CHAPTER – I
Introduction

Theatre being a mirror to society has a great deal of truth, no matter whatever
theatre one creates...

(Mahesh Dattani: 2010b)

The immediacy of social and mass appeal is a phenomenon peculiar to theatre. A
dramatic text written within the framework of realist tradition of drama is nothing but
an embodiment of the existing social realities. The intersection between society and
literature is evident in drama; theatre can become an alternative medium for reading a
given society. Set within the context of contemporary Indian drama, this study focuses
on the representation - in text and on stage - of violence against women which still is
so rampant in Indian society. This study encompasses plays in translation in the case
of Vijay Tendulkar as well as plays originally written in English; the selection based
on what may be referred to as “woman conscious” plays written by Vijay Tendulkar,
Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Dina Mehta. The plays included for
detailed analysis are - Kamala, Kanyadaan, Silence! The Court is in Session, and The
Vultures, by Vijay Tendulkar, Bravely Fought the Queen and Thirty Days in
September by Mahesh Dattani; Lights Out by Manjula Padmanabhan, and Brides are
not for Burning, and Getting Away with Murder by Dina Mehta. Apart from these
nine plays, the dissertation also includes references to a few other plays by the same
playwrights, and also to a few plays by other playwrights, and to relevant films.

The term “woman conscious” is also used by Rosemary K. Curb in her article
named “Re/cognition, Re/presentation, Re/creation in Woman Conscious Drama: The
Seer, the Seen, the Scene, the Obscene”. Here she says:
The term “woman conscious” encompasses all drama by and about women that is characterised by multiple interior reflections of women’s lives and perceptions. The drama and theatre I am seeing as woman-conscious may be called feminist, lesbian, lesbian/feminist, or post modern or it may eschew labels. (Curb 1985: 302)

Notably, the term “woman conscious” in my thesis would include plays about women’s lives written by both men and women playwrights. By “woman conscious” plays, I refer to those plays that pay attention to the everyday realities of women’s life, especially women’s experience of violence based on the existing binary gender divide (the distinction between male and female). In the theatrical scenario of contemporary India, it is seen that both men and women playwrights have taken important initiatives by representing the crimes committed against women through their literary works. This conscious awareness as to the injustices done to women is evident in the writings of male playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, and Mahesh Dattani to name a few. Therefore, I would prefer to use the term “woman conscious” to refer to all those plays written with a concern for ethics, morality and social justice, particularly in relation to women’s circumscribed condition in the Indian society by both male and female playwrights.

The phrase “performing violence” used in the title of my dissertation refers to the enactment of violence against women on stage. As the plays are meant to be staged generally, and given the reciprocal relationship between the dramatic text and its onstage performance, the study would seem to be incomplete if the performance aspect of the plays is ignored. Hence, this study includes both - textual representation of violence against women in the dramatic texts, and the theatrical representation of violence on stage. This requires me to watch performances of the chosen dramatic
texts and/or to collect recorded performances when available. Given the difficulties involved in collecting recoded performances of the plays, an attempt has been made to explore the “possible” performances of some of the written texts based on the stage directions provided by the playwright.

Drama/theatre in India has a long history of its origin and development which can be dated back to the ancient *Vedic* period. The earliest plays were written in Sanskrit, and they were chiefly based on the stories of *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. Bhasa, Bhavabuti, Kalidasa, and Bhatta Narayan were some of the chief contributors to the world of Sanskrit drama. These Sanskrit plays followed the rules of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the ancient Indian treatise on theatrical activities attributed to Bharata. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is an inevitable part of the Indian theatrical/performance tradition just as the *Poetics* is to the Western dramatic tradition. *Nāṭyaśāstra* is commonly referred to as the fifth *Veda* with its major emphasis on the theory of *rasa*. *Rasa* is not only the sole object of dramatic representation but it also refers to the aesthetic pleasure experienced by audience. Ralph Yarrow has made an interesting observation on the importance accorded to *rasa* and performance by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Central to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the theory of *rasa*; not only is the performance of a dramatic text transmitted through the presentation of affective “flavours”, but more fundamentally the ultimate aim is to cultivate the receptive faculties of the receivers who should ideally develop the qualities of an adept or *rasika*. Performance itself is a rich experience activating and including a whole range of other means such as music, colour, text, movement, rhythm and so on. The aim of such performance is to establish a condition of wholeness or harmony (*samhita*). The elevation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to the status of the *Vedas*, the Hindu scriptural texts is an indication of the serious role played by it in
establishing social harmony. The notion of performance in the Indian context has emerged and developed with the advent of the *Nātyaśāstra*; it is understood as an individual and communal act which aims at the transcendence of everyday limits of consciousness by the precise of holistic functioning of multi-channelled awareness (Yarrow 2001:11).

The significance of *rasa* or “aesthetic pleasure” provided by performance of the plays is immense as the performances of the plays are carried on with the purpose of both entertaining and bringing social changes. *Rasa* is a particular attribute of the *Nātyaśāstra*. Gradually, a shift occurred both in the Indian and Western dramatic tradition as pointed out by M.S.Kushwaha. The dramatic traditions sustained by these two treatises (*Poetics* and the *Nātyaśāstra*) have gradually disappeared from the modern world and replaced by individualisation and experimentation of dramatic forms, as noticeable in the absurd genre which defies the Aristotelian tradition of drama. Similarly, the relevance of *Nātyaśāstra* also declined with the decline of Sanskrit drama. However, the two concepts: tragedy and *rasa*, advanced by Aristotle and Bharata respectively still retain their relevance (Kushwaha 2000:13).

It is important to draw a line of separation between the terms like drama, text, theatre, and performance; although these terms do not subscribe to any water tight division among themselves. Richard Schechner makes a convincing division between the above mentioned terms. But Schechner does not use the term text, which according to him refers to a written document. Instead, he uses the word “script” by which he refers to something that pre-exists any given enactment. He seems to use script in a broad sense, encompassing the notion of “doing” in it and not necessarily the written document. According to him scripts are patterns of doing, a kind of
manifestation of actions; not merely modes of communication or of thinking. For example, Schechner cites the example of the script of dancing. Dancing takes a persistent shape in the process of its enactment; this shape is kept intact from one event to another, passed/taught by one group of dancers to another and eventually both the dancers and spectators get familiar with that shape. Thus, dancing is encoded in the patterns of doing. It was only after the invention of writing that drama arose as a specialised form of scripting, and consequently potential manifestations previously encoded in patterns of doing were later encoded in patterns of written word. Gradually, drama in the West concentrated more on the written aspect of a script and detached itself from doing. Although, the avant-garde in the West and traditional theatre elsewhere refocused attention on the "doing" aspect of a script, and also on theatre and performance; the drama-script still dominates the world of performance in the West. The words: script, drama, theatre, and performance are loaded words and none of them have neutral synonyms. As for our general understanding, Schechner talks about script as the domain of the teacher or the master, drama as the domain of the author or the composer, theatre as the domain of the performers and performance as the domain of the audience. Drama is a tight verbal narrative and exists as a code independent of any individual transmitter; drama can also easily be turned into written text if required. A script can be loose or tight; and gets developed through rehearsals. Theatre to a certain extent is the visible aspect of a script, and performance is the widest possible circle of events condensing around theatre. Schechner offers a model of four discs of which the one named as performance is the largest of all; it contains the other discs namely theatre, script and drama within its circle:
From the above discussion of the terms in the light of insight provided by Schechner, we can perceive the broad spectrum of performance. It is within the region of performance that theatre takes place, and at the centre of theatre remains the script or sometimes the drama (2004: 68-72, & 94).

