Chapter - 3

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF GENDER AND VIOLENCE
This chapter attempts to first provide an introduction to gender and then discuss the different theories of gender. However, these theories have been used only as a background material and have not been used to read Dattani’s plays. Dattani being an Indian playwright, operates in an Indian context. His plays have always had an Indian texture. Hence, gender discrimination is also very much Indian in texture in Dattani’s plays. The plays are discussed and are analyzed from the point of view of Indian scenario and context. This chapter also attempts to provide introduction to violence and different facets of violence. It also provides brief examples of gender and violence seen in certain playwrights in India.

a. Gender

The term ‘Gender’ comes from a Latin word-‘generate’ which means ‘to beget’ and the Latin stem of this word is ‘genes’ which means ‘race or kind’, an absolute English meaning is ‘to copulate’ while the Modern English Dictionary meaning is ‘Concept of Sex’, or ‘Sexual differences’. The concept of ‘Gender’ is developed by feminists to contest the naturalization of sexist culture that lays bare the hierarchy and antagonism inherent in it. Ruthven in Feminist Literary, An Introduction, claims that “Gender is a cultural meaning attached to sexual identity. The purpose of making this distinction is to free women from sexist stereotyping based on limiting conceptions of their nature” (pp. 4). Lacan rejects the notion of biologically rooted fixed essence for men and women. For him, both masculinity and femininity are linguistic concerns, and it is language that has erased the distinction between the terms ‘female’ and ‘feminine’, which has led to inferiorisation of women (Lemaire, Anika. Jacques Lacan, pp. 89).
Chapter 3  
A Theoretical Overview of Gender and Violence

The struggle over the term 'Gender' is crucial to feminist scholars, as it is the focal point of women's oppression, which not only denotes the sexual differences but also highlights the inequality between the two sexes. Further it determines the socially acceptable behavior for both men and women. Men and women are associated with a hierarchical value system that always privileges the male.

Gender is everywhere. When we dress a girl child in soft colours and frilly clothes, buy a male child a gun, when we admonish girls for behaving like boys, or tease boys for being timid 'like girls', we are 'doing' gender. That is, we are allocating to the male and female sexes specific and distinctive attributes and roles; likewise, we also impose different sets of expectations on them. More important, we seem to imply that these attributes and roles may not be easily exchanged. We do all of this without much thought and are not particularly self-conscious about thus ordering the world. In other words, it appears fairly commonsensical to us that boys and girls ought to be distinguished through physical markers such as clothes that they behave differently, are raised to different things. If questioned, we answer that this is natural, the way things are and have always been, that God or nature intended us to live thus.

BOYS Don't Cry' /'Girls Don't Get Dirty' / 'Girls Don't Climb Trees'

We encounter such ideas of male and female natures and capabilities, male and female roles and responsibilities-in one form or another everywhere, in our homes, at school, in the outside world, in books, television, religion. We are consistently told what is typical feminine behaviour, we are admonished if we do not behave thus. Boys are scolded if they do things boys are not supposed to do, such as cry, if they fall down and hurt themselves. Likewise, we are often reminded that our natures and destinies are crucially inter-linked. Little girls who display an adamant streak in their characters are often warned that they cannot
afford to behave like this when they marry and go away to their husbands' homes. Boys are encouraged to be brave and adventurous since, after all, they have to go out into the world and earn a living.

As we grow up, ideas of masculinity and femininity become central to the way we think about ourselves. Many of us actively reject interests which we recognize as untypical of our sex: girls do not really fight to play games, or engage in physically strenuous activity. Neither do boys appear eager to learn cooking or interest themselves in the details of housework and care of children. From their adolescent and post-adolescent years upwards, girls seek to look beautiful, appealing, and sometimes cultivate a deliberate passivity. Boys, in turn, court a macho ideal, swagger into an aggressive masculine identity with which they may or may not feel comfortable. Girls practice coyness, while boys express an unbridled sexuality.

As boys and girls emerge into adulthood, their futures appear more or less fixed, both in terms of their work roles and their emotional lives. Girls assume that they have to get married, raise children, cultivate patience and obedience, put the family interest over and above all else, learn to do with less of everything, accept that women have to sometimes sacrifice their wants for the good of the family. Boys are convinced that once they finish schooling or university, as the case might be, they have to find a job. They also tell themselves that they cannot afford to be light-hearted about life they have to be serious, learn to be responsible and dignified, bold and dynamic and not emotional or sentimental.

Clearly, our ideas of male and female natures derive less from empirical facts and observations and more from norms and expectations that govern our lives. Even those whose lives and actions run in direct contradiction to these norms accept the latter's salience. Thus a timid man believes he is less of a man while a bold woman imagines that she is less feminine than other women. In other
words, experience is often measured against the norm and found to be inadequate and wanting.

What are these norms and who sets them? Who defines social expectations? Why do we take them to heart, live them out?

Norms that set standards of typical and ideal male and female behaviour favour different roles and responsibilities for men and women. These norms usually have to do with patterns of work, modes of feeling and relating, style of clothing, systems of learning and communication and, most significantly, access to resources and power. Norms and expectations exist in almost all societies, to a greater or lesser degree. They are, however not unchanging. Nor are they consistent and uniform.

The point is that a norm is powerful and influential, not because everyone adheres to it but because it is made to seem universal.

Norms and expectations which define male and female natures and behaviour are essential components of and rest on social and economic systems. These systems in turn are informed and shaped by these norms and expectations. But social and economic systems are also influenced by other things, for instance, caste, religion, language. These in turn influence and shape norms of masculinity and femininity. The question arises: are norms and expectations regarding masculine and feminine roles and actions decisive in shaping caste, class, religion, sexual preferences, or do any or all of these determine norms of masculinity and femininity? This is a difficult but important question. It involves unpacking systems and the ideas which govern them and scrutinizing systems for the ideas they create.

Many thinkers, theorists and political leaders have thought long and hard on this question. This question, in fact, has been central to the thought and politics of
women's rights' activists and feminists all over the world. Several kinds of arguments have been advanced and argued and yet there is no easy consensus on the matter. One thing, however, appears settled. It is now recognized that by posing this important question about masculinity and femininity, a significant and necessary category of analysis has been formulated—**this is what we call gender**.

In its most commonplace sense, **gender is a grammatical commodity**. It exists in most languages and divides up objects into masculine, feminine and neuter. Usually there is no particular reason as to why certain objects are considered feminine or masculine or neuter. Besides each language does this differently. Gender in language is thus a matter of habit and convention—this is how things have been referred to and this is how they ought to be referred to. However, the term 'gender' has other meanings. It has come to be associated with biological sex. **Sex** is considered a fact, one is born with either male or female genitalia. **Gender** is considered a social construction—it grants meaning to the fact of sex.

Religious definitions and interpretations which claim at men and women have innate attributes that cannot be changed. These inhere in the very bodies of men and women; are, in fact, expressions of the sexual difference between them. That is, genital and physical differences between men and women imply that they possess different qualities. Often, such definitions are traced back to the sayings of a God or Gods, and justified by pointed references to religious texts and customs. Almost all such observations declare women's bodies to be inherently inferior and sinful, and fit to be controlled by men. Or alternatively they claim men's bodies and souls to be the measure of humanity. That is, man is the norm, the rule. Woman is a derivation, and as such is included in man. Men are granted the power to define, interpret, judge and represent the world on their own terms, while women are to be defined, interpreted, judged and represented by men.
Categorical thinking about men and women is common place and part of our everyday lives. Its effects are to be found in many things around us. Spaces are sharply divided into masculine and feminine: the space of home is identified with women, and the outside world is considered an exclusively male sphere. It does not matter that women too engage with the outside world, as workers, consumers, citizens; or that men are active in the family and home, as fathers, husbands, decision-makers. Women's identity rests on their roles as wives, mothers, as homemakers, whereas male identity is linked to productive work, public visibility and power.

