a family where women are not encouraged to take up such activities, it has been a constant battle for her not only to choose a vocation but also to build it up step by step. The other difficult choice she made was to write about women’s emancipation in an oppressive society.

Nishat writes in Hyderabadi Urdu and seeks to preserve Dakhni culture. The struggle to do what she wants has made her think deeply about women’s expression and language. She feels that their voice has been taken away by men. She wrote basically on women’s issues - purdah, talaaq, polygyny and violence. As a woman she looked at the things with a woman’s eyes. In her plays the man is the antagonistic figure. The conservative Muslim men warned her about writing like this but she said she was educating people. She is so caught up in the suffering and helplessness of the burqa-clad women that she expresses their suppressed feelings through her play Purdah (Joseph et al. 242-244). The discourse about being secluded and oppressed and about “the urgency of emancipating the claustrophobic heads of Muslim women from their burdening fabric” (Daneshpour 343) continues to be the major part of debate in her play Purdah. Nishat raises certain cultural issues that deeply concern the daily living conditions of Muslim women. The play was performed successfully as a street play in 2002 during the “Akka” Women’s Theatre Festival at Rangayana, Mysore 2003. Nishat makes young Muslim women speak out their grievances and thereby their resistance to the cultural issues. They are the awakened generation, have a number of questions to ask and are in search of answers. The most important concern of them is about the social practice of observing purdah which implies “multitudes of complex social arrangements which maintained social distances between the sexes” (Jeffery 2-3).
Purdah covering a woman’s face and body has a tremendous influence on Muslim woman’s life. It secludes her both physically and mentally from the rest of the world. “Purdah is both shame and safety for women. It becomes a sign of culture and . . . sustains man’s position as the signifier in the power pyramid of patriarchy. A structure constituted by these power paradigms tightens on the female by making them learn shame to be a part of their growing up” (Chaturvedi 257). The prevalence of purdah has ensured the continuation of women’s subordinate role. Restrictions are put on whom the girls can meet and talk to and even on the manner in which they speak and walk. The isolation of women from the outer world and their dependence on men has facilitated their control by men. “Where sexual control is practised in many societies, purdah is an extreme form of sexual control” (Engels 15). The young girls in Muslim families get training from their parents regarding adulthood. Whenever they go out they have to wear a burqa and go in a covered vehicle. Great care is taken to seclude them to protect their modesty and honour. Shibani Roy states, “In the male dominated Muslim society purdah is a male imposed symbol of domination and seclusion symbolising the eclipse of a Muslim woman’s identity and individuality. The woman by wearing it subscribes to male domination and gives up her claim to personal liberty” (Roy 45).

Some change however, has occurred as a result of gradual exposure to education, compulsion to seek employment and the urge within women to seek freedom. This is what is discernible in Nishat’s play Purdah. It is believed that purdah is a kind of safety. It is believed to be the protector against the reaction from people and a way of curbing the possibility of unwanted attention. It is a device to preserve the purity of the young ladies. It conveniently disguises the female body and renders anonymity on her though it facilitates their mobility. “It makes it possible for an area of privacy, however limited this may be, and it also makes it possible for a certain position as an observer without being observed” (Jain 1996 247).

Ironically enough in the play it is the purdah-worn and dawni-clad young ladies who are teased a lot. It is they who drew the unwanted attention of the boys who even utter indecent words. Nishat criticises the negative effects of the purdah as Imtiaz Dharker does in her poem “Purdah” which is “a kind of safety / the body finds a place to hide” (Dharker 03). But she also implies that it is the safety of a tomb. “The cloth fans out against the skin / Much like the earth that falls / On coffins after they put the dead man in” (Dharker 03). The simile conveys very effectively that purdah can kill the potential in the mind of the young woman by cutting her off from the outside world. Purdah can act as
a cover on the intellect just as the earth thrown into a grave effectively covers up the dead person and cuts him off from the outside world of experiences and enlightenment it offers and it even restricts speech. In her poems “Grace” and “Prayer” Dharker expresses her anguish and resentment at women being denied entry into mosques. In Shibani Roy’s view: "Purdah affects a large area of a woman’s life and precludes her from many areas of participation. This vitiates her life and produces a limited perspective and has a dementing influence on her entire personality" (Roy 47). It can deny a young woman the opportunity to seek learning and enlightenment and results in the deadening of the intellect. Purdah has been viewed in the context of subordination of the female, the control over her body and the confinement of her space. Hence in the play Nishat argues why men wish women to be in a burqa. She makes her characters come out of the house and attend the college.

Like the American based Pakistani theologian Riffat Hassan, Nishat announces firmly the equality between man and woman. Hassan says, “If man and woman have been created equal by God who is believed to be the ultimate arbiter of value, then they can not become unequal, essentially at a subsequent time. Hence their obvious inequality in the patriarchal world is in contravention of God’s plan” (Hassan 13). But women are respected provided they conform to the normative patterns defined by men. Sudhir Kakar discusses that it is not wifehood alone which confers a social status on women, what is required is a faithful adherence to the code of behaviour prescribed for her in the law texts. He writes, “To be a good wife is to be a good woman” (Kakar 56). Implicit in this is the idea of respectability being synonymous with male control and female submission. It also defines space which is available to women and the rewards and punishments associated with obedience and defiance. Woman is always described as “soft, docile, irrational, vulnerable and therefore greatly in need of male control” (Das 22). In several parts of the country purdah was and even now is a “severe form of cloistering women” in the interests of regulating “social interaction, the maintenance of traditional authority and the solidarity of the extended family” (Minturin 73). Minturin has analysed the tradition of purdah in Rajput families and the manner in which it restricts “interaction of wives with their husbands and other members of their husband’s household” (Minturin 45).

Various social conditions and living styles have been modified and changed to alter the practice of purdah if not completely but marginally to provide some extra space to female sex. In the play “Purdah” the young girls are allowed to go to colleges and here
they discuss the issues that concern them. These young ladies have been provided with a space. Only few wore either lehenga-dawni or the burqa but not all. Nishat points out how a body which is desired to be made invisible in reality acquires a certain visibility.

In the play, it is a burqa-clad girl Muskan draws attention of boys. It is ironical that burqa does not protect Muskan who wears it from top to ankles and is teased by the passer-by boys - “The roadside Romeos” (540). Burqa in her case fails to protect her from the dirty looks of the boys. Every day they follow her as long as they can. They talk indecently without any regard for her being a burqa-clad woman. They follow her whistling, teasing and singing songs. They tell that they have a mother and a sister but not a wife. All the girls opine that “She walks with style . . . that’s why the boys come after her.” But Muskan resists asking, “So what! Why shouldn’t I walk as I please?” (542). All the girls are of the opinion that she invited trouble due to her stylish walk. A question arises whether Muskan be blamed for being lively, vivacious and for asserting herself. She says in resistance, “Why don’t we have the same style of clothes and the same social customs everywhere? In the entire world perhaps we are the only people having such varied styles of dressing and eating. For instance, in Europe people wear the same types of clothes and eat the same kind of food everywhere” (541-42). She is of the opinion that clothes have nothing to do with religion. The place they stay in decides the kind of clothes they wear. She says, “The problem comes only with the burqa” (542). Nishat subverts the popular belief of people who say that women are safe in the burqa. She asks, “Are women objects to be kept “safe”? And “safe” from what?” (543).

While going to college Muskan tells Zubeida that she has dressed fashionably, worn fashionable ornaments and sandals, and has braided her hair in a new style with flowers. Zubeida is not in a burqa and can not dress like Muskan. She asks Muskan a very pertinent question, “But what is the point in your dressing up so well? Nothing can be seen. Your burqa covers everything.” But Muskan is helpless as she has “got to wear it” (539). Again it is Qamar who wears lehenga-dawni is followed by a boy. She too goes through a similar experience. A boy used to follow her daily. Suddenly one day he came right in front of her and asked for her book, she was very scared. He tried to grasp her hand. She ran and ran till she reached the school. He scribbled all nonsense in her book and brought it home. Her mother took it but thankfully since she did not know how to read, nothing happened. It would have been terrible otherwise. She further tells that in her village, people wore the same kind of clothes and spoke the same way whether Hindu or Mussalman. Thus with or without burqa girls are bound to be teased by men. In the play a
boy scribbles in the notebook of a girl. Another boy pulls the dawni of another girl. The young college-going girls therefore resist the practice of wearing burqa. They also resist against the extreme restrictive life-styles which are stifling and self-denying.

The girls speak out the ill-effects of wearing burqa and how it affects their health. The purdah and the associated code of conduct are more than a set of rules for their behaviour. They are conditioned in the process. Qamar tells how her mother had given her a dawni and lehenga-jacket and had told her to wear it close to her chest always. She had said that daughter must never drop the pallu. Susan Bordo points out that it is the female body “whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection . . .” (Bordo 144). This socialising involves the control and exclusion of women in certain spaces. It thus involves space, action and relationships allotted to women. “Mothers validate the patriarchal customs, beliefs and institutions . . . They ultimately want their daughters to remain here and suffer, efface themselves, and perpetuate and multiply their mould. It is from this mind set of the mothers that their daughters are seeking release” (Chaturvedi 259). Mothers have become the agency and in turn the agent for power application of patriarchy by exemplifying what womanhood is all about. They validate the patriarchal customs, beliefs and institutions. Women of every generation, bound in the constraints of purdah and subjected to its observance have ironically contributed to the perpetration of purdah with its inhibiting effects. This involves mothers’ teaching of their daughters to behave with proper shyness and caution.

The irony in the play is enhanced by the fact that the young burqa and dawni-clad ladies are humiliated. Shaherbano tells her friends that one day in the afternoon when she was walking alone a quiet lane, suddenly a boy came up from behind. He was riding a bicycle. He came closer, snatched her dupatta, wrapped it around the handle bar and started to laugh loudly. When she screamed helplessly, he threw the dupatta and fled. She was scared of her mother who had a bad temper. She always told her daughter to keep her eyes down and to hold her dupatta close to her chest. Shaherbano tells “I’m tired of listening to the same stuff. I rather feel like dropping the dupatta now . . .” (541). These words of Shaherbano are a pointer towards emerging resistant consciousness. While purdah denotes restrictive lifestyle, the “movement away from purdah is a movement towards self-identity and freedom” (Jain 1996 252). The act of experiencing the self begins. She expresses her anguish for being tutored all the while which is frustrating at times. In this context Manijeh Danishpour reiterates the notions of Leila Ahmed, Fatema Mernissi and Haideh Moghissi: “Until recently, because of a persuasive sexist and
oppressive presentation of women in Islam, Muslim women often felt that the only way to be liberated intellectually, socially, politically, and economically was by abandoning Islam. They felt that Shari'a restricts women's activities and limits their decision-making power. Therefore, Muslim feminism . . . allowed us to envision non-dichotomous possibilities, challenge cultural constructions of sex and gender, and gave us permission to reclaim and redefine Islam" (Daneshpour 342).

Nishat through her play expresses her concern for her fellow women. She brings out her own experiences of life in her plays. Her behaviour had been conditioned since beginning. She was interested in dancing. Her father brought her ghungharus too. But when she was eight years old, her Papa said, “Girls should not dance, Muslim girls don’t dance”. Her dancing ended in school. Her mother did not allow her to act in the school-plays. “No! You can not participate. Our girls don’t do all this”. She was silenced, slowly and systematically. She was allowed only to participate in “baith-baazi”, debates and essay-writing competitions. She badly wanted to paint. She was not allowed to but she did it secretly and used to say it was her brother’s work. First, she was stopped from dancing - that was a blow. Then she was told she could not paint. Her father had female students, he appreciated their work but she was not allowed to paint and she felt much oppressed. All the sadness and depression that entered her blood seemed to have been expressed in her works. She was not a happy person. Perhaps, given the freedom, she would have been a great dancer or a great painter, instead she wrote poems. It was frustration for her to stay inside the kitchen and not to be allowed to join the mushairas (Joseph et al. 236-237).

Wherever Nishat went, she was labelled a woman. In 1996 when a fundamentalist group Shabban, did not allow girls to enter the theatre, she wrote a poem called “Burqa” and sent it to Siyasat. They were very angry. She organised a meeting at the press club in 1997 and recited the same poem in front of an invited Urdu audience. There was dead silence in the hall. It was called propaganda poetry. Whenever critics and other poets responded like this, she became even more committed to what she was writing and did not bother too much about their opinions. When she wrote poems on communal riots they were published and accepted but whenever she criticised her own community her voice was ignored. She was not allowed to speak on any sensitive issue (Joseph et al. 240-241). When her father saw a boy following her and whistling, he insisted that she wore a burqa. She wore one for three years but removed it the minute she was inside the girls’ bus. She is a kind of Muslim who reads namaaz twice a year - on Ramzan and Bakrid. Since 1985
she has been writing several plays but it has been difficult to get a theatre group. Muslim girls were not allowed to act. The enactment of plays involves body language. All other girls she managed to train would get married and leave. She expresses her self through the girls in the play who show that they are persons with very independent and unconventional ideas. They have been the rebels resisting against an orthodox aspect of their religion. They express a discreet resistance against them. Nishat brings out that the rules of decorum which form a part of traditional education are failing to curb the surging urges of youth. The rules forbid men to look at and admire a woman's beauty. If a man happens to see a beautiful face, he should turn away his look. Nishat shows that such a thing is not happening now-a-days. The young boys in the play do not seem to be influenced by such teaching. They cast their eyes on the young ladies. They look with nothing holy in their looks and they get fascinated towards them. Their words and actions suggest their intention to seduce. The girls Qamar and Shaherbano get scared of such boys and run fast towards their houses. Besides they are scared of their mothers' scolding. The girls discuss how to tackle the teasing boys. It is high time women should unite to put an end to such an exploitation and oppression. Women should be made aware of the rights and live with self-respect as women. Zubeida thought of giving those boys a hard slap but there were too many of them so she kept quiet. All the girls share their experiences of such boys. Nishat expresses that purdah system allows girls no expression of individuality. She obliquely criticises several aspects of Muslim society.

Nishat brings out the elaborate pantomime of traditional marriages of Shia, Sunni and Mehdivi on the other side of the stage. These traditional marriages promise a "mehar" - the money assured or given to a girl as a security against divorce or the misfortunes of widowhood. Nishat refers sarcastically to such conventional marriages involving a monetary transaction but no real exercise of individual choice. Munawar is a Sunni. In her sect the qazi reads the nikaah and there is a nikaahnama. Girl 1 questions "But after the marriage, what happens? Talaq can be given whenever one wants and . . . there is nothing to stop it" (543). One after the other the girls comment on the matter. Shaherbano is of the Mehdivi sect. She is of the opinion that if the girls do not like marriage and want a talaaq, then there should not be any problem. As Mehar amount is more Mehdivi girls can not get talaaq from oppressive marriage. Nishat believes that "Islam looks at marriage as a contract, an understanding between a man and a woman" (543). But such a thing is not happening. Women do not marry to make themselves happy but to please others by adhering to the norms of their religion though such a marriage may
mean an unhappy life. The resistance against the norms of such marriages is futile. Nishat tries to bring out that such marriages are nothing but bondage and a burden. She feels that the marriage and purdah system represent the severe and stern aspects of the society and the religion.

In Scene three, the entire setting has dissolved. Different resisting voices are heard engaged in debate. “Voice 2: Isn’t woman a human being, a person in her own right! But she is always considered inferior to man . . . Voice 3: In what way is she inferior? She can stand shoulder to shoulder with a man in every respect. Why should there be any discrimination between them?” (543). Voice 2 asks why she is made to wear the burqa when man has no restriction on his movement. Voice 3 tells, “How we perspire in the summer” (544). But whether they perspire or die, they are not permitted to step out of the house without wearing the burqa. According to the Voices, going out wearing burqa is like totally effacing one’s identity. Voice 1 says. “What value can our lives have when our very existence is negated?” (544). It seems to be the aim of the society of men to deny the very existence of women or to relegate it to the negligible. Therefore Nishat interrogates, “What can you call this if not oppression?” (544).

The girls speak in praise of a social reformer called Soghra-Humayun Mirja. She used to say that women should not sit back with indifference and apathy to their treatment. They should raise their voice in protest and try to bring about the change in social attitude. They should not expect others to help them but must learn to help themselves. They needed to be educated, to work in office and stores to be able to fend themselves. She also raised her voice against polygamy. She was positive and forward-thinking. The young girls have brought together some of the poets of Hyderabad. Their poems are a clarion call to be independent and protest against exploitation. Soghra Humayun Mirza says: “Hurt by destiny we may be, but not disloyal are we; / Aggression and cruelty we have suffered, separated from you / But alas! Your heart has remained unaware of our agony; . . .” (546). Nausaba Khatoon tries her best to bring in awareness among the womenfolk by telling: “O my sisters, stand firm for the sake of God / In the struggle for your rights prefer death to life / Learn to stand on your feet / Do something on your own; / Women must fight like warriors / Their success rests on what they do . . .” (547). Zainab Begum asks, “In which Shariat is written the tenet of purdah for women. / In the time of the prophet the women were as free as men” (548). Nishat highlights how the writers like Zainab Begum “connect strongly with the feminist hermeneutics that have revisited verses of the Qur'an, to correct false stories in common circulation,
citing verses that unequivocally enunciate the equality of women and men while deconstructing verses attentive to male and female difference that have been commonly interpreted in ways that justify male domination” (Daneshpour 342). The works of these writers as they struggle for equality serve as key examples of literature reinterpreting the Islamic ideology and gender justice.

Despite these talks on emancipation, the play ends with a pantomime showing acid being thrown on women. A voice of a girl is called out to put a stop to this act of fear. “Put a stop to this cult of fear / Why throw acid on our face / Live your life and let us live / By us is life sustained” (549). They ask why they throw acid on the faces of women. They wish that the life be sustained by allowing women to live.

In the play Nishat expresses with a pervasive irony her resentment against the discrimination with which women are treated in the male-dominated Muslim society in particular. She also analyses the damaging effect of the social norms that are observed with continued severity. Referring to acid attacks her women characters carry an underlying disappointment that the lot of women in society will not change in future times. But women must, as Riffat Hassan cautions, “challenge the sources that regard them not as ends in themselves but as instruments created for the convenience and comfort of men” (Hassan 13). The practice of purdah can be attributed to the vulnerability of women who led extremely restricted social lives on account of the hostile and strange environment and also due to their conditioning.

Purdah denotes seclusion or segregation as well as relegation to the restrictive and oppressive female quarters. While the play deals with the concept of purdah from various angles, the playwrights’s anger and bitterness can not be missed. It reads how the playwright as well as other Muslim women-reformers and activists have resented and resisted the system through their literature. Consequently, there appears to be a growing movement of Muslim feminists who demand that the rights guaranteed by Islam must be applied in their lives. They have come to understand that feminism as a theoretical perspective and a practice criticises social and gender inequalities and seeks to transform existing knowledge and aims at women’s empowerment.
(c) Feminist Family Studies: Resisting Domestic Domination by Fighting Their Own Battles

Introduction to the Plays “The Wedding Tangle” (Bengali, 1904) by Swarnakumari Devi, “Prey” (Marathi, 1947) by Malatibai Bedekar, “Gamble” (Marathi, 1951) by Muktabai Dikshit and “The Swing of Desire” (Kannada, 1990) by Mamta G. Sagar

The four plays “The Wedding Tangle” by Swarnakumari Devi, “Prey” by Malatibai Bedekar, “Gamble” by Muktabai Dikshit, and “The Swing of Desire” by Mamta G. Sagar present the core concerns and voices of women in the domestic space i. e. the family. Families “naturally consisted of young, married heterosexual couples with children and whose members shared a harmony of interests” (Thorne 10). Home is the domestic and traditional space where the family resides and the family is the foundation of social order even though family is a private realm separate from the public realm.

