CHAPTER-IV
Scripting Violence – Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani

I could not have written anything other than what I wrote. That is exactly what I saw and I do not have as a writer the capability to write what I can not perceive. (Tendulkar 2001: 37)

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapters that violence against women is one of the major functional social realities surrounding the Indian society which many contemporary Indian playwrights have chosen to represent in their writings. But this area has not been adequately explored in the past by researchers working on contemporary Indian theatre. Most Indian playwrights (both men and women) have made a concentrated effort to voice the various manifestations of violence experienced by women both in their private and public lives. In this context, the plays written by Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, Mahasweta Devi and Usha Ganguli to name a few, are of wider contemporary relevance. Their dramatic writings tend to represent the various social evils along with the issue of violence against women.

As the primary focus of my dissertation is on various forms of violence experienced by women in Indian society, this chapter would particularly discuss the selected woman conscious plays written by Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani. Also given the constraints of space, it would be difficult to include all the above mentioned dramatists who have scripted plays about women and violence in contemporary India. Therefore, I have restricted my selection to the plays of Mahesh Dattani and Vijay Tendulakar whose plays follow the genre of Western realist focusing on how gendered violence is being represented on stage. As I do not have access to the performances of all the aforementioned plays, an attempt would be made
includes analysis of the plays by Vijay Tendulkar and the second part includes the plays by Mahesh Dattani.

**Analysis of Vijay Tendulkar’s Plays: Kamala**

Vijay Tendulkar’s *Kamala* (1981) is based on a real-life incident - the *Indian Express* exposé by Ashwin Sarin, a Delhi based reporter who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market in 1981 for rupees 2,300 to present her in a press conference so as to show that trafficking of women is still rampant in states like Madhya Pradesh. Set against this historical background, the play is resonant with the theme of violence against women. The play is an attempt by the author to explore the position of women in Indian society, where they are still the victims of different kinds of visible and invisible violence.

*Kamala* is the story of an Adivasi girl whom Jaisingh Jhadhav, the journalist, buys from a rural flesh market in Bihar for rupees two hundred and fifty. It is ironical to see that Jaisingh, who considers himself a warrior against exploitation of women, buys her with the sole purpose of building his reputation in media. That his intention is neither to bring an end to this flesh trade nor to help Kamala is evident in his dialogues. Jaisingh says to Sarita: “…women are sold in many places like that, all over the country. How do you think all the red-lights districts could operate-with that? That is not the point. The point is how we project Luhardaga - the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case - not in the case itself…” (2004:15). Jaisingh’s words clearly reveal his motive, or by extension the actual motive of a major section of contemporary journalists. The fact that Kamala - the woman - undergoes inhuman exploitation in that flesh market is not important for media. What is important for media is to how to make the best use of her narrative so that good reputation can be
earned. The case itself is not really relevant to media unless its presentation is done to suit its motive. His speech brings into light the dark facts regarding the condition of women in Indian society where they are still sold and bought, especially the poor and lower caste women. Women are thus reduced to commodified objects that can be used for any purposes by the male governed powerful institutions such as family, media, etc. Through Jaisingh’s character, Tendulkar reveals the picture of “gendered” media which is complicit in the victimisation of women in various ways, instead of helping them. Michael Taussig points out that the representation of violence always plays a dual role, either by inflicting violence or by healing violence. Taussig uses this notion of representation of violence in terms of the colonial context, where it functioned as a high-powered means of domination; but this seems relevant in the present context too (2007: 507). Jaisingh’s act of presenting Kamala in the press conference, exposing and compelling her to answer all sorts of vulgar questions raised by his fellow journalists, could be read as media inflicting violence on her. Representing Kamala in the press conference in this way Jaisingh sells her for the second time. She is twice victimised – firstly, she is a victim of trafficking and secondly, she is abused by the media. She is a victim of the abuse of power by media. According to Foucault, power itself is not evil, unless it is used to limit the freedom of others and dominate them. In the abuse of power, one imposes upon others, one’s whims, appetites and desires (in Heller 1996:103-04). Here Jaisingh is found to impose his power on Kamala to fulfill his desire to earn promotion. She has been treated not as a human being; only as an object by Jaisingh: he uses ‘it’, instead of using ‘she’ or ‘her’ to refer to her: “Jaisingh: I missed the night train - then I chased it in a private taxi...” (2004:7).
Jaisingh has sarcastically used phrases like “Bride in the mandap”, “Ekdam id ka chand”, to refer to Kamala; whom he wants to make the centre of attraction at the press conference with a view to creating a “nice front page item” out of her. In the press conference Kamala again becomes a victim of verbal abuse by almost all the journalists present there. Verbal abuse of women in media is evident in the speech of Jain, Jaisingh’s friend: “With that, another one began to itch to ask a question. He asked, you must be having free-sex too. How many men have you slept with?” (2004:29). In Kamala Tendulkar has not portrayed Kamala as a victim of direct physical violence. Instead, she has been represented as a victim of psychological and sexual abuse, which is much more painful. Finally Jaisingh takes Kamala to an orphanage to get rid of the crime of buying a woman.

Like Kamala, the other two female characters, Sarita and Kamalabai are also victimised in different ways inside the family. Sarita is turned into an object by Jaisingh; she provides him with domestic comfort, social companionship, and physical enjoyment whenever he wants. In fact, Sarita has hardly any freedom inside the family. She has also become a slave like Kamala. But Kamala was bought for Rs. 250, while Sarita’s slavery is the result of her marriage with Jaisingh. She was not sold; rather Jaisingh got a huge amount of money along with her as dowry. In a sense her slavery is worse than that of Kamala. Through Sarita, Tendulkar executes an exposé of the dowry system that is dominant inside the family and marriage - the institutions governed by patriarchal values and norms. In the play, Kamala’s realisation of her identity in terms of “slave”, “purchase”, “sale”, and her willingness to produce children for Jaisingh is significant. It shows that the society has shaped her mentality in such a way that she cannot think beyond her being a slave. Kamala’s acceptance of her slavery intensifies Sarita’s own sense of enslavement, and her marginalised position in the family. Here Tendulkar has represented Sarita as a victim
of existing gender distinctions which regard women as the inessential and
marginalised other; Jaisingh, being a male chauvinist, cannot recognise her condition.

Jain’s speech clearly reveals Sarita’s plight in the family. He ironically
comments on Jaisingh when he says to Sarita: “Hi, Bhabhiji, I mean an English ‘hi’
to him and a Marathi ‘hai’ to you. The warrior of exploitation in the country is
exploiting you...Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes slave of wife...”
(2004:17). Jain calls her a lovely “bonded labourer”. Kamala’s departure makes Sarita
more aware of her own slavery. She loses her sleep and is broken up emotionally. Her
speech becomes a signifier of her disturbed mental state and the exploitations she has
suffered. She says:

Sarita: He does not consider a slave to be a human being – just a useful
object. One you can use and throw away...Listen to the story how he
brought the slave Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got
free – not just free – the slave’s father shelled out the money – a big

Saying this, Sarita bursts out in tears; but at the same time she tries to hide her tears.
Another woman character, Kamalabai seems to be in a better position than Sarita and
Kamala. Although she has to work hard, she is at least paid for her services. She
enjoys a sense of freedom which Kamala and Sarita lack. When Kamala asks her
whether she is bought or hired, Kamalabai feels like losing her self-respect and
immediately decides to quit. But, like Kamala and Sarita, she is also turned into an
object when Kakasaheb uses the term “the poor thing” to talk about her. Like
Jaisingh, Kakasaheb is also the upholder of masculinity as the right norm.

To transform the text into performance is always a complex and endless task.
The written text goes through many metamorphoses and becomes a part of the entire
performance process. On stage, the body of Kamala along with the other aspects
associated with it can be perceived as a visual image or as a sign signifying her
exploited self. She appears on stage with a veil and a dirty and torn white sari. She sits in one of the corners of the stage and maintains a sense of modesty and silence throughout the entire play - all these aspects turn into signs on stage and formulate the image of a woman who is poor and exploited. Kamala becomes a physical presence that can be perceived directly by the audience and later on reconstructed with the help of their ingrained consciousness. Semiotically, Kamala's body becomes a signifier of violence against woman while phenomenologically the body becomes a lived experience between individual consciousnesses of the audience and the reality; presenting violence against women as a sensory and mental phenomenon. Similarly, Sarita's act of weeping, becoming motionless and twisted in pain, and sitting alone can be perceived and analysed as visual images or signs representing her psychological pain.

A recent performance of Kamla by the Naatak theatre group took place at Cubberly Theatre, Palo Alto, in the San Francisco bay area of California. Produced by Alka Sippy and directed by Monica Mehta Chitkara, Kamala was performed in Hindi for three days on 5th, 10th and 11th February, 2012. The performance seriously dealt with the issue of trafficking as manifested in the review of the play published in the India-West. The performance could successfully highlight the issue of violence against women. Jansingh Jhadhav was played by Rajat Sharma; who brought Kamala from a village in Madhya Pradesh to present her in the press conference. A shabbily dressed woman Kamla, played by Shruti Mitesh Bhawsar, was seen in one the corners of a beautifully decorated drawing room. The most interesting moment of the performance came up when Sarita met Kamala and they exchanged their thoughts and Sarita's subsequent realisation of her enslavement. Both Sarita and Kamala delivered their most nuanced performances in this scene (Sohrabji: 2012). The review on the performance of Kamala, “New Naatak Production Tackles Indian Sex Trafficking”, highlighted the performance's emphasis on the issue of women trafficking in various parts of India.
Kanyadaan

Kanyadaan (1983), Tendulkar’s other widely celebrated text, is mainly centered on the theme of marriage between Jyoti and Arun Athavale - the Brahmin girl and the Dalit youngman respectively, and the subsequent consequences of this marriage. The play is also an attempt to explore the class divide between the upper castes and the lower castes, the awakening of Dalit consciousness as a threat against the upper castes, and finally the victimisation of woman (Jyoti) in this entire process. The chief protagonist Jyoti is the daughter of Nath Devalikar, a Brahmin socialist MLC. Jyoti’s decision to marry Arun, the Dalit young man, makes Nath very happy as he is determined to erase casteism and spread democratic values for all. But in reality, there is a gap between his theories and practices. He remains at the centre of the family and exerts the power of his hegemonic masculinity over the rest of the family members by persistently imposing his ideologies. Jyoti sticks to her decision to marry Arun, despite the strong disapproval coming from her mother and brother. This is because Jyoti has internalized those ideologies propagated by her father. The family becomes a site for implementing hegemonic masculinity by her father. In this process, Jyoti’s own life becomes miserable. Here her speech is a verbal expression of her internal agony when she talks to Nath:

Jyoti: You think about it. I have to stop thinking about it, I have to stop thinking and learn to live. I think a lot. Suffer a lot. Not from the blows, but from my thoughts, I can’t bear them...But I could not help it. I was deeply offended by your hypocrisy. I thought: Why did this man have to inject and drug us every day with truth and goodness? And if he can get away from it at will, what right had he to close all our options? ... (2004: 565)
Later on when Jyoti decides to leave Arun being unable to tolerate his violent behaviour, her father does not support her decision. Through the character of Nath, Tendulkar shows that within the patriarchal system women are also used by men as objects of experimentation to fulfill their political and social commitments. Nath’s motive becomes clearer when he makes the following revelation to his wife:

Nath: Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail! We must save this marriage. Not necessarily for our Jyoti’s sake...This is not just a question of our daughter’s life, Seva this has...a far wider significance...this experiment is a very precious experiment. (2004:537)

Tendulkar’s choice of the word “experimentation” and its application on Jyoti is significant; it affirms women’s subordination under patriarchy which still views women as mere objects of experiment and thereby put their life into misery. Within her own paternal home, Jyoti becomes the victim of systemic objective violence perpetrated by Nath with the power of his masculinity, or by extension the patriarchal system. The two terms “systemic” and “objective” are used by Žižek in his discussion on the concept of violence. By systemic objective violence Žižek refers to invisible violence underlying the peaceful veneer of a system (2009:1-2). There exists an inseparable link between power and violence. The patriarchal system gives power to man to subordinate woman and this subordinate position makes women vulnerable to various forms of covert and overt violence. Why Nath chooses Jyoti to experiment his political ideologies is significant; it indicates his adherence to the patriarchal view of woman as mere object of experimentation.