This division of spaces reflects the division of work or labour. Women's work at home, whether for the family or at a task that fetches her money, is not considered work at all. It is instead seen as an extension of her duties as a wife and a mother. By definition, the household space cannot be a site for productive activity. The logic of feminine and masculine spaces works in other insidious ways as well. Most of women workers are the level of coolie, expert garments, electronic trades etc., face discrimination in the form of wages. Here low wages are the order of the day. It is assumed that women's work is supplementary to the family's income, for after all, her real duty is performed at home and anything else she does is gratuitous. Men's wages alone represent a living wage and their work is 'real' work; primary and necessary. But this discrimination is some what erased at the professional level like teaching, medicine etc.

A significant number of men, especially from the poorer and more deprived classes, are as subject to low, wages work as women and, like them, are often disallowed from protesting for better wages, but they are likely to be more mobile than women. They also are more likely to learn new skills or upgrade existing ones. More men than women work in the organized trades or the services sector, subject to wage revisions and where the learning and upgrading of skills are important.
Though a certain sort of feminism and environmentalism have utilized categorical thinking to the advantage of women, throughout history, this mode of thinking has worked to keep women away from male preserves: higher education, economically empowering jobs, political visibility and power, intellectual life, art. It has effectively confined women to the cramped spaces of the home, to low, paying jobs, denied their mobility, curtailed their desire to go about the world, meet new people, experience life in all its detail. On the other hand, men have derived a great deal of advantage from the simple and seemingly irrefutable logic of categorization. Being male is a condition that exudes power and confers privilege, even if not all men are powerful or endowed with resources to affirm their claims of masculine prowess. Masculinity is, of course, interpreted differently by different groups of men, and to very different purposes. Yet it is seldom dissociated from expressions, enactments and practices of power.

What grants masculinity power not only over women but also over other men as well? Historical explanations of masculinity and femininity are diverse. Yet they are informed by a crucial epistemological and political principle: masculinity and femininity are not aspects of biology or physiology. Neither are they god-given. Instead they are parts of systems of thought and action which human beings have constructed over centuries. This means that their meanings and significance are myriad, dependent on time and place, influenced by facts of both geography and history. A few theories of masculinity and femininity could be cited as instances.

b. Marxist Theory of Gender

This theory has several variants and emphases, but its fundamental hypothesis is clear and coherent; gender is not an isolated piece of reality, it has to be seen in relation to the social whole, to what Marxists refer to as totality. That is, ideas of masculinity and femininity are neither normative, as religious doctrine
would have us believe, nor do they exist as categorical imperatives. Male and female roles and functions are not just functional—they do not merely reflect social expectations. They exist as aspects of a social and economic system. In this sense, they reflect, express as well as influence social and economic realities: of economic power, social dominance and cultural authority.

Marxism as a system of thought emerged in the nineteenth century, when capitalism as an economic system was becoming dominant. Marxism set itself against the exploitative nature of capitalism, objecting to and challenging capitalism's exploitation of thousands of workers, whose labour was utilized to build huge profits.

Important argument of Marxism is this: human beings make their own lives and they do this through two interlinked material processes: production and reproduction. Production comprises all those tasks and activities performed by members of a society to secure their basic needs: food, shelter and clothing. Reproduction refers to the specific task of bringing children into this world and raising them to adjust to and accept the world they grow up in.

Production and reproduction are crucially linked because to be able to grow food, or build a house, one needs to survive. Survival needs an enabling context—where one eats, sleeps, is looked after when old or sick, where one finds companionship and love. The sphere of reproduction, the family, efficiently organizes daily living to this end and thereby enables production to go on. Marxism postulates that every society organizes production in specific ways. Thus the production of food, shelter and clothing in any society follows a certain pattern or mode, depending on what is being produced, how it is produced and who produces it. The mode of production is not static. It changes over time.

Modes of reproduction are both physiological and cultural: women give birth and thus literally produce children who go on to occupy their appointed roles
in the production process. A landlord's son inherits his father's lands, a
cwasherman's son inherits his father's profession. But women play another major
role in the mode of production. They sustain relationships, family unity, raise
children, and socialize them into accepting their roles in the production process.
They do this in many different ways. One of the most effective forms of
socialization happens through culture and religion. Often women are the bearers of
culture and faith, they actually take charge of most family rituals and observe
religious codes faithfully.

Marxism addresses the question of masculinity and femininity in the context
of a theoretical terrain defined by these various concepts, and utilizes them to
explain how women became subordinate to men.

In this connection Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx' comrade and fellow thinker,
writes at length on Gender. He suggests that early human societies were
egalitarian. There existed a simple and functional division of labour, 'a pure and
simple outgrowth of nature', between men and women. Men hunted, fished,
provided the raw material for food and made the tools necessary to carry out these
tasks. Women cared for the house, prepared food, clothing and looked after
children.

Each was master in his or her own field of activity: the men in the forest,
the women in the house. .. The household was communistic, comprising
several and often many families. Whatever was produced and used in
common was common property (Engles Fridrich, The Origin of the
Family, Private Property and the State. Moscow: Progress Publishers,
1948, pp. 47).

The woman was at the centre of the communistic household, for often she
alone knew who the father of her children were. Sexual relationships within the
household were freer than we know them now. Women could choose their men.
They, in fact, controlled the household, the men were mere visitors who could be
asked to leave when the women did not want them.
Things changed when human communities settled in one place for a long time. Earlier, human beings lead an essentially nomadic existence, wandering from place to place in search of food and water. Once they started living in a stable environment, they learnt to grow crops and began to raise animals. Now food ceased to be a day-to-day problem. They could not only meet their everyday food needs, but could also store and use surplus food. As human beings produced more food, learnt to make and use tools, and began to practice animal husbandry, they had a range of goods at their disposal. Once the production of these goods accelerated, the communistic nature of society changed. Fights between groups became common, as they fought over resources. Often the victors carried away the losers to work as slaves for them. This created what Engels called the 'first great division of society into two classes': masters and slaves, the exploiters and the exploited (Ibid, pp. 51).

Gradually as groups accumulated wealth, the relationship between men and women changed, for all the wealth was a result of production, essentially a male activity. Domestic work and the household, where women had wielded authority over men and the group in general, lost its significance.

*In the old communistic household, which embraced numerous couples and their children, the administration of the household entrusted to the women was just as much a public, a social necessary industry as the providing of food by the men.*

But when production became more valued than the household,

*The administration of the household lost its public character. It became a private service. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production (Ibid, pp. 53).*

**Household labour was devalued and women became domestic slaves**

Thus, the division of labour, once a 'pure and simple outgrowth of nature' ceased to be in favour of women. The growing significance of production created a new institution: private property. For men who produced more and more of
everything wished to keep all of it for themselves. Private property was not only land, animals or slaves, soon it came to include women as well. Men wanted to own women, so that they could gain control over the children, something which they needed to do, if they had to pass on their wealth to the next generation.

With a woman being deemed a single man's property, her control over her children also loosened. Earlier, children inherited through their mother, rather than their father, which is predominantly the case now. Inheriting through the mother was known as mother right. But when women lost their exalted status in the household, mother right too gradually disappeared. Over a period of time, children learnt to identify their descent and inheritance through the father. By this time, the woman and her household had ceased to be central to the group's life. Now, the man and his house and property assumed importance and men became valued group leaders. This is how patriarchy—the rule of the father—came into existence.

Engels characterizes the transformation of women into property and the disappearance of mother right as the 'world, historical defeat of the female sex' (Sacks, Karen, 'Engels Re-visted : Women, the Organization of Production and Private Property'. In women, culture and society, edited by M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphore, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 110-111). With women becoming the property of men, sexual love ceased to be free and of advantage to women. A woman was now bound to a single man and gradually, monogamous marriage became the norm. This meant that a woman had to be chaste and loyal to her husband, but he did not have to be likewise. Since he had economic power and sexual authority, he could choose to have several mistresses and wives. Engels argues that as communist households slowly dissolved under pressure from private property, their internal relationships also deteriorated. Spontaneous sex-love and promiscuity gave way to degrading and oppressive relationships. Therefore enough women welcomed sexual regulation and control, and when monogamy emerged, they actually felt it was an advance on whatever they had known earlier.
In Engels' view, the historic defeat of the female sex and the emergence of patriarchy led to a devaluing of female tasks, roles and responsibilities, and a consequent valorization of male roles and functions. This also led to sexual hypocrisy in marriage and a chauvinist sexual ethic in society. Men wanted wives and families, and at the same time claimed their right to hold sexual freedoms, in the form of extramarital relationships. Women on the other hand were enjoined to remain chaste and loyal to the idea of monogamy.