The women playwrights have offered to study the families by studying the interaction of members within them. According to Alexis J. Walker, “Families are homogenous units, so one family member can faithfully account for the views, beliefs and experiences of other family members” (Walker 2009 18). But in such accounting the views of women are not considered due to patriarchal domination. The plays highlight resistance in the family by re-visioning of families that incorporate multiple voices and perspectives.

The women playwrights with their feminist consciousness have largely dealt with the lives of middle class women in their families. Through their plays these playwrights have contributed significantly to the field of Feminist Family Studies which regard men, women, children, youth and old people and their relationships in the domestic spaces. The feminist theory and research have had a significant influence on the field of Family Studies. The feminist family scholars like Katherine R. Allen, Sally A. Lloyd, April L. Few, K. M. Baber, J. Bernard, W. Brown, D. H. Demo, W. J. Doherty, G. L. Fox, D. L. Sollie, L. A. Leslie, L. Thompson, J. B. Wills, Majineh Daneshpour and many others have generated new theories, methodologies and practices regarding how women, men, children, youth and older adults relate in families and society. Gubrium and Holstein ask “What is family?” (1990) and argue that family is as much a discourse as it is a concrete set of social ties and actions. At the heart of Feminist Family Studies is a concern and critique of a domestic place called home which is full of contradictions - joys and
The feminist family studies examine and address the problems of women and families. It expresses its concerns for women's rights and equality and in turn women's concerns about the well-being of their families. Family studies began in the US at the end of the 19th century at the time when industrialisation and urbanisation were creating numerous social problems affecting the structure of families. Family studies are committed to the development and well-being of women and families. The focus of the studies is on investigating dynamic relations within families and family's interactions with communities and other social institutions. The researchers in family studies challenged the traditional paradigms; recognised the diversity of relations within family and the impact of gender, generation, economic and social positions on women and family relationships and the well-being in society. They introduced an important shift that both catalysed and continued to foster the development of women within their families. The strategies of the feminist family studies included the following: exposing the patriarchal bias in diverse families; asking previously unasked and even unaskable questions about invisible family processes and structures; invited women's voices to be articulated and heard; and contributing new knowledge about the experiences of women in their families.

The playwrights with their plays have directed the study towards the feminist re-visioning of the family relations through which they have challenged and enhanced the understanding of the family in the key areas of parenting, girl-education, extra-marital relationship, bigamy, widow remarriage and man-woman relationship as expressed in their plays. The study in resistance like the study in feminism explores women's everyday experiences in their families. The plays reflect and resist "the perspective generated by privileged men with stay-at-home wives" (Allen et al. 06) who resist the view of themselves as subordinate to the interests and well-being of other family members. Resistance like feminism is all about vision - a vision that is centred on the desire for and advocacy of gender justice and positive social change.

This section examines the four plays which depict the women protagonists in the domestic or private space which according to historians and critics like Partha Chatterjee, is the sacred and spiritual space that nationalism carved out for women. According to Bhatia, "Marriage will bring her into the realm of the domestic - a spiritual space for women carved out by the patriarchy" (Bhatia 19). The cult of true womanhood has
upheld the notion that "the attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity . . . With them she was promised happiness and power" (Carby 1987 23). The playwrights through their protagonists and their comments challenge the cult of true womanhood and express its ineffectiveness for judging the standards of all women - poor or rich, ignorant or intelligent, educated or uneducated, and professional or housewife. Through their protagonists the playwrights have challenged many aspects of the space of family which is still quite conservative in its viewpoints. They show how women belonging to all strata of the society needed to form "unconventional definitions of womanhood" which stands "outside the parameters of conventional heroine" (Carby 1987 59). The playwrights have observed that women are not yet free from the conventional definitions of womanhood. They as liberating figures present a new image of woman. The plays elucidate how feminist theory has fundamentally challenged and enhanced the understanding of "the family" in key areas of reproduction, intimate relationships, parenting, adolescence, family and work, ageing. They also express a renewed emphasis on the ways in which women's subjectivities and locations influence their behaviour and life styles and how family members subvert the notions of the "traditional family" into spaces of creative adaptation. They have dealt with the politics of domesticity through subjects pertaining to marital discord, education of women, social institutions, extra-marital affairs, widow remarriage and so forth.

The Feminist Family Studies at its core theorise gender as a key point from where power gets deployed, distributed and even misused in the families. Home where the family resides is the place where caring and conflict co-mingle. Women in this space are held responsible for the invisible duty of performing important tasks of care giving and nurturing with little recognition. Women are expected to do so in significant ways. In the plays the protagonists challenge these normative structures by their very existence in this limited space by resisting the idealised family rhetoric. Bell Hooks describes homeplace as a site for resistance. According to her it is a virtual and physical space where oppressed women can discuss the roots and consequences of their marginality and strategies that fully use personal, family and community strengths. In the homeplace, women resist sexist discourses by rewriting their own histories from both individual and collective points of view. The plays show how this homeplace gets deconstructed as a privileged site. They show homeplace as a source of resistance and change.
Families are key structures in which privilege and oppression are systematically exercised. It is rightly said by Kate Millet that the most powerful institution of patriarchy is the family as it “affects control and conformity” (Millet 55). Likewise, the families are the key locations which also produce and give way to developing and empowering relationships and at the same time resisting consciousness among the oppressed i.e. women. These plays push feminist scholarship to incorporate “families” as the central locations and sites of oppression as well as resistance, agency and restriction. They also reflect that families as sites of contradiction and tension are profound in their enactment of both love and trauma. Bell Hooks believed that, “the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous... had a radical political dimension” (Hooks 2001 384).

The individuals or the members within the families relate to each other - parents to their children and wives to their husbands and also the domestic servants to their masters and mistresses. Much of the Family Studies focus on women’s roles as wife, mother and daughter, that is, as nurturer, central to the well-being of others. Women are restricted in their ambitions to the roles of wife and mother. The field of home economics, as one of the only professions open to women, “was built on the experiences, consciousness and concerns of women in their major role of the historical period, which was home and family” (Bubolz et al. 421). In this view, women’s own needs, desires and abilities are ignored or at best given minimal attention.

Besides these theories, the feminist theatre is providing the privilege of speaking more and being heard the voices of such women who remain subdued and suppressed. The achievement of these women playwrights lies in the production of the theatre that could enact the injustices and inconsistencies operative in the domestic spaces. Theatres also exhibit the opposition that women have to face while vocalising their concerns and rights. The dialogism of the dramatic form provides the women protagonists their individual voices through which they assume the power to comment on and bring alive for the reader/audience the experiences of women within the thresholds. Yet their contribution to the genre of drama and theatre demands attention for the distinctiveness they brought to it. These playwrights pushed these issues to the forefront in the languages that spanned many regions across the country. Their plays represent women as the protagonists along with more just, realistic and humanistic lines. The playwrights resist the pervasive marginalisation and misrepresentation of women in traditional narratives by offering a pattern of interrogating the gender assumptions of traditional writings. It is the outcome of “Woman’s education, her rights of citizenship and other legal rights. Above
Women are rising up to assert their views by resisting the suppression of their views in the family field. The protagonists articulate their agency and resistance within this domestic space. Despite the spatially marked constraints the playwrights offer their reader/audience a glimpse of women’s ability to resist the domestic domination. They assign their protagonists the conscious awareness of the constraints as well as their strengths. Instead of resigning they use the space of their house itself to articulate their concerns. They question the regulatory system by nagging, quarrelling and also by arguing in order to assert themselves and emphasise their rights. They question their injustice at the cost of destroying personal relationships. They resist “the exploitative and restrictive role of woman as prescribed by patriarchy, namely as a giver, provider but never a seeker of herself” (Singh 2000:43).

It is universally acknowledged that marriage offers more rewards to men than to women. The protagonists in these plays strike against the rules of marriage and represent the rebellion against masculine authority. This type of examination of the position of women with regard to family and marriage “marked a new phase in the interpretation of women’s issues . . . and revealed the blending of three influences: the Hindu reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, progressive ideology and Western drama” (Dimitrova 12).

The playwrights, as in “The Swing of Desire” go a step further by recognising “the body’s claims to pleasure and fulfilment” (Gopal 2005:67). They make their protagonists talk back to social conservatives who tried to regulate domestic spaces. Instead of seeing the domestic spaces as the spaces of restriction and confinement, the women playwrights have considered them as sites where debate and arguments are possible. As Bell Hooks calls home a site of resistance, the force of their resistance can be understood through their conversations among women and with their men that take place within confines of their houses and which show that they can speak for themselves and bring forth debates on social issues. It expresses their attempts to “breach the conventional structure of gender and class relationship and to provide models of new possibilities” (Bhattacharya 87). These playwrights have contributed in the making of “modern womanhood by virtue of facilitating the propagation of feminist values, the translation of feminist images into social behavior, and the breakdown of sex-role stereotypes” (Brewer 04). They are
active in addressing discrimination and securing access to legal, educational, occupational, reproductive, sexual and familial rights, protection and self-determination.

Ironically resistance in both feminism and Family Studies has been critiqued as harmful and irrelevant. Whereas the feminist critiques of the family consider family as so oppressive to women that they reprove it by advocating that it should be abandoned because it is beyond reform. Other scholars like A. J. Cherlin point out the ways in which marriage is becoming deinstitutionalised; and the contemporary demographic shifts are rendering it irrelevant what was once thought to be the “natural” paring of marriage and family (Cherlin 848-861). Not only that the feminists like J. C. Tronto have demonstrated that the care giving performed by women as a result of their family ties e. g. as mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and kin, is not “natural” but socially constructed ( Tronto 644-663). These plays thus display energy especially in the portrayal of women protagonists caught in a variety of domestic situations. As Risman notes, such a focus is "the next frontier for feminist change agents" (Risman 445). They exhibit a renewable faith in the power of questioning assumptions, deconstructing them and working out new ways of being and doing interdisciplinary work which is challenging but rewarding. They also exhibit a change in the outlook on the role of women thereby bringing about the revisioning of families that have the potential of expressing multiple voices and perspectives.
Swarnakumari Devi (1856-1932) - a novelist, poet, playwright and journalist was one of the most distinguished literary figures of her times. According to Kazi Abdul Wadud, Devi "contributed in significant ways to our modern literature" (Wadud 32). Anurupa Devi (1882-1942) a famous name in Bengali literature put it, "The advent of Swarnakumari on the literary scene of Bengal heralded a new era for women . . . She was the first writer to show up the strengths of women's writing and raise women's creations to a position of respect" (quoted in Tharu and Lalita 1991 235). Devi, the tenth child of Debendranath Tagore often used forms that her more famous younger brother Rabindranath Tagore later picked up. Bani Roy an eminent woman writer of the times feels, "Early Rabindranath shows remarkable affinity with the style, techniques and even the titles of his elder sister who was probably a model and a support. Rabindranath, however, was not so generous or encouraging" (quoted in Tharu and Lalita 1991 237). Devi resented being patronised as the famous writer’s sister and struggled hard to establish her own reputation as a writer. In her poem "Likhitechi Dinrat", she expresses these resentments and her frustration. Today no one claims that Devi’s writing is comparable to that of her brother Rabindranath whose mature works place him among the most distinguished writers. But one can ask, "Had she received the support and encouragement she deserved, what might she not have achieved?" (Tharu and Lalita 1991 238). The plight of Devi surfaces Virginia Woolf’s story of Shakespeare’s imagined wonderfully gifted sister called Judith in A Room of One’s Own.

Engrossed in literary activities for more than fifty years, she was one of the most accomplished figures of her time. The major reform movements of advocating education for women and the remarriage of widows which spanned the second half of the nineteenth century form the backdrop to some of her books. When at 13, she was already writing, she married Janakiram Ghosal who was then a deputy magistrate. Among her major achievements is the journal Bharati which her brothers had started in 1878. She edited it for more than thirty years. Her second daughter Sarala Devi was also involved in this venture. She gave priority to popular articles on science so that women who could not speak English would have access to new scientific ideas and new information. She was among the first to coin Bengali names for the new scientific concepts. She herself
contributed seven articles on geology. There is much to report of her involvement in social reform and nationalist politics. In 1887, she helped form the *Sakhi Samiti*, an organisation to help widows and destitute women. In 1889 and 1890, along with Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade and Kadambini Gangopadhyaya she participated in the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress. She also started the Ladies’ Theosophical Society in Calcutta.

Widow Remarriage was a constant preoccupation for many social reformers - both male and female from the earliest decades of the nineteenth century. In 1865 Vishnushastri Pandit brought out a Marathi translation of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar’s *Remarriage of Hindu Widows* which had sought to establish that the weight of *shastric* authority was actually in favour of allowing remarriage. The *Hindu Widows Remarriage Act* was also passed in 1856. Many reformer-writers like Swarnakumari Devi focused their attention on this issue and tried their best to publicise the reformist zeal among the people through their writings. Indeed, Devi is among the first few women to have written plays at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her contribution to drama is significant. *Paak Chakra* was published in 1904 and was performed at the Star Theatre, Calcutta, around that time. With a touch of humour the play deals with a number of social issues of the playwright’s times like - dowry, widow re-marriage, girl-education and literacy. The play introduces the progressive norms as early as 1904 through debating the social problems of the times. It is a farce which is *“a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple, hearty laughter in the parlance of the theatre”* (Abrams 39). In the play exaggerated character-types find themselves in ludicrous situations in the course of the plot but they achieve their comic effects by the sustained brilliance and wit of the dialogue. Devi has created the exaggerated types of characters in Master and Mistress. Mistress is put into a laughable and ludicrous situation where she is made not to know what exactly is happening. She is taken for a ride by her son, Binode and her husband Shyamdhan Datta. The play opens with an overwhelming presence of women whose relationship holds no reserve.

The play deals with Binode’s marriage with Harimohan Babu’s daughter; and Soshimukhi’s with Chandrakant - the male domestic servant at Binode. The Matchmaker adds to the comic aspect of the play. Though Matchmaker she is highly learned for her profession. She is a Sanskrit scholar and her adherence to the rules of Sanskrit grammar adds to the fun of the play. Mistress’s mistakes in understanding the Sanskrit words and thereby Matchmaker’s correction of those words create comic situation. The playwright
through their dialogues brings out what is called “The errors of illiteracy” (38). The play is replete with comic and witty repartees by the characters, through which the playwright has addressed several social issues of contemporary India. It engages with domesticity, marriage and family. It works through different kinds of relationships. It is the story of family relationships and describes women in domestic spaces. The women work out their relationships in different ways to assert their selves.

**Soshimukhi**

The play treats the subject of widowhood in an entirely different vein. The widows in the play are not the stereotypical - sad, morose and cursing the fate for their lot but are buoyant. They exhibit the calm acceptance of their fate. Though they do not resist overtly, in their own silent ways they are successful in asserting their individuality and claiming rightful space in the family and the society. As early as 1904, Devi presented a radical widow on the stage. Widows are doubly sub-categorised - first as women and thereby as widows. The endeavour of Devi has been "to investigate families as contested sites of power without losing touch with their revolutionary potential as sources of resistance, empowerment and change" (Allen *et al.* 03). At the end of the play Soshimukhi marries Chandrakant. This act of hers exhibits her resistance to the traditional ideology of widow who has to live sacrificing the joys of life.

Soshimukhi is the protagonist of the play but much of the show is stolen by Mistress, the owner of the house. Soshimukhi is a young widow. Boroda another widow with a girl-child is the sister of Master - Shyamdhans Datta and staying with him after her husband's death. Soshimukhi works as a domestic help at Master Shyamdhans Datta's house. Mistress claims that Soshi is her "sister's mother-in-law's friend's foster daughter" (57) and considers her a closer relative and treats her as a member of her "closer kinship" (57) and not as the harbinger of bad luck as the widows are usually considered. Soshi is self willed and capable of violating the prescribed code of conduct for a widow. She understands the weaknesses of her Mistress who expects constant attention by all. Mistress feels fortunate to have Soshi who is of some relief for her. Mistress acknowledges it by telling, "There's no one but you to show me some sympathy!" (40). The play unfolds the multi-level relationships of Soshi with others in the house. She offers Mistress her sympathy which Mistress expects very ardently.

Soshi has her own ways of asserting her self - she finds it difficult to be servile and humble. She does not want to be ignored and shoved into a corner. Her association with Mistress clearly demonstrates Soshi - a widow's need to belong, to have relationship
and someone to depend upon which is stable and provides her a safer habitat. Being single and widowed young woman she knows that her choices are limited and hence cajoles Mistress much in need of being always in her favour. Still she resists falling into the trappings of conventional widowhood. She submits or at least pretends to surrender to the will of Mistress. She is able to achieve this through a split in her own personality. Despite her surrender to Mistress, she exercises her own will. She delicately balances her relationship with all at home especially with Mistress since she is controller of all matters of the house. She indulges in self-praise and is aware of her capabilities. She sings to herself, "My ingenuity I must applaud - / The Master and the Mistress in my control . . . / They move like toys to my order, the way I want" (43). She knows, "One has to handle people as they are." Boroda admires her: "What a clever girl! She buys the Mistress with one hand and sells her with the other! Different dogs need different handling, it's true. She couldn't have remained in this house for long, had it been otherwise" (44-45). By doing so she restores her position as well as her self-respect by getting along with everyone especially with Mistress. Soshi is able to take her own decisions. The free and independent-minded Soshi disrupts the idea of conventional widowhood.

Soshi has an immense amount of confidence. Boroda has someone in her brother - Master Shyamadhan Datta to fall back on but Soshi is invariably at the receiving end. She has no support except for Chandrakant but he himself is a domestic help at Master and is much disliked by Mistress. This has made her to learn how and when to take sides. She feels compelled to assume the role of comforter of Mistress for her own sake. It expresses her ability to survive and compromise. If at all any kind of comfort or solace she is to have, it is from within, which help her outlive the sorrows of her widowhood. She plays an active role in a situation which offers her no choices. She has realised that her survival necessitates lot of pretension and also of keeping up appearances. She has learnt to agree when there is disagreement. She has to be false to her own self in order to be true to Mistress. The socio-economic factors of her life predominantly govern her behaviour and compel her explore and discover the alternative ways of survival and empowerment.

Soshi is willing to marry Chandrakant. Though Mistress is not in favour of Chandrakant, Soshi's autonomous self asserts her individuality and rejects Mistress's inclination. Soshi and Chandrakant love each other and marry at the end much in the face of Mistress's dislike of Chandrakant. Mistress was ready get Soshi married to her own son Binode but not with Chandrakant as she dislikes him much. But Soshi's is not an
unquestioned allegiance or thoughtless servitude to Mistress. Her decision is her own decision, in which she can go a step ahead towards her own liberation.

Soshi however is in a dilemma for a while. She contemplates whom to choose. “One is the master and the other is a servant; / one is the son, the other the domestic. /Marriage to one will make me a rich man’s wife, /I’ll have maids to serve me and the society to respect me. / If I marry the other, I’ll remain as I am. / So where’s the dilemma?” and decides to marry Binode. But she feels sad and thinks, “And what about my Chandrakant? / He’ll surely die. / Whom shall I consult about this?” (60-61). But this dilemma of hers is short-lived. Though she gets fascinated by the prospective rich Binode, she marries Chandrakant. It indicates her act of self-preservation, her rebellion and above all her sense of fairness. She remains true to Chandrakant. She is able to move out of the prescribed stereotypical pattern of behaviour primarily on the basis of her self-confidence and the right choice of a person who loved her much.

The songs of Soshi are the expression of her true self. She knows that the world is a place of great fun but she also knows that it is “A whole nut, a bit too hard” but “must eat” (49). Though she is caught between the social image of widow and her defiance of that image, she does not run away from the life. Being young, she is naturally bent towards enjoying life but being a widow she is aware of the hard realities. She expresses her dilemma through her songs which express her rejection of the traditional roles of a widow and her need to experience life to its fullest. Her songs also express how she undergoes the difficult and painful experiences which are necessary steps towards her maturation. Her “encounters with the outside world help to shape and define the parameters of subjectivity” (Felski 137). She is not a gloomy widow bereft of life-affirming joy. She unconsciously resists the Indian gender agenda for widows. She counteracts the stereotypical expectations and braces ahead with hopes.