In Kanyadaan, the chief protagonist Jyoti is a victim of class conflict and intimate relationship partner violence; she undergoes both physical and psychological violence in her conjugal relationship with Arun. “Intimate partner violence” refers to
the acts of violence against women by their intimate relationship partners. A woman may be raped, beaten, stalked, and even killed by intimate relationship partners instead of strangers. It continues in a cyclical pattern and exerts deep psychological impact on the victim, apart from physical violence. The use of alcohol by the perpetrator also plays a significant role in intimate relationship partner violence (Mahoney 2001: 143-155). Arun, Jyoti’s husband lives on her income, comes back home drunk and beats her up. Even during her pregnancy, he physically assaults Jyoti injuring her stomach:

Seva: What could Kumud say? He had come home drunk as usual. Jyoti didn’t say much. She said it was no big matter. There is an internal wound in her stomach. The neighbors told me not to allow the girl to stay there. They said, take her away, he beats her and even kicks her. (2004:543)

Violence against Jyoti is reported verbally in between the conversation of the characters, but not directly shown on stage. It indicates Tendulkar’s awareness of the fact that visual representation of certain acts of violence may provoke more violence, instead of condemning it. The playwright seems to be more concerned with representing the impact of those horrifying behaviours on Jyoti’s psyche. His manner of representing violence against women shows his concern for this social malaise; this can be considered as an act of social activism via literary writing. The play also contains non-verbal signs. As per the stage direction in the play, Jyoti is often seen with tears rolling down from her eyes. Her tears, the mark on her shoulder, physical changes in her as if she has become suddenly older, her silence, her attempts to suppress grief and unbounded hatred in her eyes when she receives the call from Arun – all these can be perceived on stage as visual signs or images representing the effect of violence in her. With the help of verbal and non-verbal signs, the playwright has
represented the violence undergone by Jyoti. The performance of *Kanyadaan* on stage (which will be discussed later) with verbal and visual signs also opens up multiple ways of understanding the problem of violence against women.

The play mostly takes recourse to the verbal semiotic devices, basically the words to signify the acts of both physical and mental violence experienced by Jyoti. The play has very little scope for direct visual representation of violence, apart from the mark on Jyoti's shoulder. Not only the play, its performance on stage also (which will be discussed later) took recourse to the semiotic devices rather than phenomenological ones while referring to the acts of violence perpetrated on Jyoti. The manner of representing violence both in the play and the performance is commendable as it is done with taking into consideration the sensitivity of the issue.

Tendulkar reveals the shocking reality that wife beating has become an accepted "norm" in the Dalit community. Arun's father would come home drunk and beat up his mother, and now Arun perpetuates the same tradition. Violence against women is encouraged and accepted as a way of life within the patriarchal order. The playwright shows that in both the communities - Brahmin and Dalit - the patriarchal system is operational. Earlier Jyoti was used for experimentation by her father and now she is used for revenge by her husband. Seva's speech is significant in this regard drawing our attention to the real intention of Arun:

Seva: ....The truth is that your Dalit son-in-law, who can write such a wonderful autobiography, and many lovely poems, wants to remain an idler. He wants his wife to work. And with her money he wants to drown himself in drink...In this way she is returning all the kicks aimed at generations of his ancestors by men of high caste. It appears that this is the monumental mission he has set out to fulfill. (2004:543-44)
Here Arun’s violent move can be interpreted in the light of René Girard’s views on violence. According to Girard, violence is a communicable and contaminating process and it has the tendency to transfer itself unto a surrogate victim if it is deprived of the original victim. Violence is self-propagating (2005:31-32). Arun tries to revenge on the upper castes by imposing physical and mental violence on Jyoti for the violence undergone by the Dalit community in the hands of upper caste people; thereby turning Jyoti into a surrogate victim. Here Jayaprakash’s speech points to the nature of violence experienced by Jyoti. He says: “Perhaps. It is possible that gunning down women and children is essential for one’s defence. But this means that the very victims of violence may go on to perpetrate the same brutal violence upon others…” (2004: 547). But whatever is the reason, in both the cases it is the woman who suffers.

The concept of “learned helplessness” can be applied to Jyoti’s condition in this whole process of victimisation. She is physically and mentally tortured by Arun; but, she continues to live with her abusive husband. Once when she decides to leave Arun, her father does not allow her to do so. Generally it is the woman who is blamed for continuing such an abusive relationship, but the playwright here shows that the power of patriarchal norms is still dominant to govern women’s lives and decisions. Jyoti decides to accept life as it is. Perhaps her past experiences make her strong enough to face intimate relationship violence. However, a woman’s decision to continue an abusive relationship is the result of a complex interrelationship of factors. Seva, who is portrayed as a social activist fighting for the rights of women, fails to protect her daughter from being victimised; because the power of decision making in the family is practically controlled by her husband.
Vijay Tendulkar's plays seem to be clearly and overtly geared towards social change. Most of his plays explore the existing oppressive realities of Indian society such as the operations of power mechanisms and its relationship with violence, class conflict, patriarchy, gender relations, violence experienced by women and so on. In _Kanyadaan_ also like _Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session_ and _The Vultures_, Tendulkar deals with the condition of women in Indian society where they are still the victims of gender-specific violence. He shows that masculine hegemony, which is a patriarchal construct, is still intact in Indian society making women more vulnerable to violence. It is a significant move by Vijay Tendulkar exposing the violence inherent in the social systems like patriarchy, family and marriage.

When a play is performed or a written text is transformed into a performance text, the performance opens up different ways of realising the text and also adds to the written text. The various aspects associated with the process of transforming a text into performance have been already discussed in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation. _Kanyadaan_ has been performed by many theatre groups at different places in different times. Among its performances, I had access to two performances of the same play. The first one was performed by National School of Drama as a part of Bharat Ranga Mahotsav 2004 in Delhi. Bharat Ranga Mahotsav is a theatre festival of plays from India and all over the world organised by NSD; _Kanyadaan_ was performed as a part of this festival at Kamani on 23rd March, 2004 under the direction of Dinesh Thakur. As in the text, in the performance also Jyoti was the major focus of attention as a victim of violence. In a very subtle manner Dinesh Thakur played the role of Nath, the father who used his daughter for experimentation. His bodily movements and facial expression fairly pointed to the inherent anxieties of a Brahmin
father whose daughter decided to marry a Dalit man. But he maintained different composure. Every time Seva tried to make Jyoti rethink about hurried decision, Nath opposed Seva’s opinion and encouraged Jyoti to stick to her decision. The character of Jyoti became a physical presence on stage. The shock and pain caused by Arun’s abusive behaviour were apparent on her facial expressions. As in the written text, the performance also did not contain any direct visual description of the different forms of violence undergone by Jyoti in the aftermath of her marriage. The sufferings of Jyoti not only affected her life, but it was equally disturbing to the entire Nath family, especially to Seva. On stage, Seva’s dialogue delivery accompanied by her passionate tears was significant both — semiotically and phenomenologically. Her words and tears signified the impact of violence on the near ones of the victim; her physical presence together with her gestures, tears, and dialogues turned her into a sensory image; a woman who was afflicted with pain.

Jyoti’s bodily movements and expressions were befitting; her voice mingled with tears projected the trauma within her. She immediately ran away when Nath mentioned about the mark on her shoulder — a mark that bore witness to her experience of physical violence. The disturbed mental state of the other characters (Jyoti’s family members) was aptly represented in the performance with the help of the actors’ bodily movements, gestures and tears in between the conversations. On stage, we see all the characters as lived bodies’ and how they as living entity react to the acts of violence perpetrated on the other body - that is of Jyoti. No direct execution of violence on Jyoti was shown in the performance; but the impact of violence was explicit on her bodily appearance. Maurice Merleau-Ponty says: “to perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body” (1964: 42). The
characters as living bodies perceived the other body (Jyoti) that is in pain. Their perception of Jyoti’s pain reflected in their bodily expressions added to the audience’s perception of Jyoti’s pain. Nath’s behaviour towards the end part of the performance overtly represented his mental conflict; he failed to resist his tears when he came to know that Jyoti was beaten up during her pregnancy. Towards the end of the performance, the physical changes in Jyoti became apparent; it signified the other body that she carries in her - the body of an unborn child. Naturally, the acts of violence that Jyoti underwent would also affect her unborn child. Jyoti was a bodily presence on stage – a powerful image bearing all those painful experiences in her. The mental trauma in her became readable on stage. The performance ended with Jyoti leaving her parental home permanently and moving forward to accept the reality. Nath remained on stage; he seemed lost in thoughts. The stage lights became dim and darkness reigned.

The second performance of *Kanyadaan*, which I saw recently, was held in Guwahati on 23rd February, 2012. Produced by Bijoy Mukhopadhyay and directed by Bratya Basu, Ballygunge Swapnasuchana of Kolkata presented the play. This performance of *Kanyadaan* came out to be text-centered, except for the end, which the producer planned according to his own understanding of the gap between theory and praxis. The end was innovative and added a sense of newness to the performance. As the content is already discussed in my former analysis of the text and performance of *Kanyadaan*, here I would discuss only the performance part of the play. My access to two different performances of the same play enables me to make a comparative analysis of both the enactments. To begin with, the first part of this performance fell flat in terms of representing the seriousness and complexities that arose once Jyoti
decided to marry Arun. The frequent laughter that came from the audience was astonishing, turning the crucial moments of the play into comic interludes. Given the realistic nature of the play and the written stage directions provided by the playwright, Sohini Sengupta playing Jyoti could not do justice to the role. The frequent use of "hesitation" as a gesture by Tendulkar when Jyoti goes to express her decision was totally missing on stage. Her recourse to excess playfulness made the entire situation light and comic.

Of course, it is not mandatory to keep the character as it is in the text, but at the same time the character should not be presented in such a way so that it loses its impact/relevance in the mind of the audience. A truthful and serious portrayal of Jyoti was not seen in the first half of this performance of *Kanyadaan*. However, in the second part Sohini Sengupta successfully executed her part, representing Jyoti’s painful married life. Her experience of violence became visible in her image. Tears on her eyes while delivering the dialogues brought silence to the auditorium and the impact of physical and mental tortures she underwent could be felt. The ending goes thus – Jyoti leaves the stage, Nath and Seva remain still and Jayaprakash cites some of the canonical texts like Michael Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* etc. in order to signify that there is a vast gap between theory and practice. Nath’s attempt to implement his democratic theory on his daughter goes in vain making the latter’s life miserable.

Considered as a sensory phenomenon, both the performances of *Kanyadaan* led to a visual and sensory perception of the plight of Jyoti in its totality; her experience of violence and its impact on rest of the family members.
Arun is encouraged to marry Jyoti by her father Nath (perf. Guwahati: 2012).

Jyoti is being pacified by her father Nath when she returns home to say good bye (perf. Guwahati: 2012).
Seva is trying to persuade Jyoti to change her decision to marry Arun (perf. Delhi: 2004).

Arun’s rude behaviour towards Jyoti at her own home (Perf. Delhi: 2004).
Silence! The Court is in Session!

Silence! The Court is in Session (1967) deals with the story of Miss Leela Benare - the chief protagonist who is abused psychologically in the course of an imaginary trial. Within the play, a Mumbai based association plans to perform a play named “Mock Law” in which Benare is to play a part. Without taking her consent, Leela Benare is allotted to play a specific role - a woman accused of infanticide. Subsequently in the rehearsal process Benare’s private life is exposed by her co-actors; she loses her mental balance during the rehearsal process and collapses. Using Benare as his mouthpiece, Tendulkar represents the reality concerning unmarried women in Indian society where they are vulnerable to various forms of abuses and scrutinised on the basis of existing patriarchal ideologies.