Though Engels does not write at length on the specific features of masculinity and femininity, he is clear that female lives, trapped within the realm of reproduction, were doomed to not being free. Engels suggests that for women to reclaim their humanity, they would have to necessarily enter the realm of social production.

*The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree (Ibid, pp. 120).*

Engels argues that modern industrial production which requires women's labour as well as men's would prove advantageous to them, since it would give them economic independence and, more important, force a re-organization of the household. In fact, it would generate a demand for the conversion of private domestic work into a public industry. Thus, the family would cease to be a 'private' institution and become truly social. Though Engels is scathingly critical of capitalism as a system of economic slavery, in which rich industrialists lived off the labour of workers, he understands the capitalist system as essentially contradictory. It thrives on exploitation but at the same time creates the social conditions in which this exploitation could be challenged. For women, capitalism is a moral horror since they have to work in terrible conditions and are forced to
neglect their homes. Yet work outside the home earns them an income, makes them socially productive. Besides, capitalism has created the means for large-scale social production—by which all work, including housework, could be organized on a public scale, which would benefit women. He brings together two struggles: the workers' struggle against capital and women's struggle against confinement within the devalued sphere of reproduction. Workers are enjoined to take collective possession of large-scale production in the interests of a common good and to secure justice for all, while women are asked to join workers in this struggle, so that they could re-organize production to accommodate mothering, child-care and nurture.

Engels's description of how society works and how male and female identities, roles and functions came to be defined are useful in several respects. Firstly, Engels demonstrates to us that the basis for male dominance is male economic power and sexual authority. Secondly, he shows us how the subjugation of women implies not only a devaluing of her as a person, but of her role in reproduction, that is, as mother and as one who creates the human and familial context for relationships. Thirdly, he suggests that male dominance and female subordination, and by implication masculine and feminine norms and ideals, are the products of history, and therefore subject to change through human effort. Fourthly, he outlines the general historical context when such changes may be effected in the context of industrial growth under capitalism.

Engels' theory of gender, of the evolution of male economic power and sexual privilege, offers a complex explanation of how women came to be enslaved. Some feminist thinkers, however, have found his premises problematic which is explained below.

One of the most coherent theories of masculinity and femininity has been outlined by Gerda-Lerner in The Creation of Patriarchy. Lerner works with
Engels's formulations, as well as with the insights provided by the theorists of patriarchy, but subjects them to an original interpretation and refiguring. Most important, she utilizes these refigured arguments to examine evidence from ancient societies. Based on this, she goes on to outline a theory of how women and men came to live under patriarchy.

Lemer's arguments are based on evidence from archaeology and ancient law and archaic art and sculpture from Sumeria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Assyria. She builds on the idea of women as objects of exchange and goes on to point out that this has to be understood, not as an appropriation and objectification of women but of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity. That is, though women were abducted, or given away in exchange for male labour, they were not always passive victims who submitted to their fates meekly. Though they were less free than men, women did utilize their positions of power or limited power to act, whether directly or covertly.

Lemer also distinguishes between different sorts of female powerlessness. She notes that the position of women was

expressed within degrees of un-freedom on a spectrum ranging from the slave woman, whose sexual and reproductive capacity was commodified as she herself was; to the slave-concubine (mistress) whose sexual performance might elevate her own status or that of her children; then to the 'free' wife whose sexual and reproductive services to one man of the upper classes entitled her to property and legal rights.

Gerda Lerner's account of the subordination of women and the institution of masculine control traces the creation of patriarchy through the following stages:

1. Men appropriated women's sexual and reproductive capacity through a complex process involving abduction and sexual slavery.

2. The exchange and abduction of women created the basis for the control of their offspring as well. The power of older men over women and children and their desire to safeguard their resources for future generations may have provided an important impetus to the coming of private property.

3. Later, as grain agriculture spread and kingdoms came to be established, law and legal strictures were invented to perpetuate the patriarchal family system.

4. As men learnt to exercise control over women, they extended their authority over other vulnerable groups: thus slavery emerged, in tandem with the growth of private property and the spread of large-scale grain cultivation.

5. While men's power was established and expressed through the control they wielded over the mode of production, women could only get what they desired through the sexual ties they had with men.

6. Women could not really transcend their limited situations because men and the patriarchal system systematically excluded them from education and access to different sorts of knowledge.

c. Freud and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis offers one of the most influential and thought-provoking arguments about the making of masculinity and femininity. Though these arguments refer to the making of individual identities, as individuals mature from infancy to adulthood, they possess a historical dimension since the constitution of individual men and women always happens within specific historical and social contexts.

Psychoanalysis is famously associated with the life and work of Sigmund Freud. Freud understands human consciousness as comprising several levels:
there exists a conscious level, to do with everyday behaviour, speech, thought and action. But this conscious level possesses an internal dynamism, that is, it responds not merely to outside 'stimuli, impressions and influences it receives from the world, but also to an internal logic. This Freud terms the logic of the Unconscious. The Unconscious is murky, inchoate and unpredictable-the seat of instincts and drives which human beings are barely aware of. As a human beings grows up, these instincts and drives are repressed, but not in a merely negative sense. Instead, they are channelled, regulated, disciplined and forced to observe certain norms and rules.

Freud's theory of human consciousness is central to his understanding of masculinity and femininity. As children grow up, they acquire a sense of themselves, others and the world around them in and through a dynamic process, involving the id, the ego and the superego. For Freud, one of the most important phases in a child's psychological growth—that period when the ego is stabilized—is the time when the child discovers that it is an entity in itself. This happens when the child can actually differentiate its body from that of its nursing mother. This stage is followed by the discovery that it needs to distinguish itself from its bodily functions—most children play with their own urine and shit until they are slapped away from either. Later on, this reprimanding extends to the child playing with its genitals—it is taught to observe 'shame'.

The series of reprimands, of do's and don'ts, inscribe themselves onto the Unconscious as a set of commands which go on to constitute the superego. The superego marshals the instinctual urge to play with shit and genitals in such a way that the child grows up with a sense of itself as separate, with distinctive boundaries. This is the beginning of ego-formation.

Something crucial happens at the stage when little girls realize that their bodies are different, when they find out that they do not have a penis. This is
extremely significant, according to Freud, for this urges them onto a different developmental path than boys. For girls, affected by a sense of lack, suffer 'penis envy', and this makes them dislike their mothers, for, after all, it is the mother's fault that daughters are like mothers—they do not have a penis. On the other hand, they long to be with and like their fathers. They want to possess the father's penis and when they realize they cannot, like mother, they want a child from him, as a sort of compensation.

Freud thus locates the beginning of masculinity and femininity in a psychic process which he insists is central to all human development. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, he provides a historical context for his theories of human development and repression. He now argues that the repressions which operate in a child's life, in the context of the family, assume a greater resonance at the community and social levels entire systems of action and thought are brought to bear on the repressed wish or desire. Taboos, restrictions, law codes, sexual norms, courtship and marriage systems—in short, the entire realm of culture and custom comes to structure repression. That is, the repressed wish is displaced onto another terrain: though it does not engage with its original object of desire, for instance, the mother in the case of the little boy, the wish looks to fulfill itself in and through the love of another woman. Likewise, other urges—raw, creative energies, that are usually compulsive and brutal—are sublimated in fabulous works of art. In this sense, repression becomes a state that creates alongside of what is repressed, an entire civilizational system. Or, repression and civilizational growth exist as two moments of the same process of instinctual control and regulation.

Freud observes that the process of repression is complex with respect to women: for in place of the forbidden desire of the girl for her father and the boy for his mother, society created a norm to channellize the desire: monogamous marriage, with an emphasis on female chastity and an enabling of male promiscuity. This norm existed in relation to other norms, such as sexual ones.
Since girls experience the absence of a penis as a lack, they are sexually doomed; they can only feel incomplete and passive. Boys, however, looking to overcome penis envy, learn to feel themselves powerful and feel empowered by sexual energy. This leads to greater levels of repression in women and render them prone to all sorts of neurosis.