Soshi’s songs no doubt express her expectations from life. But they also indicate her loneliness, her yearning for a companion and as a widow how she should live with pungent tears and overnight rice. She expresses, “What skill with words and amazing wit- / But a lonely queen am I without a King, / My only sorrow I must admit” (43). By expressing so, she does not feel guilty about her desire. On the contrary, she hides her sorrow and behaves light-heartedly. She is very unlike the widow. Therefore she could assert, “But that’s naught- I’ll snap my fingers for such a pair; / In my own little corner I sing my glory / O glory, to me” (43). She finds support by compassionately involving herself in the act of pleasing Mistress. Though it seems the absolute erasure of her self, in
reality these are the tactics of hers for survival. She does not allow herself degenerate into self-pity. Her songs are the manifestations of her reconciliation to a condition where she decides to ward off depression and sorrow often deemed typical of widowhood. They also express her determination to stand up for herself.

In her play Devi articulates the silence to which widows have been subjected to for centuries. Soshi frees herself from tradition and superstition in order to explore the world’s possibilities while taking care of her own destiny. The play expresses her determined endeavour to extricate herself completely from the defeatist mode of living. Her assertion and resistance win the battle for her.

**Boroda**

Boroda is the sister of Master - Shyamdhans Datta. After her husband’s death she along with her daughter enters her brother’s house. Primarily she has to be of some use for the rest of the family without leading to the tussle between the daughter of the house and the daughter-in-law of the house. Through Boroda, Devi portrays the plight of those widows who return to their parents’ house after their husbands’ death. Though Boroda’s conflict is not central to the play her presence allows the social background to emerge in detail. It highlights how the death of a husband brings about a reduction in woman’s status. She is compelled to remain untouched by other’s bitterness and acrimony towards her and remain tempered with a spirit of endurance.

Mistress though not bad towards Boroda, is indifferent to her plight which is a pointer to the apathetic attitude of the society. Devi adequately raises various issues concerning the deprivation of widows - their endurance, their silence, their loss of dreams, the rearing of their children and their future. Though she is the daughter of the house, her widowhood condemns her to the role of subservience. A single woman deprived of the protection of husband comes under the protection of another man - the brother. And as such she is constrained in many ways and her social sphere gets limited and circumscribed. She feels the need to be absorbed. Boroda hence naturally develops a lovely relationship with Soshi. It fulfils their need in each one of the two. Their sisterhood allows more space for recovery. Hers becomes a single objective existence. She wishes her daughter to be educated and self-dependant since she herself stayed illiterate all her life and requests Matchmaker to teach her daughter. The play comments on the education of girls. Boroda, the widow realising her status in her brother’s house wants her daughter to be educated. She is ready to spend five rupees every month for her education. She perfectly sounds an optimistic note. Though Boroda and Soshi represent different age
groups they profess the same ideology of living for self while taking care of others.

Mistress

The play is not only about the widows who demand space and, struggle for it but also of an older generation woman Mistress who not only defends widow remarriage but is also ready to have Soshimukhi - a widow as her own daughter-in-law. Mistress’s motherhood which is egocentric, gives her a sense of power, power that may not necessarily be wielded in the wider social world but within her own house. She insists on getting a dowry of ten thousand rupees for her son and is adamant in her insistence. But the same mother is ready to get a widow to marry her son - Binode without any dowry.

Among many claims that women make on their husbands, one is on economic grounds. She has managed to keep her husband under her control. With the help of Soshi and Boroda she manages the household and exercises full control. Though she is not a termagant wife she surely expects her wishes to prevail upon. Luckily, her happiness is sustained by the decency of Master - her husband. He is the President of the Progressive Norms Committee and has signed a declaration that he will neither demand nor offer dowry. No doubt he had the selfish intention in signing. When he signed he did not know that his two daughters would die in their childhood. But as he has committed himself to that “foolish oath” (49) as he calls it now, he can not conveniently break it for his son’s marriage. Despite he borrows five thousand rupees from Harimohan Babu as a dowry.

Though Mistress is allowed to handle money matters, Master keeps her in dark regarding many other matters. He does not inform her why and when he has borrowed five thousand rupees from Harimohan Babu. He also does not want her to know about the fifty-rupee raise in his salary. Even her son Binode plays a trick with her and arranges his own marriage with Harimohan Babu’s daughter keeping her under the impression that he is marrying her favourite - Soshimukhi. She is not considered seriously either by her son or by her husband. She uses anger and defiance in order to assert herself. Her psyche goes through her need to be loved and the need to be on her own. The play is full of this kind of her ranting. Her unnecessary and unwanted worries make the reader/audience laugh merrily at her but also sympathise with her. Her behaviour and talk may give the impression of her as weak-minded, immature and disappointing character, living a life of self-indulgence. But she is a radical-reformist at the core of her heart and is bold enough to have a widow as her daughter-in-law. When Master expresses his resent, she reminds him of his oath that he took for the committee and that he will be honoured for such an act of his. When he quips, “But she is a widow” (55), Mistress firmly tells that widow
remarriages are permitted by the Shastras. Mistress forcefully tells, "You'll be the first one to do so and show the way" (55). She instills courage in him by telling and convincing him that there is no fear of being socially ostracised. Though initially she appears immature and childlike, she emerges a strong woman with her own social convictions. She strongly resists her husband's disapproval and wards off his fears. She says, "I can see very clearly. You men pretend to be blind with eyesight and dead while alive, when it comes to dealing with us. Small girls hardly ten or twelve years of age are widowed the day after their wedding and it becomes a social taboo to even mention their remarriage. But if I die today, then tomorrow you ... I can't understand why God wants girls to be born into this horrible land. If one woman sheds tears for another in sympathy ... ten others come running to beat her! ... The entire set up makes me burn with anger. The male sex that torments us so much will never come to any good, never ... Do you think once the practice of widow-remarriage is generally accepted all widows will run to get married? Women aren't like men. Some women would rather remain spinsters than get married even once, leave aside widows willing to get married twice! But it means that a path is kept open for that eventuality. Women are the weaker sex; in case someone is in great misery then marriage may be considered an option, even for a widow. But keeping them in misery is what your dharma instructs you to do, isn't it? That's the way to your salvation. Alas, how else can your sex be called superior? And these are the Presidents of the Progressive Committees, editors, social workers, and so on!" (56). But men make the very light of women's resistance and call it foolish. Master goes to the extent of making fun of the seriousness of her talk by telling, "All right, I'll give you permission. I'll write in my will that after my death you can marry again [ ... ] does that make you happy?" (56). Such words of his torture her a lot.

The words of Mistress express how aggrieved she is and compelled to review the practices of discrimination, and subjects it to an interrogation focusing on social reality. She moves from the personal to the social. By subscribing to the ideal of sisterhood she impresses the reader/audience. She is able to combat the regressive pulls of her husband. Men are looked up to and treated wiser and more mature than women. But Master - the man is insensitive to the rationality of Mistress. The playwright brings in a strong element of ridicule targeted against the insensitive men folk who ignore women's rationality and their ability to resist and challenge. She attacks a person's sense of responsibility.

The ending of the play appears to be tame and reconciliatory. The play speaks of women of the earliest twentieth century who stood their ground as the challengers. The
play highlights the point that men differ from women in their perception of widow remarriage and in their response to it. Soshimukhi - the protagonist moves beyond the prescribed gender constraints for a widow. The playwright subverts stereotypical structures to make space for the personhood of widows. She analyses in a fundamental way many aspects of widows' lives in the society that help understand some aspects of widows' conditioning. The play highlights that the paradoxical solution to the widow question is to be found by the widows themselves with the help of their own tremendous potential within them, by combating reactionary anti-widow ideas. They themselves have to identify their strength and use them creatively. "Women have the freedom, complete freedom as much as the men have . . . today's society doesn't control our lives and worlds the way yesterday's did," says Nabneeta Dev Sen (Dev Sen 2003 69). Devi has shown that even in those days of yester-years there were women who controlled their own lives.

The play as a social parody propagates widow remarriage. This humorous yet satirical play written in the first decade of the twentieth century was prompted by the straightforward defence of widow remarriage. Through the centrality of widowhood, Devi has staged the power inside a widow to face life, the power to speak, to assert, to resist and to find a respectable place for herself. Though the protagonist is dependent on the relatives for her survival she is not a conventional widow. Devi has deconstructed the stereotypes. Even the old matriarch - Mistress plays a crucial role in making valiant effort at social reclamation for widows. She rants and sulks but is determined. Devi as early as 1904 gave voice to that invisible minority which survives on the fringes of society. She has attempted to bring them to the centre-stage by presenting them in a positive light. Instead of waiting endlessly, the protagonist chooses her own path by confronting and overcoming the inhibitions of life.

The play is, to borrow the words of Allen et al. a "treatise about maternal love as a politicised practice full of contradictory desires and demands" (Allen et al. 07). The play opens a new window on parenting in the family field. The assumption underlying this play is that social problems such as dowry and widowhood can be resolved if they behave assertively in their interpersonal relationship. It emphasises how the members within the families relate to each other - parents to their children, wives to their husbands, which is based on the structured set of social relations in which they are all embedded.
xiv. Prey

*Paradh* (Marathi, 1947)

Malatibai Bedekar  
Trans: Shobha Deshmukh

“The Marathi language is a little more than a thousand years old; Marathi literature is only about two hundred years younger. The process of the new-born language hardening into a vehicle for literature was quickened by a social urge” (Rajadhyaksha 150). Marathi literature has produced powerful women writers in Kamalabai Tilak, Geeta Sane, Laxmibai Tilak, Indira Sant and many more. It is under B. P. Kirloskar (1843-1885) a producer, actor and dramatist that the drama achieved its first full-fledged expression. Though the Marathi drama started in 1843, it was only in the 1890s that women started writing plays. Women playwrights like Hirabai Pednekar, Kashibai Phadke and Sonabai Kerkar wrote sociological, mythological and also historical plays. “About 116 plays were written by nearly 80 women playwrights between 1894 and 2000. These plays cover a wide range of topics - from the mythological and spiritual to the social, psycho-social and psychoanalytic” (Pandit 263). During 1950s there was a perceptible change in the themes of these plays. The playwrights like Malatibai Dandekar, Tara Vanarase and Malatibai Bedekar wrote on the themes of bigamy, dowry, late marriages and forced spinsterhood of working women. The theme of many playwrights like Malati Joshi, Asha Parachure, Sushila Marathe and many others dealt with the themes of the love-marriage, extra-marital relationship and the effects of the social, legal and political changes on the family life. The main objective of such plays was not only to entertain but also to teach the women reader/audience. In Marathi literature a section of writers kept up resistance in the plays of the day. They broke away from the conventional norms and explored new ways in the familial location. Bedekar has contributed significantly to the awareness of women’s oppression in the domestic space through her writings. At the age of 33 she married the well-known novelist and film-maker Vishram Bedekar in 1938. She was also called Barutai Khare. She was a well-known creative writer of the years that witnessed the Freedom Movement. She wrote under the pen-name Vibhavari Shirurkar. It was only in 1946 that she revealed her real name: Malatibai Bedekar.

If the term “feminism” refers to the principle of asserting women’s rights and independence, Malatibai Bedekar is a feminist claiming and advocating the rights of women. The feminist concept had been popularised since the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1960s. Much before that in the beginning of twentieth century in India,
women had started supporting women's cause. In an age of conservatism, when women were not daring to write and publish, Bedekar not only wrote but also staged her play *Paradh* in which she dealt with the progressive ideas. She created a sensation by her play *Paradh* which is translated into English as "Prey". She usually wrote about the lives and aspirations of educated women, most of whom were single and working. After reading her stories, S. V. Ketkar comments, "Men and women are two different castes. Men will never be able to understand women's minds using their own logic. For society to understand women's mind, women must speak" (Tharu and Lalita 1991 425). And as Bedekar spoke she created a lot of controversy. Her literature is generally recognised as "having introduced a strong, new feminist note in Marathi literature" (Tharu and Lalita 1991 426).

The play "Prey" was first performed on 27th April, 1947 during the Natyamahotsav of the Mumbai Sahitya Sangh and was awarded the first prize and published in Mumbai. Written in a conventional style, the play has four Acts divided into subsequent Scenes. The play focuses on the victimisation of women in general and shows the plight of an uneducated woman who is deserted by her husband and exploited by the society in particular. Bedekar told Tharu and Lalita that she wrote about women because she was interested in the changes that were taking place as women became educated and so altered their lives (Tharu and Lalita 1991 425).

The play exemplifies the status of a deserted woman in the society. The protagonist Ramabai/Rama voices her anger towards the patriarchal as well as the matriarchal tyranny. She does suffer but not mutely. She does not want to become a "silently labouring beast" (Baker 1990 247) and tries her best to rebel against the injustice meted out to her. The whole of the play works through woman-to-woman dialogues with all the characters caught up in their individual contexts. Rama's husband Barasaheb and Ketaki's husband Raghu are the only two male characters who are lawyers but do not appear on the stage. They go to the same club and have the same prestige. Inspite of being a wife of a well-known person Rama has to work as a cook in Raghu's house. Her decision to be a "mistress" of Ketaki's husband Raghu is going to rock her husband's as well as Ketaki's house. It can be an act of revenge on everyone. She takes a radical position out of sheer frustration and helplessness. Her decision metaphorically encompasses generations of female experience, failures and also their temptations.

The character of Ketaki is a foil to Rama's character. Ketaki's behaviour and values contrast with those of Rama's. To Ketaki her identity is rooted in her physical
beauty. She tries to maintain it even at the cost of her mother-in-law’s anger and dislike, and her husband and children’s inconvenience and displeasure. She feels obliterated in the absence of her make-ups. She too resists in her own way against her mother-in-law and husband’s expectations. She says to her mother-in-law, “I do whatever I want. This is my house and my family. I run it according to my own system” (283). Indirectly, it is she and her mother-in-law are responsible for Raghu’s moves towards their servant Rama.

Rama’s decision to be a “mistress” of a married man is something that shocks the feminine sensibility since the Indian woman - a wife and mother of a child thinks of going to another man who is also married and is a father of two children. She experiences an extreme form of alienation when Janaki - the enthusiastic social worker for the upliftment of destitute women - denies Rama any support and shelter. It is because Rama’s husband has warned Janaki that if she gives Rama shelter he will take Janaki to court for instigating his wife to leave her home and for misleading her. In the face of such a situation Rama finally decides to walkout without caring for the consequences. Her decision to be a “mistress” of Raghu can be conceptualised as a transgression in the Indian socio-cultural value-system. But as Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan observes that some of these transgressive practices like cross dressing, or crossing the boundaries from one sphere of activity to another, remaining unmarried, adulterous love and economic independence do not always remain suspect. In course of time some of these cease to be viewed as transgressions and become socially accepted acts (Rajan 71-92).

Rama is put to injustice by her husband who not only abuses her with infidelity but turns her out of the house. He smothers her by not seeing her and not talking to her. Her mother-in-law does not allow her either to meet him or talk to him. It gives a lot of food for thought about woman’s expectations from a married life. She expects a respectable married life. But “a woman who was unable to put her husband in her pocket might be an object of pity, never of respect” (Bedekar 1991 487). As a daughter-in-law, Rama is at the lowest rung in the hierarchical ladder, all else is above her. Her thought of resisting the conventional norms of the society has thus many connotations behind it. Her helplessness makes her to accept the new identity of herself as a “mistress”. The uneducated, deserted, helpless but “attractive” wife decides to be a “kept” woman.

Women are expected to feel empathy for one another. The personal sorrows of women make sense only when they are shared and understood in the contexts of their oppression. Rama unfortunately could not receive the empathetic, uncritical and compassionate listening by any of the women which was significantly necessary for
fostering courage and self-confidence in her. She expects from Ketaki, Ketaki’s mother-in-law, Janakibai, her own mother-in-law and her own mother to tell her, “You and I are feeling the same feeling” (Benjamin 144). But she in turn "feels betrayed by a begrudging sisterhood" (Keller 32). There is the absence of the feminist ethic of mutual support and sisterhood. The feminist imperative to be kind and sympathetic to other women and “the omnipresent injunction to play nice and don’t be trashy” (Zwinger 190) fails to operate in the case of Rama. The dominant female group in the guise of mother-in-law fears Rama and worries about being thrown out for best. This ideological struggle between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is well-depicted in this play.

Rama was denied education also. Her poor mother had to look after a big family consisting of six daughters. According to mother educating the girls is useless since girls belong to their husband’s houses. Mother would, according to Rama, definitely have made an effort to educate her son. Her mother was not able to grant Rama the unquestioning affection of a mother. Rama expects from her mother, “Feel what I feel, reflect my desires, reflect my frustrations, be part of me” (Wyatt 59). But the mother fails terribly in being a support system to her daughter. Bedekar brings out the mother-daughter relationship. Rama’s mother’s helpless situation makes her hard hearted. She gives Rama the feeling of being unwanted. No doubt, the mother is not bad but is moulded by traditions, constraints, anger and lack of any support system to her own self. Above all poverty has circumscribed her. It reflects “how poverty limits relationship options and negatively affects the interactions of people in partnership with each other . . . and women’s struggles to accommodate the demands of the provider role” (Walker 2009 22). Rama’s father, the supposed head of the family continues to live on the outer edge of the family. He is uninvolved and uninterfering, and totally unconcerned to understand the reason for his daughter’s defiance and pain. Bound by cultural conventions and financial depravity, her mother’s sole desire in her life is to get her six daughters married off. She remains subdued under the burden of marriageable daughters. The conditions at the family affect the inter-personal relationships. The mother yields to the invisible pressures inflicted upon her by the traditional and social environment. She is caught in a social game in which emotions and compassion have a very little role. She is totally immersed in child rearing and doing the monotonous domestic tasks besides going out to work. This is all due to the father who does nothing that is traditionally expected of a father.
Rama is silenced and repressed in her attempt to have justice. When she could not fight any more against the system of power she walks out in a resistant gesture to Raghu. She announces firmly that she too shared the feelings with which Raghu placed his hand on her and she is willing to stay with him as his mistress. She recognises life's realities for a woman and makes her own choices and walks out. Going to Raghu's shelter to be his "mistress" is not an easy but becomes an ultimate solution to her plight.

Feminist critics can see positive feminist sign of rebellion in Rama's refusal to be a stereotype - that of a submissive role. But the critics may doubt the suitability of Rama's going to Raghu as a solution for her problems. But it does show her as self-determined woman who imposes on herself the new identity as a "mistress". Bedekar makes the protagonist Rama to step out of the matriarchal control and highlights Rama's claims for sensuality. Rama too declares, "Till now I didn't respond to him at all. Now I'll tell him, you have disturbed my peace of mind. I admit that I share the feeling with which you placed your hand on mine. I am willing to stay with you as your mistress" (307). Novy explains, "The man in a position of relative social power laughs at the conventions of society that gives him that power, while the woman subordinated by her society worries about its judgement of her" (Novy 16). The playwright has deliberately constructed the play of resistance but instead of gaining any triumph, the protagonist is compelled to retreat with disastrous consequences falling into a "prey" to Raghu's advancing towards her and compromise with her fate in the face of non-cooperation from any other women-folk of the play.

Bedekar has handled Rama's anger and resistance subtly and in a refined way. She balances Rama's resistance, her inner desires and the compulsions of her life. No one in the play helps Rama to come out of the crises. Not that what Rama does at the end of the play is appropriate but at least the playwright has probed the consciousness of Rama and has tried to deconstruct the hegemonic notions of power. She gets a glimpse of her inner being and desire and tries her best to empower herself to confront the power, comprehend the situation and get control of her life.