In the Indian theatrical context what is noticeable is that out of the four terms - drama, script, theatre and performance, the script has become a synonym for the written text. However, the use of these four terms overlaps and supplements each other. Schechner draws an analogy between hunting and dramatic performance; he seems to believe that the element of play which characterises theatrical performance is adapted from hunting. Hunting is a kind of playing and it is inherently theatrical or dramatic. It is a strategic future and crisis oriented playing which includes winners, losers, leaders and followers. It uses costumes and disguises; and has a beginning, middle and end. Its success is based on small group action or team work. After all, it is a scripted behaviour like theatrical performance. Drama developed in China, Japan, Korea, India, America, and Greece derived from this hunting culture (2004: 104-09).

The term "Indian theatre" encompasses a variety of plays within its boundary which include classical, ritual, devotional, folk, dance drama, and finally modern plays. The world of Indian theatre is an open one, incorporating a wide array of varieties; it undergoes many metamorphoses in the process of its development. In the 18th and 19th centuries, a change in the historical attitude of Indian dramatic writing
was seen after it came into contact with the Western literary and theatrical tradition. As a result, a new trend developed which is now known as “modern Indian drama”. It is a genre that developed under the European influence in the colonial period. According to R.H. Solomon the designation “modern Indian theatre” refers to a new genre that developed between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. This was the period in which the Europeans were discovering the ancient Indian culture and the Indian elites were discovering the modern European culture. Out of this shared encounter came the new theatrical genre of “modern Indian theatre” (2009: 16).

In her book named *Theatre of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performances in India since 1947*, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar clearly describes the European influence in the development of “modern urban theatre” in India. The two hundred years old modern urban theatre was first institutionalised in the colonial metropolis and it epitomises the conditions of colonial modernity. Modern urban Indian theatre borrowed its organisational structures, textual features, and performance conventions from Europe, especially from England. Such borrowings from the European theatrical incorporated in modern Indian drama superseded the popular traditional/indigenous performance genres of India. The audience of such theatre was the growing English educated Indian middle class. Gradually this new form was absorbed by the existing traditional theatrical traditions in many indigenous languages. This Western influence led to the formation of a body of new literary drama/dramatic theory in many Indian regional languages, and also to large scale translation and adaptations of European as well as Indian canonical plays and thereby paving the way for the emergence of national theatre in India (2005: 3-4). An anti-modern trend developed simultaneously as pointed out by Nandi Bhatia in *Modern*
Indian Theatre: A Reader, which preferred to perform the Sanskrit plays to establish a connection with the ancient Indian past in order to formulate an authentic and nationalistic Indian theatrical tradition. This revival of interest in the Sanskrit plays during the 1957 through the initiation of Kalidasa Festival of Ujjain is also a part of the notion of contemporary Indian drama. Such trends/movements of reviving the ancient Indian past resulted in the emergence of what is now known as the "theatre of the roots" movement. This movement receives popularity with the contribution of theatre persons like Suresh Awasthi who strongly propagates that modern Indian theatre should return to its "roots" (Bhatia 2009: xxi-xxii). In Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre Laksmi Subramanyam uses the post independence period, specially from the 1950s, to refer to as the modern period in Indian drama. Subramanyam cites Mahesh Elkunchwar definition of modern Indian theatre which places Tendulkar at the centre of this modernist sensibility (2002: 14). According to Elkunchwar, Tendulkar's writings confront and respond to the problems of his time and also accepts the challenges of his subject material; thereby he expresses a "new voice" and "disturbing insight into the human problem". Tendulkar's sensibility is more modern and more definitely shaped and influenced by the West than that of his predecessors (in Subramanyam 2002: 14).

The practitioners of the later phase of modern Indian drama "indianised" this genre by adding Indian traditional modes of performance that existed in the pre-colonial past. Hence a fusion between the traditional Indian past and the modern Western influence is still noticeable in the dramatic literature of post independence India. However, the two terms "modern" and "contemporary" are used quite loosely in the present time to refer to theatre developed in the post independence period
without taking into account the fact that the influence of modernity in India was felt in the pre-colonial period itself, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Modernity being a European phenomenon developed in the seventeenth century Europe. Despite the problems associated with fixing a specific date of the emergence of modernity in Europe, Anthony Giddens in his *The Consequences of Modernity* provides a convincing observation on this phenomenon. Associating modernity with a particular time period and an initial geographical location, Giddens defines modernity as modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence (2008:1). Accordingly, the ideas on modernity started flowing to India and spread with the coming of the British in the eighteenth century. Another renowned scholar of Indian theatre, Ananda Lal also points to the problem of loosely using the terms “modern” and “contemporary” in the periodisation of Indian theatre. Instead he suggests that the terms like postmodern, postcolonial or even contemporary can be used to refer to the theatrical developments in India from 1947 onwards. He says:

> Many people, even cognoscenti, use ‘modern’ very loosely to refer to post independence developments, often unaware that those very aspects that they associate with modernity had all appeared previously at different time during the course of the colonial period in India. (2009: 31)

Ananda Lal locates the beginning of modern Indian theatre in India in the nineteenth century and considers *The Persecuted* as the first modern Indian play written in 1831 by Krishna Mohan Banerjea.

Vasudha Dalmia also uses the term “modern Indian theatre” to refer to Indian theatre after independence. According to her in the 1960s and 1970s the metropolitan
cities of India witnessed a surge of theatrical activities. The new plays were written and performed in many parts of the sub-continent, in locations like Bombay, Calcutta, Bangalore and Delhi and so on. Not only was there the birth of new realism in Indian urban theatre, emerging from the problems and issues of a rapidly industrialising India, but the urban Indian theatre during this period also successfully moved towards using the myriad folk forms which were being “discovered” (2006:5).