At another level, the institution of marriage leads to a general disciplining of erotic energies; these are to be expressed in and through reproductive or genital sexuality. That is, sexual desire is deemed legitimate, only when it serves the purpose of intercourse. This obsession with genital sexuality leads to a fragmentation of sexual energy; men find compensation for this through a recourse to other sorts of creative activities, whereas women have to content themselves with mothering.

Freud's reading of human development is both particular and abstract—he bases his observations on case studies, but goes on to tease out arguments of a general nature from these. He is aware of the immense complexity of human nature and never meant his suggestive concepts to be more than measures that help one map a particular human situation or condition. In a historical sense, his theories offer us a way of looking at how norms of masculinity and femininity are embedded within individual psyches, even as the forces which define these norms are social. The superego is the voice of society, of institutions whose do's and don'ts the ego seizes on and internalizes. Little girls and boys become recognizable female and male persons, not merely in a psychic sense, but also in a social sense—the girl's desire for a child is also one that society approves of.

Freud's descriptions of the evolution of masculine and feminine identities elicited a major counter-response from his one-time associate and later rival, Carl Gustav Jung.
Jung views the individual's assumption of a gendered identity as a process that involves two equally valid categories; the male and the female selves are not cast in a dominant, subordinate position here. Instead, it is assumed that the one needs the other for resolving questions regarding one's individual self. The female principle, or character, is not viewed as a lack, a failed man, but as an essential component to the process of our growth into a healthy adulthood.

American feminists who were active and vocal from the 1960s and 1970s produced a rather provocative and powerful description of the making of masculinity and femininity. These theorists shifted the argument away from production and reproduction. They did not ask which of these spheres was more instrumental in securing male domination. Instead, they concentrated on the experience of sexuality.

Catherine MacKinnon, an American feminist thinker and lawyer, says

“As the organized expropriation of the work of some for the use of others defines the class, workers, the organized expropriation of the sexuality of some for the use of others defines the sex, woman. In my view, sexuality is to Feminism, what work is to Marxism... By saying that ... I mean that both sexuality and work focus on that which is most one's own, that which most makes one the being the theory addresses” (Mackinnon, Catherine, Feminism Reconsidered, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 132-133).

That is, female-ness and femininity are both the result of a process of forcible theft of woman's sexuality. Deprived of what is hers, she is forced into subordination.

The analogy that she establishes with Marxism, however does not work all the way. Workers rebel against capitalism, she argues, but women comply and buy into the system that makes them subordinate. They do so by into agreeing to be protected wives and grateful lovers. Worse, they accept their secondary status as their rightful due. In such a society, women learn to disvalue and deny their desire
to the point that they participate in their own self-destruction. 'Because sexuality arises in relations under male dominance, women are not meanings. The content of sexuality in fact demands and eroticizes the subordination of women. That is, women learn to experience their powerlessness and devaluation as pleasurable. For men, this powerlessness, on the one hand, and women's collusive acceptance of male sexual authority, on the other, prove enormously empowering and feeds into their sense of themselves as essentially and powerfully virile and dominant.

To overcome this utterly demeaning condition, women need to speak out, against the violence of men which passes off as love, against an eroticism which demeans them. MacKinnon's fervent plea in the cause of female anger and desire was simply this: 'I say, give women equal power in social life. Let what we say matter... Take your foot off our necks, then we will hear in what tongue women speak (Ibid, pp. 150).

Another American feminist Adrienne Rich writes on male sexual identity and culture as being indifferent to women, but brings a very different historical and theoretical edge to her arguments. She looks critically at heterosexuality-or the practice of men and women turning to each other for sexual pleasure and gratification-and suggests that it is neither natural nor inevitable. That is, men and women assume they have necessarily to cohabit and have sexual relationships, but this assumption needs to be interrogated. Firstly, sexual strictures with respect to women are so insistently laid down that they beg the questions: What are men afraid of? What do they imagine women would do, if their sexuality were not controlled? Secondly, male power over women-the exploitation of labour, the sexual use of women in marriage and prostitution, the limiting of women's mobility by keeping them tied to the house, the withholding of education and knowledge from them expresses itself best through strategies which keep women tied and available to men and men alone; which seek to convince women that marriage and a sexual preference for men are their inevitable lot.
Given this curtailing of women's sexuality and their bondage within heterosexual marriage relationships, is it not evident that men fear women would desert them for other women—not only for sexual love, but for every other sort of comradeship? Having posed these questions, Rich goes on to argue that precisely because it is neither natural and all too coercive, heterosexuality must be understood as a norm which imposes a certain kind of femininity on women, along with prescribing a valorous and powerful masculinity for men. This norm not only devalues women in several respects but also actively works to subsume her sexuality which, Rich suggests, may be at home in what she describes as a 'lesbian continuum'.

This continuum comprises a range of female intimacies, and not merely those of a genital, sexual kind. It includes the sharing of rich, inner lives, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and acceptance of female support and advice, the comradeship of work—the list is endless. A lesbian continuum offers a different experience of sexuality and the self, says Rich. It is not negative, neither man-hating nor choiceless (that is, women look to each other not out of despair but for deep emotional reasons). It is never recognized or accepted by women, but is most certainly there, feeding into our lives. Lesbian love is the most articulate expression of this inner life, and has to be understood as a protest against heterosexuality and all that it implies, both as a system and as a sexual practice.

To Rich, masculinity and femininity are both social ideals developed within the matrix of what she calls compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, Adrienne, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Identity, London: Only Women Press, 1987). As such they need to be subjected to acute criticism. Once this matrix is challenged, identities become unstable and are thus malleable and can be re-imagined.
These various descriptions and theories of sexuality and identity postulate a crucial and central role for the experience of sexual love—whether as violence, heterosexual passion or repressed homosexual love—in expressions of gender. They have been criticized precisely for this reason: firstly, that they suggest a narrow and singular definition of sexuality, and, more important, they use extremely limited and questionable evidence to illustrate their arguments. They extrapolate from literature and specific historical examples to elucidate and criticize contemporary social practices. These criticisms are individually valid—Catharine MacKinnon does appear insistent at times on a singular and undifferentiated conceptualization of sexual experience and sexual love. She does not account for the play of other factors, such as race or class in constructing female identity. Andrea Dworkin does extrapolate from literature, utilizing her reading of specific literary texts to advance huge claims about female and male sexual identities.

Yet these women, and others like them, writing from within a tradition of public action and advocacy, do illuminate for us that murky area of human experience where the body and ideology meet. This is where acts of violence against women are ultimately linked to cherished and closely held notions of the female body, female desire and female usefulness. These notions are present across the social spectrum. Experiences of other forms of powerlessness, such as those imposed by race or class, do modify the details and expressions of these notions.

One of the most sophisticated theories of gender to emerge in the Indian context was that advanced by E.V. Ramasamy Periyar (Periyar: Property, Caste and Gender), an anticaste radical and original thinker who lived and carried out his agitational propaganda in Tamil Nadu. Periyar argues that masculine and feminine norms are not given. There exist only a set of human norms—anger, pride, courage and so on—and as many women as men experience and express these emotions. Even maternal love is not a natural feeling. Periyar argues that except for nursing
the child, the infant could be looked after as well by its father as by its mother. Periyar submits accepted notions of femininity to a scathing critique—beauty, chastity and motherhood, he notes were convenient and elaborate fictions which not only convinced women that they were destined to be subordinate and subject to men, but also enabled them to delight in and welcome that subordination.

Likewise, he suggests that masculinity is merely an expression of brute male power. In this sense, it is the greatest obstacle to female freedom. Periyar is particularly critical of sexual standards which excuse, legitimize and even celebrate male promiscuity, while condemning women to either a life of limited monogamy or wretched widowhood. He undertakes an exhaustive critique of chastity and its converse, female promiscuity. Arguing that the chaste wife and the prostitute mirror each other, he suggests that the one connotes lifelong sexual slavery to one man, while the other sells herself to several men. In their case, femininity is condemned to servitude.