The three elderly mothers in the play are represented as the agents of patriarchy. They exercise their power to uphold their own power structure. Bedekar gives voice to Rama to relate how her inner being is dried up by the assaults of her mother-in-law who charges Rama of infidelity to her husband. Her mother-in-law a tyrannical female patriarch relentlessly represents the hegemonic order. She becomes the instrument in sending out Rama. Barasaheb's role is not clear. He seems disgusted. Only his irritated

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voice is heard in the whole of the play and is not seen on the stage. He forgets that "marriage is not a plain and simple contract but is part of a larger human relationship . . . something more than desire, a feeling of understanding, of acceptance and belongingness, of a shared experience" (Jain 2003 79). He does not provide her any space and opportunity for rational interaction by not meeting her. She feels harassed by his indifference. Consequently she directs this resentment towards her own self.

The helpless Rama’s mother asserts her power by demanding financial help from Rama despite her pathetic plight. The mother is not a proverbial “bad mother” but she acts with good intentions for the well-being of the daughters. She is a conventional mother who wants to see her daughters married off. She is not bothered about what would be their lot after their marriage. Rama pertinently but with hurt voice asks, “Do marriages improve our conditions in any way?” (269). Mother’s sole worry is in the absence of their marriages they may become insecure in the patriarchal institutions. Her intentions make her hard-hearted. The motherhood represented in the play is placed between the feminist agenda to displace it from its idealised place in the culture and to ascertain its traditional place as a symbol of power. In the play the three elderly women have been displaced from their idealised places in the culture and they are depicted as the alternates of patriarchal agency asserting their selfish intentions.

The mothers are portrayed as individual persons and not as the infallible deities representing traditional motherhood. Bedekar has done this despite the high place the mother holds in the Indian society. The rapid social and cultural changes are forcing the women writers to portray mother not as an idealised being but as an individual with all shortcomings in them. This fundamental shift discusses the image of the mother and the motherhood. The creative women writers started redefining the parameters of what constituted motherhood. By doing so, they have brought in a strong element of ridicule in their portraiture. The mother figures perform the role of the “female patriarchs” who lack the sustaining, understanding and loving nature as supporters. It is natural with some women that there arises among them the will to rule in their relationship. Rama’s mother-in-law enjoys power vicariously through her son. She unloads, unburdens her anger on her daughter-in-law. In fact the world that surrounds Rama is full of indifferent and oppressive relationships where a woman becomes a woman’s worst enemy. It is said that “man’s cruelty to man is exceeded by man’s cruelty to woman but even that is no match for woman’s cruelty towards woman” (Nandy 116).
The play stages the resistance of Rama to her mother, mother-in-law, Ketaki’s mother-in-law in particular and to the social institutions like the houses for destitute in general. It is an irony that houses for helpless women indirectly push Rama into the hell of adultery. Her resistance consciousness becomes obvious when she offers resistance to all. She resists her economic dependence on others. At the cost of her dignity and self-esteem she enters others’ houses as a servant and cook. Her repressive marital relationship pushes her to respond to Raghu’s moves. Her decision to be a “mistress” is a subversive strategy meant to resist both matriarchal and hegemonic culture.

Rama observes her mother’s helplessness, her mother-in-law’s callousness, Ketaki’s mother-in-law’s selfish motives, her husband’s indifference, Raghu’s inclination towards herself and her own meaningless existence, her responsibility of her child and subservient status. She encounters everybody and finds no one helpful and as her saviour. When a woman comes to the help of another woman, she feels relieved of her burden and in this new found bond she feels equipped to challenge the patriarchal regime. In the absence of such a female bonding or sisterhood her resistance gives way to hatredness towards all. That hatredness makes her feel indifferent towards the decision she takes.

"The really strong women are those who cross boundaries, deviate from social codes and work their way to selfhood" (Jain 2003 247). Though her decision seems to be devoid of reason, it explains the psychological trauma and the mental torture that she has undergone. In a situation which offers her no choices Rama loses hopes in the face of utter helplessness and despair, and the responsibility of her son. "The supreme violence of a man’s rejection of a woman - combine to produce an utterance that defies the ruse of the law and confers on this text the dignity of a tragic discourse. What we have here is a classic instance of choice overruled inexorably by necessity - by fate, in short" (Guha 2008 56). She could not defy the authority of the society to the extent of enabling to live honourably in the society. Her decision amounted thus to an act of resistance against a patriarchal tradition that has claimed her as a “prey” and her resistance took “that characteristic form often adopted by the oppressed to subvert the designs of their oppressions in the guise of conforming to them” (Guha 2008 56-57).

Rama’s decision thus reflects the damaging influence of the societal repression on her personality. It is the natural consequence of her gradual understanding of the hardships faced by women living alone without male partner. When Rama is left alone to fend for herself and her child she finds a cure for herself. The Hindu women follow the ideals of wifehood i.e. pativrata. For them Mandodari, Sita, Tara, Draupadi and Ahilya
are the ideal wives to be emulated by them. But Rama’s decision challenges the concept of *pativrata* as well as the concept of fidelity. Her husband’s faithlessness and rejection do compel her to resist by transgressing the codes of *pativrata*. The play describes the release of the emotions of pity and fear by the audience at the end of this tragedy. In his *Poetics* Aristotle discusses the importance of catharsis. The audience faces the misfortune of Rama - the protagonist, which elicit pity and compassion. Simultaneously, the audience also confronts the failure of Rama thus receiving “*a frightening reminder of human limitations and frailties*” (Pandey 2005 36). However, both these negative emotions of fear and frailty are purged because “*the tragic protagonist’s suffering is an affirmation of human values rather than a despairing denial of them*” (Pandey 2005 36).

Women are easily dislocated because they are never seen as persons in their own right. This is also because of the silence of men which pushes women into functional roles. The silent and recessive men necessarily upset the power relationship in the families. Their silence grants power to women who experience it and articulate within hierarchical structures. It clearly sends the message that men do not wish to involve themselves in the wrangling of women. The silence of both Rama and Ketaki’s husbands, Rama’s father does give power to Ketaki, Ketaki’s mother-in-law and Rama’s mother-in-law. In the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship each tries to fulfil her aim - one seeking to dominate and the other trying to have her own rights and claims over the relationship. It also comments on the woman-to-woman relationship which is not free of the inherited stereotyped roles.

Rama’s husband’s passive indifference and recessive self-preserving silence leaves Rama with very few options. She cannot return to her parents’ house, she can not continue in her marital home, and even staying alone in an independent house is difficult for a woman deserted by her husband. She is victimised by her own husband who disowned her for no fault of hers. When she finds her sense of fairness offended she moves out of the inner courtyard of the established morality and conventions. The play brings out “*the importance of institutional support*” (Baber 61) and how its absence pushes the protagonist to take untoward decision. Homes as well as the homes for destitute women that are meant to offer comfort and security are no longer able to do so.

Ramabai’s mother-in-law wielded her power as mother-in-law and that generates resistance and that was Rama’s undoing. Ketaki’s mother-in-law imposed her will on Rama that was Rama’s misfortune, Rama’s own mother clamps social and familial norms
on the daughters and that is her cruel fate. Janaki refuses to help Rama that was Rama's ultimate failure. Her decision to be a "mistress" highlights the inhuman and exploitative patriarchy as well as matriarchy of which she is the "prey".
xv. Gamble

Jugar (Marathi, 1951)

Muktabai Dikshit (Krishnai)

Trans: Uday Narker and Maya Pandit

Muktabai Dikshit was born in Dhule in Maharashtra in a joint-family in 1902. She soon became a child-widow and was sent to Baroda where she completed her B.A. thereby M.A. in Philosophy. In 1939, she married a widower V. N. Dikshit who was an intellectual with a very progressive and modern thinking. Both were in the forties and their marriage created waves in the society. She died in 1977. She dominated the Marathi stage from 1950-60. She used the genre of drama effectively for the interpretation of social problems but “the scope of her problems is probably not as wide” (Rajadhyaksha 169). She wrote a number of articles and short-stories under the pen-name “Krishnai”. She was a compulsive writer with liberal outlook.

Jugar was staged on 15th August, 1950 by the Jeevankala Mandal of Pune in the Bhanuvilas Theatre and published in 1951 and is translated into English as “Gamble”. Dikshit made use of theatre as a medium and an exclusive forum for highlighting women’s issues. Her motto had been to teach and to entertain the woman reader/audience. She made use of the feminist theatre which “is a source of empowerment; it enables women to speak out. It is at the intersection of art, activism and social relevance and sees theatre as an instrument of real change in women’s lives. It is an exploration of women’s own idiom, their own form, their language and ways of communication. It is a challenge to the established notions of theatre” (Singh 2009 150). According to Tara Bhawalkar, Dikshit’s Jugar has been the first and significant play of the post 1950 period (Bhawalkar 343). It has been marked for the advocacy of women’s rights and for providing social justice and also for raising their status. The playwright challenges men for bigamy, and assaults the orthodox practices of degrading women in the society which rejects the first wife and thereby humiliates and insults the second wife. She strengthens women by providing voice to them. The play highlights “the rage with which Indian women have claimed theatre as a space to rearticulate their relationships with public and private” (Nagar 56). Whatever De Hart pronounces about American women of 1960s had already begun in India. “The feminist revolution of the 1960s . . . was begun largely by educated, middle class women whose diverse experiences had sharpened their sensibility to the fundamental inequality between the sexes . . . they stepped in a commitment to equality and the techniques of protest” (De Hart 349).
The play “Gamble” has multiple perspectives. It deals with the themes of bigamy, love-marriage, conventionally arranged marriage, second marriage, women’s role in their marriages, mother/father-daughter relationship, generational conflicts, the power exercised by men, the secrets of the family and every individual’s need for freedom of expression. Since time immemorial man has the privilege of marrying many women. Neither did religion nor laws deter him from it. He had the right to reject his wife any time. But the laws on the Prohibition of Bigamy brought solace to women to some extent. The time of action of the play falls on the borderline of that period i.e. in 1946. These laws prohibited men from marrying second time unless they divorce their first wives. Dikshit attempts to present the plight of not only the rejected first wife but primarily of the second wife - her suffocation and her humiliation. Indirabai has to become the second wife of Babasaheb - a successful government officer who is not used to any opposition. They have two daughters - Kishori and Baby. Kishori’s is love marriage with Vasantrao who is a doctor. Baby a college student supports the Prohibition of Bigamy Act. Shrikant, a young man of thirty-five years is a nephew of Babasaheb. Babasaheb’s marriage with Indira leads to the departure of his first wife Sharada Joshi to her maternal house at Bhramhadesh, where she dies. Her daughter is Usha who is about to marry Vasantrao.

Dikshit employs an innovative technique where the important characters Sharada Joshi - the first wife of Babasaheb; and Kishori - the deserted wife of Vasantrao do not appear on the stage. It is through Usha that Sharada Joshi is made known to all. All women characters are strong in their own ways. Sharada though physically weak is strong enough to resist the society and desert her husband. Not only does she go away from his life but also wipes the kumkum from her forehead. She asks her daughter not to use the name of her father i.e. Joshi. Her question is why a wife should use the name of the husband who deserted her.

Dikshit questions and resists the age-long endings of the narratives in literature which is always “And they started living happily”. She shows that marriage in life is not the beginning of a happy life. In her Foreword to the play she raises a pertinent question whether arranged or love marriages afford happy life to a man and a woman. According to her love marriage is also not a solution for happy life. Hence marriage is like Jugar i.e. Gamble. The one who gambles does not have any control over the proceedings of the game. Hence marriage is not a definitive path of happy life. The play is the first of its type to come out of the stamp of “the play for Mahila Mandal” and also from “Purushapatra Virahit” plays. It is not an “all-women play”. Since time immemorial man has the
privilege of marrying many women. Instead of divorcing her and freeing her from the bondage of marriage, he would free himself from that responsibility and marry afresh. Dikshit calls such love marriages "Atee Preeti Vivah" (Dikshit 1951 03) - i.e. marriage of too much love. Love marriage, according to Dikshit, will not be a happy marriage because "the foundation of such marriage is also the foundation for the sorrow of the first wife" (Dikshit 1951 03) (translation mine). The play embodies five modes of resistance: Silence by Indira; Rage of Baby; Balanced rejection of her husband Vasantrao by Kishori; Usha’s decision to marry Vasantrao and Usha’s angry retorts to her father. The play brings out resistance to bigamy in multiple ways - Indira silently resists her husband and makes Usha Patankar realise her mistake of marrying a married man Vasantrao who happens to be Indira’s own son-in-law; the play exhibits the balanced resistance of Kishori who silently rejects her husband Vasantrao (who decides to marry Usha Patankar) by returning to her maternal house without any blame throwing; Usha’s decision to marry Vasantrao, initially because of her love for him but later it turns into revenge when she comes to know that Kishori is daughter of her father by his second wife; Baby is a social activist and supports the Prohibition of Bigamy Act. The playwright allows Usha a chance for self-retrospection by endorsing Indira’s narrative of her own agony as a second wife.

The ideological struggle through questioning by women is well depicted. Questioning as the first step of resistance has become an integral part of this play which opens with a graphic but somewhat saddening description of Akka/Kishori’s return to her maternal house when her husband decides to marry Usha. Kishori quits a long-standing love-marriage of 6-7 years and walks out for the proverbial “other woman” - Usha. Her decision to leave the house of her husband is substantiated by the title of the play. Her husband Vasant loved and married her with the thought that with the dice of love-marriage in his hands, he will surely win the game of happiness and which is the typical feature of every gamble. Now he is ready to marry Usha. But Shrikant, his friend tries to convince him telling that there is no other gamble as treacherous as marriage. And love-marriage is a betting game when life itself is at stake. Therefore Shrikant advises Vasant to think well before throwing the dice for the second time as he has already lost the gamble of one marriage. Usha is of the opinion that men can gamble with the love of women and women are not even allowed to take revenge even if there is an opportunity. She resists this notion and asks “why” to this situation. Her mother Sharada used to say that marriage is a gamble which she lost. Indira did not want to play the game but she was
forced to play it. Her happiness was placed as a pawn on the chessboard of her marriage and got ruthlessly slaughtered, and was sacrificed. Through the incidents of second marriages the playwright works out on an entire patriarchal structure that has generated the whole of value-system. Every character in the play questions the efficacy of second marriage, also the efficiency of man who shedding his responsibility towards his first wife goes in for second marriage in search of love.

**Baby**

Baby is a young girl of marriageable age and is brought up in a perfect happiness. As a college student she is much influenced by reforming fervour for the upliftment of women-folk. She is dead against the notion of those men who thought themselves to be god’s own people and therefore have the right to possess women. She dutifully attends all the meetings and delivers speeches in favour of the Prohibition of Bigamy Act. She protests against the limitations imposed on girls of marriageable age. She questions men who desert their wives in order to marry again giving false excuses. She asks, “What do they think women are? Toys? Play with them as long as you like and then cast them aside when you feel bored! Unconcerned! Should not someone question these husbands? Protest against injustice and make them answer for their actions?” (313). Her rejection of the traditional roles of women and her eagerness to free women heightens the reader/audience’s awareness that she is a rebel. She becomes impatient to see her mother’s inactiveness and feels there is no meaning in simply suffering. Her resistant nature once again asserts her stance to her mother, “But to suffer injustice is not to oppose it. What you need is to enlighten the masses, take recourse to law by staging an agitation” (314). She herself can not see her sister “dying a living death” (314) for no fault of hers. She even goes to the extent of saying, “instead, it would have been better had something happened to Vasantrao” because “men do injustice in broad daylight” (314). She knows “how to struggle” (315). As a radical reformer she knows that no convincing will be useful and “what is needed is a stick” (315). She has faith in collective effort also. She has decided to gather a thousand girl students with black flags at the time of Vasant’s marriage with Usha and shout slogans to stop it.

Baby corrects her cousin Shrikant when he playfully teases her for coming home before it is dark. She is sure that men are so scared that women can move on their own. Expecting younger girls coming home before dark is “a case of older generation trying to shape the younger generation in the same mould of social and familial docility” (Jain 2003 162). Baby is not against the institution of marriage. She too wants to marry in a
“grand ceremony” (317). She gets angry at the male attitude when Shrikant speaks lightly of second marriage of Vasant and utters “They will be so complacent at the cost of others!” (317). She is like her father Babasaheb who too relies on “sticky efforts” (319). She has a sharp insight and had warned her parents regarding this second marriage long time back but she is not taken seriously. She even goes to Usha’s house without informing her parents to demand an explanation from a lady who is going to marry her sister’s husband. When her parents and her cousin Shrikant come over there she is asked to go home but she asks, “Why should I go home? Am I such a kid?” (342). She thinks she too has a right to know everything concerning her sister. Similarly she wants an explanation from Ushatai for why she is bent on burning down her sister’s happiness. She reminds Usha that the injustice done by others can not justify her own unjust behaviour.

Baby comes to know that Usha’s mother is none other than her father’s first wife, and that Usha is her elder sister. She asks her father pungently that with what face he is going to ask Usha not to marry Vasantrao. Further when Babasaheb tells that Vasantrao is out of his senses to marry second time, she is surprised how Baba can say that about Vasantrao when he himself got married second time. When she realises that injustice is inflicted on her mother and Usha, she is of the opinion that why Usha should not take revenge and avenge it. It speaks of Baby’s sense of fairness and concern for women. The mystery unfolds slowly as to why her mother Indira used to be so oppressively silent. Baby is in demand of answers for her questions. It is through this questioning that she expresses her rage against the privilege of men to marry second time unconcerned of the feelings of the first wife. Baby is constructed as the “other” to the “other” traditional and feminine model. She is the voice of radical, revolutionary and adventurous young women, and of reason and pragmatism. As early as 1950, Dikshit through Baby speaks boldly of the motherhood of those wives who are rejected by their husbands. She proposes the idea of solving it privately but she also knows that the husbands can not tolerate even the idea of their wives bearing children privately.

**Indira**

Indira is the second wife of Babasaheb who says, “You can’t fathom her mind. We’re married for more than twenty-seven years now, even I’ve not been able to do that” (320). Indira interprets her story to Usha from the standpoint of her own social position and the compromises she has been forced to make. She may be afraid to adopt a radical position but at the end of the play she could step out of patriarchal control and assert her views. Tutored into a submissive role by society her choice of silence is in keeping with
the gender roles accorded by the social system. But when she realises that the second marriage of her son-in-law is going to affect the lives of her own as well as her step daughter, she expresses herself. She narrates dauntlessly how silently and mutely she underwent the patriarchal and societal oppression as a second wife. She tells how she became a repeated victim of others’ comment for being a second wife. She unfolds her twenty seven years’ of married life to Usha layer by layer - “I don’t know how to explain this. But I could never enjoy life from my heart! When I entered the house as a bride everyone would ask pointedly, ‘Oh, so is this the second daughter-in-law?’ That sharp irony used to pierce my heart. Your mother’s shadow fell on all the years of my married life. Everything in my home carried the stamp of her touch . . . the very atmosphere around me reflected signs of her existence” (354). Her breaking of her silence saves the family of her own daughter Kishori and prevents Usha from committing a grievous crime.

The playwright has handled Indira’s “instinctive retreat into silence” (Piciucco 93) and her resistance more subtly. She had been compromising between her own demands from marriage and the familial compulsions imposed upon her. The wife has to shape her dreams and desires in accordance with her husband’s. But finally she could deconstruct the hegemonic power and express her own pangs that she went through throughout her married life. She hid her bruises and unhappiness behind her own silence. Thus silence does not always necessarily mean non-communication, at times it signifies a sullen withdrawal, a closing-in. Her misunderstood withdrawal into silence is in reality a “de-hegemonising the politics of domination” (Piciucco 94).