Hence, it would be more appropriate to make a division of the modern period into pre-modern and post-modern period, or into early modern and late modern period or contemporary period of Indian theatre instead of confusingly using the term “modern” to refer to the contemporary developments. Given that the term post modern has dual meanings in that it also refers to the recent trends in the field of literary theory apart from a time frame; this thesis would use the term “contemporary” to refer to the social realist plays written during the post independence period, chiefly during the late twentieth century. The select plays by the chosen playwrights written during this period are mostly set in contemporary urban India. Here the term contemporary Indian drama is used in a broad sense to include the plays written in English and in regional languages which are gradually translated into English. Erin B. Mee’s observation reveals that the term contemporary Indian drama refers to a post-independent development in the Indian theatrical tradition:

After India gained political independence in 1947, a number of playwrights felt the need to develop a theatre that did not follow British models, but in some way Indian. Kavalam Narayana Pannikar, along with Habib Tanvir, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad, members of what is often referred to as the "Theatre of Roots" movement, began to study Kathakali, Yakshagana, Chhau, and other traditional Indian performance forms to see what could be used in the creation of a modern Indian drama. (1997:1)
Even this analysis of the dramatic developments by Mee uses the term “modern” to refer to the developments in post independence period, while the title of her article containing this analysis is “Contemporary Indian Theatre Three Voices”, published in the “Performing Art Journal” in 1997. But the implication here is clear: she uses the term “modern” to refer to the contemporary period of Indian theatre.

The emergence of the “Theatre of Roots” in the post independence period also contributes to the growth of Indian drama in regional languages. The group of playwrights belonging to the theatre of the roots movement tends to turn to their roots to create a modern Indian theatre. This endeavor on their part is what Erin B. Mee refers to as the process of “Decolonising Theatre”. According to Mee, the theatre of roots, street theatre, and English language theatre are three among the many kinds of theatre flourishing in India today, on the proscenium and non-proscenium stages in various locations of the country in different languages, structures, and forms (1997: 4-5). These playwrights have made a concentrated effort to go back to the traditional roots and liberate Indian theatre from the Western impacts. While doing so, these playwrights also pay attention to the issues concerning women’s daily lives and their ongoing experiences of violence in Indian society. However, in my analysis of the representation of violence against women in contemporary Indian drama; I have restricted my selection to plays written following the Western realist tradition by Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan and Dina Mehta. The plays scripted by them describe the social reality of violence against women in Indian society. Fidelity to the actual reality of lived life is very much there in their representation of violence.

Modern Indian drama shares a changing and contested relationship with modernity in India’s colonial and nationalist past and post colonial developments. The
thematic range of modern Indian theatre includes a variety of themes such as the politics of the British Raj, condition of working classes, famines, psychological fragmentation, and issues concerning women, familial and dowry problems, rights of the Dalits and so on (Bhatia 2009: xi-xii). In the process of amalgamating the pre-colonial past and the post-colonial present as well as to reflect upon the contemporary situation, the Indian theatre (English as well as translated plays into English from regional languages) in the post independence period has used myth, history, folk/legend and traditional symbolic representations. The playwrights of this period are mainly concerned with representing the existing oppressive structures of Indian society such as patriarchy, class, tradition, gender, violence etc. But simultaneously it would also be interesting to find out how the ideas of modernity influenced the world of Indian theatre. The growth of social realist plays in the post independence period exploring as well as representing the various social issues/problems can be considered as the impact of this growing modernist sensibility. In this space of growing modernist sensibility and modern Indian theatre where does one situate the woman? What is the kind of a voice she finds? How is she represented? etc. – these are some of the questions that this study would take into account while analysing the chosen dramatic texts.

Coming to the question of contemporary plays written in English originally, a cursory glance would reveal that drama written originally in English is still in its formative stage. Referring to Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni’s strong criticism of “Anglophone” playwrights who need to be “butchered” and “castrated”, Christopher Balme points out that the Indian English playwrights and their plays from its beginning till date have suffered from economic, artistic, and ideological pressures of
being submerged in a rich theatrical culture of popular, religious and commercial performance traditions (Balme 2009: 345). It is of recent origin that a few numbers of playwrights have started writing in English under various constraints. These playwrights include – Pratap Sharma, Gurucharan Das, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta and a few others. Meanwhile, the plays written by these playwrights are rarely staged as the performance turns out to be a failure mostly because of the lack of audience’s support, except in the case of metropolises where they do receive adequate audience support. While drama in English is constantly struggling to sustain and popularise itself, the plays written in regional languages continue to prosper in the hands of playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Usha Ganguli, and Mahesweta Devi.

Recently an interesting and positive shift is noticeable in the audience’s response to the plays written in English and their performances on stage. In this context, the plays of Mahesh Dattani depicting the issues pertaining to contemporary urban India have become successful in achieving wider popularity both in India and abroad. His plays have been successful in catching the attention of audience, and also in changing their perception about theatre in English. Dattani’s plays like *Thirty Days in September*, *Tara*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen* have achieved significant popularity while the plays of Dina Mehta and Manjula Padmanabhan, written in English are still awaiting such a platform both in terms of staging and academic popularity. On the other hand Vijay Tendulkar’s plays, originally written in Marathi and translated into English, are widely staged and read. As Dalmia points out, both English and Hindi continue to share the honour of being the two important target languages of translation in the 1970s. When the question of print arises, the English
language occupies an important position, as it can contribute for national visibility of the plays. But in the field of performance, Hindi and other regional languages always get the upper hand (2006: 7).

This thesis has total six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The chapter division goes like this – (i) Introduction, (ii) Violence, Gendered Violence, and Representation, (iii) Dynamics of Performing the Text: Text, Performance, and Reception, (iv) Scripting Violence - Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani (v) Scripting Violence - Manjula Padmanabhan and Dina Mehta, and (vi) Conclusion. The chapter on violence, gendered violence, and representation would discuss the notion violence in general taking into consideration its theoretical and social dimensions, and also the relationship between gender, violence, and power. This would be followed by a discussion on “gendered violence” and how it is represented in the cultural and literary discourses. The third chapter would discuss the process of transforming a written play into a performance text, the various aspects relating to the text/performance divide, the components of the theatrical text; the tools of analysing the text and performance; and finally how both the text and performance are received by the reader/audience. Given that I would study the textual and performance analysis of gendered violence, this chapter seems to be a major component as the theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter would be applied to the subsequent analyses of the plays. The fourth chapter would analyse the woman conscious plays by Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani with specific focus on the various examples of “gendered violence” women experience in Indian society. The fifth chapter would analyse the women conscious plays by Manjula Padmanabhan and Dina Mehta. Like the preceding chapter this chapter would also look at the various forms of violence against women in the plays.
While analysing the representation of violence against women or "gendered violence", I would also look into the issues like child sexual abuse (female), foeticide and infanticide of the female children represented in the plays by the four playwrights. This chapter would be followed by the conclusion. This whole study is centered on the idea that how literature, especially social realist theatre can be a useful means of representing the social problems; here in this context the problem of violence against women. The very act of scripting plays on this issue can also be considered as an act of resistance via literature as the plays like Kamala, Kanyadaan, Bravely Fought the Queen, and Brides are not for Burning, to name a few, stand for the playwrights' sympathetic understanding of the issue. Finally, the act of staging those plays open up numerous possibilities of interpretation. The performance text then becomes a collective event including the playwright's text, the director, the actors, and the spectators. A well-directed performance can influence its viewers, generate awareness, and lead to activism against the social evils. Or is it possible to say that the spectators may turn into "spect-actors" in the process for social change?