What was the basis of masculinity and femininity, both of which were obviously social constructs? Periyar locates the existence of these norms and attributes within a social and economic system which historically had come to favour the male and mandate a law of the father. This system also possessed the sanctity of religion. Thus, economics, masculinity and a spiritual priesthood together held it in place. Periyar's descriptions and critique of this interlocking social system appeared inspired by Engels's work, though he embeds his ideas within the recognizable context of caste Hindu society.

Periyar argues, following Engels, that after man had successfully established his rights to private property, he took woman as a wife into the household. This enabled him both to enlist her services to protect his property and supply him with progeny, and to lay exclusive sexual claims to her person. Chaste wifehood became a norm, and motherhood an ideal and virtue. Valorized for these
roles and destinies, women too learnt to value themselves thus, securing thereby their insubordination and an unequal social system, which allowed some to hoard wealth and forced others to work at producing this wealth.

Periyar notes, however, that there is a distinctive and significant dimension to motherhood in caste society: the desire to have children who would inherit one's name and wealth assumes a certain resonance, on account of the religious reasons that are habitually advanced to justify this desire for progeny:

*After it had become the norm for people to want children to safeguard property, brahmins who had invented fictions of heaven and hell to keep the poor from robbing the rich and to amass some of this wealth for themselves now argued... man must have a [male] child who would keep alive his name after death and perform his yearly obsequies (Viduthalai 11.10.48).*

Thus even as the real historical reasons for wanting children—to safeguard property—fades into the recesses of communal memory, the fictitious reasons invented by brahmins came to take hold of the Hindu male imagination. Motherhood came under increasing pressure for now it was deemed significant for the reproduction of an unequal social order in this world, as well as the next.

The inscription of female sexuality within the terms of private property and caste, argues Periyar, was reified by the institution of marriage. Here, Periyar links the servitude suffered by castes low in the social hierarchy and the subordination of women:

*Just as how Brahminism condemns a very large portion of the working population to shudrahood, so it has condemned women to the servitude of marriage... To the extent that a woman lives up to the norms of a chaste an ideal wife to that extent she accepts and revels in her slavery (Viduthalai 28.6.73).*

Marriage, observes Periyar, regulates and disciplines women's familial and reproductive labour, even as it actively denies their desires and rights to a self-respecting life of their choice. Of whatever caste or class, the bond of marriage, he argues, invariably—renders woman a property and slave of her husband.
Indian Women did not challenge patriarchal values and their position in the society remains subservient. Women are portrayed and treated as weak, shy, timid, insecure without a support and basically born to serve and satisfy male desires - objects of sex and pleasure. Fifty years after Independence women may be given some seats in the Parliament. 33% Reservation bill is on the anvil. In a male-dominated hegemony of patriarchal ideology the position of a woman is precarious. Down the ages women are compelled to live in a society which recognizes only men as primary existents and women as auxiliaries. Our society characterizes woman as ideally sympathetic, gentle, warm, passive and dependent. Domestic life and the work patterns evince the concept that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. The great philosophers who have immensely contributed to the existing values of life have paradoxically treated woman as an object to be used by man. Woman is “God’s second mistake”, said Nietzsche. To Aristotle, “Woman is an inferior to man.” He again says that “the female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities.” Schopenhaur says, “Woman is by nature meant to obey”. In Hamlet, Shakespeare refers it as, “Frailty thy name is woman”. Shakespeare stands up to every critical approach including the sociological one. He is not a feminist. Even then, he concedes the notion of hegemony in “The Taming of the Shrew where he makes Katherina councel her daughter: “thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign”. In Indian Vedic age Manu, the law giver of Hindu Dharma Shastra, clearly assigns woman a subordinate position to man:

*Day and night woman must be kept in subordination to the males of the family in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons... ...Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God* (English Translation, “The Laws of Manu” by Dongier, Wendy and Brain K. Smith, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 197-198).

In our society woman had no right to read the Vedas and so literacy became a rare quality in woman. The Digamabra Jains held the view that women can never
attain salvation except by being reborn as men (Image of Women in Sashi Deshpande’s Novel Roots and Shadows: A Critical Study, Ramesh Kumar Gupta, Poetcrit, Jan. 2000, pp. 41). All these definitions about woman’s conduct, behaviour and existence were given by men. Male gaze create role models, urge women to look this way and that. According to them, ideal feminine type is thin, elegant, works, hard to be beautiful, diets, exercises. Feminists argue that the ideal of beauty has to be viewed as a construction, a myth imposed on women. They claim that this myth serves a particular purpose in patriarchal society. For one, it divides women into the pleasing and plain. In a context where so-called plain looks are considered valueless and, worse, a disadvantage for women, all women aspire to re-make themselves. Those who cannot live up to the norm are afflicted with a sense of inadequacy, guilt and jealousy and most of all a corrosive anxiety that they would meet with male disapproval and indifference. In this connection Eve Ensler Playwright and Actor says “I am more amazed and amused at the way women look at their body. I have seen many radical feminists, who are still captives of their own bodies. They are still bothered about whether they are skinny or obese, worried about their hair texture and skin colour. They have not been able to come out of the idealized image of how women should look like, which is itself a creation of the patriarchal system”, she says. “True liberation will be achieved only when women, irrespective of their physical attributes, can take pride in their body” (Deccan Herald. 2, March 2002). One of the fundamental and rudimental concerns of feminism is to expose that a woman is a being. She is not an accompaniment of man. A woman is not the ‘other’; she is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and defect, finding her own way to liberation.

Gender oppression in India takes on different dimensions. In comparison to ‘developed’ countries, the problems of women in India have had a different history. The system of Sati, though thought to be ancient, is still a burning issue.
So also are female infanticide, dowry etc. Child marriages thought to be eradicated, is still in vogue. The plight of widows is still critical and pathetic. The possibility of widow marriage is very low. This indicates a very bad plight of widows. They are even treated as untouchables in orthodox families ["Husband should marry again, in order to be able to continue to perform religious rites for which a wife’s presence was essential. A widow, however, should never think of remarriage, because she should aspire for mukti (salvation) rather than swarga-- (Manusmiriti:5.167 - 8,6.65)].

Women were refused from the right to enter the 'masculine' public domain. So there is a long tradition of questioning the social position of women.

In India women have long been subjected to oppression, given that traditionally they were regarded as inferior to men physically and intellectually. Their subjection was sanctified by law, theology and culture ["Day and Night women must be kept in dependence by the Males of their families, Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age, a woman is never fit for independence" (Manusmiriti:9.2-3)]. Women could not own property, engage in business, or control the disposal of their children or even of their own persons ["Women are nirindriyah or devoid of valour and are therefore useless or incompetent to inherit" (Baudhayana ii.3,46)]. Indian society is crystallized in a matrix of patriarchy wherein the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate but a cultural construct. In the cultural context, the complexity of the patriarchal set up in India arises out of society’s dual attitude towards women. She is respected as mother and oppressed as daughter and wife. The pattern of socialization ensures the continuing dominance of male values over female ones. The emphasis on the strength of men and the corresponding emphasis on timidity, fragility, and submission for women clearly indicate that violence in any form whether physical, verbal or attitudinal becomes the distinguishing and distinct character of a male in a patriarchal set up.
Practice of gender inequality greatly influence the socialization process of women in India. Most households, even today, prefer male children to female, because ‘they will carry on the family name’ ["daughter is a source of misery and a son alone can be the saviour of the family" (Athraveda, VI, II,3)]. Thus the ever increasing numbers of female infanticide and female foeticide every year. The sex ratio which has always been unfavourable to girls has been deteriorating since Independence. Since 1991, the population of female children has been less than that of male children at all ages below fourteen. Girls also have a lower rate of immunization and receive less physical nurturing than their brothers. All this is justified with facile excuses such as ‘girls need less food than boys because boys work harder’ or ‘girls need not be educated because they will get married soon and leave their homes’.