Silence! The Court is in Session also highlights the importance of performance and its social signification, of the technicalities involved in enacting a play and how performance can also function as an oppressive apparatus by supporting the existing gender bias against women. In the play the oppressive aspect of performance becomes prominent. The whole idea of performance having serious social impact gets subverted in the hands of people like Mr. Kashikar and other members of the theatre group. In the name of spreading enlightenment, the group turns the life of Miss Leela Benare into a living hell. They plan to stage a play on infanticide so as to expose the private life of Benare publicly. Herein the irony lies and the gendered nature of most performances come up. The play draws attention to the fact that how, in some performances, women’s lives, especially violence against them are represented to provide merely entertainment; the directors and organisers show no serious concern for the issue. The social concern of Tendulkar is well evident in the script. But the
performance (within the play) is abusive in nature. This is purposefully devised by the playwright to justify his point that performances are also at times biased when the question of woman comes. An almost similar example we see in the performance of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). The lack of social concern was evident in staging when the play about a woman being gang raped was received with laughter by the audience.

*Silence! The Court is in Session* is a play in three acts. Act I introduces Benare as someone free and outspoken kind of a woman; but having a deeper understanding of life. A school teacher by profession, Benare tries to endure and accept her present life as it comes to her, after being sexually and psychologically abused and rejected by both her maternal uncle and Mr. Damle. She says:

Benare: ....I say it—I, Leela Benare, a living woman. I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be. It is a very important thing... (2004:61)

Such bold acceptance of life by Benare changes in the course of the trial. At the end of the trial she declares that her life is a burden for her. She says: "My life was burden to me. But when you can't lose it, you realise the value of it" (2004:116). The imaginary trial of Benare turns out to be so violent that Benare loses her mental balance and collapses in front of her co-actors. The crimes of infanticide, unmarried motherhood, having an illicit relationship with Mr. Damle and her maternal uncle - she is charged with all these accusations without making the male persons answerable for abusing Benare. The imaginary court here, consisting of people belonging to the different sub-strata of Indian society, supports the binary gender hierarchies.

The social bias towards woman as merely passive objects of control is very much evident in the play. If we look at the way the imaginary trial begins and
continues, we can feel the bias against women inherent in the legal system. Not only is the legal system complicit in women’s victimisation in society, but performance also at times functions under normative structure of patriarchy to repress women’s voice. Suddenly Benare is arrested and accused of infanticide; even the group does not take her consent whether she is willing to play that role, or is comfortable with the role. Benare expresses her reluctance to play that part: “... I don’t like your word at all! Infanticide...infanticide. Why don’t you accuse me instead of—um—snatching public property! That has a nice sound about it, don’t you think...” (2004:78). But her constant appeal to change her role is ignored.

As the trial proceeds, the mock law court draws the private life of Miss Benare into public. Her private life is exposed publicly in an intriguing manner. Every time Benare tries to interrupt by saying something, she is silenced by banging the gravel:

Benare (shooting up on to her feet): No! No!
Kashikar (banging his gravel): Silence! Mr. Ponkshe, give us the conversation. (To Sukhatme) Now we will hear the name.
Benare: No! You promised, Ponkshe!
Sukhatme: Mr. Ponkshe, what indeed could the conversation have been, for Miss Benare to be so agonised? (2004: 106)

Tendulkar shows how silence can be imposed by the privileged class over the powerless ones to hide the actual happenings and protect their own interest. Mr. Damle uses Benare to fulfill his sexual needs and finally rejects her when she becomes pregnant. Ironically the court does not consider Mr. Damle as an accused. He is only invited as one of the witnesses; but he is absent in the court and the trial continues without him. Tendulkar seems to critique the biased functioning of law that can turn a victim into an accused while the real accused remains totally unaffected. It is an ironical representation of the biased legal system in terms of dealing with
women. Infanticide - the crime against which Benare was arrested in the beginning turns out to be the verdict of the court at the end. Upholding the conventional norm that motherhood out of wedlock is a moral crime that may pollute the entire society, the court orders Benare to kill the child in her womb. In a sense the court indulges in the same act of violence against the unborn baby which in the beginning it appeared to protect. No matter how repressive and violent these traditional norms are and their adverse impact on human psyche, the court upholds them. After hearing the verdict Benare collapses. As per the stage direction in the play, tears rolls down from her eyes; she sits down, half fainting and finally collapsing with her head on the table; she becomes motionless. These non-verbal expressions of her grief along with the changes in her physical behaviour powerfully represent her disturbed psychological condition. On stage theses bodily changes in Benare, accompanied by silence constitute a powerful visual image of a woman being violated emotionally. In Act III, Tendulkar shows a shift in Benare’s character from her former lively attitude to her constant recourse to silence in the present. Tendulkar himself believes that silence in theatre can be as expressive as words; according to him pauses can enhance the power of the emoted words if the playwright or an imaginative director (in the absence of a playwright) uses them with care.

Now silence on her part is not imposed; it is a “willed silence”. Commenting on silence Foucault says:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things; how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorised...There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (2008: 27).
Viewed in this light, the discourse of silence in the play, both “imposed” and “willed” silences in Benare’s case, seems to be a strategy authorised by the dominant discourse of patriarchy. Silence becomes a norm to be internalised; a space provided by patriarchy for women to withdraw. Nevertheless, when semiotically considered, silence functions as a significant sign here, perhaps a sign signifying Benare’s understanding of the futility of communicating her painful situation to that of her co-actors; who are nothing but the indirect/invisible perpetrators of violence. In the theatre group, Tendulkar represents the different sub-strata of Indian society who support the existing gender bias and denies any sense of autonomy to women. As Sukhatme, the lawyer says:

Sukhatme: ...Woman is not fit for independence.’ ... That is the rule laid down for us by our tradition. Abiding by this rule, I make a powerful plea...With the urgent plea that the court should show no mercy to the accused.... (2004:115)

Ponkshe, her co-actor whom Benare trusted and shared her past experiences, also betrays her by revealing the name of Mr. Damle publicly. In Act III, Samant’s witness pushes Benare to a very tense situation. The court manipulates Samant to be a witness who does not even know who Mr. Damle is. While playing his role as a witness against Benare, Samant takes the help of a book and delivers some lines from that book. Whatever Samant says, the lawyer links them to Benare’s personal life and subjects her to mental torture despite Benare’s passionate appeal to stop it:

Benare (with sudden passion): That’s enough!
Kashikar (banging his gravel): Order, order!
Benare: It’s all a lie! A complete lie!
Ponkshe: Of course it is. So?
Karnik: Even if it is a lie, it’s an effective one!
Mrs Kashikar: Do go on, Samant.
Benare: No! Stop all this! Stop it! (2004:93)
The written text of *Silence! The Court is in Session* provides ample performance possibilities of representing violence against women. In Act II, as per the stage directions, tears rolls down from Benare’s eyes, her voice is choked. She is agitated, and with tearful defiance she delivers the words (2004:94); all these are visible semiotic codes deliberately used by Tendulkar to express her inner agony. Silence prevails on stage and a kind of peculiar and cautious excitement is noticeable in her co-actors. They find Benare’s tears usefully significant and push her into even more trouble. As Sukhatme says: “...There’s some substance in what Mr. Samant said. Even though it came from a book. It holds water!”(2004:94). Benare constantly tries to leave the stage. She moves towards the door to find a way out. But the door is locked from outside. Except for Samant, the other members derive pleasure by watching her in pain. Kashikar says: “It’s all become quite unexpectedly enjoyable...” (2004:94). Both in the text and on stage, the closed door can be considered as a sign signifying the claustrophobic space from which there is no escape especially for woman.

In Act III, Tendulkar places Benare standing near the door where she remains still. She is ordered to come to the witness box, but Benare does not move on. Mrs. Kashikar offers herself to bring Benare back and forcefully pulls her to the witness box. As per the stage direction in the text, Benare's face reveals the terror of a trapped animal. Mostly she remains silent. As the entire court fails to make her speak, she is repeatedly accused of contempt of the court. Benare again tries to leave the witness box when Ponkshe blocks the way and Mrs. Kashikar catches hold of her and leads her to the dock. In Mrs. Kashikar, Tendulkar shows how women also exhibit moral callousness towards other women. Like the mothers-in-law in *Brides are not for Burning* and Baa in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, here Mrs. Kashikar may be considered
as one of the perpetrators of patriarchal violence. Upholding the normative codes as regards how a woman should behave in society, Mrs. Kashikar propagates the patriarchal codes of viewing a woman:

Kashikar: What better proof? Just look at the way she behaves. I don't like to say anything since she's one of us. Should there be no limit to how freely a woman can behave with a man. An unmarried woman? No matter how well she knows him? Look how loudly she laughs! ...

(2004:100)

In the imaginary trial, Karnik discloses Benare’s attempted suicide when she was rejected by her maternal uncle after sexually abusing her. Here also the court does not hold the male accused responsible who used her at the age of fourteen to gratify his needs and finally abandoned her. Sukhatme defines her as “licentious” woman; a form of linguistic violence to which she is immediately subjected. Again Benare strives to leave the stage, but Mrs. Kashikar grasps her and forces her back to the dock. She is not only verbally abused but physical force is also used to bring her back.

Another shock comes to Benare (in Act III) when Ponkshe reveals Benare’s desire to marry him to save the life of her unborn child; Ponkshe publicly ridicules her. During this revelation by Ponkshe, the bodily changes evident in Benare are expressive of her internal pain. Here also Tendulkar uses very powerful and realistic stage direction to represent the trauma in Benare. She flinches and stiffens. She is tensed, drained of color and totally desolate (2004:104-105). She does not move on when she is ordered to come to the dock; again Mrs. Kashikar drags her back. She now looks half dead. These bodily expressions/movements on stage can constitute a powerful visual image of a woman being tormented psychologically. The performative significance of Benare’s repetitive attempts to leave the stage and Mrs. Kashikar dragging her back cannot be overlooked. She becomes desperate to come
out that claustrophobic atmosphere created by the trial which publicly insults her private life.

Not only in the trial, but in real life also Benare had to experience violence. As evident in her monologue towards the end of the play, Benare was sexually abused by her maternal uncle when she was hardly fourteen years old:

Benare: ...It’s true, I did commit a sin. I was in love with my mother’s brother. But in our strict house, in the prime of my unfolding youth, he was the one who came close to me. He praised my bloom every day. He gave me love... Why I was hardly fourteen! I didn’t even know what sin was — I swear by my mother, I didn’t... (2004:17)

When Benare wanted to marry him, everybody including her mother was against her decision; because such a marriage is culturally prohibited. Finally her uncle disappeared from the scene. That Benare is abused at an age of 14 when she could hardly understand what a sin was is totally ignored by the imaginary court. No one bothers to consider the truth that Benare was used by both her maternal uncle and Mr. Damle, and finally thrown away when their purpose was fulfilled.

Kashikar's comments on her personal and professional life provoke and frustrate her almost to the point of suicide. Kashikar says that soon Benare would get the termination letter from her job as a punishment for her crime; the crime being her unwed motherhood. This pushes her to take recourse in suicide for the second time. Earlier also she attempted suicide as revealed by Karnik: “...My information is that the accused attempted suicide because of a disappointment in love. She fell in love at the age of fifteen, with her own maternal uncle! That’s what ended in disappointment” (2004:111). This time she tries to drink the poison, but luckily the bottle is thrown away by Karnik. Nobody bothers to think why Benare takes recourse to such acts of violence against her own self. The proceeding continues irrespective of the fact that
the accused has attempted suicide. This is quite an explicit representation of the biased and inhuman functioning of law by Tendulkar.

In the play, Benare is a representative figure of the numerous victims of gendered violence instigated by patriarchy. Benare is a victim of historical normative violence inherent in the patriarchal system. She suffers both visible and invisible violence. But, simultaneously Tendulkar also attempts to represent Benare as an assertive woman who in the midst all troubles tries to fight back and oppose the socio-cultural constructs. In Act II, Benare with tearful defiance says: “What can you do to me? Just try!” (2004:94). Unlike Mr. Kashikar, Benare dares to defy the conventional norms for which she is harshly criticised as an immoral woman. On the other hand, Mrs. Kashikar seems to be totally ignorant of the actuality of her existence. She is not even aware of her marginalised status within the four walls of tradition. She undergoes verbal abuse and negligence in her conjugal relationship; most of the time she is forcefully silenced by her husband Kashikar.