Violence against women, among the darkest realities of contemporary Indian society, occupies a significant space in plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Dina Mehta – the playwrights whose selected works have been included for analysis in this dissertation. These playwrights have made a conscious attempt to explore the positioning of women in Indian society and their victimisation. Tendulkar's best-known play Silence the court is in Session! represents the plight of Miss Leela Benare whose private life is exposed and publicly dissected to reveal her "illicit" love affair with Professor Damle during the course of an imaginary trial; where the man is summoned merely as witness while Benare remains
the prime accused. Throughout the play Benare is subjected to verbal and psychological abuse. Both in her later life and childhood she is sexually abused. The play has ample scope for visualisation of the pain that Benare carries in her - her silence, her constant attempt to leave the stage, her being stiff and motionless in the course of the trial, and her attempted suicide; these are all signs/images in the context of the play representing her trauma. In *The Vultures*, Tendulkar looks into the mutual hatred among the family members of Hari Pitale's family caused by greed that results in their brutal behaviour towards each other. The play is resonant with violence where the female is both agency and target. The manifestations of violence be it violence against women or men, are mostly overt. The play contains instances of both physical and psychological violence. Verbal abuse or linguistic violence is also all pervasive in the play. Excluding Rama, recourse to linguistic violence has become a routine behaviour for most of the characters in the play. In *Kamala*, the dominant male character Jaisingh Jadav exploits the three women characters. The chief “protagonist” Kamala is a victim of women’s trafficking who is also subjected to verbal, sexual and emotional abuse. She is used as an object to buy promotion and reputation in the field of journalism and becomes a pawn in the power game between society and media. *Kanyadaan* is mainly centered on the theme of marriage between Jyoti, and Arun Athavale, a Brahmin girl and a young Dalit man respectively, and the subsequent consequences of this marriage. Centering on this theme, 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. She is not only physically abused by her husband, but also scarred emotionally.
Mahesh Dattani’s *Bravely Fought the Queen* is resonant with male violence which is used as a means of asserting male dominance in a necessarily phallocentric world where all women characters are victims of different forms of violence perpetrated by patriarchy. They become the marginalised “other” in their relationships with their husbands, with memories of wife battering and psychological violence; always subjected to the male gaze. Baa, the mother figure becomes an iconic representative of that class of woman who perpetuates the stereotypes in society. In *Thirty Days in September*, Dattani explores the theme of child sexual abuse through the character of Mala. Her maternal uncle sexually abuses her during her childhood leaving in her deep psychological scars. The play is mainly dialogue based; sexual violence encountered by both Mala and Shanta are represented by using powerful dialogues and flashbacks.

Manjula Padmanabhan’s play *Lights Out* deals with the issue of collective sexual violence (gang rape) and people’s indifference towards the victim, based on a real gincident that took place in Santa Cruz, Bombay in 1982. The play is resonant with sexual violence perpetrated on women by a group of four people at regular intervals, and records the reaction of a small group of upper-middle class people towards that gang rape. With the help of fictional characters, who are representative of a stereotyped upper-middle class mentality, Padmanabhan has drawn our attention to the bitter reality about women’s lives in contemporary society and also people’s apathy towards it, and moral callousness that breeds violence against women. Like *Thirty Days in September* this play is also dialogue based; the act of gang rape is narrated and the victim does not appear on stage.
Dina Mehta's play *Getting Away with Murder* is resonant with both visible and invisible violence. The play mainly portrays the lives of three women characters and violence done to them. The chief protagonist Sonali is a victim of child sexual abuse like Mala in Dattani’s *Thirty Days in September*. *Getting Away with Murder* not only represents the various forms of visible and invisible violence against women in private and public spheres committed by individual perpetrators; it also brings into focus another heinous crime against woman perpetrated by a group under the pretext of witch killing. Thus, Mehta exposes and puts on stage a plethora of different kinds of violence against women in contemporary Indian society. Mehta’s other play *Brides Are Not for Burning* explores violence against women by those who are in power. The play explores the issue of domestic violence against women caused by the prevailing dowry system. The system of dowry relegates woman not merely to an object of possession but also of purchase. The physical, sexual, and psychological victimisation of women by men seems to be the playwright’s major concern here. Like *Lights out* and *Getting Away with Murder*, this play is also dialogue based. Violence is not visually represented on stage.

However, such examples of violence against women in Indian society are not a new phenomenon. Women underwent various forms of physical and psychological violence in the past, and the same situation continues in the present. It can be dated back to the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* where we find Sita entering the fire to prove her chastity, Draupadi being humiliated in the *Kaurava* court and so on. Although in the *Rig Vedic* period women enjoyed some kind of freedom, the situation changed in the later periods with the emergence of the caste system, *satidaha* (widow immolation), *purdah*, female infanticide and so on. These social constructs restricted
women's rights, mobility, and their freedom. In this respect, *Manusmriti* (the *smriti* written by Manu, the Hindu law giver) also played a significant role by restricting women's freedom and allowing them a very limited and confined space within the society.

Violence has been generally categorised into overt or visible and covert or invisible violence. Visible violence seems to designate something perceptible; a happening in the physical world which can be seen and recognised. Covert violence is invisible, less spectacular, but perhaps more dangerous - having deep psychological and emotional impact. The roots of violence can be attributed to the abuse of power by society, institutions, groups, and individuals. While dealing with the issue of violence against women represented in the plays by Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan and Dina Mehta, this dissertation also looks into the nature of violence in general. The notion of violence is inseparably linked to the concept of power, which in turn is very much a part of the debate on gender. Power seems to be the common factor connecting gender and violence. Hence, the three concepts of violence, gender and power are interlinked. On the basis of the existing binary gender divide, women are more vulnerable to various forms of violence as compared to men, especially in the domestic sphere. Even many cases of domestic violence remain unreported by women because of the fear of social humiliation.