Indira’s assertive tone at the end of the play has the energy of a fundamentally determined character who has taken upon herself the radical and complex responsibility to dismantle the structure of ideology of her husband and the society that have snubbed and silenced her throughout. She at last speaks and tries to replace the male voice with an authoritative female voice. The second important aspect of her breaking silence is to save Usha from the agonies of being, and being called a second wife and also to save the family and happiness of her own daughter Kishori. She has been undergoing the process of self-making. Though the same force is there in Usha’s resolution, Usha traces the plight of being a second wife. Therefore she retreats. Indira goes to Usha not to beg her to save her own daughter’s marriage but for an outlet to her suffocated mind and to save one more woman from wretched life of being a second wife. She felt she could give Usha the affection and love she has been deprived of since her birth. The intimate conversation between them subverts the conventional expectations from the step-mothers. Through
Indira, Dikshit presents the sorrow and agony of second wives to those who hold the second wives responsible for the sorrow of first wives. Indira makes Usha to have a peep into the reality of a second wife’s life and gives a glimpse of her past life which is a whole of silence and suffering. Indira does not want to see the life of other women perish under this structure where all the blame falls on women. She led her life with indifference and with her mute acceptance of harsh reality, trying to adjust to the situation. Indira succeeds in convincing Usha who realises that one can not have happiness out of someone else’s tears of grief. Usha confesses that it is Indira - her step-mother who saved her from a terrible downfall. It is a deconstructive strategy adopted by Dikshit. Indira objectively analyses the situation and explains to Usha who looks at revenge as her aim.

In the entire play one becomes conscious of the role accorded to Indira by the family members, society and culture and above all by her husband. Curiously the play initially seems to suggest a complete lack of assertive woman in Indira playing an ineffective and indecisive role. But it is she who emerges an assertive and compelling woman. Her loss of dignity, of self-respect and individual esteem all are inseparably aligned with her being a second wife. The comment of others and self-awareness of being a second wife does not prove to be a temporary one but it continues to put its burden even after the episode of Usha’s forthcoming marriage with her own son-in-law which makes her re-live the psychological trauma, the mental torture that she had undergone. Hers is a prolonged psychological exploitation.

Indira’s telling of her own experiences is a troubled attempt to find out if it is possible for her to stop Usha from dwelling in grief and learning to live in better ways if she accepts not to be a second wife. She tries her best to teach Usha to resist the temptation of retaliating for the injustice being done to her mother Sharada. Indira shoulders the responsibility of preventing Usha “from sliding further into ruin” (Bhalla xli). It is a role which concedes her a kind of agency to her to set Usha’s life on right track. Therefore she resists her husband and comes out to Usha to make her see the reality where she will just be turned into an object. Indira has been an “object”, the “other” and the “ignored”. In her marriage with Babasaheb she does not find any choice being offered to her. Her marriage is a marriage without love and consent. Indira through her self-experience tells Usha that at the end her only recourse will be hate and a wish for the death of Kishori - a wish that is explained by the fact that Usha will wish to wipe out Kishori forever as she will be the cause of her uneasiness.
When Indira goes to Usha’s house to speak of her own grievous life, Usha thinks that Indira has come to tell her to save her daughter Kishori’s marriage. She also thinks that it is Indira who has ruined her mother’s marriage. Indira clarifies everything telling that she never ruined Usha’s mother’s marriage. On the contrary, her own happiness was placed as a pawn on the chessboard of Sharada’s marriage. For the past twenty seven years she has been trapped and suffocated in this game. In reality, she could never enjoy life from her heart. According to her, Usha’s mother never lived a life of suffocation because she left the house that had treated her badly. She went away to Brahmadesh and never ever set her foot in the house again. She says, “It was I who felt the real suffocation throughout my life. That is how I live even today” (354). It was not Indira who had gambled. The dice were placed is her poor hands and she dropped them in sheer fright but that was counted as her move. All decided she was happy. Her suffering compels her to advise Usha not as a mother of Kishori but as a “woman” who has had some experience of the male mind. She cautions her to think carefully before she throws the dice.

Marriage according to Indira is a strange riddle created out of the eternal conflict between man’s unruly nature and women’s unending attempts to control him. She says, “I don’t blame anyone of course but my daughter, Akka . . . How do I tell her that Usha is doing injustice to her? Usha, I came to you. Not to beg you to save Akka’s marriage, but for an outlet to my suffocated mind. To remove any bias in your mind about me! I’d like Akka to be happy, of course, but that’s in nobody’s control. I came because I felt I could give you the affection and love you have been deprived of since your childhood” (355-56). The dialogue between Indira and Usha develops such a relationship between them that it subverts all conventional expectations one has from the step-mother. Indira practises “an oblique, undeclared contestation” (Hegland 412) against her subordinate position in a harshly patriarchal society. She asks, “Can human grief be diminished by making laws?” (314). Rita Felski in her Beyond Feminist Aesthetics has differentiated the female bildungsroman from that of male bildungsroman. The female bildungsroman grows up through perseverance, adventure and self-assurance working through the years and as a result the female bildungsroman takes place at a later stage, as is evident in the development of the character of Indira. The play “exemplifies an appropriation and reworking of established literary genres such as the Bildungsroman” (Felski 122). The bildungsroman is a process of becoming, to acquire an agency and to grow out of passivity and a secondary role. Indira is able to assert by saying, “My mind, which I had suppressed, has overthrown all control and revolted. It tells me, ‘you did not ruin
anyone’s marriage. You are not to be blamed’” (353). It is the society which has to be blamed for pushing her into the role of a second wife.

**Usha**

Usha is made to retreat from her decision of marrying Kishori’s husband Vasantrao. She is saved from victimhood by her step-mother Indira. Dikshit has evolved a balance between traditional compulsions and the inner demands in the character of Usha. The traditional compulsion is that she should not marry a married person. Her inner demand is that she loved Vasant and she wants to marry him. It is Indira who talks to Usha and makes her realise whether she should marry or not, or also why she should not marry Vasant. Dikshit is able to make Usha to probe into the consciousness and thereby help her. She in particular lets Usha to experience the confusing and disturbing moment within, and get a glimpse of her future life. Usha finds herself unable to confront the situation where she has to fight herself with the shadow of her co-wife falling on each and every article of Vasant’s house. She is able to comprehend the situation and get control over her own life.

Initially Usha tries to break patriarchal norms with impunity. Indira wonders at Usha’s outburst of anger, rage and suffering at such a tender age. But according to Indira all that anger was not hers. “All the agony that your mother endured till the very end burst through you. You painted a picture of her life . . . Oh, yes the body was yours, but the spirit was your mother’s, she possessed it” (353). With the help of Indira she is able to compromise subsequently with life’s realities. She resolves the issue of her marriage and her frustration in the loving company of Indira. She could make life tolerable for herself by evolving a strong feminist sense of gender solidarity, identifying with the idea of sisterhood of women. Usha could destabilise the victimising male structure by defying Babasaheb - her own father whom she meets for the first time in her life. When she meets him, it is not without anger, bitterness and resentment because Babasaheb has deserted his wife on the pretext that she cannot give birth to a child. Usha’s contention is Babasaheb did not give a chance to his wife in her life and therefore she faces him forcefully. She tells that Babasaheb insulted Usha’s mother’s motherhood and got married the second time. Dikshit exhibits how men were free to move in and out of marriage any time - “Wives can be replaced any time. That’s no big deal” (Dev Sen 2001 16).

Usha questions her own father, “Have you ever considered what those women feel about it? Your mother may have wanted a grandchild, but your wife must have desired a child more. Instead of sharing her grief, you left her alone to bear it . . . I inherit my
mother’s looks and my father’s morals! I must marry according to my desire! You married for a child, I’ll marry for love! You didn’t care for my mother’s happiness; why should I care for your daughter’s? I am going to take her place. This is my revenge for the wrong done to my mother” (347, 348, 349). These words explain that the relationship with one’s parent is not necessarily always one of love or affection; it is often of resistance and evaluation. By rejecting the social norms she attempts to search happiness for herself. But it is not her search for happiness but revenge which she wants to inflict on society which put her mother and her to injustice. When Shrikant tells her that the nature of woman is not to take revenge it is to love she blurts out, “Who decided these natures? You! To suit your own convenience! But the days of such glib talk are over. You can’t dupe us or tell us what our nature is like! We shall love as we wish and decide when to take revenge for the harm done to us. You can gamble with our love and we aren’t even allowed to take revenge even if there’s an opportunity! Why? Why should only women be forced to adopt the philosophy of mercy and not avenge themselves of injustice?” (341). She questions the oppressive patriarchal power structure.

The position of Usha assumes significance when one looks at the ending of the play which is compelling and vibrant. She derives her strength from Indira and thereby rejects Vasantarao. Initially Usha sounds assertive in her decision to marry Vasant. But the much needed strength is punctured by the narration of Indira’s own experiences as a second wife. Usha goes through the traumatic event when she listens to the harsh reality veiled behind the second marriage and being a second wife. Usha’s anger and indifference to the threatening of Babasaheb is a result of the hurt feelings, a sense of aggression and a moment of avenging the loss of happiness to her mother. There is hardly any deliberate thought. It shows her imbalance of emotions and thoughts. Yet the solution is offered by her step-mother Indira. It is she who saves her from being the one like her.

Dikshit wishes that educated women should use their education fruitfully for the betterment of women’s lot. She refers to Agarkar and Karve who sacrificed their lives for women’s education. She brings out the unconcerned attitude of those men who play with women as long as they like and cast them aside when they feel bored. She tries to enlighten the women and advises them to start an agitation and take recourse to law. It can be concluded that the theme of the extra-marital relationship, second marriage and the aftermath of such relationships and how it distorts the life of not only the first wife but also the second wife and their children, and their resistance has been bought out severely.
The play "The Swing of Desire" by Mamta G. Sagar (b. 1966) represents the conflicting interests of husband and wife who are part and parcel of the domestic space where co-operation and conflict are the normal features of familial relationships. There are certain social norms which grant every right to some members to abuse other family members. Sagar, a recent voice in Kannada theatre world focuses attention on the problems faced by the talented woman artiste. She has taken up with conviction the issue of sexuality and the commodification of woman's body in her play which also concerns with the woman's quest for self and the fulfilment of her desire. The theme of the play is how and why women seek an identity outside marriage. Manasa the protagonist is represented as a strong willed woman who asserts herself.

Manasa is a dancer and her husband Pratap is a manager of her programmes. Herein is embedded the core of their problem. She occupies a dominant position due to her profession as a dancer. The esteem that made her inches taller belittles him. It is an unacceptable position to Pratap where Manasa as the dancer occupies a bigger space in the public world and Pratap as a manager of her programmes occupies a relatively smaller public space which affects their marital life. As a wife she is supposed to be inferior to her husband. The male ego does not tolerate that the wife should have a superior status. This situation turns out to be complicated when frustrated Pratap feels humiliated in the public and tortures her. These unquestionable male aggressions are the cultural constructs. The idea that the man should be the head of the family perpetuates the oppression of women. That a qualified dancer with roaring popularity should be reduced to a helpless female object - "child bearing machine" (233, 234) speaks of the formidable male power that holds Manasa the captive of her husband. She wants to escape and respite from this marriage.

Manasa becomes the victim of her husband's physical as well as psychological aggression which results in her emotional injury. She experiences both violence and abuse. "Violence refers to all forms of physical aggression while 'abuse' refers to all physical and non-physical acts that cause physical and emotional injury to the victim" (Madhurima 17). Manasa is not allowed to dance after her marriage. She is not allowed to have her freedom of choice. In 1984 Pagelow provided a broad concept of family
violence by taking into account the physical, verbal and psychological aspects of violence. He defined family violence as “any act of commission or omission by family members and any condition resulting from such acts and inaction which deprive other family members of equal rights and liberties and/or interfere with their optimal development and freedom of choice” (quoted in Madhurima 17-18). Pratap physically assaults and psychologically abuses and denies Manasa freedom by reinforcing his dominant position as a husband. The use of coercive methods by the husbands has tacit societal approval. According to Nivedita Menon there are two qualitative differences in women who experience the different forms of intimate partner violence. “Two of the major factors that determined women’s coping strategies were the financial resources (such as economic independence or financial support from natal families) and familial resources (such as emotional support from either the natal or the marital family). If women have one of two resources, financial or familial, they were likely to take proactive steps to either end the relationship or to end the violence within the relationship (Menon 253). Manasa’s economic independence provides her agency to take oppositional stance and she ends the abuse as well as her marital relationship. Her overt behavioural and verbal responses to abuse and her resisting acts of agency are reactive. Her actions can be constructed as her self-defence and self-preservation.

In the play Sagar has emphasised the female will and agency. She makes her protagonist Manasa to boldly question the commodification of her as a body, devaluation of her individuality and violation of her dignity and honour. Manasa strongly resists the idea of being a mute sex object of her husband. She says, “The age between twenty and thirty is a precious time for a woman. If one wished to do something in life, one should do it then or never. But for me, all gone, all lost because of a selfish man . . . he loved me not my talent, not my success, just my body” (232). Frustrated and humiliated, she develops an extramarital relationship and has a child from it. She does not feel guilty of this. She tells openly about it to her husband which further entangles their relationship. She asserts herself by coming out of the house and gives dance performances. She is not ready to give a second chance to Pratap who comes to her asking for forgiveness. She cleverly sees through his intentions and his cunningness. Her curt answers to him show how frustrated she has been because of him. She says firmly, “I shan’t repeat my mistakes and fall into your trap again. How dare you come here and say that you love me contrasting after the way you treated me? Don’t expect sympathy from me . . . Who are you to
forgive me? Foul-minded men like you don't even deserve a second chance. Go away.” (247-248).

In their study of the Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) the feminist family scholars relied on various techniques that were ignored by earlier scholars. They studied obvious power imbalances in the marital relationships. The sociologists, psychologists and philosophers have developed a new theory called Resource Theory which has been advancing in feminist circles. Attending to financial resources in the family Atkinson, Greenstein and Lang illustrate the influences of wives’ breadwinning on wife abuse. They suggest that husbands who earn more than their wives are less likely to perpetrate abuse. Only when husbands have traditional attitudes towards their wives’ employment, it is then the husbands’ relative income gets associated negatively with the likelihood of wife abuse. For husbands with egalitarian values, relative income is unrelated to the likelihood of wife abuse. But a husband with traditional values whose wife earns more than he does is at risk of abusing his wife. Atkinson and her colleagues point specifically to the structural and cultural conditions that foster the construction of masculinity through wife abuse. In other words, traditional husbands who do not experience a sense of masculinity through their own breadwinning compensate by exerting force over their wives (Atkinson et al. 1137-48). Ezzedeen and Ritchey reveal that despite women’s educational and economic advances, women who earn more than their husbands still cede power to them (Ezzedeen et al. 1107-35). Manasa too allowed her husband to manage her programmes. She proactively subordinates her self for the sake of her family and children. Tichenor’s study reveals that a woman’s power in marriage actually diminishes when she earns more than her husband (Tichenor 191-205). In the absence of man’s traditional economic dominance, the wife despite everything tries to preserve her husband’s power to make decisions. Thus a woman with the privileges may simultaneously be subordinated in her marital relationship.

Besides resources, intersectionality also affects relationships. Intersectionality places emphasis on individual’s multiple, intersecting social identities, as well as how social structures influence the construction of these social identities. Manasa as an artiste, mother and wife tries her best to evolve balance between the traditional demands of being a good wife and mother; and her own compulsions to be a dancer. Without the cooperation and support of Pratap she finds it impossible to bear his abuse and deserts her home. She empowers herself to confront the power politics, comprehend the situation and get control over her life. The play embodies her rage and balanced rejection of the life
expected by her husband. She dismantles the structure of dominant ideology that has suppressed her and replaces the voice of Pratap with an authoritative voice of herself.

Usually the lack of resources restricts women, they get battered and are compelled to stay in the relationship. They become the passive recipients of abuse. Women with more traditional orientations are less likely to report abuse by their male partner. But Manasa’s better position in the division of labour and accessibility to social privilege results in her articulate position. In the process, Pratap feels neglected. Consequently, his relation with Manasa takes a vicious course of abuse. She says, “You stopped me from dancing, made me a child bearing machine, an object of your wanton desires” (233). Her economic supremacy is opposed by his control over her body as an object by recurrent tormenting abuse in the wedlock. He thinks that she belongs solely to him which is symbolically carried through his control over her body. Even after getting the advantageous position in the family and the society, Manasa is not only abused but also becomes the target of violence. She expresses her abuse in the words, “Chhi! My body has become rotten these six years as an object of your lust” (234). The abuse reflects the tendency of Pratap towards Manasa who feels ashamed of her body. He treats her as an object of sexual targeting and this disrespect towards her is also a way of attacking her sense of honour. This is nothing but the “ancient and repeated humiliation of woman” (Bhalla xxxiv). Here one becomes conscious of the role accorded to women by the people, society and culture. Pratap’s using her on the bed can be regarded as the manifestation of aggression against her. It can also be seen as an attempt to grind her into submission. India’s patrilineal culture is based on rights of possession which while making the possessor the owner, categorise the female as the object of that possession. Resistance by woman to this is essentially a challenge to these rights of possession which the male relations - father, brother, husband - have over female.

Pratap obstructed her optimal development as a dancer and curtailed her freedom of choice. Manasa says, “You are so possessive . . . You’ll make me sacrifice my creativity for your false pride. A woman glows at her husband’s success. She never complains, never envies. Why can’t a man accept the fact when his wife goes ahead of him? A woman accepts her husband’s fame and success as her own. Why can’t a man feel the same about his wife? . . . You can’t bear people praising me, can you?” (234).

The construction of how women should act when violence and abuse is perpetrated against them embodies another dominant narrative which is called “agency-as-exit”. Women who experience abuse at the hands of their intimate partner are ready to
leave. Leaving has been constructed as one of women’s viable options. Baker notes that the dominant cultural script for battered women commands them to leave their abusive partners. Indeed, the very construction of battered women has undergone a significant shift, from emotional victims to survivors who possess agency (Baker 55-74). In many ways, survival embodies a form of agency which highlights the actions taken by women to restore a sense of control. The feminist scholars of domestic violence emphasise leaving the abusive situation by a singular act of “walking away” from the relationship. Manasa moves away from her efforts of trying to maintain the relationship to actively creating an agenda for leaving. She expresses her resentment at the oppressive domestic and sexual regime and walks out in a resistant gesture. She exhibits the potential to arrive at a self-determined identity. The process is marked by the desire of Manasa to regenerate herself as a dancer. She steps out of the patriarchal control and finds her voice, to offer Pratap resistance, to fling facts on his face. She revolts but Pratap is neither aware of her problems, nor of his own sadistic drives. Judged individually, Pratap is not vicious but is the victim of cultural construct. But whatever is his reason, the sufferer ultimately is the woman. At this juncture, she feels it exigent to speak, to expose, to shout and to flout. She is successful in constructing her own identity and receiving the applause which she desired for her art from the people. Manasa defies her husband saying, “However much you try to stop me, no matter what you do, I am ready to face anything for my art! I am desperate now, I’ll do anything” (234). The play posits the fact that Manasa ultimately establishes herself as an autonomous being free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, nature and also from her own fears and guilt of developing an extra-marital relationship and having a child out of this relationship. The significant aspect of this relationship is that she suffers no guilt and begins to evolve a new code of ethics and reveals the parentage of one of her children. When she realises that Pratap’s love for her has changed into “a possessive demonic lust” (232) she asks fervently, “Was I the only one there to quench his lust? Couldn’t he find anyone else?” (232). Her path to individualisation is marked by contacts with diverse experiences such as extra-marital affairs. She pinpoints that the code word of their marriage is sex and not love. The realisation that love has no place in her marital world drives her to the extreme stance of seeing only deceit and treachery. She also begins to see how physical abuse becomes a symbol of power and authority, and marriage another kind of enclosure. Marriage proves to be a trap and she feels like a caged animal. Making enormous sacrifices on her profession Manasa begins to understand that marriage has obstructed her growth as an
individual and as dancer. Fearing that her continued stay with her husband would stifle her progress and self-elevation she deserts him and goes back to her dancing career which is a sure sign of her escape from sexual politics.

Manasa expected warmth, affection, intimacy, mutual respect and consent in her marital relationship. Therefore when she comes across such a relationship she goes for it and has an offspring out of it. She uses this as a weapon to pierce the ego of Pratap. She scoffs saying, “Just one blow from me and he hasn’t recovered to this day.” She discloses that one of their children is not his. She upbraids him by saying, “I won’t say . . . I won’t. Whatever you do, I won’t. Who is that child, who is its father, you’ll never know” (235). By doing so she “defies traditional expectations and exists outside cultural code of femininity” (Waldron et al. 95).