Mrs Kashikar: Exactly

Kashikar: What do you mean, exactly? Hold your tongue. Can’t say a word!... (2004:72)

But Mrs. Kashikar is not conscious of all these humiliations she undergoes. Coming back to Benare again, it is noticeable that despite her attempts to assert her own individuality, Benare is compelled to surrender to what the majority thinks as right. Like in real life, in the play too no solutions are made available. Tendulkar indicates no way of coming out of this dominant patriarchal structure to challenge the ongoing crimes against women. This seems to be the posture of the dramatist in this play also, as in his other plays. But why does the playwright repeatedly maintain this posture? Perhaps, the playwright realises the difficulties associated with changing such a long-
established structure which is so deep rooted in the human psyche. Being a proponent of social realism as a mode of representation, Tendulkar has portrayed the real condition of women in society.

**The Vultures**

Sheer violence characterises *The Vultures* (1961) - another play by Vijay Tendulkar. It tells the story of five members of the same household and the conflicts between them generated by their greed for wealth and property inheritance. The setting of the play is the house of Pappa, Hari Pittale. The Pittale family consists of Hari Pittale, his two sons Ramakant and Umakant, his daughter Manik and his daughter-in-law Rama. Hari Pittale's illegitimate son Rajaninath lives separately and does not seem to be a member of the Pittale household. The naming of the play "The Vultures" carries symbolic connotation as all the members of the household, except for Rama, behave like vultures; they exhibit the tendency to snatch each other's part by using all sorts of violent means. The play fuses both realistic and symbolic modes of representation to represent the picture of domestic/family violence chiefly caused by greed. Tendulkar includes the sound of vultures screaming off stage in between the actions of the play which adds to the symbolic aspect of the play.

The manifestations of violence in *The Vultures* are mostly overt. The play contains instances of both physical and psychological violence. Verbal abuse or linguistic violence is all pervasive in the play. Excluding Rama, recourse to linguistic violence has become a routine behaviour for almost all the characters. The nature of language the characters speak in this play is radically different from Tendulkar's other plays. The place where various forms of violence are executed by the characters on each other is the family. The family becomes a site for performing all sorts of violent
acts. Violence among the siblings: physical, psychological, and financial abuse and neglect of the father; psychological violence against Rama (the wife of Ramakant) – these are some examples of violence that we come across in the play.

Unlike in Silence! The Court is in Session, or Kamala, or Kanyadaan, the representation of violence in The Vultures is not only against women, but against both woman and man where the perpetration is chiefly male. Violence in The Vultures is the result of joint activities by different individuals of the same family. In the introduction to Vijay Tendulkar’s Collected Plays in Translation, Samik Bandyopadhyay says: “Violence in The Vultures operates in a series of axes—sons against fathers, brother against sisters, brothers against brothers, each leading to an exile from home, followed by a series of returns/reversals, the exiles attempting to avenge themselves” (2004:1). First Ramakant, Umakant and Manik turn against their father and apply violence to make him run away from home. The following dialogues by Pappa represent his helplessness amidst such violent moves taken by his own children:

Pappa: Oh! Oh! Oh! No, no! Don’t kill me! ... Don’t kill me! Don’t kill me!...don’t kill me... (On his face, in his body, there is immeasurable fear. He sits trembling violently). Don’t kill me, all of you. I beg you not to kill me...please don’t... (2004:229).

After Pappa runs away, the two brothers plot against Manik and execute inhuman torture upon her; finally Manik leaves home. Then the two brothers fight between themselves and Ramakant leaves home with his wife Rama. An undercurrent of the Machiavellian spirit can be perceived in the actions of the characters. Their each violent move is motivated by their sole desire to pursue wealth; they apply all kinds of deceptive and violent means against each other to inherit property.
As my major concern here is the representation of gendered violence, I would specifically concentrate on the women characters and their vulnerability to various forms of violence within the family. The functioning of violence against women inside the family is also influenced by the existing gender bias. Women are more vulnerable to violence as compared to men; but their sufferings inside the family often remain unreported. Similar is the case with the two women characters Manik and Rama; they are victims of gender specific violence inside the family, but their sufferings are mostly kept hidden. Manik is abused physically while Rama’s sufferings are of the psychological kind.

It is often seen that the institution of family supports the patriarchal norms and promotes the gender discriminations. The patriarchal attitude towards women as passive beings is very much evident in Ramakant, whose comment on Manik during the game of cards represents his general attitude towards women. "...These women—they just hold their cards in their hands, and throw them down. That is all their game is. No bloody brains" (2004:234).

In Act I scene (ii), the two brothers Ramakant and Umakant torture Manik verbally. She is humiliated by them; they ask her for evidence of her being a woman. They interfere in her personal matters: opening her purse, publicising the pills she takes and insulting her for having an affair with the Raja of Hondur. As per the stage directions, Umakant goes to the extent of pulling her towel; she screams and tries to leave. Then Umakant trips her up and she falls. A loud cry comes out from Manik and she leaves the stage saying: "Oh-h! These bastards’ll burn me alive one day! They’ll poison me, they’ll slit my throat" (2004:215). Umakant even uses abusive language to deal with her. He uses phrase like "light skirt" to refer to Manik which she finds
offensive. On stage, Manik’s dialogues together with her bodily movements clearly signify her pain and anger after undergoing such repulsive behaviour from her own brothers.

Apart from insult, humiliation and verbal abuse, Manik also experiences absolute physical violence in Act II, scene (i). Tendulkar represents the shocking reality of extreme physical violence against women perpetrated inside the family. The two brothers subject her to frequent physical torture. In the game of cards when Manik refuses to give one rupee and twenty paise, both the brothers apply physical force on her. Umakant grabs her neck and forces her to put down that amount:

Umakant (grabbing her neck): Put down the money!
Ramakant: Don’t give it Manik! Let’s see what bloody happens!
Manik: Ohh! You’re twisting my neck—so tight! Ahh! Let go! Let go of me,
    I say! Let me go Umya....
Ramakant: Don’t bloody let her go, Umya! Drag the bloody money out! Look
    how she’s is wriggling! Squash her bloody neck! Twist it!

(2004:235)

The above mentioned conversation between the three characters can be considered as a linguistic sign signifying the violent instinct in Ramakant and Umakant. Ramakant encourages Manik not to put down the money, but suddenly he takes Umakant’s side and both inflict Manik with physical violence and verbal abuse. In this context the repetition of the slang “bloody” connotes the inherent vulgarity in them. Manik’s constant appeal to “let her go” signifies her helplessness amidst such violence.

In the same act the two bothers plan to use Manik’s pregnancy for earning profit. They plan to blackmail the Hondur fellow for impregnating Manik. They decide to demand twenty thousand cash and if that person refuses to pay the amount, the two brothers would make a hue and cry about his illegitimate relationship with
their sister. Within her own family Manik is used as an object of earning profit. In order to fulfill their motive, they plan to fracture one of her legs so that she cannot go out and meet the lover. Both Umakant and Ramakant strategically break her leg and keep her locked inside the house. The play does not provide scope for showing them breaking up her leg. The sound (off stage) of a heavy object crashing the floor followed by Manik being surrounded by them, acts as an acoustic sign indicating her fall. Later on, through Umakant’s speech the playwright confirms the two brothers’ brutal violence against their sister. Umakant now demands Rs12, 500/ for pushing Manik to break her leg; he says to Ramakant: “I’ll make you puke it, Ramya! Twelve and a half. Won’t take a rupee less, you swine! I pushed Manik - I! (2004:245).

The worst happens to Manik in scene (iii) of Act I, when the two brothers attempt to abort her child after knowing that the Hondur fellow died of heart attack. They find no hope of receiving the money demanded by them. Besides, the fact that the son of the Raja is alive in Manik’s womb also terrifies them. They sense more trouble and decide to destroy the child before he is born. Again they adopt brutal means to abort Manik:


Umakant: shoot, my shoe?

Ramakant: No joke, brother! He’s our enemy, dammit...a bloody traitor. A bloody bastard!

Umakant: Let’s knock him out! The Raja in little Manik’s belly! One kick—that’s enough.

Ramakant: An idea, damn it! Let’s abort him! Let’s knock him bloody out...Let little Manik scream till she bloody bursts! How she’ll scream, damn it. What a bloody riot. Knock him out!... (2004:247)
The words are here representative of the wild instinct possessed by the two brothers. The two brothers assume that the unborn baby is a male child and hence they plan foeticide. In the game of earning wealth, not only Manik but her unborn child is also victimised.

Finally they become successful in executing their mission of foeticide. Ramakant plans to kick Manik in such a way that the child goes out of her belly:

Umakant: Stop. I’ve football practice. You’ll be able to kick.

Ramakant: Come on. I’ll give such a kick, he’ll fly up to the bloody skies...come on... (2004:248)

They execute the plan by using sheer violence and kill the child in her womb. Like in Act II where Manik’s one leg is fractured by them, here also the playwright provides only selective representation of the episode. That the two brothers abort their sister’s baby by kicking on her belly is not shown on stage. This horrifying act of violence is indicated by off-stage directions: the two brothers shouting at Manik to open the door followed by her terrifying screaming. Subsequently, violence done to Manik is shown on stage via certain non-linguistic signs; which include acoustic and symbolic signs and bodily gestures. She comes out half crawling down the stairs with one leg plastered. Her white sari is soiled with blood and she looks back with pain pressing her abdomen. Her gesture of pressing the abdomen with pain, red blood visible over the white sari, her terrifying screaming – all these semiotic contents included in the text constitute a powerful image on stage, of a woman being violated in unthinkable ways. She becomes a sensory image of violence to be perceived directly by the audience. The representation of violence against women in this manner can shake the audience and compel them to re-think the bitter realities concerning women. Tendulkar seems to opt for a truthful representation of domestic violence without representing the actual violence on stage.
In *The Vultures* the two brothers commit foeticide in order to prevent future trouble while in Benare’s case in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the verdict of abortion (which is in a sense foeticide) is given in the name of preventing immoral deeds in society. However, whether guided by the motive for profit or preventing immorality, Tendulkar highlights that under a variety of pretexts, crimes like foeticide or female foeticide are still carried on in Indian society.

Another woman character, Rama, the wife of Ramakant is also a victim of domestic violence within the same Pittale family. But the nature her victimisation is different from what Manik experiences. Manik is a victim of overt physical violence in her parental home while Rama’s victimisation takes place in her in-laws family, largely sanctioned and encouraged by the institution of marriage. Rama is not beaten up or nor does she experience any other physical assaults. Rama’s experience of violence is that of a psychological kind and less visible. In *The Vultures*, Rama’s individuality is constantly under control of the entire family. She cannot do anything following her own wish. She is there to carry out the orders of not only her husband, but also every other individual. Her every move is directed and controlled by the family members. For example, her first appearance in the play is followed by her sister-in-laws’ commanding attitude towards her. She has to wake up her sister-in-law in time, keep boiled water for her, fold her clothes and so on; the failure in these activities exposes Rama to the anger of Manik. She has to serve her father-in-law and brother-in-law regularly in time, apart from her duty towards her husband. Nobody in the household recognises her service to them; in return she has to endure their rude behaviour.

Her condition is no better than a slave like Sarita in *Kamala*. Like an obedient slave, Rama goes on doing her duty towards the entire household. Her voice is
constantly silenced by the rest of the family members. The forced visits to Swamis, astrologers and doctors by Ramakant in order to conceive a child is another form of mental torture that Rama has to undergo in the Pittale family; while the problem actually lies within Ramakant himself. With total lack of freedom as an individual along with those forced visits to astrologers and doctors and her unfulfilled desire for motherhood – all these factors create deep psychological scars in her. In scene (ii) of Act II, there is a conspicuous verbal expression of her mental pain when Rama says to Rajaninath: “…Every minute a new thousand, million death. A pain like million needles stuck in your heart...you can’t endure them. But you can’t put them out. You can’t support them. But you can’t throw them away…” (2004: 240). Rama feels like performing sati every moment in that family. Wife hood creates a kind of living death for Rama: “…I commit sati every moment! I burn! I am consumed!…” (2004: 242). The playwright’s choice of the words is significant here which perfectly represent Rama’s plight. The connotation of the word sati is significant in this context. Within the socio-cultural milieu of the Indian society, sati signifies death. The suppressed pain in Rama compels her to compare her life to the act of committing sati. Perhaps, sati alludes to her “death-in-life” existence. The dialogues are powerful enough to visualise the tragic state of affairs concerning Rama’s married life. The play seems to question the very institution of marriage that often puts the life of a woman in danger. Like the family, the institution of marriage also upholds the binary gender divide and puts further restrictions on the wife.