Women are victims of gender-specific violence in almost every phase of their life span. Their "marginalised" position within the patriarchal structure of society makes them easily available to different forms of gender specific violence. The concept of marginal/marginalised was originally coined by Robert Park in 1928. He used it to refer to a person or group that had been cut off or isolated from the mainstream of social life. On the other hand, Rutledge M. Dennis points to the
dualities associated with the concept of marginality. He uses the term dual marginality to refer to the marginalised as both “outsiders as insiders” and “insiders as outsiders” so as to highlight the ambivalent position of the marginalised. It indicates that no marginalised individual can evade or escape the social sphere. They are present in the society but at the same time they are ignored beings (Dennis 2005: 3-4). Despite the problems and dualities associated with conceptualising marginality as pointed out by Dennis, this concept subsequently achieved popularity in the feminist debate.

Marginal or marginalised is a term now widely used in the feminist debate to refer to women’s subordinate status in the mainstream social order, caused chiefly by the gendered social system.

Gender refers to the social, cultural and historical construction of sexual differences such as male and female, masculine and feminine in which the female is always seen as the marginalised other and the male as the privileged self. The structure of these gender distinctions is that of binary oppositions, which reinforces power relations by providing a naturalistic justification for women’s sexual, social and conceptual subordination and men’s superiority. This binary structure follows the patriarchal norms to distinguish between the two sexes. Here I have used the term “Gendered Violence” to refer to the acts of violence involving men and women in which the female is usually the “victim”. This arises from an unequal power relation between men and women under patriarchy that attributes power to men, and subordinates women. In a sense, patriarchy itself is a violent system where men being the socially privileged and powerful category, take the power to dominate, subordinate and violate women in all social relations. This binary gender divide privileging the male is commonly seen as the central cause behind the occurrence of a
ть number of violence against women in the domestic sphere and public sphere. The term domestic violence in this thesis would particularly refer to the acts of violence in heterosexual relationships, especially against women inside the family. In its broad sense, the term domestic violence includes the instances of violence rampant in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender relations as well. Domestic violence against women not only includes inter-spousal violence but also violence perpetrated by other family members.

Although the term gender is deconstructed in post feminism into multiple categories⁴, my study will focus on the binary gender categories only. At the centre of this binary division of gender remains the privileging of the male over the female. Different manifestations of gendered violence are noticeable in Indian society, which not only include physical violence but also sexual, psychological and emotional abuse. However, these different forms of violence occur in different phases of a woman’s life imposing a long lasting impact on her. Both in their private and public lives women are vulnerable to such examples of violence. Despite the fact that any form of violence against women is declared as an act of violation of women’s human rights by the United Nations in the Vienna Conference on Human Rights held in 1993, many of these forms of violence still continue; they are not cognisable offences in our society, and usually justified by invoking religious, cultural and traditional beliefs.

It is of comparatively recent origin that women have started voicing their problems publicly in their writings – either through novel, poetry, drama or any other literary or factual piece of work. As my specific concern here is the plays representing the issue of violence concerning women scripted by both men and women playwrights, therefore I would look into how the emerging genre called “women’s
theatre" also contributes to foster awareness on violence. One of the important factors that help in the emergence of the women playwrights is the re-discovery of women's theatre history in the West in 1980s. This development encourages the women playwrights to write "women's theatre". The impact of feminism in the construction of women's theatre history cannot be overlooked. According to Charlotte Canning, women's lived experience constitutes a crucial category to develop a feminist theatre history. She also talks about the importance of consciousness raising as a means to challenge the oppressive ideologies against women not only in their everyday life, but also in the domain of historiography. She points to the failure of conventional historical methodology in portraying women's experience as this methodology rests on the exclusion of women and the mystification of male experience as universal. Only in the mid 1970s to early 1980s, women associated with the "New Women's History Movement" such as Linda Gordon, Gerda Lerner, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and John Kelly who wrote histories of ignored topics including the history of women and birth control, women and family, and women and work – the subjects which were not previously considered for historical investigation (1974:530-32). The women's liberation movement in the West in 1960s and 1970s had helped in rediscovering the hidden female tradition in the field of theatrical writings also. In the West this impact of feminism on feminist theatre practices has been discussed extensively by critics like Micheline Wandor, Elaine Aston, and Jill Dolan and so on. But feminism as a political movement working to establish a progressive and democratic society for women has been undermined in the 1980s with the advent of post feminism and its backlash against feminism. Despite the post feminist reaction against feminism of the 1970s, the importance of the later is still felt as women still
experience the socially constructed gender inequalities, a fact which is almost ignored in the post feminist discourse. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the lasting and radical impact feminism has made in liberalising theatre practices.

There has been comprehensive sociological study of women theatre workers in the past decade; it seems fairly evident that compared to the ten years ago, there are more women working in areas previously dominated men as directors, writers, technicians etc. and that the past five years have produced plays which focus attention on the experiences and imaginations of women (Wandor 1984: 76). Elaine Aston makes an extensive study on the rediscovering of the “hidden female tradition” influenced by the advent of feminism. She says that the feminist concept of women hidden from history influenced the literary study in two ways - (i) by motivating feminist critiques to understand how and why women had been obscured by made history, and (ii) by initiating the recovery of their lost female ancestors (1995:15). Susan Bennett observes:

One of the thorough and radical changes in drama studies since the early 1980s has been the reorientation and reorganisation of dramatic and, more generally, literary canons to include works by hitherto excluded ‘minorities and, especially, women. (2000: 46)

Hence from the studies made by these feminist theatre critics, we find that this feminist intervention in the field of theatre studies initiated the rediscovery of the “hidden” female tradition of playwriting, directing, and performing. This effort also fueled the growth of more writings and plays on the issues concerning the “woman question” or women’s everyday experiences. This emergence/recovery of women’s theatre history is possibly one of the factors that influence the growth of plays dealing with the issues concerning women by both male and female playwrights. The
emergence of women's theatre in the 20th century can be considered as the outcome of this rediscovery of the women's theatre history. "Women's theatre" refers to the whole gamut of productions and scripts by women about women, and characterised by the consciousness of women as women; while women conscious plays may include plays about women by man as well. Consciousness raising regarding the issues concerning women's existence seems to be major aim of both woman conscious plays and women's theatre. Many women's organisations in India during the 1980s and 1990s adopted the concept of street theatre as a powerful medium for creating awareness on a variety of social issues including the issue of violence against women. Nevertheless, woman conscious plays were also there in the last century before the advent of the notion women's theatre in India, which is rather a recent phenomenon of 1980s and 1990s. For example, Vijay Tendulkar wrote *Silence! The Court is in Session* in 1967 - a play which can be undeniably considered as a woman conscious play. But then again this rediscovery of women's theatre history in the West and its subsequent spread to India also help in the growth of woman conscious plays.