Marriage requires compromise and quite often the loss of self. Manasa reflects on this historic truth experienced by many women. She recalls attention to the limitations of gender roles and implicitly transgresses and transcends those roles created by the patriarchal system. She subverts what Jill Dolan identifies as traditional representation in which the female body “is imaged within representation only as the site of male desire” (Dolan 99). But Manasa no longer considers herself an object or a possession of some man to sleep with.

Manasa rebels against patriarchal hegemony in order to explore her own potential and to live on her own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on her life. She ruthlessly sets out to pursue her professional goals. She can tolerate no diversion. “Self-chosen withdrawal takes on the form of a weapon for survival in a patriarchal community and criticises those cultural ideologies that come in her way of becoming a free individual” (Bedjaoui 51). Manasa retreats to dancing to liberate herself from the shackles of patriarchal set up through economic independence. The song “The Darling girl of Mutturu” which is embedded in the play becomes the subject matter of Sagar’s play and acquires a symbolic value when Manasa says, “I want to be independent . . . a star . . . a butterfly . . . I want to fly away, spreading my wings far and wide. I want to be a song, to step to the tune, to dance . . . I want to chase my dreams” (243). She takes great pleasure in her independent identity as a dancer. She is keen about her social image. She is elated listening to the words of praise from her admirers. She says, “Ah! What sweet words! “These were the words that I craved for, while I was with Pratap” (245). She considers family and children “like getting trapped in quick sand while trying to reach the stars” (245). She rebels against the orthodox aspects of marital relationship. Her
stand shocks the audience out of complacency. She does not want to cast herself in the mould of “cultural stereotype of femininity” (Wyatt 06). She responds to her husband with quiet defiance. Her body in performance signifies the possibilities of self-definition. It testifies to her personal revolt against male hegemony and her ability to survive outside male domination and social norms. Pratap thinks that perhaps she will never be able to manage herself without him. But all alone, she achieves her goal. She gains the assertion of will and confidence in herself. She learns to trust herself. She realises that her profession as a dancer is her own and she decides what to do with it. It helps her realise her own self. Pratap has stifled her growth and therefore she defies him and finds a way of her own, rejecting all over-riding influence. She starts believing in her own self and accepting the responsibility of her own life. Simone de Beauvoir observes, “The more women assert themselves as human beings the more marvelous quality of the “other” will die in them” (Beauvoir 173).

The gender bias, the strictly marked male and female roles and the undue emphasis on the female chastity and the social stigma attached to it have all been defied in this play. At the end of the play Pratap comes to her requesting her to accept him. But to her bad luck she realises that it is not love that has guided him to her but it is his selfishness that draws him to her. It throws light on the hypocritical behaviour of Pratap. She helplessly realises that as he is caught up in the crises he comes to her. She plays an active role in a situation which offers her no choices but to send her husband away. She does not hesitate to make a choice. She is full of anger and outrage against Pratap who has made her a victim of his senselessness. Her hurt is deeper as she is among those who have hoped and fought for gaining their individual self. The radical feminists regard such women as “potential sources of liberating power” (Tong 03). Manasa’s decision at the end of the play emphasises the strength of women. She does not want once again to fall into the prescribed gender roles. She has challenged in this play the “Patriarchal, chauvinistic and indifferent Indian male role” (Sivaraman 132).

For Sagar, the self-realisation and search for one’s own refuge is the sole aim of growing as a person. The play depicts resistance against the gendered conditioning of socio-cultural practices and against male sexual power. She offers a strong resistance to the notion of female modesty. Her protagonist Manasa is unlike any other woman who has been dehumanised into something like a doll, providing merely an aimless pastime for men. According to Wollstonecraft the woman “was created to be the toy of man, his rattle and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be
amused” (quoted by Gubar 456-457). But Manasa refuses to be one and is one among those few women who have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man.

Sagar presents another contrasting situation where the marital discord is evident in the relationship between Sister (of Pratap) and her husband Bhava who is a doctor. Sister is a perfect woman in worshipping her husband and in being submissive to him. But she could not make her husband happy. He expects an intellectual companionship from his wife and feels disgusted with her submissive ways. Her sorrow is she is unable to rise up to his expectations. The feminist directive is that women should care for and nurture each other. Husband and wife should be guided by an ethic of mutual nurturing. He has no wish to listen to her tale of sorrow and to be a part of her sorrow. Disappointed but enlightened Sister comes to Manasa for emotional support. At last sisterhood helps both of them to seek support, compassion and understanding in each other. There is a raising consciousness among women that they share certain things in common as a gender group as child-raising, household chores and responsibilities. They also share the particular feelings of exploitation and oppression that they face. They together wish to struggle against their subjugation in society and sex based inequality and injustice.

The play exposes the relative freedom with which women are able to express their stories. Sagar points to the ways in which marriage is becoming deinstitutionalised. In the patriarchal Indian society the husband’s role is that of a provider and wife’s is to keep the household. As and when such relations are challenged and disturbed, marital discord sets in as man can not give up his dominant position. Due to asymmetrical roles, conflict is inherent in conjugal relationship. Paradoxically women’s economic dependence exposes them to various kinds of oppressions and exploitations. Equipped with education and economic independence they are claiming egalitarian way of living which implies change in the traditional role relationship between husband and wife. But husbands are not likely to accept the new position of the wives and use greater force and violence to retain their traditional position. Sagar has analysed the institution of marriage in which women are no longer depending solely on their husbands for their happiness. She has also gone on to breach the guilt syndrome associated with adultery. The play also reveals that women no longer are the unconscious victims of their husband’s force. Women are in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles and relationship within their given social world.
Introduction to the Plays “The Six of Them” (Telugu, 1995) by Chalam Volga and “The Journey Within” (Bengali, 2000) by Usha Ganguli

Women all over the world are the muted group. They are considered unable to truly express their feelings, opinions and thoughts through their own words. The truth is they are not allowed to express themselves and even if they express they are not heeded. Besides, they are afraid of men’s power and of rejection and they needing protection in the face of economic dependence, they are likely to acknowledge themselves as such. C. Muske in her Women and Poetry makes clear how women have been diverted from knowing and loving themselves as their lives are consumed by attaching to men and raising children. She also expresses that “having and giving a literary voice to women provides opportunities to shatter women’s frequent silences” (quoted in Waldron 05).

The two plays Antaryatra (“The Journey Within”) in Bengali by Usha Ganguli and Vallu Aaruguru (“The Six of Them”) in Telugu by Chalam Volga give speech to women’s silences and perform the act of consciousness-raising even among the reader/audience. They have written about feminist activism and a consciousness-raising group wherein groups of women establish a presence while “operating outside the arena of conventional politics or social organizing” (Katzenstein 53). By making them speak, the playwrights mould them into “channels of progressive change” (Grigson 297) and develop among them the “insurgent consciousness” (Sundar 18).

The Muted Group Theory is developed out of the cultural anthropology field and recently it has been developed in communication field as a feminist and cross-cultural theory. It helps explain communication patterns and the social representation of non-dominant cultural groups including women. The Muted Group Theory was first proposed by a cultural anthropologist Edwin Ardener who attempts to explain why certain groups in society are muted i.e. they are either silent or not heard. Ardener explained the Muted Group Theory from a gendered perspective. As a critical theory it is concerned with power and how it is used against people. As all critical theories separate the powerful and the powerless, this theory chooses to divide the power politics between men and women. It begins with the premise that language is culture bound, and because men have more power than women, men have more influence over the language. It is they who create the words and meaning for the culture by allowing expression of their ideas. Women, on the
other hand, are left without a means to express that which is unique to them. That leaves women as a muted group.

The Muted Group Theory does not claim that the differences are based in biology. Instead, the theory claims that men risk losing their dominant position if they listen to women, incorporate their experiences in the language and allow women to be equal partners in language use and creation. According to Ardener the groups that are on the top of the social hierarchy determine to a great extent the dominant communication system of a society. Consequently women are muted. They can not easily express their perceptions or experiences. The validity of their experiences and the legitimacy of their feelings get ignored. (Ardener 1-17). The theory expects that women must convert their unique ideas, experiences and meanings into male language in order to be heard.

Cheris Kramarae takes mutedness a step further especially from a feminist standpoint when she talks about the way women perceive the world and are perceived in the world. Women are perceived not only as less powerful but also as a group who do not speak the same language as men and whose language does not have any significance of note. Because of the dominant male-oriented language that women and minorities are not heard. Even worse, when they are listened to, they are perceived as not being worth. The Theory is developed to explore the experiences of a subordinate group particularly women. Cheris Kramarae in her *Women and Men Speaking* opines that for many, women and other marginalised groups' lack of voice remains the problem with no name or worse not a problem at all. The experiences, values and beliefs of men become institutionalised whereas women’s needs, rights and concerns become marginalised. Not only that, they are even devalued. The critical strength of the Theory is that it empowers and encourages women. It validates and explains the experiences and perceptions of women. It can also be applied to other historically subordinated groups and their difficulty in achieving their proper place in the society. It is an explanation of why some groups seem to have a voice and why some do not in any society.

In 2005 K. Miller explained that the Muted Group Theory posits that the dominant male group in a culture controls the various avenues of expression, including media outlets and therefore the ways laws and rules are written, and the words that are used to describe the culture. Hence the ways that the muted groups communicate will not be recognised or understood in the world of the dominant group. In this example, a woman’s emotional talk or metaphors about home life will not have a place in the world of men; and women will be deemed inarticulate in public settings. These aspects make the muted
groups feel uncomfortable and inappropriate expressing themselves in public arenas, and they tend either to avoid public communication or use other methods like communication through journals or online with other members of the muted group (Miller 308-309).

Another hypothesis argues that women express themselves in many modes like letters, diaries and even by gossip, other than those monopolised by men. The literary genres also provided women with the media through which they learnt to express their consciousness by developing their own languages. In order to become the participating members in the society, women started transforming their perceptions into terms of the dominant group. Though they are not likely to create new words sometimes they do help create meanings special and unique to women. Besides letters, diaries, gossip, journals, online communication, and the feminist dictionary proposed by Kramare, theatre has provided a space to women to articulate their mutedness. The playwrights Usha Ganguli and Chalam Volga have been active in bringing women’s issues to the front through the medium of theatre. These theatre practitioners have tried to help women by making them “learn to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 17). Theatre practices since ancient times have been focusing on a single protagonist. Whereas these two playwrights undermine the classical Indian aesthetics by focusing on an ensemble and also on a single woman performing the lives and influences of literary and real life women on them and thus have dramatised the feminist belief that the group is also more important along with the individual. The playwright-actor-director Usha Ganguli’s Antaryatra - “The Journey Within” written and solo performed by herself depicts the external journey of an actor-director who weaves in an autobiographical introspection with the voice of famous theatrical women characters into a rich narrative of feminist consciousness. It is a play in which Usha Ganguli acts in order to narrate the story of women’s struggle through their life. She explores women’s consciousness through a variety of characters like Rudali, Nora, Bina, Munia, Himmat mai and many other roles. The influence of real life experience of women like Amita Di, Keya Chakravorty and others on her also has obviously enriched her one-woman performance.

Volga wrote her play Vallu Aaruguru - “The Six of Them” inspired by the female characters created by a Telugu novelist Chalam in his six novels written during the first quarter of twentieth century. Volga imagines a sequel when these six women happen to meet one day and bare their souls to one another. This experience of theirs has a great cathartic influence on them. These six women become trusted associates and exchange
bitter comments and critique of the marriage system and the right to have children without marriage. These women nurtured resistance in the face of repeated humiliation of their individuality and lack of agency. They appropriated marriage with their own social meanings. Loosening strict gender controls they aimed at self-advancement. They subverted the ritual of marriage and male primacy to build up their own self-esteem and self-confidence. It goes with what Antrobus describes the common purposes of women’s movements where “Feminist politics seeks to challenge and change structures that seek to subordinate women, in solidarity with women” (Antrobus 605).

The plays by Ganguli and Volga have been emerged from several radical and progressive influences on the playwrights. According to Fisher, the feminist strategies of sitting in a circle, giving voice to personal experience, and organising around collective experience for the goal of social change derived in part from consciousness-raising (CR) groups of the second wave of the Women’s Liberation movement (Fisher 2001). The CR groups tend to be made up of people of the same sex and roughly of the same age. The CR groups allow informal discussions where women could speak bitterness about their feelings, ideas and actions as a sexually objectified and devalued class with limited opportunities in a sexist society. In CR groups, women realised that power worked within and through personal relations; they described their common, yet previously unspoken experiences of rape, illegal abortions, unwanted pregnancies, the dilemmas of child care and the tyranny of housework.

In these two all-women plays there is no single protagonist but a group of protagonists. There are no male characters. They are “purushapatra virahit” (Dikshit 03) plays. They construct a small CR group where everyone contributes and participates equally. Theirs is as Shirley Bernard calls for “sisterhood first, competition last” (quoted in Bardwick 145). The playwrights have particularly been concerned with the situation of women as beloveds, wives, widows and mothers in the context of predominantly Indian society. They explore the ideas of exploitation of women in the society and promote solidarity among women through their sisterhood. Their “shared awareness of sexist experiences creates co-operation, thus sisterhood, among women” (Bardwick 149).

The playwrights have realised that if women are to accomplish anything they will have to seek out themselves, support each other and find strength through intimate relationships. The consciousness-raising intimacy creates intellectual and emotional awareness, co-operation and trust. In their plays these two playwrights have established CR groups and have accomplished two things. They have brought out the influence of
women on them not only from their real life but also the women characters from literature. By bringing all these women in their plays they have developed relationships among them. In a society in which women's most important commitments are supposed to be with men, their resistance to their mutedness by creating significant relationships among women is in itself revolutionary. Secondly, these women have become aware of how much they have in common insofar as they have been moulded by sexist values and have come to the perception that their doubts are common. These women from literature have helped the playwrights to become aware of their own unconscious self-denigrating beliefs. Instead of blaming themselves, they express their anger outward and are solaced by that rage. They directly point accusingly at their parents, husbands, children and thereby society at large and indicate that they all are to blame for their unhappiness. These playwrights have attempted to explore women's psyche. They take the reader/audience on a journey into their inner beings through consciousness-raising. Each of their characters belongs to a distinct social space but are yet bound together by virtue of their being women. They passionately argued for voice, "to speak and be heard on what affects their lives" (Couldry 184).

According to Kalmuss, Gurin and Thompson feminist consciousness is composed of five elements: (a) polar effect (i.e., demonstration of affinity or warmth toward a particular group - men or women); (b) power discontent (i.e., belief that women have too little influence relative to men); (c) legitimacy of sex differential in status (i.e., extent that one believes in inequities in the social system or personal shortcomings of women); (d) nontraditional role orientation; and (e) advocacy of collective action on behalf of women (i.e., extent that one believes individual and/or group action can resolve social problems) (Kalmus et al. 1981). The two plays take the reader/audience a good deal further in the exploration of the space of theatre as well as the feminist consciousness. They demonstrate affinity and warmness of women towards other women.

The play "The Journey Within" is not just a monodrama but a series of extended monologues of women from literature and also from real life. These women and also the six women of "The Six of Them" come together to open their hearts and talk to reader/audience and also among themselves in order to talk about themselves and their lives. Long observes that "telling women's lives often involves new and mixed genres" (Long 55). This is, in fact, their "psychic symbiotic union" (Fromm 1976 23) in which some kind of attachment exists psychologically. They develop a pattern of relationship in which they all come close and psychologically develop attachment. This experience of
their's has a great cathartic influence on them. The psycho-therapists believe that if one is able to relate one's self to others directly, one can overcome one's isolation and anxiety. These women build a communion of CR among themselves and reach out for an experience of women solidarity, sisterhood and interdependence. They also develop a convention calling for sisterhood i.e. "Bhagini Bhav" (Bhawalkar 365). "Sometimes called sorority, sisterhood includes the idea and experience of female bonding, and the self-affirmation and identity discovered in a woman-centered vision and definition of womanhood. Because sisterhood is based on a clear awareness that all women, irrespective of class, race or nation have a common problem - patriarchy, the term is an important part of contemporary feminism" (Humm 210-211).

The feminist awareness of sexism is not only leading to re-evaluation of the importance of women's relationships with each other but also to a new awareness that such relationships hold an enormous potential for mutual support. Women have tended to respect and trust other women. Especially if she is sensitive to what it is to be rejected and emotionally coerced, the more powerful woman is likely to respond with support and to withhold negative judgments. In this way the weaker may inhibit the stronger. Emotional needs are more likely to surface in relationships between women than they are in relationships between men. Women create intimacy through the "best friend" relationship and that they have learnt it will sustain them through stress.

The plays are a tribute to female protagonists who are representatives of real life women each belonging to a distinct social space and yet bound in some way by the virtue of being women. "Women have the common experience of negotiating oppression(s) despite occupying different social locations and possessing variable privileges" (Few 30). The plays can be considered as the history of Indian womanhood played out in large enough social space covering middle-class homes in the urban space to the rural women at the extreme margin. These plays are not born out of any conflict but rather out of the juxtaposition of characters and the stories, the relationship they share with the performer/playwright-reader/audience. These women voice their experiences within the male dominated discourse. Performance of these plays provides a space for collective strength and communication where women through the collective could summon their individual resolve to resist oppressive conditions and destructive relationships. The two plays work through a woman-to-woman dialogue. "As a self-appointed spokesperson of the oppressed" (Zondi et al. 83) these playwrights speak out the oppressive hegemonic tactics to subdue women.
The two plays have become the splendid narratives of feminist consciousness giving rise to both fascination and debate. The primary interest of these two playwrights is in the way that the plays fashion themselves into the narratives - the sequence of events in the life of the playwrights and the characters into an organised meaningful structure of a dramatic plot. Both the playwrights through the telling of women’s experiences propose their personal views about women’s plight and their fight in general. They have attempted to represent the scenes and events of those plays and novels that have impinged upon their consciousness. They explore the institution of marriage and family, how they have been constructed by patriarchy and what are its expectations. They also bring out how due to lack of understanding and co-operation the family structure is beginning to crack. The plays are splendid examples of how performance by women on the stage in particular and literature in general empower women folk. They convert the muted woman into a “talking woman” (Papanek et al. 07).

The plays also reveal the inner expanse of women’s responses to life. Whatever has remained as muted and unexpressed beneath the weight of tradition, convention and constriction is spoken of to the reader/audience through the enactment and the narration. The plays register their dissent in innumerable ways and the disapprovals of society’s callous and chauvinistic dismissal of theirs as also of other women’s worth as women. The female characters have evolved their own patterns of resistance and defiance. They have possessed a fiercely uncompromising nature that allows them to persist in asserting their individual selves. They are bold enough to express their desires. It certainly shows the march from “massive silence” (Showalter 1981 180) to “revisionist, questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures” (Showalter 1981 183).

Uncovering such diverse responses offers a new awareness of the question of gender and theatre which as Anuradha Kapur asserts, “Some very challenging work has been done by women directors as they have shifted the debate towards new forms and towards new subjectivities. Though their productions are very different, a broad trajectory unites them: their bringing the question of gender on the stage which has remained almost unaddressed in modern performance” (Kapur 2009 49). Thus the two plays present two things: they consider as their subjects a sort of experience that has been for the most part invisible and unheard till now. Secondly, by resisting mutedess, they express and thereby visibilise these experiences in ways that displace some of the narrative strategies. They articulate their experiences. All events, even mental ones, are physicalised on stage, as happenings. These various happenings and experiences
discussed in the plays confirm, as Anuradha Kapur asserts that the "feminist theatre has unquestionably added to the dramatic canon a set of important topics including the... childcare, mothering, prescriptive roles and gender stereotypes, female friendship, female sexuality and the political importance of identity" (Kapur 2001 05). The plays explore the nature of women's risk and courage. Although they deal with women's reflections and observations, thematically these are also the plays for male reader/audience who wishes to understand better the inner self of women.