The marginalised condition of a wife within the institutions of family and marriage is also evident in the exchange of dialogues between Rama and Ramakant. When Rama requests her husband to stop playing their murderous games, Ramakant’s
reply indicates his adherence to the patriarchal norms; he does not consider her to be worthy of offering any opinion:

Ramakant: "Look here, Rama! In this house, we’re not accustomed to listening to any smartness from women! No man in our family’s been a bloody henpecked husband, what? I know very well indeed what to do, what not to do. No need for a woman to teach me sense...” (2004: 251).

Finally, Rama’s repressed desire for motherhood is fulfilled through the help of Rajaninath, the illegitimate son of her farther-in-law. But this joy of motherhood also does not last for a long time. Her sister-in-law Manik aborts the child in Rama’s womb in order to take revenge on her brother Ramakant. Thus, Rama becomes the surrogate victim of Manik’s revengeful desires. Manik’s violent move is an echo of the general nature of violence; that one act of violence begets other acts of violence. The whole process of violence works in a chain. In this context B.B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim’s observation on violence is significant. They also use the metaphor of chain to emphasise the notion of violence. A chain is a construct and can be modified, adjusted, or imagined anew. It is always contingent on specific structures and human agents situated in specific temporal-spatial contexts. Similarly, violence can be compared to a chain as it is also unstable and unpredictable. Like a chain, violence is also subject to change (2007: 14). Here also violence is imagined anew by Manik for revenge, it turns up in an unpredictable manner. Rama is not only a victim of violence inherent in the social institutions likes family and marriage which often act as oppressive apparatuses restricting women freedom and subjecting them to visible and invisible violence; she is also a victim of violence against women by women. This time she is used by Manik for vengeance on Ramakant. Rama becomes a pawn in the game for material success initiated by the Pittale family. Tendulkar represents Rama’s
psychological pain chiefly through verbal signs unlike Manik’s pain. Perhaps Tendulkar is aware of the non-representational character of physical pain, and hence he provides ample scope for non-verbal representation of Manik’s physical pain caused by physical violence. But in Rama’s case, she basically undergoes emotional violence which can be articulated via written words. In The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World, Elaine Scarry’s makes an important observation on pain. According to her “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (1985:4). But whether it is physical or mental pain, the element of inexpressibility is very much a part of both. What a writer does is simply an attempt on articulation of pain. Her/his sympathetic understanding of the plight of a victim of violence perhaps motives a writer to voice it via literary representations. Tendulkar’s attempt also seems to be guided by his sympathetic understanding of the bitter realities involving women in Indian society.

The analyses of Tendulkar’s four plays - Kamala, Kanyadaan, Silence! The Court is in Session and The Vultures reveal his sympathetic understanding of the problem of violence against women. His plays contain women characters of conventional and unconventional types and also submissive and non-submissive types. But the point of similarity among all these characters is that they all are used or abused in different ways by the male members of the society and subjected to various forms of gender specific violence. Tendulkar’s plays not only portray the sufferings of submissive woman like Rama and Sarita; but also portray the sufferings of assertive women like Manik and Benare. But he offers no alternative way of countering those sufferings/violence experienced by them, except for accepting the inevitability of such
violence in their daily lives. At times, his plays tend to affirm that there is no other way for a woman but to accept the power of patriarchy. Shanta Gokhale’s makes an apt observation in this regard:

In some of his most significant plays, Tendulkar presents women in pairs. They are quite different from each other in behavioural traits, class and character; but underneath these superficial differences lie lives that resemble each other in the ultimate truth of being commanded by men, for their pleasure and under their laws. (2007:32)

But what the playwright has represented in these plays is the reality which is operative – the reality of violence against women. A cursory reading of his plays is sufficient to grasp the playwright’s concern about violence concerning women’s lives. Apart from the four plays discussed in this chapter, his other plays like *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghashiram Kotwal* also project the subjection of women into various forms of violence along with other social problems like operation of power in society, corruption, caste hierarchy and many more. For instance, the two women Laxmi and Champa in *Sakharam Binder* are exploited by the dominant male character Sakharam in different ways. Laxmi survives for silently surrendering to the needs of Sakharam while Champa dies strangled by him for defying his authority and daring to charge him of impotence. Garni in *Ghasiram Kotwal* is also used as a pawn in the power game between father and the state represented by Nana. Nana exploits her sexually and finally puts her to death.

**Analysis of Mahesh Dattani’s Plays**

Mahesh Dattani is one of the leading writers of contemporary Indian drama who has elevated Indian drama in English to a major genre of social criticism. He is the first Indian playwright to win the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1998 for his
collection of plays *Final Solutions and Other plays*. The diverse experiences of the playwright as being a member of the contemporary urban India seem to have a great deal of influence over his writings. His representation of the society is based on his own experience of it. Like Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani has also made an outstanding contribution to the world of contemporary Indian theatre by representing diverse issues relating to the Indian society. Homosexuality, politics of capitalism; gender, family and identity politics are some of the major themes of his theatre. He voices the experience of the marginalised sections of Indian society which include the minorities, gays and women. For him theatre functions as a mirror reflecting the society and the playwright’s speciality lies in exploring the society with all its hidden and polemical issues. Dattani remains true to his environment while depicting it in his plays; he considers theatre as the most powerful means of reflecting the society as it really is. He is a playwright who very much believes in the inherent potentialities of theatre that can turn itself into an active agent for reflecting the social problems.

In my analysis of the representation of gendered violence in Mahesh Dattani’s plays, I have restricted my choice to the stage plays scripted by him. Apart from stage plays, he has also written many radio plays and screen plays which are also equally significant. But they are two different genres and require different approaches of handling. The radio plays are basically written for narration while the screen plays are for the screen. As I have chosen to focus on the text/performance relationship, the stage plays best serve my purpose. The selection of the stage plays is based on what I prefer to call as woman conscious plays by Dattani. The plays chosen for analysis in this section include – *Thirty Days in September* (2001) and *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991). Both the plays are resonant with different manifestations of violence against women.
**Thirty Days in September**

Like many of Dattani’s plays, *Thirty Days in September* is also heavily loaded with the same “invisible” issues. The play unveils the prevalence of sexual abuse and the after effects of such violent acts on victims. *Thirty Days in September* centers on the story of Mala, who is a survivor of child sexual abuse. Her mother Shanta who constantly tries to divert Mala’s attention from the haunted memories of her past, also turns out to be a victim of incest.

In *Thirty Days in September*, violence against women is seen in the form of child sexual abuse and incest. The two terms “child sexual abuse” and “incest” are terms often bandied about and we need to use them with proper attention to the nuanced differences. Child sexual abuse is one of the many forms violence committed against children; the female child is more vulnerable to this form of abuse. In *Thirty Days in September*, Dattani focuses on sexual victimisation of female children within the family by close family members and relatives. Sometimes the perpetrator can be an outsider also. Incest refers to sexual relationships (abusive, coercive, and reciprocal) that take place between close members of the same family. It is generally looked upon socially as taboo. There can be incestuous relationship between father-son, mother-son, mother-daughter, and even incestuous relationship between siblings. Commenting on incest, Christopher Bagley says that it is important to distinguish between incest and child sexual abuse as the terms have been often used interchangeably. Incest traditionally refers to sexual relations between biologically related family members and has been forbidden by taboo in most societies in recorded history (1990:39). However, the distinction between incest and child sexual abuse often remains blurred.
Incest occurring between an adult and a minor child can be considered as a violent act in the form of child sexual abuse. In both cases, this abusive act is perpetrated either forcefully or it happens without the child being aware of that he/she is being abused. Such abusive acts result in damaging psychological after effects on the child. In many cases, the survivors of child sexual abuse suffer from post traumatic stress disorder which is an after effect of undergoing deep psychological violence. According to Julian D Ford, post traumatic stress disorder offers a framework for understanding the effects of experiencing some potentially traumatic events such as terrorism, domestic and community violence, physical and sexual assault, child male treatment, homicide, disaster, genocide, war and so on (2009: ix). It is a psychological disturbance that occurs after observing or being involved in a severely traumatic or horrifying event. Although most people believe that they could carry on with their lives no matter what may happen to them, some events are so traumatic that people are unable to cope and function normally after they take place (Olive et al, 2007: 35-36).

The chief protagonist Mala in Thirty Days in September is a victim of both physical and psychological abuse. Experiencing both physical and psychological abuse during her childhood by her maternal uncle Vinay, Mala exhibits certain symptoms of long term after effects of sexual abuse in her adulthood. She turns into a patient of post traumatic stress disorder. As Kathleen A. Kendall-Tackett points out, although not everyone who experiences sexual abuse shows symptoms, but the effects of childhood abuse may continue well into adulthood. The symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder are not only noticeable in the victims of sexual abuse, but children experiencing other forms of traumatic events may also exhibit symptoms of PTSD. These symptoms include – depression, aggression, nightmares, withdrawn behaviour, sexualised behaviour, sleep disturbances, hypervigilance, anxiety, anger,
flashbacks and self-mutilation etc. Women may also exhibit some additional health problems such as frequent feeling of fatigue, sleeping disturbances, chronic pelvic pain and irritable bowel syndrome to name a few (2001: 102-105). Thus, the play contains an overt manifestation of violence against women (in the form of sexual victimisation of Mala) and its traumatic after effects on them.

At the same time, not all children react to the experience of sexual abuse in the same manner. The amount of trauma a child experiences depends on many variables. Factors that increase the degree of trauma include - the abuser being a close family member, abuse that lasts for years, physically damaging sexual abuse, the tendency of adults not to believe the child when he or she tells about the abuse, and failure to report the abuse until later in adulthood (Olive et al, 2007: 80). In the play, we see the reflection of these factors in Mala’s character. She is sexually abused for many years by her uncle. But she constantly fails to report this until she reaches adulthood. Besides, her mother’s indifference and negligence add to her suffering as Mala fails to confide in her. This failure to communicate the pain along with the experience of sexual violence creates a deep psychological scar in her; that manifests itself via different overt symptoms.

The past experience of violence has become an integral part of her life as she says “I just have to learn to live with the pain” (2010c:107). Acute depression makes her vulnerable to other forms of “re-victimisation”, of which she is not aware. As a grown up child Mala develops sexual relationships with many people including her uncle, cousins and even with strangers. She makes herself easily available for sexual relationships with anybody. According to Kendall-Tackett, such sexualised behaviour is a symptom shown by children who have been sexually abused and this may vary as the child grows up. As an adolescent the child may get involved in illegal behaviour, substance abuse, prostitution and so on (2001:103). Mala makes her available to the
sexual advances made by her cousins, who abuse her sexually and later on put the blame on her. In her sub-conscious mind, Mala develops a self impression that she is only meant for such sexual activities; therefore she tries to enjoy them and get pleasure from pain. In Thirty Days in September, Mahesh Dattani powerfully represents the complex and troubled mental condition of a victim of child sexual abuse by creating a character like Mala. Mala repeats: “...somehow I just seem to be made of it. May be I was born that way, maybe... This is what I am meant for... (2010c: 89 &112). Mala’s repetitive dialogues are significant representing the troubled psyche of a victim of child sexual abuse.