Often in Indian society, excessive value is attached to traditional roles and responsibilities. A woman’s choice are made for her because it is assumed that she cannot make her own. She is taught from a very young age appropriateness and inappropriateness of her behaviour- she should not talk loudly, she should sit with her legs crossed or her knees together, she should spend less time studying and more time doing house hold work, she should not question the decisions taken by her father or her brother about how she should live her life etc.

With rapid progress taking place in other parts of the world, the plight of the Indian woman is still a matter of concern. Perhaps, it is essential to demarcate the boundaries between, the urban educated woman and the rural illiterate ones. In the urban area the educational qualification and social status of woman is so high that the possibilities of finding a “suitable” husband in the eligible groups are limited, because there is a general assumption that woman should not be more educated and have a higher income than man. The alternative of remaining unmarried is not accepted in the relevant communities and will provoke negative sanctions. An independent unmarried woman is considered as an “immoral”
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woman who lowers the status of her family. She impairs, for example, the marriage prospects of her sisters and brothers. In urban areas men may come late from work and may take time away from family responsibility, but women are not allowed to do the same. There is a belief that working women are bad mothers and inefficient housewives. Many orthodox Indians accuse them of lacking morality. Even her husband misunderstands and thinks that she is of loose moral character, when she mixes with her male colleagues. From home to work place and vice-versa, she is being frequently harassed by the eve-teasers, co-workers, superior authority etc. The urban educated women carry a double burden of work, at home and work outside, they often face role conflict and stressful situations. She is expected to contribute to the maintenance of the family but at the same time she is also expected to fulfill all family duties. In addition, they may face sexual harassment and the hostility of male colleagues (juniors / seniors) at work. They also face problems like general travel, resentment from men, conservative opinion of management and the managing of both a job and a home. When women overcome these obstacles, break the glass ceiling and reach top positions, they are branded as aggressive, masculine and neglectful of their families.

The other group is the rural illiterate folk where a majority of rural women work in the fields or with contractors on the roads and brick kilns to earn their livelihood. No minimum wages have been prescribed for the workers and the principles of equal wages for equal work for male and female is hardly implemented. Beside this they also look after House keeping—which includes several tasks such as fetching water from the village well/pond, collection of firewood, cleaning, washing, cooking, Animal husbandry etc.. The high incidence of illiteracy among rural women constitutes one of the greatest barriers to their development. It limits their scope of employment, training, utilization of health facilities and exercise of their legal and constitutional rights. Rarely a village woman would muster courage to challenge the deviant habits, such as
drinking, gambling, and extra-marital relations, wife beating etc., by her husband. Women are made to bear all these sufferings without challenging the supremacy of their men folk. If this in brief is the plight of the majority (read Hindu) women in India, then the case of minority is even deplorable.

d. The Minority of the minorities: Islam and Christianity

The 'Purdah' system in Islam makes attainment of education for Muslim women a difficult goal to be achieved, and it has also restricted the Muslim women to make significant economic contributions, either towards her own independence or towards the economic visibility of the family. As a result the Muslim community suffers more from economic deprivations. The 'Purdah' bound mother is also a poor educator of her children and generally fails to motivate them towards higher levels of educational aspirations and achievements. This failure also prevents the upward mobility of the family. Muslim women after marriage are not allowed to move out without escort, as a result they cannot continue their education after marriage. So when compared to their Hindu counterparts the number of employed Muslim women is smaller. Muslim law is discriminatory against women in matters of polygamy, divorce and a share in ancestral property. According to law a male can have as many as four wives and women cannot raise a voice because of social religious sanction. A Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman but a woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man. The much awaited model 'nikahnama' of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), which was expected to give muslim women more rights in marriage and protect them from the unfair practice of triple 'talaq' ('divorce' said three times in one setting), has turned out to be a disappointment. It was released in Bhopal on May 1, 2005 at the 18th general council meeting of the AIMPLB. The AIMPLB is a body of 400 members representing almost every sect of Islam in India. The model 'nikahnama' is supposed to be a sort of standard marriage contract for the Muslim community. Since most nikahnamas prepared by local
qazis or elders gave women a raw deal in cases where the marriage was called off, reformists and women’s groups put pressure on the AIMPLB to design a uniform code for marriages in the community and more important abolish the practice of triple talaq. The issue was debated for almost a decade and the AIMPLB assured repeatedly that a model nikahnama would be passed. So, when its executive committee promised in December 2004 that it would be reform the existing system, Muslim women across the country hoped that finally justice would come their way. Unfortunately, not only is the model, nikahnama completely inadequate, but it has proved that AIMPLB does not have the courage to take a radically progressive set up in favour of women in Islam. Outraged at the AIMPLB’s lack of sensitivity and willingness for reform, women’s organizations across the country have announced that they will not accept the model nikahnama and will formulate a new one. ‘The All India Women’s Muslim Personal Law Board’ has rejected the model nikahnama in total. In Mumbai, several women’s groups issued a joint statement criticizing the nikahnama. The statement said: “The Nikahnama released by the AIMPLB is one more proof of their misogyny and confirms the fact that they exists in a time wrap with no notions of gender justice or women’s equality” (Frontline, June 3, 2005). The organization took objection to the following guidelines – that a wife should be “Obedient” to her husband, that she required her husband’s permission to step out of her marital home, that she should safeguard her “honour” and “respectability” when the “need” arises, and that she should be “allowed” to visit her parents and relatives. According to most observes, the largest number of bigamous marriages are found among Indian Muslims or the cases in which the husband abandons his first wife and goes off to marry another woman. Most of the people do not divorce their wives who are legally bound to them thus they avoid paying the dower or Mehar (Mehar - a certain sum of money paid by the bridegroom to the bride immediately after marriage) to the abandoned wife, and the wife is forced to adjust with another wife. Because of economic compulsions she is not able to leave the husband’s
Due to all these reasons, women do not have the backing of either law, religion or society and tend to be ‘handicapped’ to the extent of not being able to fight back.

The Muslim law gives unlimited rights of divorce to the Muslim husband and the Quran enjoins the husband to retain his wife with kindness or separated with kindness. But in practice the power is enjoyed by the husband. Considerably Muslim men possess the arbitrary power of divorce. They can divorce their wives at any time, without giving any reason, simply by repeating the word ‘Talaq’ thrice. But if the wife wants divorce she can ask for it only on the grounds of impotency of husband and cruelty. So the Muslim law is not in favour of women. Early marriage is also very common among the Muslims. It creates problems in acquiring education for women. Due to marriage at a tender age, parents cannot think of imparting education to their girls and also early marriage is detrimental to the health of girls, one due to frequent child birth and oppressing women from outside movement—thereby further restricting their freedom of choice, action etc.

In Christianity things are not much different either, the Holy Bible lays down double standard for male and female. They are:

"Wives submit yourself into your own husbands as unto the Lord".
"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church and he is the saviour of the body"
"Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:21-33, Colossians 3:18-19)

After Adam and Eve, the first woman, sinned against God. God told the women:

"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conceptions in pain your shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis - 3:16)

Male-female power struggle began from here.
St. Pauline teaches that “women is the glory of man and that women are not allowed to speak in church, the married woman stands at the bottom of the hierarchy at the top of which is God. Christ and husband mediate in between, so that the woman seems further removed from Christ and from God than her husband” (1 Corinthians : 11 : 3-15). So “women are not allowed to speak in church” was taken as the scriptual justification of women’s subjugation to man and the exclusion of women from liturgical activity in Christian churches.

In Christianity the wife cannot apply for divorce on the ground of adultery by the husband while the husband is allowed to do so. In her case the husband’s adultery must be coupled with other factors. This provision provides double standards of morality for man/woman. The Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872, which is more than a century old, remains operative even today. The charged atmosphere after the Government of Indian Act of 1935 did not bring forth initiatives to reform Christian personal law.