However a distinction between the three terms "feminist theatre" "women's theatre" and "women conscious" plays should be made; the three terms are used almost synonymously while there are differences in them. Of course, the common factor behind the formulation and development of these aforesaid concepts seems the feminist movement of 1960s and on. The emergence of feminist theatre is a nineteenth century phenomenon and it is characterised by consciousness of women as women. It is directed towards the deconstruction of sexual differences and creation of women characters in the subject position; thereby it aims to undermine the dominant patriarchal order. This flourished particularly in Britain and the United States.
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(Keysser 1996: 1). According to Loren Kruger "Women have always made spectacles of themselves, as the saying goes. Only recently, and intermittently at that, have women made spectacles themselves. On this difference turns the ambiguous identity of a feminist theatre" (in Keysser 1996: 49). Hence one can not overlook the political underpinnings of the feminist theatre that lie in its effort to dismantle the existing patriarchal ideologies and resituating women in the subject positions. In fact the whole approach itself is a political move inspired by feminism. There can not be made any water tight distinction between women's theatre and feminist theatre and the terms seem to be tautological; both the terms are used synonymously by many. Women's theatre is an exclusively women's domain while the feminist theatre in the Indian context, unlike in the West, also includes plays about women by men. For example, the plays such as *Silence! The Court is in Session* by Vijay Tendulkar, and *Nagamandala* by Girish Karnad are also considered as feminist plays. The well known street play *Women (Aurat)* by Jan Natya Manch (People’s theatre of India) led by Safdar Hashmi - a male playwright, is also called a feminist play. Hence, instead of defining them as “feminist” plays, I find the two terms “activist” and “woman conscious” less confusing to refer to such plays.

In the Indian context Tutun Mukherjee offers an appropriate and convincing definition of the term women’s theatre; it is a politically nuanced theatre that is oriented towards change and produced by women with feminine concerns. She calls it a forward-looking step trying to break away from reductionism, and locates gender identity in the flux of socio-historical processes. It is the product of feminism; feminine awareness shapes the making of the play (2005:14). An important strand of women’s theatre in India is its intervention in areas which directly concern women. It
has been used to voice those issues which are largely suppressed or considered as non-existent by mainstream theatre (Subramanyam 2002: 31). The mainstream theatre in India is dominated by the male authored plays, representing the issues concerning women from a socially/ideologically constructed male perspective. The entry of the plays by women playwrights into the mainstream theatre world of India is only a recent phenomenon.

In the recent past a striking growth is seen in the field of women’s theatre in India in the hands of playwrights like Mahasweta Devi (b.1926), Shanta Gokhale (b.1939), Usha Ganguli (b.1945), Manjula Padmanabhan (b.1953), and Dina Mehta and so on. These playwrights have started writing plays describing the issues concerning women, and also voicing their resistance to social pressures imposed on them as women writers. Tutun Mukherjee’s *Staging Resistance Plays by Women in Translation* is a noteworthy anthology of women’s theatre in India. It includes a number of plays by women translated into English from different Indian languages. Each of the plays, dealing with social issues from woman’s point of view, exposes the various forms of violence undergone by women. Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out* and Dina Mehta’s *Brides are not for Burning* and *Getting Away with Murder* undeniably belong to this emerging tradition of women’s theatre produced by the women playwrights with specific focus on violence perpetrated against women and aiming at bringing social changes. These plays no doubt belong to the category of women’s theatre, but simultaneously they can also be termed as woman conscious plays by women.

A sense of concern for the problems faced by women in Indian society is also noticeable in the writings of certain male Indian playwrights; a fact which is often ignored while discussing their plays. Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008), Girish Karnad
(b.1938), Mahesh Dattani (b.1958), Mohan Rakesh (1925-1972), Arun Sharma (b.1931), Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia (1932-2003) are some of the playwrights to name a few, whose plays represent the issue of violence against women along with representing the other oppressive structures of Indian society such as class, caste, and gender. Hence, perhaps it would not be a wrong idea to include their plays under the term woman conscious plays.

In the Indian theatrical scenario, the appearance of the women playwrights is a rather late development. The achievements of women in the field of theatre have not received adequate importance yet. Tutun Mukheijee says that in India, the emergence of women’s theatre history is a late nineteenth century phenomenon. Before that also plays were written about women and women were a part of dramatic performance, but they remained hidden. In the entire history of development of Sanskrit drama, there was hardly any discussion of a play written and directed by a woman. There were women performers, dance choreographers, but they were not visible till the late nineteenth century (2005:6). A remarkable increase in women’s participation in theatre as playwrights/director/performers was seen in the last three decades of the twentieth century. The lives of Indian women are far more circumscribed than their Western counterparts; and the Indian women playwrights try to represent it via their dramatic writings. These playwrights share the same thematic pattern such as the representation of women’s relationship, their struggles, and their journey towards emancipation and so on. They are not resistant to the influence of Western feminism, but their chief motive seems to be to sensitise the receptors of their text to the problems faced by women in the Indian society (Mukherjee 2005: 15).
The emergence of women's or feminist theatre practices can help to challenge the canonical masterpieces which seem to support the dominant values and norms. Since the 1970s, the advent of feminist literary studies has established a body of scholarship concerned with challenging the value system that governs and determines the literary canon. Such studies have revealed how the canon is also based on the dominant economic (capitalist) and social (patriarchal) values and that it promotes the gender bias. Hence, the need for adopting the feminist approach whether in theatre or any other field of literary analysis has emerged. This approach can help in reading the canonical master texts from a feminist perspective and also to discover the lost work by women writers (Aston 1999: 80).

Jill Dolan's application of Judith Fetterly's concept of the "resisting reader" to the theatrical context is significant. The phrase was originally used by Fetterly to refer to the feminists readers who had to resist the ideological work of the "master text". But Dolan uses it in the theatrical context to refer to the feminist theatre critic who interprets a performance's meaning by reading against the grain of stereotypes and resisting the manipulation of both the performance text and the cultural text that it helps to shape. The feminist concept of the "resisting reader" is relevant to my context of analysing the representation of violence against women in contemporary Indian drama. At least such an approach to the plays would help in recognising and critiquing the dominant interpretation of the dramatic text. The dearth of plays written by female playwrights in the field of contemporary drama, as also of analyses in the area of violence against women represented in the dramatic text, both are significant given the obvious monopoly of the dominant ideology that still prefers to have male authored text and their conformist/traditional interpretations. In this context it is also
noticeable that in the academic institutions and syllabi, the inclusion of plays by the women playwrights is still a low-key activity.