Apart from using the words as semiotic codes to signify Mala’s experience of sexual violence and its long lasting impact on her, Dattani also uses flashback in Thirty Days in September to represent the same. Flashback is often used in terms of a cinematic narrative – a sight that disrupts the present action of a narrative to describe some past events by means of dreaming, remembrance etc. In the play flashback is used as a device to reveal Mala’s disturbed psychical state. Dattani represents her violent past via flashback, not allowing for a visual representation on stage. This indicates the playwright’s adherence to a truthful manner of representation; that is not concerned with providing the audience with voyeuristic pleasure by representing the truth as it is; but to create awareness on such social crimes by means of truthful representation. This is an example of truthful representation of violence rather than a direct visual representation of the truth. At the same time, flashback is also one of the symptoms that a victim of child sexual abuse may exhibit by suddenly re-experiencing his/her traumatic past. Hence, the use of flashback serves both the purposes in Thirty Days in September. The experience of child sexual abuse not only hampers Mala’s natural growth, but she also fails to develop a stable love relationship with Deepak. She adopts an indifferent stance to Deepak’s request to marry her:
Mala: You don’t understand! YOU JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND!! I can not love you

Deepak: Why?

Mala: (Looking at the Man). Because - because - How can I even begin to explain to you? I see this man everywhere. I can never be free of him. I am not so sure I want to be free of him. Even if I were, I am not sure whether I have the ability to love anyone…else. (2010c:134)

The pathetic part of this form of violence against a child is that the child is not even aware of the fact that he/she is being sexually abused. Besides, this very act would have far reaching future effects generally occurring between the ages of six to eight years. The nature of this crime against the child is rendered invisible as is also the case with the other forms of violence against women in the private and public sphere. Often, it is seen that the incidents of child sexual abuse remain hidden and unreported; partly because of the lack of awareness on the part of the child and parents and partly out of fear that such revelation would adversely affect the child’s future. In Mala’s case also, the similar things happen; she is abused sexually almost regularly during her childhood. But practically it remains unreported. Her speech mentioned below is a revelation of sexual victimisation borne by her as a child:

Mala: I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when Uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us…Oh God! It did go away. But it comes back. It didn’t go away forever! (2010c:106).

Shanta is as much a victim of child sexual abuse as her daughter Mala. Both are sexually abused by the same perpetrator - Vinay. Although Shanta and Vinay’s relationship can also be analysed in terms of incest, it takes place while Shanta was a minor; hence it would be appropriate to consider her as a victim of child abuse instead of simply referring to this act as incest. Some children are very symptomatic, whereas
others show few symptoms. Sometimes, symptoms appear as delayed responses. In other cases, symptoms may get better overtime (Kendall-Tackett 2001: 103). Shanta hardly shows any symptom. But her recourse to silence, her withdrawn behaviour and indifference to her daughter’s pain - all these can act as powerful signs signifying something shady about Shanta’s own life. Towards the end of the play Shanta reveals the shocking truth, that she herself was also sexually abused by the same person. Being utterly helpless Shanta appeals to Deepak: “…Please save her. I did not save her. I did not know how to save her. How could I save her when I could not save myself?…” (2010c: 135). When Shanta was six years old and Vinay was thirteen, the latter started molesting her for continuous ten years. In Shanta’s character, Dattani has portrayed the distressing after-effects in a victim of child abuse who sometimes has no other way of surviving except for bearing the pain silently. Shanta’s “tongue is cut off”. To her “silence means shanty”. Probably, being a woman she is aware of her social limitations within the patriarchal set up of the family and the futility of revealing such matters. The oppressive gender structure that places women in a subordinate position and reduces her to an object of sexual gratification is responsible for this increase in the rate of sexual victimisation of female children. Ann Levett’s suggestion seems relevant in this context; she says that since it is invariably adult or adolescent males who sexually abuse children, we not only need clarification of the part played by gendered power structures but also programmes aimed at improved sex education (1990:40). According to her, the construction of the category “woman” includes subjects designated as female accepting and participating in a set of socially subordinate positions which serves directly or indirectly to constrain women’s sense of effective agency (1990:45).
A sense of learned helpless is also seen in Shanta like Jyoti in *Kanyadaan*. Herself being a victim of child sexual abuse and not being financially well-off, she fails to protect her daughter. Shanta not only takes recourse to silence but also to kind of willed forgetting so as to adjust with her present and forget her traumatic past. She wants her daughter also to follow her own strategy; Shanta constantly advises Mala to forget her past. The recollection of a traumatic past makes the pain fresh with which many survivors fail to continue their existence. Hence, they take recourse to such kind of survival strategies so as to continue living. The same kind of recourse to silence or willed forgetting is seen in many survivors of the Holocaust. The Holocaust memory consists of loss, violence, degradation and intense suffering. Many of the survivors of the Holocaust memory preferred to maintain silence instead of commemorating the dead through monuments because they wanted to forget the trauma and also to avoid being associated with a shameful past. Language fails to articulate such traumatic memories; if they are retrieved it takes place in soma to-sensory levels like during nightmares or in response to a certain stimulus (Plunka 2009: 300-02). Such forced repression of painful memories may also result in neurosis as we see in the case of Shanta and Mala in *Thirty days in September*. Shanta and Mala have individual or private experience of a traumatic past while the traumatic memories experienced by the survivors of the Holocaust are shared and collective.

Mala dispenses her repressed anger and depression on her mother until Shanta reveals the truth about her own sexually abused childhood. In this context, Carol Ann Hooper's observation on anger shown by the victims of child sexual abuse is significant. She observes that the act of expressing anger at their mothers enables the girls partially to break their identification with them and hence with powerlessness; it also make them feel
worthy of protection from abuse. Moreover, it is easier to direct anger at women than men (2008:6). Mala says: "... This hell is where I belong! It is your creation, Ma! You created it for me. With your silence..." (2010c:135). In a sense Shanta is re-victimised; silent and helpless Shanta serves the role of a surrogate victim for Mala.

Like Mala, Shanta also suffers much while trying to repress her pain and adjust with her surroundings. A sense of guilt develops in Shanta who feels that she has pushed Mala’s life into a more dangerous terrain. Along with the repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse by her own brother, there is her feeling of failure as a wife and a mother to protect her child. Having gone through such disturbed psychological states, she finds no other way but to destroy herself. As per the stage directions, Shanta takes recourse to intrapersonal physical violence; she picks up a broken piece of glass and jabs it in her mouth that causes bleeding. Of course, finally she is saved with the help of Mala and Deepak. But this is an indication of how devastating and long-lasting can be the consequences of sexual victimisation of children; which affects the child either overtly or covertly throughout his/her entire life.

Dattani not only expresses the existence of such deplorable crimes against the female child by close male abusers; but also reveals the ongoing changes that have occurred. Deepak’s move in the play is praiseworthy; he constantly tries to help Mala despite her sheer indifference to his marriage proposal. As P.J. Bracken points out, individuals with the syndrome of post traumatic stress disorder fear and avoid a range of situations not directly related to the original situation (2002:49). Mala is also seen exhibiting a sense of fear—it is the fear of being rejected/neglected in the society if her friends and associates come to know about her abused past. She also develops a sense of avoidance and constantly tries to withdraw into her inner world of anxiety,
depression, and anger. Finally, Vinay's act of gifting a flat to Shanta makes Mala see red. On the spur of the moment she makes a bold revelation of what she experienced as a child:

Mala: He bought your silence. So that you can never tell anyone what he did to your daughter!
Man: You have gone mad.
Deepak: Let her speak.
Man: Your taxi is here. We can talk tomorrow.
Deepak: Go on, Mala.
Mala: Where were you when he locked the door to your bedroom while I was napping in there? Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? Fifteen minutes every day of my summer holidays, add them up...Surely you must have known Ma. (2010c:133)

Here again the playwright makes a daring representation of the existing social reality of child sexual abuse by using verbal signs. After revealing the disturbing memories of her childhood, Mala asks Deepak: "...So you have your answer. But so what? Where do I go from here?"(2010c: 133). Perhaps she realises the futility of such revelation which cannot by any means alter her situation or liberate her from the past.

To be enacted, social problems and social changes must be voiced first. The very act of scripting Thirty Days in September that centers on the issue of child sexual abuse can be regarded as a part of the activist motive on the part of the playwright. In Thirty Days in September, Dattani has drawn attention to existing reality of child sexual abuse with the help of fictional characters like Mala and Shanta. Theatrical performance, which is a consciously performed representative act, offers an important social function in terms of intervention. It offers multiple ways of understanding the social problems. Besides, a well directed performance can also be used to question
and defy the oppressive social norms and practices; it can turn a theatre into an agent for social activism.

Dattani himself recognises the importance of performative aspect of a play when he says “One hopes that the academic context include the performative one... A line on page may not have the same impact etc...” (in Multani 2007:168-69). For him the staging aspect of a play is equally and sometimes more important. Theatre to him is very much a kind of shared experience between the society, playwright, director, actors and audience. Apart from the social responsibility of the playwright, a playwright also needs to understand the machinery of the theatre. This, according to Dattani, is the most important requirement in a playwright. He says, “I create what is going to happen on stage, but I only begin that...” (Dattani: 2010b). Subsequently, the play goes to the director who attempts to perform it with the help of actors. The actors explore on stage what the playwright says in the text and finally the play goes to the audience. According to him, we can have a play without a playwright and a director; but we cannot have a play without actors and audience (Dattani: 2010b).

Peter Caster makes two sub-divisions of the notion of performance as activism – the first is staged activism, social protest that employs tactics of performance, sometimes to mixed results; while the second is activist performance which is more conventional stage drama deliberately located within a particular political project (2004:108). The performance of Thirty Days in September, where I was among the audience (performed at Rabindra Bhawan, on 21st Sep’ 07, Guwahati), can be considered in the light of an activist performance as the major motive the performance was to make people aware of the hidden crime of female child sexual abuse.

Deepak’s verbal encounter with Vinay - the person who abused Mala in her childhood (perf. Guwahati: 2007).


The performance successfully represented Mala’s disturbed post traumatic mental condition and her anxieties. On stage, Ushma Bordoloi effectively represented the suppressed pain and depression that Mala carried since childhood. The perceptible powerlessness of Shanta (performed by Santwana Bordoloi) and her recourse to silence to protect both herself and Mala having experienced the same abuse by the
same perpetrator – the visualisation of these behavioural patterns on stage created a sensory experience for the audience to feel the intensity of pain and shock which the two women characters experienced. The prevailing silence in the auditorium can also be considered as a sign of audience’s internalisation of this ongoing heinous act of violence against children and its long lasting after-effects. In a sense, this particular performance of *Thirty days in September* (perf. Guwahati 2007) was an attempt to communicate the presence of such deplorable crimes against children in society; the whole effort was successful in the sense that it had the courage to explore and enact the grotesque, dark facts concerning the lives of children in society. This performance of *Thirty Days in September* proves that if seriously done, a performance can also become a useful tool for social activism. In his response to this performance ‘*Thirty Days in September*’ at Rabindra Bhawan, the playwright (who was present during the staging) says that the transposition of the setting and the theme of the play to Assam (from the original locale in Delhi) and its enactment in the midst of an Assamese cultural setting and the Assamese family somehow enhances the power of the play (Dattani: 2010b). But the performance hardly distinguished between the two terms – incest and child sexual abuse. The director termed it as a play about incest while *Thirty Days in September* is a play that deals with both – child sexual abuse and incest. This rendered to the performance, which was otherwise impeccable, its one jarring note. The two abusive conditions are not inter-changeable and it is imperative that the performance reflects this in order to getting the meanings across. The performance was, however, successful by appealing to the conscience of audience. Prevailed silence in the auditorium is a sign of audience’s participation in the happenings relating to Mala and Shanta. It is a collective response of a whole group of
audience to the memories of violence the two female characters carry with them. And who knows how many members among the audience have similar experiences of childhood sexual abuse and now taking recourse to silence? Hence, the therapeutic power of this kind of performance to the numerous victims of child sexual victims is immense. According to Augusto Boal, the therapeutic effect of theatre lies in the dynamics of seeing and being seen, in the recognition of the self and the other, and in the subsequent expressions of desire for change in everyday life. In theatre we see and hear, and therefore we understand; and herein lies the therapeutic function of theatre (in Feldhendler 2002:94).