So it is well established that women in many countries and even in India experience the ‘apartheid’ of gender from the time they are born. Their fundamental rights to education, equality in access to opportunities and, often, survival are restricted or even denied, and they are considered easy prey to physical and emotional exploitation.

e. Gender Representation in Theatre

Representation of gender issues in Post-Independence modern Indian theatre presents an interesting field of inquiry. In fact, the gender awareness and representation of gendered subjectivities is what emerges as a common thread that binds most of modern playwrights together. The major playwrights who are considered to be the founders of modern Indian theatre, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani etc., seem to be preoccupied with this problem. Whether the play is located in the modern middle class background (as in Tendulkar’s Silence! The court is in session), or whether
it appropriates the folk form and themes (in Girish Karnad’s Nagamandala), or whether it deals with the issue of the modern nuclear family (as in Mohan Rakesh’s Half-way House) or Mahesh Dattani’s ‘Tara’ and ‘Bravely fought the queen’, the gender perception in these plays is dark. Notions of family and the place of men and women in it, the typical roles defined by tradition for male and female members, values associated with them, concepts of morality and sexuality—all these represent interesting contradictions as far as women are concerned.

In the Post-Independent period society had undergone tremendous changes. The new nation state had proclaimed its commitment to a progressive social change and economic prosperity. Gender was one of the major components of this progressive social change. There was, in a sense, a conscious attempt to reconstruct traditional identities and roles. Society had been going through the process of industrialization and urbanization for a century. The values of liberty and equality of the individual were promised by the constitution. The Indian Freedom Movement had seen millions of women coming out of their houses in to join the political struggle and many of them had to go out and earn not only their own livelihood but also had to shoulder the responsibilities of their families. The traditional joint family was becoming extinct, and was being replaced by the nuclear family. Career was not the prerogative of men alone; women were jumping into the fray. The social system was becoming grimmer and harsher. The traditional value system had given an unquestioned superiority to the male over the female. Women did not deserve freedom and liberty, Manu had said. Coming down to modern times, even the Nationalist ideology was masculinist, for example “Gandhi’s ‘non-violence’ with reference to passive resistance is considered as effeminate”.1 At the same time, however, the new social developments made it obligatory for patriarchy to relocate its ideology of ‘protection’, notions of morality, and ‘benevolent control’.


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So most of the Modern plays highlight the gender stereotyping which is forced upon women. The roles allotted to women in the patriarchal setup are purely domestic-daughter, wife and mother. From birth the girl-child is subjected to the negative reinforcement of her vulnerability to rape and assault. As a girl she is under the protection of her Father / brother; after marriage her husband is her lord and master and in old age her son becomes her protector. As part of the gendered difference that is emphasized from childhood the girl is taught to believe in the importance of ‘family values’ - values which are presumed to be her responsibility and not the male’s. From childhood the girl child is made to feel that her life and destiny revolves around the biological cycles of puberty-menstruation-child-birth-menopause. A girl / woman is expected to be meek, submissive, patient; she should subordinate her will and desires to those of the male unselfishly. Such sustained sociological conditioning inhibits and restricts the full development of a woman’s personality.

The modern playwrights, in their own ways, tried to map the concerns of gender onto the terrain they were exploring through their plays. It is interesting to examine how they seek to sort out the problems of tradition and modernity in their perception of gender issues. Though, contentious, it is nevertheless one of the first attempts at discussing the place of gender in society. Instances of a few plays could be used to substantiate this point.

To begin with, Mohan Rakesh’s ‘Half-way House’ (1971), represented one of the first major attempts to hold a mirror to the gender issues confronting the society and provide a critique of the power relations as they emerged in the modern society within the institution of family.

The family in the play is a bourgeois nuclear family with a working wife and her non-working husband, sitting at home doing nothing worthwhile. There are three children, two grown up, one young. The elder girl elopes with their
paying guest and gets married to him, and the young boy in his early twenties is a Rowdy (loafer), a dropout from college. The youngest girl is a 'brat', an unruly specimen, who flies into uncontrollable fits of temper and throws tantrums at the slightest pretext. There is no agency to 'control' the children.

In the first act, the working wife of the family begins as the 'harassed woman'. She has to work in the public domain and when she returns home, the house pounces on her, dirty, disarranged, chaotic, screaming at her for attention. She is not only the agency of restoring order to the outwards chaos, she is the shoulder on which the edifice of the family rests. The first act shows the woman in complete contradiction to her traditional roles. The status and values associated with the 'given' notions of family do not work here because the man seems to have pushed the woman beyond the threshold into the world outside. Her husband is responsible for her rottenness. And as a result of this, the woman at the end of first act, decides to quit it all. She has finally decided to leave the house. She runs after several men but fails to establish a relation with any one of them. She feels greatly frustrated and takes it on her children. All this makes their house a veritable hell.

The Second act projects women in the traditional perception as morally weak, full of sexuality and desire and who therefore needs an external agency to control her sexuality. So 'Half-way House' looks at the impossibility of woman's gratification of her sexual desires and consumeristic ambitions, forbidden by the traditional structures of society. Sexuality, consumeristic ambitions, double responsibility are all explored here.

Karnad's 'Naga-Mandala' questions the gender-biased justice which favours men. The problem of sexuality and fulfillment is represented by Rani who is married to Appanna who refuses to treat her better than a door mat. His affections are engaged elsewhere and poor Rani is locked in the house. She is
Confined to the kitchen. She is deprived of the affection of fellow-human beings and knowledge of the outer world. Kurudavva, the friend of Appanna’s mother, learns about Rani’s suffering and gives her an aphrodisiac root. Rani follows her instruction and mixes the paste of the root in the curry to be served to her husband. Then, the curry explodes and boils over, giving away coils of pink steam. She is afraid that it may harm her husband so she throws it on the anthill. Naga, a king Cobra, living in the ant hill, consumes the curry and immediately falls in love with Rani. He assumes the form of Appanna and daily visits Rani at night. Naga’s night visits awaken Rani’s womanhood and arouse her desire, so far forbidden.

The power relations between the husband and wife and between Naga and Rani are in a sense quite identical. Rani is not supposed to ask any questions about the treatment that is being meted out to her. She says, ‘Scowls in the day, embraces at night’. Rani’s rebellion against Patriarchal norms of her society forces her to face the snake ordeal, because her chastity is suspected and charges of adultery are leveled against her. Finally she succeeds in it, but ironically at the same time Appanna is not questioned.

So Naga-Mandala questions and exposes gender-biased values and morals of patriarchy which have oppressed woman for ages. Appanna enjoys extra-marital sex openly and unashamedly whereas Rani sleeps with Naga who assumes the form of Appanna. Everybody knows Appanna’s relation with his concubine, yet the village Elders ask only Rani to prove her chastity. Thus, the play uncovers the injustice of the patriarchal moral code which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband but not the faithfulness of a man to his wife. Marulasiddappa in Drama’s turning point express an opinion similar to that of Karnad: “The irony of the term ‘fidelity’ comes through in this sequence of events; Appanna and Naganna-two faces of one man, one seen at day, the other at night-symbolize the exploitation and double standards of man, while Rani is the
symbol of a woman’s eternal endurance of this oppression” (Drama’s turning point, Trans. Chaitanya, spectrum, 11th June 1994, pp. 4).

Tendulkar’s *Silence! The court is in session* also challenges patriarchal value system. Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The court is in session* presents the same situation as that of Naga-Mandala. Leela Benare is a member of a drama troupe of amateur artists. During her teens, she is seduced and sexually exploited by her own uncle. He does not marry her and her mother supports him. Benare overcomes the shock and completes her education. She becomes a teacher and earns good reputation as a teacher. Her academic interest takes her to Prof. Damle who she respects for his scholarship and intelligence. Though married, he exploits her sexually and betrays her. She requests Balu Rodke and Ponkshe to marry her and save her from ignominy. But they are neither compassionate nor courageous to help her. Benare ridicules their diffidence. She is frank and open. She exposes the hypocrisy of people and laughs at their flaws. The other actors of the troupe are victims of her ridicule. So they plan to take it out on her. In the name of a mock-trail, they expose her private life, humiliate her and hurt her heart. They do not find fault with Prof. Damale, the real culprit who has spoilt her life. Concluding the trail, Sukatme who is the counsel for prosecution in the mock-trail says to Kashikar, the judge:

*Milord, infanticide is dreadful act*-----------------------------

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-----------------------------------------------woman bears the grave responsibility of building up the high values of society. ‘Na Stri Swatantrya marhati’ ‘No woman is fit for independence’-----That is the rule laid down for us by tradition. (114-15)

The judge also supports it by giving his verdict:

*Prisoner Miss Benare, pay the closet attention. The crimes you have committed are most terrible.*
There is no forgiveness for them. Your sin must expiated —

Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live, But the child in your womb shall be destroyed.