It can be concluded that the plays of Ganguli and Volga provide unique insights into how literature shapes women's beliefs through consciousness-raising and by speaking out their experience and about sisterhood. The plays represent women as also self-centred, promiscuous and not conforming to traditional gender roles. They appeal as Heilburn presumes of all women folk. "The secret of unmet friends is that they have called upon the same strengths to escape or endure the same kind of situations" (Heilburn 153). The female characters from literature and the real life acquaintances of the playwrights are ordinary "women imprisoned within the confines of the home, deprived of all rights, derided and feared and have had to survive by the most enduring will to live" (Lamont 140). Despite they become the "role models for untold thousands of sisters to whom they delivered messages that defied the male dominance encouraged by mainstream culture... By so doing they redefined women's place. They forged and memorialized images of tough, resilient and independent women who were afraid neither of their own vulnerability, nor of defending their right to be respected as autonomous human being" (Davies 41). Women's life stories give insight into the richness of gendered relations and the processes by which women negotiate them. The articulation of oppression through the dramatic performance has brought out the social realities and aspirations of women's lives. "Thus, the ability to name one's own identity empowers women and families to define themselves and to center relevant issues that may have been marginalized previously" (De Reus et al. 448). Feminist theory is committed to gender equality, social justice and social change. The centrality of women's experience is of great value in feminist theory. Thus it is not enough to study women but it is necessary to strive to capture women's experiences from their own perspectives and in their own languages. Women's life stories give insight into the richness of gendered relations and the processes by which women negotiate them.
xvii. The Six of Them

_Vallu Aaruguru_ (Telugu, 1995)

Chalam - Volga

Trans: M. Sridhar and Alladi Uma

Volga (b. 1950) - the pen name of Popuri Lalitha Kumari - wrote the play _Vallu Aaruguru_ which is translated into English as “The Six of Them”. It is inspired by the characters created by a Telugu novelist G. V. Chalam (1894-1979). Most of his writings deal with women especially the kind of difficulties they encounter - physical as well as psychological within society and families from their near and dear ones. He gave a jolt to the complacence of the Telugu literary world by writing one controversial novel after another. “Gudipati Venkata Chalam is considered the champion of modernism” (Raghuramaraju 109). “Chalam was influenced by western liberalism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Consequently, he became the great advocate of individual freedom. He championed the cause of women” (Naveen et al. 115). Volga acknowledges Chalam’s profound influence on her writing, especially his advocacy of women’s rights at both the psychological and physical levels by carrying his name along with hers - Chalam Volga.

The six women of the play “The Six of Them” are the characters from Chalam’s six novels - Sasirekha, Maidaanam, Aruna, Daivamichchina Bharya, Brahmaneekam and Jeevitadarshan. These novels present different types of women and their relationships. They raise questions about man-woman relationship, the right to have children and also the institution of marriage.

Chalam’s novels present six courageous women whose lives reflect the wars that society wages on women. Their flawed lives enhance the beauty of their experiences. Volga’s an all-women play _Vallu Aaruguru_ imagines a sequel when these women who live separately, happen to meet one day and they decide to open their hearts and talk to each other that day. Through their conversation they come closer psychologically, develop attachment together and talk about their lives. They build a communion of consciousness among themselves and reach out for an experience of woman solidarity, sisterhood and inter-dependence. By their acts they expose themselves “to risk; risk of rejection by members of one’s family of origin, hostility from neighbors or friends, interference from the state, threats to one’s livelihood from employers, and physical violence from strangers and acquaintances” (Oswald et al. 151).

The six women are living individuals, interested in life with its hopes, dejections and chaotic flow. They are dissatisfied with routine of ordinary world and therefore break
away from their existing life-patterns. The playwright Volga does not allow her women to accept life as it comes to them. Her women are individuals with the force of personality to say a definite “Yes” or “No”. They have defiant individuality. They fight against the commonplace conformity and stick to their own vision of life. They resist despite being powerless, oppressed and dispossessed, and inspire the young women to go together in the march demanding justice. As Homi K. Bhabha points out the “contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history - subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement - that we learn our most enduring lesson for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality . . . transforms our critical strategies” (Bhabha 172).

These six women are unlucky enough in not getting any “magic helpers” (Fromm 1941 174) to protect them from a feeling of inadequacy. Despite, they are spirited enough to take life in their hands and struggle to acquire a new consciousness in order to protect their integrity as human beings. In their days during 1920s and 1930s they fought their lone battles. At the end of the play they feel happy to see the women going in the march, raising slogans, opposing and questioning the injustices and violence of men. The eponymous heroine of Chalam’s first novel Sasirekha (1920) has a childhood marriage. As Sasirekha grows up, she falls in love with Krishnudu. When the time comes for her to join her husband, she elopes with her lover. Later, she is attracted to Krishnudu’s friend Sundara Rao for his music. Unable to resist the attraction she opts to live with Sundara Rao but soon realises that he is a shallow man. Abused and ill-treated, her disillusion is complete when she meets the Brahma Samajists - Rama Rao and Navajeevan Das. Though she is keen to join and work for the Samaj, she is rejected as a sinful woman. She is suggested that to amend her ways she should marry Rama Rao. Thus she returns to the point where she had begun her journey. Had she wanted marriage, she could have gone to her husband in the first place. She firmly believes that marriage is not necessary where there is love. It is difficult for Sasirekha to live a life devoid of love. Her question is, “Why marriage where there is love?” (469). She is a lover of beauty and can give up anything for it. She loved Krishna’s handsome looks, Sundara Rao’s melodic music and Rama Rao’s truthfulness. She asks, “Is it wrong to love these? . . . Will I change just because you say that it is mean and selfish?” (470). She also says, “How could I retain my love for the man who had no respect for me?” (470). She says that she does not want marriage without love and even she does not want to cohabit without love. She is of the opinion that when everything in nature changes, it is possible for human nature also to
change. When Padmavati tells her that even great people have not been able to oppose the diktat of society she questions, “Doesn’t society respect those husbands who treat their slave-like wives worse than animals? Why should I, how should I, respect such a society? Society excommunicates cowards who are scared of it. Do you think I am afraid of such a society? My very being is freedom” (473). She gives up marriage to hold on to love, to love eternally and for a freedom that will not bow down to anyone’s authority or rule.

Rajeswari is the protagonist of *Maidaanam* (1930). The novel had a defiant theme for the 1930s in making a Brahmin woman fall in love with a Muslim. The novel is about a married Brahmin woman Rajeswari who neglected by her lawyer husband seeks love and affection in a Muslim youth Ameer. She falls in love with Ameer and gets aborted her child to return her total devotion to her lover. She has seen the meanness of marriage and the immorality of love. When she considers her life, her revolt against this society, its hypocrisy and its false morals, she feels immensely proud. She says, “I am a woman who wanted to revolt against marriage, fight for love and for freedom, and to bring about a revolution” (476). She has a hope that some day humanity will accept her questions and will respect her rebellion. She feels happy to see a band of girls giving out slogans for the freedom of women. These are what Rajeswari had individually desired for.

Padmavati from *Daivamichchina Bharya* plans to keep love and marriage distinct. She loves Radhakrishna but refuses to marry him. She thinks that marriage dampens love and entangles one in the drudgery of keeping house and rearing children. To keep her love inviolate she marries Nyayamurti who orders her never to meet Radhakrishna. She is crushed in the dilemma. She did not like to belong to anyone and live a wretched life of housewives in the name of love. She feels very happy to see the women of these days gather together and march on the roads calling out slogans and making public the violence and pain all six of them had undergone.

Aruna in the novel named after her, is reluctant to enter into any kind of relationship that might curb her freedom. Men pursue her but she holds them in contempt. She tells that the society needs still hundred more years to understand the question - why marriage where there is love? She knows society will not accept its flaws as flaws. She feels freedom is not being afraid of the desires. That is progress according to her. She is happy to see all women going in the march opposing the injustices and violence of men.

Sundaramma of *Brahmaneekam* is a simple illiterate woman. After her husband’s death, she is forced to live with her mother in her uncle’s house to escape the ill-treatment of her in-laws. She is drawn into an illicit relationship with her uncle Chandrasekhar and
becomes pregnant. They are forced to marry but the lover, after becoming her husband, starts abusing her because he is forced to marry a widow. The society excommunicates her and she gets no help in bringing up her child. She is exploited by a man who pretends to be a doctor to treat her sick child. When her child dies, Sundaramma kills him. Her story describes the cruelty that women encounter when they are pushed into the world unprepared and untrained. She questions as to who is responsible for her ignorance. Her motherhood was not respected. No one was kind to her. Mothers like her are pained at not having any moral support, education or courage, and getting scared amidst that blind love for the child. She questions, “Can’t we have children without recourse to marriage? To have children why is marriage necessary?” (488). She is of the opinion that another mother will not suffer the way she has if a woman has a choice of having children.

If the five women battle with their life, the sixth one - Lalasa attains peace after a struggle. She participates in the Salt Satyagraha and goes to jail but is soon disillusioned by the hypocrisy of some of the Satyagrahis. She marries Laxman Singh and is later attracted to Malvankar, a musician. She leaves home to be with her lover from whom she receives nothing but abuse. She is in trouble when her husband refuses to take her back. She is guided on the path of peace by Desikachary who teaches her that inner contentment must be the goal of human life. She wishes to make things clear through her conversation with other five women. She hoped that in future women like all six of them will make their own choices as to whether they should have children or not.

These six women typically share their personal stories and woes about their own lives. Through their narratives they complained, made bitter comments and indicated cynicism concerning marriage. They broke out of confining expectation and suffered the consequences. Because they resisted, these women are branded as obstinate, shameful, foolish, sinful or childish. But they become the trusted associates and critique the marriage system. They “have clearly declared that their place is where they chose it to be not where it is decreed to be” (Gerami 346). They exercise their faculties in constructing their self. Through resistance, they exposed the gaps in the wall of gender power. Their goal was to single out their experiences and their subtle resistance to the patriarchal demands and gender definitions promoted by the society and to bring about positive modifications. They were unlike the majority of women who remain tethered to men dependent on them for economic support, social propriety and even physical protection. It can be described as the “Bargaining with Patriarchy” (Kandiyoti 274). These six women are not for such bargain. Their deportment is assertive and they have
self-confident bearing. They resist the stipulation that women must confine themselves to religious, social and sex-segregated patriarchy-approved activities. They demonstrated self-mastery, decision-making and a sense of personal identity thereby turning away from traditions and often the wishes of parents and husbands.

As Lila Abu-Lughod in her “The Romance of Resistance” summarises that resistance is significant in understanding power. These women and their forms of resistance can tell much about the power of people and the forces exerting influence over them (Abu-Lughod 1990). As early as the first quarter of the twentieth century these six women of Chalam had proclaimed that -

- Woman has a body; it should be given exercise.
- Woman has a mind; it should be given knowledge.
- Woman has a heart; it should be given experience.

They wanted to wipe out domestic violence, gender discrimination, stop outrage on women and condemn dowry deaths. According to them woman is Adi Shakti. They want not marriage but living together; not husband and wife relationship but companionship. They pronounced women’s sexuality is not for sale. They will not sell their sexuality in marriage. They denounced female foeticide and called it shameful. They proclaimed choice of motherhood is woman’s right alone. To decide whether to have a child or not it must certainly be a woman’s right. But theirs was not a time to oust men’s leadership and wipe out all kinds of authority. But they did try to resist it individually and opposed it. The present day women are asking for them by collectively going in the march and calling out slogans which is heartening to these six women who witness it. They feel happy to see that the women of present days have taken the violence and pain from homes and books to the market place. They are impressed to hear the collective resisting voice of women. The collective marching of women on roads exhibits their self-esteem and self-confidence created through resistance by these six women and fuelled by growing literacy, opportunities through education and evolving favourable social and economic conditions. It advances their unity as well as their competence and confidence.

One of the girls in the march tells them that the individual fights these six women waged then; the courage and daring they showed; the revolt that each of them raised and the questions they asked - all these constitute their inspirations. Even as many years passed by nobody forgot them. The girls of the present day are now trying to find answers to the fundamental questions they raised in their days. It came out as all the six of them had hoped. They knew it for sure that some day humanity will accept their questions and
will respect their rebellions. Their fundamental questions were - Why marriage where there is love? Why need a marriage to have children? Why this possessiveness and desire in all human relationships? With these questions the six women resisted the authority of the society. Sasirekha asks, “Why should we always yield to its authority?” (473). Their very being was freedom. They knew it very well that the so-called pativratas underwent only difficulties. Not even a single pativrata had the right husband and led a happy married life. The pativratas have got nothing but tears, disgust and pain. These six women do not want to be such pativratas. Rajeswari resists the very notion and asks, “Why the hell should I be?” (474). The world has so much anger and animosity towards these six. The society expects these women’s voice must tremble with fear. These women must show that they are repentant. When they consider their life, their revolt against such society, its hypocrisy and its false morals they feel immensely proud of themselves.

All the six of them dissect the society threadbare and expose its weakness and its influence on women. They point out that women are bound by societal norms. Whether they like it or not they have to have no other option but to have children. But Rajeswari takes her own decision. Out of her own will and freedom she had taken the decision to abort her child. Proudly she asks a question, “Who can take such decision?” (475). These six women have faith in their experiences and they have the necessary courage and strength to look down upon those who do not have faith in their experiences and who do not have any respect for them. They are of the opinion that the society does not know about the meanness in marriage. They are the women who wanted to revolt against such marriages, fight for love and for freedom and to bring about a revolution. They do not want to give anyone a right over them. All of them resist against those men who used them the way they liked, made them feel disgusted, not even looked at them when they did not need them, dumped them in a corner, forced themselves on these women whenever they wanted. It is not love according to them. They wished to make men realise how intense and lofty the life is. They tried to encourage men, lift them to greater height and enthuse them to great work, great ideals and great thoughts.

The six of them gave such a jolt to the society that the minute the society thought of these women, some of them were unable to sleep, were restless, angry and disturbed. These six women think that such a life has a real meaning. Aruna says, “We’ve never accepted defeat from life or society. We never took refuse in death, reverence, inertia, or ordinariness. We entered the battlefield straight away. Were we injured? Were our hearts broken? Doesn’t matter. This is better than death in marriage” (479).
The six women even discuss female foeticide and ironically say, "They discovered a new means for the 'achievement of world peace!'" (480). These women think of their experiences in a society where even the urge to have an experience is prohibited and in a society that says nothing other than upholding family honour is important for women but for them as Lalasa says, "Experience does not mean joy alone, it's pain too" (482).

According to Sundaramma, "There was no respect usually shown to the woman who had delivered, to her pride, nor concern or love for the woman and the child. Only loneliness, pain and unhappiness . . . For the sake of money, do they have to plead with husbands and men? Do they have to beg? Do they have to surrender their bodies to them? Do they have to sell themselves? . . . Can't we have children without recourse to marriage? To have children why is marriage necessary?" (487, 488). Lalasa says, "For love why should there be marriage? For motherhood why marriage? . . . These are the questions that can transform this society totally." Lalasa says again, " . . . everything is wasted and burnt and destroyed within women. Why is this so? Have we ourselves brought ourselves to this stage? . . . Is blindness ruling the world? Is cruelty trampling the hearts? What the destination? Where's liberation? There's only one way! Courage. Faith in life. Revolt against stupidity, fate and authority. Fearlessness about the future. Courage in the heart. Indifference towards the outcome that should be our way of life" (484).

The primary tenet of marriage is generally the difference between male and female. The six of them did not believe in these differences. Their experiences exhibit how great the barriers and high the prices the resisting women suffer and pay. In spite of severe social restrictions, these women stand to overtly work to change gender restrictions. There are examples of drastic family reactions to their transgressions.

The six of them discuss how people find it difficult to understand such revolutionary women. People are of the opinion that all six of them are the imaginative creations of some "madcap" (470). They raise questions regarding the existence of such women. But they are there in every street and in every house. Only people have failed to notice them. But the world can not bear to have them around. They negate their existence. Perhaps six of them were not fit to live during those days of early twentieth century. They went in search of a world where there is no end to love, where everything is love-filled, and where love makes no distinction between moral and immoral. They feel that there is no place even today for persons like them. They doubt whether there is anyone like them who has given up marriage to hold on to love, to love eternally and for the freedom that will not bow down to anyone's authority or rule.
The six of them are abused as well as respected at the same time. On the one hand they are accused of committing blunders. On the other they are honoured as revolutionaries and representatives of female aspirations and desires. But according to them there is nothing new in that as such abuses are common to all women. They reveal their vision of life, they share their perceptions and they set out in the quest of meaning.

The peculiar strength of this play lies in its overt commitment to new ideology of liberalism. This creative play, an epitome of modernity advocates revolutionary ideas of women's emancipation. Volga's revolutionary message in the play highlights her commitment to modern thinking. The six women slam the door on the orthodox society. They nurtured resistance in the face of repeated humiliation of their individuality. They appropriated marriage with their own meanings. They become participants in the constructions of meanings. They managed to deflect social norms inherent in the society from their own validating experiences. They subverted the institution of marriage. They could prove it wrong that women are emotionally delicate and unfit for the rough and tumble of the world outside the house. These women's small and subtle acts of resistance helped in motivating all other women to gather together and go in the march and give out a clarion call for freedom from gender discrimination.

To be a radical is to advocate extreme or drastic changes in society, and literally to go to the root of social problems. Radical feminism stands on the premise that women's oppression is the most widespread and deepest form of oppression in human society. Radical feminism confronts standards set by patriarchal hierarchies in which men are responsible for women's subordination. It rejects social arrangements rooted deeply in conventional gender roles through sexual oppression as practised and perpetuated. For the radical feminist it is fundamental that women get out of this system to achieve equality. Therefore, radical feminism calls upon the sisterhood of women to work towards social and cultural transformation. By this definition much of the feminist agenda in the play "The Six of Them" has been radical.
xviii. The Journey Within

*Antaryatra* (Bengali, 2000)

Usha Ganguli

Trans: Tutun Mukherjee

“There is nothing like researching other women’s lives to bring your own life into perspective” (Flynn 312).

Usha Ganguli is an established actor-director of Hindi theatre. Born in 1945 in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, she married Kamal Ganguli and settled in Kolkata. As a child, she learnt Bharatanatyam dance. She has an M.A. in Hindi literature. She started teaching in a College, Calcutta, in 1970 and began acting with Sangit Kala Mandir and later studied theatre under Tripti Mitra. She started directing the plays after forming a theatre group called “Rangakarmee” in 1976. “Rangakarmee regularly takes its repertoire on tours across India and undertakes extension activities in theatre with underprivileged people . . . Her energetic style and disciplined ensemble work with young, large casts spearheaded a resurgence of Hindi theatre in Calcutta” (Lal 2004 128). She also translates and adapts plays into Hindi. She is one who created a place for Hindi theatre in Bengal.

Ganguli experimented with her solo performance of “The Journey Within” which besides being autobiographical expresses her introspection. The play has had many performances. As a theatre-person she has drawn her material not only from the stage but also from literature. She is successful in creating a language of difference and debated social evils with memorable plays like *Guria Ghar, Parichay, Mother, Lok Katha, Ghare Baire, Subah, Himmat Mai, Beti Ayee, Mukti, Rudali* and through many other plays which she has scripted herself. Her decision not only to create a literary work like *Antaryatra* but also to enact it on the stage explores why women take risks and demonstrate extraordinary courage with the outcome of inspiring other women to fulfil their own dreams. The play registers Ganguli’s dissent in innumerable ways and disapprovals of society’s callous and chauvinistic dismissal of women’s worth as women. The female characters that Ganguli has chosen have evolved their own patterns of resistance. They have possessed a fiercely uncompromising nature that allows them to persist in asserting their individual selves. It is a splendid example of how literature empowers women-folk.