Childhood sexual victimisation of women is a crime which is hardly revealed by the victims. Either they are too minor to recognise it as a crime, or if they can recognise also, it is the fear of society that restricts their move. After all, it is indeed an admirable attempt on the part of RAHI – a support group helping the women survivors of incest on whose request Dattani penned the play after interacting with many survivors of child sexual abuse. Commenting on the play, Lillete Dubey who not only directed the first performance of Thirty Days in September but also played the role of Shanta says that: “...A dark piece, albeit powerful and immensely moving, its commercial success and critical acclaim took us all by surprise (Dubey 2010: 82). The first performance of the play took place at Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai in 2001; which was also successful.

*Bravely Fought the Queen*

Violence against women is also the underlying theme in Mahesh Dattani’s *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It represents the stories of a number of woman characters like Dolly, Alka, Baa, and Lalitha; their marginalised existence and vulnerability to
different forms of violence in the domestic sphere. Apart from representing the issue of violence against women in contemporary urban India, the play also represents the invisible realities like homosexuality, the politics of capitalism and the use of performance and fantasy as two modes of continuing existence. Michael Walling makes an interesting observation on this play, for whom, *Bravely Fought the Queen* is a play about performance; it uses theatre to demonstrate how in a world of hypocrisy, acting becomes a way of life (2000:230).

The happenings at the Trivedi household constitute the major part of *Bravely Fought the Queen*. The Trivedi family consists of Jiten and Nitin; their two wives Dolly and Alka respectively; and Baa - the mother of Jiten and Nitin. Both Dolly and Alka are sisters and married to the two brothers. Sridhar and Lalitha constitute the other couple that appears on stage; they are connected to the Trivedi household via business ties. Interestingly, Dattani divides the play into three sections namely – “The Women”, “The Men” and “Free for All” on the basis of gender. The two worlds of women and men encounter each other directly in the third section namely “Free for All”. All the three sections representing different worldviews of the characters merge and disintegrate exposing the hidden cracks behind the surface realities of the characters. The play reaches its culmination in Act III visualising the hidden realities of adultery, homosexuality and total alcoholism.

The women characters in the play include – Dolly, Alka, Lalitha, Baa and Daksha. But Daksha is only mentioned. Although she seems to be one of the significant characters so far the movement of the play is concerned, the play does not provide for her physical appearance on stage. Why Dattani chose not to represent her visually/physically becomes comprehensible when the readers/audiences move toward the end of the play.
Besides, it would be seen in the course of this analysis that almost all the women characters turn out to be victims of either covert or overt forms of gender-specific violence; they are perceived by the patriarchal society as objects of sex, business commodities and desired objects rather than desiring subjects. Violence experienced by the women characters includes both psychological and physical violence. Violence affects the lives of these urban women characters just as it affects the life of poor Adivasi woman like Kamala in Tendulkar's *Kamala* and the unknown victim in Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*. The only difference between them is in the degree and kinds of violence they experience depending on their class, caste, region and culture, and their access to the economic and education systems. Here Alka and Dolly are deprived of any sense of power and agency in the family. Their lives are directly or indirectly governed by their husbands, by extension the patriarchal system.

The first section of the play introduces four women characters that include Dolly, Alka and Lalitha on stage, and Baa off stage. The conversation among the three women hints to a world full of complexities surrounding the lives of Dolly and Alka. Dolly's access to restricted freedom within the Trivedi household as a daughter-in-law is the effect of the patriarchal ideologies which govern the Trivedi household. There Dolly has to play her part keeping in mind the traditional role of a wife or daughter-in-law. She has to be constantly at home, looking after her ailing mother-in-law Baa. This seems to be her primary duty; her secondary duty is to help her husband in his business when required. Hardly does she get any opportunity to go out. Hence, Dolly is extremely cross when on that particular date her plan for visit to the Kapoors has been cancelled. Similar is the situation with Alka as is evident in Dolly's dialogue: "...We haven't been out since God knows when" (2000:248). Her husband
practically decides everything that Dolly is supposed to do. This is a kind of violation of her autonomy. Such violation of autonomy constitutes an act of covert psychological violence to which Dolly is subjected time and again in the Trivedi family. Only the world of “make believe” provides her with some kind solace, where she can indulge in the free-play of her imagination and create myth about herself and Kanhaiya – a fictitious character who does not really exist. Fantasy provides Dolly an escape - a relief from the cloistered space created by the “male” order.

Dolly is a victim of physical violence as well. She goes through wife-beating during her pregnancy, provoked by a lie told by her brother Praful to the Trivedi family. Dolly’s mother was deceived by her father. Her father had a first wife and four children, and he preferred to live with the first wife. When Baa comes to know this story about Dolly’s father, not only Baa calls Dolly and her mother whores, but also instigates Jiten to beat up Dolly notwithstanding the fact that she is pregnant:

Dolly: And you hit me! Jitu you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up!
Baa: No Jitu, hit her on the face, but not on the...stop it Jitu! On the face, only on the face! Enough! Stop it! (2000:311)

Dolly’s experience of physical violence during pregnancy results in the birth of a physically deformed child Daksha, who is born two months premature. Daksha is a victim of violence even before she is born. Daksha’s premature birth adds to Dolly’s mental suffering. In Act III, Dolly’s enactment of a spastic Daksha is the outcome of her own suppressed agony. Now she publicly reveals the truth about Daksha – in performance. She enacts Daksha by demonstrating a spastic’s uncoordinated arm and neck movement with dilated eyes, the sight of which even makes Jiten cry. She dances disjointedly like Daksha would do, thereby visualising the reality about a
spastic child on stage. This enactment of Daksha can also be considered as a non-verbal expression of Dolly’s psychological pain. Towards the end Dolly turns out to be stronger than before. She vehemently revolts against the existing patriarchal order that is permeated with violence against women. She says “No! Oh no! I will not let you go away so easily! They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me! It’s in your blood! It’s in your blood to be bad!” (2000:312). That her performance of Daksha brings tears to Jiten’s eyes and compels him to leave the stage can be considered as an act of successful resistance against the dominant male order represented by Jiten, which approves violence on women even justified during pregnancy. Thus, Dattani draws attention to the violence inherent in the patriarchal structure which neither spares the mother nor her unborn child.

Baa in Bravely Fought the Queen is also a representative of the patriarchal order - a system of which she herself was a victim. She is an inheritor of male violence against women. Patriarchy is so ingrained in the psyche of women that either consciously or unconsciously they carry the legacy of this system with them; they seem to be quite oblivious of the direct or indirect harm they suffer being a part of this system. Women hardly enjoy the status of an agent except for carrying out the legacy of their male companions, as seen in the case of Baa. She herself is a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by her husband:

Baa: You hit me?....Hit me again. The children should see what a demon you are. Aah! Jitu! Nitin! Are you watching? See your father! (Jerks her face as if she has been slapped.) No! No! Not on the face what will the neighbours say? Not on the ace! I beg you! Hit me but not on...aaaah! (Covers her face weakly as he scream turns silent and the light on her fades out.) (2000: 278)
On stage Baa’s verbal description of violence accompanied by the gesture indicating the slaps and her screaming constitute a visual image of a woman being battered by her husband. Later on, the same Baa who herself was a victim of gendered violence turns out to be the executor of the same acts of violence against her daughter-in-law. In a sense she is both an oppressed and an oppressor. Hence, her role in the play is a problematic. The constant ringing of the bell by Baa in the section called “the women” can be seen as a disruption of the harmony of the “all female” world of Dolly, Alka and Lalitha; where the three women share their personal details. She seems to be constantly reminding them about their traditional roles, which in this context is to perform their duties towards her ailing self. Baa acts as the propagator of the same patriarchal ideologies which made her suffer in the past. She becomes a symbolic figure representing the entire class of such women who perpetuate the dominant stereotypes in society. An almost similar example of mother-in-laws promoting this patriarchal legacy of violence against women is noticeable in Dina Mehta’s play *Brides are not for Burning* which would be discussed in the next chapter. Later on, this episode of wife beating is swept under the carpet and referred to as an accident. Jiten claims at the hospital that Dolly fell down the stairs, and hence the premature birth. The off stage portrayal of Daksha as a spastic child is significant; it indicates how dangerously a child may suffer if her/his mother is subjected of violence during pregnancy; a fact which is often not considered by the intimate perpetrators.

Like Dolly, Alka is also a victim of overt and covert forms of violence both in her parental home and husband’s family. Alka’s condition seems to be worse than her sister Dolly as she is used and abused by Nitin, Jiten, and also by her brother Praful to fulfill their selfish motives. First of all, Alka’s marriage with Nitin is the outcome of a
conspiracy of her own brother Praful. She becomes a pawn in the game that Praful plays to smoothly carry out his homosexual ties with Nitin. Praful not only deceives Alka by compelling her to marry Nitin, but also wreaks physical violence on her. She recounts in flashback how she was subjected to inhumane torture by Praful for coming back from school with a neighbour’s son on his scooter. The fellow drops Alka right in front of her doorstep, which Praful notices. Without uttering a single word Praful drags her into the kitchen. He then lights the stove and pushes her face in front of it and burns her hair. All these violent activities are executed on her in front of Nitin, who does nothing to stop these atrocities. The impact of this violence on Alka seems to be long lasting as she says “I can still smell my hair on fire” (2000: 257). These memories of violence preoccupy her in the present; she lives with them. Trauma brought about by such inhuman violence makes the lives of the victims miserable; it becomes a burden from which they are never free. Likewise, Mala in *Thirty Days in September* is not free from the memories of sexual violence experienced in childhood and exhibits overt symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The overwhelming nature of the experience of a traumatic event leads to the return of the event in flashbacks that haunts or “possesses” the traumatised person (Levi 2003:189). Hence, flashback is common characteristics shared by many victims of violence. Like Mala in *Thirty Days in September*, Alka and Dolly also recount in flashback their memories of violence.

This forced marriage of Alka with Nitin further complicates her life. Like Dolly, she also remains confined within the four walls of the house looking after her mother-in-law Baa. Nitin’s indifference drives her crazy; she fights with her loneliness by taking recourse to alcohol. In a sense, Alka defies the traditional norms
by drinking alcohol and dancing in the rain - activities which are not sanctioned to
women by patriarchy and considered as offensive if performed by women in that
given social context. She is also thrown out from the Trivedi family by her husband
Nitin for offending Baa which indicates that she is just a plaything for the inmates of
the Trivedi family. Both Jiten and Nitin always take the side of their mother Baa,
irrespective of the rudeness with which Baa treats Alka and Dolly. Earlier Jiten beats
up Dolly during her pregnancy instigated by Baa and now Nitin throws Alka out for
simply making an insulting remark on Baa's husband.

In the play both Jiten and Nitin again develop a strategy to kick Alka out of the
family so that they can get hold of the wealth which Baa has already willed in Daksha's
name. They think if Nitin throws Alka out, then Baa would start liking Nitin and transfer
the will to his name; that way both Jiten and Nitin would earn profit. Again they turn
Alka into a plaything which can be used and thrown away. Like Dolly, Alka is also
deprived of any sense of agency. Such treatment of a woman as an inessential
other/object, and violation of her autonomy amount to psychological violence in women.
Her experience of psychological and physical violence in personal relationship has an
institutional basis; violence sanctioned by the institution of patriarchy. According to
Newton Garver what is fundamental about violence is that a person is violated. It is a
violation of one's personal rights. A person's rights are of two kinds – one is the right to
one's body and the other being the right to one's dignity; and the violation of these rights-
results in violence (in Betz 1977: 340). In the case of Dolly and Alka, we see similar
violation of dignity and autonomy within the patriarchal set up of the Trivedi household.
For example, in Act III, Jiten misinterprets Alka's dance in the rain as an "immoral"
activity and puts restriction on her. Thus, her sense of autonomy is curbed. Next, Alka
immediately becomes an object of male gaze when, the same Jiten derives voyeuristic pleasure by watching her in the wet sari. She sharply says to Nitin: “I know I look indecent! Ask your brother to stop staring at me!” (2000: 299).