Coming to the question of representing violence against women, it is seen that representation is the stuff of both - the dramatic text and its theatrical performance. Drama, always having a social perspective, represents its world by describing the events visually and verbally. Each dramatic text or the theatrical performance acts as a direct verbal or visual sign representing an existing social reality. A sign is anything that provides information to others. The whole process of theatre semiotics functions within cultural, conventional, performative, and relational contexts. Moving from the notion of controlling the female body through violence to the idea of its “performance” on stage, the aim of this study is to assess this representation in dramatic literature. Contemporary Indian playwrights have used drama as a space to explore the problems generated by this issue; my aim is to analyse these attempts of selected play texts as well as performance texts of various productions to locate how drama, having an immediacy of appeal, can be used as a medium for representation as well as activism. While representing violence on stage, the representation is twice removed from the actual act of violence. The social reality is represented in the text and later on, the text is concretised on stage; which is another act of representation. The concept of representation always implies an absence, and semiotics - the study of signs and their signifying power, substitutes this absence with the help signs and their signification, both in text and on stage. Semiotically, signification is a continuous process and a matter of social convention. The semiotic approach to theatre developed by the semioticians like Keir Elam, Erika Fischer Lichte and many others, deals with the concept of “absence” being represented with the help of signs. While on the other
hand the phenomenologists of theatre give emphasis on the notion of “presence”. In this respect, Mark Fortier emphasises the sensory effects of theatre which is central to phenomenological concerns. He says that the theatre phenomenologists emphasise the notion of “presence” or “unconcealing” of the world for consciousness rather than its disappearance into the realm of signs, and therefore on the interplay with the real rather than on its inevitable deferral (2002: 39-41).

The idea of performance and performance studies receive popularity in 1970s and 1980s with the publication of the writings of Richard Schechner on “performance”. The modern field of performance studies as a discipline has emerged in the United States during 1970s at New York University and Northwestern University. The term performance is generally used in a very broad sense. According to Richard Schechner, performance studies as a discipline is theoretically wide open. Performance itself is a fluid idea and it is usually used as an umbrella term to include anything that is framed, presented, highlighted or displayed (2002:1-19). However, in my thesis I have limited the use of the term performance to theatrical performance which is only a branch of performance studies. There exists an inseparable relationship between the dramatic text and its performance on stage, although this relationship is still a part of an ongoing debate. The dramatic text carries the idea of its performance as an inherent feature in it. The interpretative potentialities of performance are multiple and this performative aspect makes drama different from the other literary genres. In theatrical performance, the text is concretised in a given space and time with the help of various other stage components. Some theatre critics assume the priority of the written text over the performance as chronologically the writing of
the play precedes any given performance, while the others assume the priority of performance over the written text.

This study is also an attempt to discuss this reciprocal relationship between a written text and its on-stage performance, with special focus on the multiple meanings generated by a theatrical performance in terms of representing gendered violence. The production and reception of meaning in performance depends on spectator’s response to a particular performance; they receive and reconstruct the performance according to his/her social and historical background. Therefore, the production of meaning in theatrical performance changes and develops during the reception process and it renders the performance open for numerous interpretations. For example - the two different performances of Vijay Tendulkar’s Kanyadaan (both the performances will be discussed in detail in chapter four of this dissertation) at different times and places by different actors open up different interpretations of the same play.6

Review of existing literature

Violence against women has been treated seriously in various disciplines such as political science, women’s studies, history and law. In my review on this particular area I have included works produced by these various disciplines along with other materials. In his book entitled Violence Against Women (1998), Ram Ahuja has made a systematic survey on this issue identifying the other social issues related to it where he suggests that a woman is never free from violence, although it may not always be the man who imposes his physical dominance over her – that women may perpetrate violence on other women and sometimes violence may be “self imposed” due to normative religious and socio-cultural attitudes. In Violence Against Women Human Right Perspective (2005), K. Uma Devi talks about the concept of gendered violence
as a human rights violation, as a form of discrimination towards women in Indian society, and highlights the fact that in India religion acts as a major patriarchal agent in the oppression of women and creates inequality between men and women. In Women Violence and Social Change (1992), R.E. Dobash and R.P. Dobash talk about the troubled relationship between the battered woman’s movement and government institutions. Women's Consciousness Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics (1985), edited by B.H. Andolsen, C.E. Gudrof and M.D. Pellauer includes a chapter entitled “Moral callousness and Moral sensitivity” dealing with the ignorance associated with violence against women, which is partly due to the hidden nature of these crimes. Dr. Niroj Sinha’s book Women and Violence (1989) deals with the various manifestations of violence against women in Indian society, being a collection of papers presented at a National Seminar on “Women and Violence: Various Manifestations” [Patna, January 1988]. The papers analyse the issues like patriarchy, socio-psychological dimensions of violence against women, political, economic, physical and mental violence faced by women, the sati system, and violence against women wrought by the emergence of electronic media, torture undergone by deserted and divorced Muslim women and so on.

Staging Resistance Plays by Women in Translation (2005) edited by Tutun Mukherjee includes a number of plays by women translated into English from different Indian languages. Each of the plays, dealing with social issues from woman’s point of view, exposes the various forms of violence undergone by women and dramatises their resistance to social pressures imposed on them. Nandi Bhatia’s Performing women/Performing womanhood: Theatre, Politics and the Dissent in North India (2010) explores the relationship of Indian women with the theatre. The
book is an attempt to make visible the works of women who performed on the borderlines of dominant theatrical activity and engaged in dramatic enactments that challenged middle class codes of female propriety. Bhatia examines the representations of actresses, dalits, housewives, courtesans in different genres including drama and attempts at recovering the contribution of both neglected as well as known figures in Indian theatre analysing the individual works of the chosen women playwrights. Gendered nature of modern Indian theatre gets highlighted. On the other hand, Vasudha Dalmia’s Poetics, Plays, and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre (2006) deals with the political and aesthetic concerns of modern Indian drama in the post independence period with particular emphasis on the dramatic developments in the capital, Delhi. In the last chapter of the book she pays attention to the emergence of women directors in the last decade of the twentieth century and their effort in dramatising the diverse aspects relating to women’s lives in Indian society. But no direct discussion of violence experienced by women and its dramatic representation is found here.