Ganguli has experimented with the genre of drama and the conventional ways of staging the play. She has used a new dramatic technique. She performs the roles of
famous women characters of well-known plays which have had their influence on her. The enactment follows her “Narration” signifying its importance in her life. It expresses her journey through theatre career and journey within herself through introspection. It can also be interpreted as the “Narration” of female development. Memory serves as a link between her present and past. The theatre serves as a catalyst and provides psychological dimensions to the plot. “Narration” is the telling of a story whether in prose or verse involving events, characters and what the characters say and do. Some literary forms such as the novel and short story in prose, and the epic and romance in verse, are explicit narratives that are told by a narrator. “In drama, the narrative is not told, but evolves by means of the direct presentations on stage of the actions and speeches of the characters” (Abrams 173). But Ganguli has narrated the play on the stage and has been successful. Through a systematic formal construction, she has represented her life on the stage. The primary interest of Ganguli as a narrator is in the way that the play fashions itself into a narrative - the sequence of events in her life into a dramatic plot. She proposes through the telling of her experiences about how her enacting the powerful female roles is the basic means by which she has made the sense of her life, provided meanings to her experiences and organised her life. In her exploration of “Feminism and the Self” Griffiths elaborates that woman’s most significant definition of self is found in relationships with others, either as individuals or groups rather than in those situations that are unaffected by relationships (Griffiths 1995). Within this dramatic mode, the playwright has not only enacted the roles that influenced her but also comments on and then evaluates those actions and motives of the characters. She expresses how enlightened she is physically as well as emotionally. The play has become “a self-revealing autobiographical text” (Wyatt 18); “a means of analysis [. . .] a way of seeing what is happening” (Steedman 106) and an analytic device to interpret women’s characterisation.

Feminist studies place life experiences of women at the centre. This focus creates a space that recognises women’s conditions and holds these experiences as valid and of value. Women’s voices have historically been marginalised and distorted not only in literature but also in social sciences and history. The aim of feminist writers is to rectify it. Through her play, Ganguli expresses her deep concern for women’s oppression and exploitation in the society. She explores the institutions of marriage and family, and brings out how lack of understanding affects them. She raises many questions related to gender-equality and gender-justice. The play has grown beyond the simple enactment of the roles by the playwright. The focus of her “Narration” and the performance of roles
shift rapidly from Ganguli - the narrator to the character - Ganguli in the play from one character to another and to herself. The play reveals women’s responses to life. Whatever has remained as muted and unexpressed beneath the weight of tradition is spoken of to the reader/audience through the enactment and “Narration”. Ganguli focuses only on those characters and the events which have influenced her tremendously. She gives them a great deal of thought and sees them from feminine angle and aspect. The feminine perceptions are expressed strongly through her “Narration”. She also expresses people’s reactions and their views on women’s performance in theatre. The female characters that shaped Ganguli’s life are the “social models for women who aspired to escape from and improve their conditions of existence” (Carby 1999 36).

Ganguli’s role-playing has proved helpful in analysing her experience of diverse plays of literature. The tone of her speech can be described as critical, outspoken, serious and ironic. It can also be asserted that she has exploited the “stream of consciousness” technique for her play. The play presents the unbroken flow of her perceptions, thoughts and feelings in her waking mind. There are long narratives of her introspection in which she records in detail what passes through her awareness, her description of the process of enacting the roles. She has attempted to represent the scenes and events of those plays which have impinged upon her consciousness. The technique of stream of consciousness can be applied to this play specifically because of its mode of “Narration” which undertakes to reproduce the full spectrum and continuous flow of her mental process in which her conscious thoughts mingle with her memories, expectations and feelings. The term stream of consciousness can also be interchangeably used with the term “interior monologue” as it undertakes to present the reader/audience the course and rhythm of the performer/playwright’s consciousness that occurs in the protagonist’s mind.

Ganguli begins her play with the memories of her childhood. She used to be adamant and had many questions. When they settled in Bengal, she merged herself with Bengali culture. As a child, she was not conditioned like any other girl to accept everything without questioning. She was quite unhappy about two things in her childhood - “Why couldn’t I do sums? . . . And why wasn’t my birthday celebrated?” (69). She was aware of gender discrimination since her childhood which she resisted by celebrating her birthday but she regrets saying, “I cannot reveal here what happened to me after that” (69). Her brother had come after four sisters so he was a pampered one at home. She narrated the path treaded by her since her childhood. When she looks back she sees the winding path she has traversed and those, whom she met during that journey, appear
before her. The characters on the stage reveal the character within and therefore the title *Antaryatra* - the journey within. She starts narrating how the strong women influenced her life and also by performing those roles that made a print on her mind. Her journey explores how the “*Social conventions and the traditional marriage provide the man with a more privileged position, which can hope for subjection and merger of the other; for the woman, the prescribed code is that of surrender and obedience. But between these socially defined roles flutters the need to find fulfillment and expression*” (Jain 2003 77). The journey too speaks of the women who exhibited maturation and courage. They have been her fellow-travellers in her journey within. She never thought that she would do theatre some days. But she did theatre successfully.

Ganguli remembers Amita di’s calm dignity and comments, “No student would ever feel estranged if all teachers were like Amita di” (70). She tells about Bina from Rangakarmee’s first play “*Parichay - The Introduction*”. Bina is concerned about the plight of the poor workers who are more or less the slaves, neither special nor important. Bina realises that she too can think, can speak using her words and her own sentiments. She can not just repeat “like a parrot” (71) whatever Sudeep says. A bus driver’s daughter, she falls in love with an intellectual Sudeep. She talked about him all the time and waited for him to come to her. But a letter came from him that said, “There is no truth in what happened. How bewildered she was and how angry!” (71). Instead of bringing life to standstill, her bereavement pushes her towards self-questioning and introspection. Soon she realises she does not need him. She can stand on her feet by herself, totally alone. She says, “I can speak for myself now” (71). His presence has made her lame but his departure makes her self-reliant. Ganguli through Bina learns to speak her own words. She investigated the process of becoming a woman. The influence of performance of Bina’s role on Ganguli was “Bina and I had become like one being. She was learning and so was I” (72). These female characters compelled Ganguli to contemplate on wider social questions and thereby resist the subjugation of woman’s personality, the confining stereotype roles of women as mothers and nurturers as well as the question of sisterhood.

Ganguli could dare leave her job and dedicate herself to theatre and it became possible to her through Keya Chakraborty whose love for the theatre and her devotion inspired Ganguli who knew that Keya di is also an ordinary human being like any other person. “She must have been weak in maths too, like me” (72) but she made Ganguli realise that good work can not be done unless one is a good human being. She gave up her job for theatre. One needs courage to do that. Ganguli asks “Can we do that?” (72).
And Ganguli could do it and that was the influence of Keya di. Through her, Ganguli learnt to resist her personal temptation for the sake of theatre. The “Narration” thereby evokes deep and meaningful contemplation. Though her Narration is down to earth it often transforms the whole experience of reading the text or viewing the play into a more interior and subtle adventure of self-analysis and self-evaluation. The real life acquaintances like Keya, Anima and Trupti are independent thinking women who take risk in their lives to assert their individuality. Another influence is that of Tripti di and her ingenuity and basic honesty - the rare qualities one can possess.

The pattern of first person “Narration” is profoundly introspective. Ganguli uses flash points of memory to reveal the essence of sisterhood, human relationships, marriage, empathy and sympathy. It also expresses the playwright’s resentment against the callous indifference of the society. As Wyatt opines these women have followed “a code that requires that they are for each other in a purely supportive way that excludes all negative feelings including envy” (Wyatt 37). They become the messengers of hope for new beginning. They exhibit a rare strength, courage of conviction and a sense of ethics which keep Ganguli going on in the face of all difficulty ridden moments. Women thus are bound together with links of mutual sustenance.

Ganguli adapted The Doll’s House as “Guria Ghar”. Nora became Munia. Ganguli through Munia realises that “there can be nothing more precious in life than self-respect” (73). She assumes that a woman can always defend what is precious to her even if she has to break the relationships. She also realises that laws do not permit a daughter to release her dying father from his pain, and a wife to save husband’s life. Ganguli resists these laws by saying, “I have to examine whether such laws are right or wrong” (73). The story zooms on the plight of women who are perpetually caught between freedom and domesticity. Ganguli exposes the unsentimental reality of the world. She performed the role of Munia so powerfully that “Once an elderly gentleman remarked, ‘This Usha Ganguli will spoil all the women with her drama.’ I don’t know how many women I have spoiled. But after all these years when I see so many young girls joining our group, I feel that maybe a new path has opened for them” (74). She realises that she has influenced the life of young girls who joined her troupe. Self-realisation by women is considered as spoiling by men-folk. She does feel happy that “a path has opened for them” (74). Through theatre Ganguli could help empower women-folk.

The incident of Munia reminds Ganguli of Anima di who had come to Kolkata after being banished by her husband who brought second wife. Ganguli narrates, “From
Nora to Anima di - I went on growing and absorbing life around me. I didn’t think then as I do now - could I have reached this point had I remained a teacher all my life? I don’t think so. The story of banishment that began with Sita and was recounted in the lives of Nora and Anima di wasn’t over yet” (75). It expresses the influence of real life characters like Keya, Tripti and Anima di who have made Ganguli bold enough to resist and question the system.

Ganguli could form her political consciousness only through her performance of the great figure of the Mother created by Gorky and by Brecht. Despite the death of all her sons, Mother takes the yoke in times of political crisis. Mother’s advice was “Don’t run away from death. Run away from the wrong kind of life that you are leading” (75). After performing Mother, Ganguli gathered her courage to take up the directorship of her own theatre group. It was to show what woman can do, what power she possesses and how she can influence others as she herself got influenced. She emerged as a part of consciousness-raising group. It even makes her think over the plight of human mother. The character of Mother also speaks of the invisible contribution of women to nation-building and community life.

The story of Savitri of “Lok Katha” presents a repeated reference to violence targeted against women. Savitri’s husband sacrifices his life for the sake of his people but they do not come to help her when she resists the Thakurs who murder her husband. Ganguli realises that woman can not expect any help from man except humiliation. It reminds her of her own life experience. Once she was accosted by a stranger with an obscene proposition. Ganguli feels devastated. “I thought all my education, my refinement, my dignity, the beautiful work for the theatre - everything was a total waste. I remained merely a primeval woman in the eyes of men” (76). That was an unforgettable experience for her. Her observation throws light on the fact that these days hundreds of women travel long distances daily for different jobs to earn their livelihood. They must be forced to listen to such obscenities every day. “If they spoke of their experiences, wouldn’t we get a different view of our culture? But in this social system, who gives women the opportunity and the freedom to speak of such things?” (76-77). Ganguli speaks of another unforgettable experience of hers. In 1986 she performed an Indian adaptation of the German silent theatre, Request Concert. The play was being performed in a cowshed. About twenty tribal “Santhal” women came to watch the play that night. In the last scene, she, as a character slowly arranges the sleeping tablets to commit suicide. She picks up the tablets with a glass of orange juice in her hand. Immediately, she felt the
riveting stare of twenty pairs of eyes on her as if forcing life on her. She could not swallow the tablets to commit suicide in the last scene that night. That changed the history of the play. “There are such women too, in our county” (77). The strong, hard working, able bodied tribal women forced and influenced her to change the ending of the play. She undergoes a strange experience which is a necessary step for her maturation.

Ganguli is reminded of Kamala and Madhuri. A gold medalist Madhuri was a wonderful teacher. She was a founder member of Rangakarmee and was brilliant in everything. But by burning her, her in-laws murdered her. She had to fight for life for fourteen days in the hospital. But even while dying she remained silent and did not protest against the injustice. She took all the responsibility on herself by giving the statement, “Nobody is responsible for my death” (77). Ganguli felt pity for her as she could not tell the truth despite being learned. Kamala on the other hand, with her very dark, pock-marked face, a mother of three daughters ran away to Kolkata to escape death by drowning with a Kolsi tied around her neck. These are the stories of Kamala and Madhuri. One lived and the other died. It is courage that helps women to survive.

Ganguli speaks of Bimala’s role in Ghare Baire, a novel by Rabindranath Tagore. Ganguli confesses, “Bimla intrigued me. She captivated me and wouldn’t let me leave. Her relationship with Sandeep and Nikhil, the dilemma of her mind, her pain, drew me to her” (78). Ganguli asserts that everybody knows Bimla because she is one among many other women. She also tells about Maya of Subah. Gone are the days when “the charm of woman’s life lies in doing things and pursuing interests not for self but for someone else like a husband or children” (Bambhani 166). No doubt women wish to serve their family but in the absence of empathy from husbands they revolt against it. Maya asks a number of questions to her husband. She makes him realise that it is she who does all work at home. She asks, “Who goes out for vegetables? - I. Who cooks food? Who washes the vessels? Who takes the responsibility to run the house within the limited salary? - I, I, I. If you are a whole-timer in the factory then so am I. But who washes your dirty socks? Have you ever washed even a hanky of mine?” (79). She makes it clear that all housewives are the unpaid servants of the house. The performance of Maya and Munia provide Ganguli with an insight, awareness of experience, realism of men-folk and the cultural values. Ganguli is on a kind of quest. It has been a form of journey which is not to the destined place but it is an ongoing process in the recovery of her self. The issue for Ganguli is not just the events of the play but coming back to an altered self.
The performance of Yehudi Bibi makes her realize that women are punished and banished for no fault of theirs. Yehudi Bibi has to leave her husband, her home and her country because she is a Jew in Nazi Germany. Her fault is that she is of a different race, has a different skin colour and a different religion. The questions of Yehudi Bibi are the questions of all women who are different and discriminated on the basis of their race/caste, class and gender. She says, “I am angry with myself. Why should I have to behave with caution every time, everywhere? If the shape of my nose and my black hair are different, why should I be punished? . . . What kind of a man are you? I can’t understand you . . . You talk about the freedom of the world, yet you don’t have the freedom to keep your wife with you! Bah! You are not humans but demons, bootlicking demons!” (79). Ganguli recalls Ulrike Meinhof. Ulrike says, “You make great security arrangement. But it is your own fear that makes you feel so insecure that you react with cruelty . . . I refuse to be a puppet in your hands. I don’t want to be that soft and fragile creature that will talk, laugh, and dance foolishly at your command. I don’t wish to be that kind of a woman” (79).

These performances compelled Ganguli to pose questions - “Isn’t this strongly feminist? And why shouldn’t I talk of feminism and the problems of women? Am I not a woman? But please don’t call me quarrelsome!” (79). The woman who asks for her right and fights for it has always been termed as quarrelsome. All these characters prepared her mind so perfectly that she is now able to face any crisis during her career and come successfully out of it. She relates her cast as Himmat Mai in the adaptation of Brecht’s *Mother Courage*. On the day before the performance comes the crisis: Ganguli loses her voice. Everybody was worried. She herself was confused as to what to do. But early next morning she jumped out of bed and chewed some raw green chillies. She had heard somewhere that “Lata Mangeshkarji ate raw green chillies every morning” (80). For the performance of Himmat Mai Ganguli exhibited *himmati* i.e. courage and confidence to go ahead. She performed *Himmat Mai*, an anti-war play at the time of the Kargil war. She has to traverse the path of struggle from *Himmat Mai* to *Jhansi Ki Rani*. She took her women’s army everywhere. Her question was, “Who could stop us? We were talking about women, focusing on their struggles and singing their songs” (80). Now they celebrate the arrival of a baby-girl in *Betii Ayee*.

Ganguli tells how she has to perform a role of Reema in *Mukti*. That was the second instance of her acting in Bengali. The role in *Mukti* was also that of a mother - a working mother deserted by her husband and insulted by her daughter. She has worked
hard for everything that is theirs today. She has tried to educate her daughter to give her a
good career. As she is still his legal wife he exercises his right to demand a share from his
wife’s property. And she is accused of being “dominating, autocratic, dictatorial” (82) by
her daughter. It is worth noting that in her crisis she is not only victimised by her husband
- the violator but has to bear the indifference of her daughter. Ganguli comments how
powerfully the role has impressed her. She resurrects the emotional violence which
shatters not only the world of adults but also of the children.

Ganguli speaks ironically of the legal right provided to woman. It is unfortunate
that most of the women do not know and even do not understand the rights they have
been given. Even if they go to court, they are humiliated by the advocates who become
brutally impatient to see a woman claiming her rights. Ganguli wonders what sort of
place the court is where “the shy inhibited women curl up in fear and shame; some
women run around in circle totally lost in the maze of legal fencing” (82). She demands
the rights of women and raises various issues regarding women’s identity and their
relationship to the family and society. She knows it for sure that if she talks still more of
law she will be slapped with a contempt of court notice.

The role of Shanichari of Rudali is closest of all to her. Rudali brings out the harsh
irony of women’s lives. She is “constantly under pressure to test her survival skills”
(Sage 182). She has to struggle so as to survive in this largely unresponsive world.
Shanichari who was not able to cry over the death of her husband, her son and her
mother-in-law, cries at the corpses of the rich people because it is her profession to cry -
to earn her livelihood.

There have been many characters, many experiences on Ganguli’s journey
through the world of theatre and her own life. All these roles have shaped her
consciousness and have introduced her to deeper dimensions of women’s world. All these
characters have been dear to her. She loses herself when she is on the stage. Many of her
co-actors on the stage left this world one by one. Ganguli thinks, “They leave behind the
burden of the world for us to carry. So much more work to be done. So many dreams to
fulfill!” (83). She feels responsible to do all these. She aspires for a positive scene in the
world. She visualises a world where everybody is happy. “I still dream that after years of
legal battle, a mother gets her child back . . . I see the husband and the wife working
together in the kitchen. The husband cleans and washes the rice and the wife pours it into
a vessel. I see a long line, a queue of girls with their heads held high walking ahead with
firm steps, with dreams in their eyes and smiles on their lips. I hear their laughter, loud
and happy laughter! . . . And I? I see myself on a wide stage . . . I see myself as Mrinal on the stage, with paper and pen in my hands. That's a fond dream of mine, to be Mrinal who has everything, from social prestige to prosperity. Yet who, in the midst of abundance, finds her true self and mission in life through a sudden and inexplicable insight" (83-84). Mrinal is the character from Strir Patra - Wife's Letter. Mrinal despite everything expresses her desire to continue to live.

The play concludes on an optimistic note. Ganguli ends her play with the indication of her faith in the affirmative values of life and incessant cycle of life which follows death. Her self-contemplation and self-evaluation exhibits her determined efforts to free herself completely from defeatist mode of living. She decides to brace herself for a future empowering the girls and womenfolk.

The play exploits the possibilities the stage offers. In the play there are stories within stories which lead from one idea to the other. The playwright Ganguli has chosen the wise, bold and worldly characters whose role she performs and talks to the reader/audience about them. It reminds of the German theorists who in the nineteenth century developed the concept of "Einfühlung" which means "feeling into" (Abrams 75). The word has been translated as empathy which signifies an identification of oneself with an observed person who is so close that the one seems to participate in all the activities that one observes. The person involuntarily projects himself/herself into that another person. While performing the roles Ganguli becomes one with the character. It denotes her fellow-feeling. She starts feeling along with the mental state and emotions of those characters and starts narrating the parallel history of her own experience and thoughts. It provides her a sense of faith in her potential.

Her journey outside, on the stage leads her to an encounter with the self leading to her journey within, towards self-actualisation and self-realisation. Her questioning attitude is more towards the expression of her self. She rejects the self-destroying restrictions laid down by the tradition. The female characters and the real life acquaintances of Ganguli though ordinary have the strong will to live. They become the role models for many of sisters and redefine women's place. It can be concluded that the reader/audience feel that if they can understand the playwright's real self through her own telling, they can gain insights that would encourage them to develop their own strengths.
References


Smith, Rebecca. “‘The Only Flying Turtle under the Sun.’ The Bildungsroman in Contemporary Women’s Fiction.” *Atlantis* 2.2-2 (Spring 1977): 126-132.