The three women characters Dolly, Alka and Baa – are all victims of covert and overt forms of violence carried out against women on the basis of the existing gender divide which relegates women to powerless objects. Such treatment of women can have a devastating impact in their mind as we see in the case of Dolly, Alka and Baa. The shock of brutal physical violence which the three woman characters experience cannot be relegated to the past, it remains affective in the present. Physical violence not only causes visible physical injury, it can also create deep and long lasting psychological scars. Dolly is unable to forget her experience of wife beating and its consequences; Alka about her experience of Praful burning her hair; and Baa is troubled by the memories of those days when she was been beaten up by her husband.

Lalitha – the other woman character of the play is the wife of Sridhar. Sridhar works for the Trivedi brothers and his wife Lalitha unofficially helps Sridhar in his work. By helping Sridhar, Lalitha is indirectly working for the benefit of the advertising agency run by the Trivedi brothers, but she gets nothing in return. Here also a woman’s labour and time both are wasted under patriarchy – a system that propagates the belief that it is the duty of a wife to help her husband in any matter when required. Lalitha seems to know a lot about her husband’s business. She says: “All my husband does at home is talk about his work” (2000: 235). The public space of the office occupies the personal space between them. Unlike Dolly, Alka and Baa, Lalitha has no such overt experience of violence. But she is also not free from the feeling of loneliness. Lalitha finds no other way but to keep herself busy by writing
creative pieces, freelancing, etc. Her obsession with the bonsai becomes a means to escape emptiness. Lalitha seems to accept the patriarchal system without complaining and tries to be content with life by devising various means of keeping herself occupied. Perhaps she is too innocent to understand the complexities of the male world of which she is also a puppet, and also to ever doubt that Sridhar would end up enjoying the company of a prostitute. Or perhaps she acts in a much more practical manner than Dolly and Alka by silently accepting the realities around her.

_Bravely Fought the Queen_ also highlights the presence of gendered violence in the world of advertising media — an institution which is heavily influenced by patriarchy and supports the traditional notion of women as merely objects of sexual desire. Exploitation of women in media by reducing them to sexual commodities is clearly represented in the play via the campaign for the Re Va Tee products. Re Va Tee is a new brand of women's inner wear soon to be launched. The campaign fails because of the objectionable nature of the concept concerning women, designed by the Trivedi brothers. The concept they evolve projects women as easily available sex objects. Hence the women of upper class, upper middle class and the rich category (whose comments are surveyed about the advertisement), find the concept offensive and reject it collectively. The verbal description of the advertisement is sufficient to make the audience/reader feel the sickening concept that totally devalues women:

*Sridhar:* You see, take our press ads. You’ve got the model lying invitingly on a bed and the signature is ‘Light his fire with Re Va Tee.’ In the story line for the video commercial, you have the model looking out of the window and she sees that her husband or her lover has come home... She lets hair loose, pirouettes and lies down on the bed, just as the door opens. Freeze. Signature ‘Light his fire with Re Va Tee.’ (2000:274)
Despite the fact that the consumers of the brand are women and they are not satisfied with the concept of the advertisement, Jiten is reluctant to change the concept. He thinks:

Jiten: Yes! Men would want to buy it for their women! That's our market. Men. Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there's no point in asking a group of screwed-up women what they think of it. They'll pretend to feel offended and say, 'Oh, we are always being treated as sex objects.' (2000:276)

He fails to realise that the treatment of women as sexually desirable objects might violate their dignity and that they would prefer to reject brand Re Va Tee. Of course the add indeed violates women's dignity. But Jiten ignores Sridhar's advice on changing the concept. Jiten not only embodies the patriarchal ideologies, but he also tries to propagate them through the advertisement. The advertisement is not overtly violent, but it is capable of damaging the self-respect of women viewers by portraying them only as commodified object of sex.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* puts much emphasis on the idea of performance in everyday life of the characters. While adopting performance as a means of continuing existence, the characters real selves remain suppressed or marginalised as seen in the case of Nitin, who has to suppress his homosexual identity in order to adjust with the dominant norm of the society, which is heterosexuality. On the other hand, Dolly, Alka, Lalitha and Baa – all perform/construct their identities as wives, sisters, and mothers following the dictates of the patriarchal system. Performance of the autonomous self is marginalised by the performance of an unreal/imposed/dependent self so as to cope with the normative structure which is patriarchy. This imposition of the norms upon individuals makes them suffer mentally by suppressing the individual differences in them and constitutes a form of violence which often remains hidden.
under the surface. These are not willed performances but forced ones; and such performances according to Jean Paul Sarte, can create psychological damage to the psyche of the performer by easily alienate the self from itself.

Apart from these two plays Thirty Days in September and Bravely Fought the Queen, his other stage plays like Tara and Seven Steps around the Fire also contain instances of less overt forms of violence against women. Tara’s physical disability is the result of her mother and her maternal grandfather’s preference for Chandan’s well being. Tara and Chandan are Siamese twins with three legs who are separated by a physical surgery. The blood supply to the third leg was from Tara’s body, and hence there is possibility of success on Tara’s surviving. Despite the obvious danger inherent in giving that leg to Chandan, Tara’s mother and her father bribe the doctor and give it to Chandan because he is male. But the limbs last only for two days in Chandan and Tara’s condition worsens. The preference for a male child subjects Tara to sufferings which are beyond compensation. In Seven Steps around the Fire, the highly educated Uma is also a victim of gender specific violence. Like Rama in The Vultures and Lakshmi in Brides are not for Burning, Uma is also frequently taken to doctors by her mother-in-law for not being able to give birth. But when the doctor wants to see her husband, her husband directly refuses.

While scripting violence against women in their plays, both Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani provide a realistic picture of the contemporary Indian scenario in which the victimisation of women based on the gender distinctions is still rampant. In the analysis of Tendulkar’s four plays, it is seen that the blind adherence to the patriarchal ideologies by both men and women seems to be the root cause of women’s suffering. Those women who try to defy this system are forcefully and violently
silenced by applying overt and covert means of violence, as seen in the case Leela Benare in *Silence: The Court is in Session*. Consequently the ideologies propagated by this system becomes “normalised” and women remain complicit with the system assuming that there is no escape from it. Thus, they are shaped and controlled by this system. Tendulkar’s choice of domestic and institutionalised forms of gendered violence, his portrayal of the women characters having no freedom and the implication that there is no escape for women from the oppressive patriarchal system could be the result of his internalisation of the dominant ideology of his time that is the patriarchal order. Thus his writings represent the dominant social order and the position of women in it. In a sense he remains faithful to his social realist mode of representation. On the other hand, Dattani also projects women as victimised and marginalised by the patriarchal system, but somehow his women characters appear to be stronger that the ones projected by Tendulkar. They fight against this oppressive system as we see in Mala in *Thirty days in September* and Dolly and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Dattani represents these gradual changes, although minor, in terms of women’s condition in urban India; his women characters are mostly educated urban ladies unlike Tendulkar who chooses to represent the poor and rural women.

So far as the performance aspect of the plays in terms of representing violence on stage is concerned, it is apparent in the stage directions prescribed by Dattani and Tendulkar that they follow the established decorum regarding what is to be shown visually on stage and what is not to be shown. In terms of stage directions, Tendulkar’s plays are richly textured including plenty of stage directions like lights, colour, music etc.; it seems the playwright visualises the entire performance in his mind while scripting it. Dattani’s plays do not provide too many stage directions and
technicalities so far the enactment of the script is concerned, but he is also unique in his own ways who introduces the multilayered or split stage. Like Tendulkar, Dattani also considers the staging aspect of a play as equally important. Theatre to him is very much a kind of shared experience between the society, playwright, director, actors and audience. Apart from the social responsibility of the playwright, a playwright also needs to understand the machinery of the theatre; which, according to Dattani is the most important requirement in a playwright. But at the same time he seems to provide ample scope for the director to experiment and design the performances of the script. He says “I create what is going to happen on stage, but I only begin that” (Dattani, 2010b). He thinks the entire concept of theatre in terms of a circle, starting with the playwright and then moving toward the actors who explore the things with the director’s help and finally it going on to the audience. But he maintains a non-judgmental stance while scripting the social issues and makes the audience contemplate over the issues thrown up on their own.

Another renowned figure in the world of contemporary Indian theatre is Girish Karnad; a key figure in what is known as the “Theatre of the Roots” movement, the leaders of which have made a concentrated effort to construct a distinctive world of modern Indian theatre by turning to their roots and making theatre free from the dominant model of western influence. In his plays, Karnad has made an extensive use of Indian traditional mythical/folk elements and values to represent the picture of contemporary Indian society. He has penned the plays like *Yayati, The Fire and the Rain, Tughlaq, The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, Tale-danda* and *Hayavadana* to name a few.

Like Tendulkar and Dattani, Karnad also deals with the issue of violence against women in some of his plays. For example, the chief protagonist Rani in
Nagamandala is a victim of patriarchal violence. The play embodies the existing gender inequalities, male chauvinism, and the great injustices done to women by patriarchy. The chief protagonist Rani is married to Appanna only to become a captive; she is violated by him both psychologically and physically.
Like Tendulkar in *Silenc! The Court is in Session*, here Kamad is also critical of the legal system which is biased and complicit in the victimisation of women by camouflaging the crimes committed against them by men. Rani’s single act of “adultery” while the has made the entire village turn against her with annoyance while the fact that Appanna goes to a prostitute keeping his wife locked is not taken into consideration by the elders. I refer here to local performance of *Nagamandala* that ends with the re-union of Appanna and Rani. In the original play Karnad has shown two possible endings which the director chose (for reasons best known to him) not to show on stage. Although it is the director’s prerogative to re-interpret, reshape and re-contextualise the text, the inclusion of the two endings could have added necessary nuances to the play. The end did not do justice to the theme of the Man and the Snake. The two endings in the original play showing the snake both alive and dead respectively carry deep connotations of human psyche, relationship and behavioural pattern. But the performance made an effective visual representation of both physical and psychological violence against Rani. The appropriate physical gestures and bodily movements, tears and silence along with the dialogue deliberations by Zerifa Wahid as Rani animated the character on stage.

Girish Karnad’s plays are also equally significant in terms of their contemporary social relevance. They are also resonant with violence against women in Indian society like the plays of Vijay Tenduklar, Mahesh Dattani and many other contemporary Indian playwrights. But Karnad chooses a non-realistic mode of expression to voice the contemporary realities unlike Tendulkar and Dattani. As this thesis specifically concentrates on the social realist mode of representation, hence Girish Karnad’s plays are not included for detailed analysis.
Endnotes

1 The performance refers to Kamala as Kamla. Both the words refer to the same play Kamala by Vijay Tendulkar which is based on Ashwin Sarin’s report on Kamala in the Indian Express (1981) whom he brought from a rural flesh market in Madhya Pradesh.

2 The term “hegemonic masculinity” was used by T. Carrigan, B. Conell and John Lee in “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” in the journals of Theory and Society (Vol.14.5, Sep., 1985). The term refers to a particular variety of masculinity that has authoritative and definitive power. It means how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance. Hegemonic masculinity is centrally connected with the institutionalisation of men’s dominance over women (p.592-95).

3 The term “learned helplessness” was used by L.E. Walker in The Battered Woman Syndrome (New York: Springer, 1984) to discuss why battered women find it difficult to leave an abusive relationship. According to Walker, the feeling of learned helplessness makes her incapable of leaving an abusive relationship. Woman’s victimisation as a child, economic hardship, feeling of powerlessness—many such factors are involved in creating learned helplessness (p.69-83).

4 Richard J. Gelles discusses in detail the various factors involving an abused wife’s decision to remain with her husband. According to Gelles three major factors are associated with this — (a) if violence is less severe and less frequent, the wife remains with her husband, (b) the more a wife is struck as a child by her parents, she is likely to remain with her abusive husband, and (c) if the wife has fewer resources and less power, she remains with her violent husband. See “Abused Wives: Why Do They Stay” in Journal of Marriage the Family (Vol.38.4, Nov., 1976): p.659-668.

5 See Vijay Tendulkar’s speech “The Play is the thing” (p.48) in Vijay Tendulkar, ed. by Shoma Choudhury and Gita Rajan (New Delhi: Katha, 2001).
Works Cited


---. Personal interview. 4th Dec. 2010(a).