In terms of doctoral work in the area, my preliminary research reveals the following material on the area. Zaheer Udin Babur’s Violence Against Women in Pakistan: Current Realities and Strategies for Change explores the Pakistani society, which is based on patriarchy, and maps the notion of violence in relation to women and also focuses on governmental response towards gender-based violence in the face of constant opposition from traditional and religious sections of the society. Shelley Bernhardt’s dissertation A Critical Literature Review Of Marital Violence and the Women who Witnessed it During Their Childhood Years explores marital violence and its impact on children who witness it. Muffled Voices Women in Modern Indian
Theatre (2002) edited by Lakshmi Subramanyam explores the image of women in the written and performance texts in the post independence theatre. The book is divided into two parts. The first part interrogates the image of women in written and performance texts by some mainstream male playwrights while the second part discusses the diverse voices of the female practitioners in this field. Edited by Claire M. Renzetti, Jeffrey L. Edleson and, Raquel Kennedy Bergen, the Source Book on Violence Against Women (2001) is composed of twenty four chapters, which are organised into four parts. The first part deals with the theoretical and methodological issues in researching violence against women. The micro oriented and macro oriented theories of discussing violence against women, definition of the term ‘violence against woman’ measurement strategies for women’s safety - these are some of the major issues discussed in the first part. The second part contains discussion on the different types of violence committed against women including sexual violence, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, disability pornography, intimate partner violence, and so on. This part points out that women are victims of violence almost every stage of their life course and violence against them crosses racial, socio-economic and ethnic boundaries. The third part of this source book discusses the prevention and direct intervention strategies, which could be taken to reduce violence against women. Thus this source book covers almost all the major aspects relating to violence against women and provides measures for preventing violence against women.

Notably, there is no evidence of work on this area at the doctoral level in my own discipline — i.e. the dramatic literature of contemporary India, despite the fact that a number of Indian playwrights have chosen to focus on the issue. Apart from
some side references to the representation of violence against women in contemporary Indian theatre, no comprehensive analysis of this area has been done so far.

Methodology

Given the nature of the issues that I seek to investigate, my work tends to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach, as I have collected information and data with the help of methodological tools from disciplines like Sociology, History, Political Science, Women's Studies, and Law. As my data is necessarily interdisciplinary, I have adapted my research tools adequately to suit my material in so far as they provide relevant information for my reading of the chosen literary texts of contemporary Indian drama. To establish the theoretical/conceptual bases of my argument, I have used the tools made available by existing frameworks of reading violence and gender. Given the nature of my subject, I have taken frequent recourse to feminist perspectives along with historical and sociological research methods to aid my reading, while trying to situate the same within the Indian context. While it is obvious that Feminism (both Eastern and Western) has necessarily looked at the manifestation of violence directed against women, corrective intervention/resistance has always been the focus of activist feminists. As I have chosen to look at the same forms of violence in terms of representation-in-performance, I have combined the perspectives of feminist thought along with critical theories that touch upon ideas of representation as manifested in dramatic literature. Consequently, I have used the ideas of performance theory developed by the theatre theorist like Richard Schechner, Patrice Pavis, Kier Elam, and Marvin Carlson; their works discuss the various aspects of theatrical performance, and also appropriate the tools of semiotics and phenomenology to analyse the dramatic texts and their performances. Accordingly, I have used semiotic and phenomenology in conjunction with feminist thought in my analyses of the plays.
My work has a feminist perspective in the sense that it deals with the "woman question" with chief emphasis on the different forms of gender specific violence that women have to undergo within the patriarchal set up of the society. So far the research perspective is concerned; it also tends to incorporate the critical social approach – one of the approaches prescribed for social research. The Critical social research takes into consideration the historical, social and political contexts that limit human thought and human action, especially those of women, working class and ethnic minority groups. My thesis would adopt this approach to deal specifically with the issue of gendered violence involving women. As the notion of violence is inextricably linked to the notion of power, I would also look at the concepts of power discussed by scholars like Michel Foucault, Robert Paul Wolff, and so on. Given that the literary texts cannot be completely isolated from the socio-political and historical contexts, a Marxist perspective would help to approach the text produced at different times in different social contexts. They are shaped by the dominant existing ideologies. Terry Eagleton aptly says that the literary works are not mysteriously inspired; they are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world and as such they are influenced by the dominant way of seeing the world which is the "social mentality" or ideology of an age. According to him, to understand literature means understanding the total social process of which it is a part (2002: 5-6). The literary texts not only reflect the dominant ideologies, but question those ideologies, and also bear witness to the emerging ideologies of time. The dramatic texts selected for analysis in this dissertation are seen to represent, question, and contest the oppressive gender norms that make women more vulnerable to different forms of violence, and also to represent the emerging ideology of resistance against such forms of violence.
Endnotes

1 *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are the two major epics produced in India during the ancient period. *Mahabharata* is a narrative in verse; said to have been composed by the sage Veda Vyasa. *Ramayana* is also a narrative in verse; it contains seven books dealing with seven different episodes. This epic narrative is said to have been composed by the sage Valmiki.

2 *Manusmriti*, also known as *Manusamhita* (Trans by Kiran Sarma. 2nd ed. Guwahati: Asom Veda Vidyalaya, 1998) is the treatise written by Manu, the Hindu law giver. The treatise contains twelve chapters. Each of the chapters contains codes concerning different aspects of human behaviour in society. These codes are commonly referred to as the laws of Manu. In chapter XI (p.304-357) of *Manusamhita*, there are prescriptions as to how a woman should maintain her conduct in society. As stated by Manu, women are created by God for the purpose of child bearing and they should always be kept under the control of men. For example, the verse three of the *Manusamhita* states that women should be guarded by her father in childhood, by the husband in youth, and by the son in old age. Women should not be allowed to read the holy texts. Her main duty is to look after the household; the husband can employ her in various activities like in cooking, cleaning, religious acts and so on in order to keep her busy inside the house. *Manusamhita* keeps no provision for women’s independence and also restricts their freedom of education.


4 In post feminism, the term gender is deconstructed to include other categories such as gays and lesbians apart from the binary categories of male and female.


6 The two performances of *Kanyadaan* are - *Kanyadaan* performed by National School of Drama and directed by Dinesh Thakur at Kamani Auditorium, Delhi on 23rd March 2004; and *Kanyadaan* directed by Bratya Basu and performed by Ballygunge Swapnasuchana at Rabindra Bhawan, Guwahati on 23rd Feb 2012. The first performance presents a serious portrayal of the plight of Jyoti while in the second performance unnecessary trivialisation was seen in the portrayal of the same character, which failed to do justice to the role of the Jyoti scripted by the playwright. The seriousness attributed to the role was lacking in the second performance, leading to an entirely different perception of the situation.
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