That is what our patriarchal culture makes us think. Like Appanna of Naga-Mandal, Prof. Damle is not punished for his sexual crime. Though men commit worst sexual crimes, people still say that women spoil the society. Men are tactically permitted to seek extra-marital sexual pleasure while women’s sexuality is limited.

Patriarchy is the system that traces familial descent and economic inheritance down the male line. In a Joint family the senior-most male is the head, patriarch, while in the nuclear families of today it is the father. Of course with the advent of feminism and a more ‘liberated’ mindset an open advocacy of the system is no longer considered fashionable particularly among the intellectual elite. Nevertheless it is wishful thinking to assume that a system that effectively stifled the female voice for centuries and had the dubious credit having women themselves endorsing and ensuring its survival can be erased by a few social activities and militant feminists.

Tendulkar and Dattani see women primarily as exploited and marginalized subjects. It is at this juncture that the place of Dattani as a playwright in the modern Indian play writing seen becomes significant.

The plays of Mahesh Dattani attempts to explore how women have been shaped, conditioned and marginalized by patriarchal set up.

In Dattani’s ‘Bravely Fought the Queen’, the women question is presented in great detail. The play highlights the issues of domestic violence, deceit, longing and fantasy. The play is set in one of twin houses on an executive estate, where
sisters Dolly and Alka await the return of their husbands from the struggling Advertising agency which they run. The cast of characters is closely knit: husbands Jiten and Nitin are also brothers; their bedridden and demented mother ‘Baa’ is upstairs in the house. All the three women in the play suffer, each in her own way. Old Baa’s husband has abandoned her in favour of another woman. She now lies bed-ridden and aged, and no one responds to her call when she rings the bell to summon someone for help. The irony is, it is in her house that her sons and their families are living. Dolly, Baa’s elder daughter-in-law, is a pale, meek creature. She is beaten up by her brutal husband, when she is in an advanced stage of pregnancy, so that her daughter is born deformed. Alka, the other daughter-in-law, has her own cross to bear: her husband is a homosexual. So all the three women in the play are passive, helpless victims of male tyranny. The play also shows that, if a women commits adultery the society questions her chastity, the same society does not bother about men, if he commits adultery.

Dattani’s another play ‘Tara’ explores the prejudices society has for girl child. In ‘Tara’, Dattani portrays woman as victim. Tara and her brother are Siamese twins at birth. When a major operation to separate them is planned, it is discovered that pair has three legs between them, and medical opinion is that third leg would survive better on the girls, so that she could be normal, but the boy would have to make do with an artificial leg. But pressure is brought on the Surgeon to give the boy two legs, though he warns that the boy’s body might reject the leg. The surgeon is silenced by a bribe, but his worst fears comes true, and the boy become a cripple, while Tara is already one. What hurts Tara most is the fact that preference was given to the boy simply because he belonged to the dominant sex, and consequently the opportunity to become a normal human being was denied to her only because she was female. The injustice is perpetuated by the victims own mother whose preference is to the male child, make the play more powerful.
Dina Mehta’s *Brides are not for Burning* (1993), which won a BBC prize for radio drama in 1979, was only published in India fourteen years later after several stage performances and thus confirms the publication problems in India for drama both by woman and by writers in languages other than English, Hindi and perhaps Bengali. The issue it deals with is of central concern to the women’s movement, to humanitarian politics in general and to theatre in its relationship with society. The play, although somewhat wordy and over sensational (it crams dowry-death, sexual politics, anarchist violence and Marxist critique in two acts) is well-crafted and neither outrageously implausible in its context nor insignificant in its time: it is dedicated to all the angry young women, who can be what they choose to be. So like this, many modern Indian playwrights highlighted gender issues.

f. Violence

This section attempts to look at the various types of violence, existing in society. It also classifies and explains dividing it into subheadings like:

a. Violence against/on women
b. Child sexual abuse
c. Violence against sexual minorities
d. Communal violence

Violence is a general term to describe behaviour, usually deliberate, that causes or intends to cause injury to people. So violence can be defined as that which harms, debases, dehumanizes or brutalizes human beings, animals or the natural world; and the violent person, as one who causes harm in speech or action, either directly or indirectly or whose mind is filled with such thoughts. Violence, probably the most familiar word in human life has become a part of every individual’s life these days. Despite of man’s progress in improving his material conditions he has failed to free himself from barbarism of the heart. So it is very hard to define violence, since it is not restricted to a particular area, person, caste,
creed, colour, class and gender and to particular causes. Violence is a fact of life in present day society. So it can be defined as the use of physical force to injure somebody or damage something or the illegal use of unjustified force.

The concise oxford Dictionary defines violence as unlawful exercise of physical force. Violence is often associated with aggressive behaviour, that may be physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Physical abuse involves pushing, shoving, shaking, punching, kicking, burning or any other forms of physical assault on a person(s). Emotional abuse involves, verbal attacks, threats, taunts, slagging, mocking, yelling, exclusion, and malicious rumours. Sexual abuse involves sexual assault or rape.

There are many more cruel forms of violence, more humiliating and destructive of human dignity than a physical assault. When a physical threat does not work, man employs other forms of violence. Social, economic and mental violence are types of such violence. Any hurt, material loss or mental anguish or an act which degrades human beings, which curbs human rights, dignity should be considered violence.

There can be numerous causes for the occurrence of violence. One of these is biological. The human mind is a complex one. Mind and brain are intertwined, the brain cannot exist without the mind and the mind revolves round the brain. Man is not a complete or perfect specimen of nature. There remains some disequilibrium throughout life marked by contradictions and complications. Throughout his life he goes on searching for the fulfillment of goals and when he fails he becomes violent and destructive. Anger and aggression are inextricably, biologically linked. Anger is an emotion and its expression takes place in the form of aggression inward or external. A person automatically reacts and attacks when there is a threat or danger to his life and/or liberty because it is rooted in his neurophysiological organization. Language plays a vital role in triggering
violence, because to communicate an emotion to others and influence others to respond, language is used. As human thinking differs from one person to another sometimes there arises violence, because each member or a group of members have different roles, goals, values, status and aspirations. Sometimes they involve in conflicts as one group or a member of the group tries to impose his point of view on the others. There comes a disagreement which we call a conflict, it leads to frustration and gradually it is transformed into aggression leading to unnecessary violence.

Social aspects can also be the cause of violence. Man is a social animal and he has to live in society. In order to have a better and peaceful life he should also contribute to society. But man being selfish exhibits streaks of cruelty. In many ways and for many reason he tries to destroy harmonious relationships in society.

He always expects to triumph and strives for recognition and feeling of superiority. All these lead to violence. Lack of understanding, forgetting one’s obligation to the others, self-consciousness, ridiculing, judging, condemning others all lead to destructive acts. Violence is found in every field. Though it is difficult to trace the origin of violence, we could say that it begins at the early stage of human life. All types of violence probably occur more frequently in the family than in any other setting or institution. The family is the prime place of the battle of sexes and the generation gap. Physical violence is so much more frequent in the family than in the other groups. There are many more reasons for violence in a family and cultural norms are the most significant among them. Our social norms have granted a common right to husband, father or the head of the family to correct other members of the family. In this process of ‘correction’ are also included wife-beating, harassment or women.

Today people are more interested in snatching away because the belief now is that one has to fight for his survival and in spite of his struggle if he is denied
his rights, he should snatch it, no matter what means he used for his achievement. Hence, violence has become a widespread phenomenon in India. It is evident that violence is often injustice done to the weaker section of the society. Unfortunately women, children, sexual minorities, religious minorities are among the weaker sections. Injustice is done to them by exploiting them in numerous ways.

Psychology looks upon violence in terms of construct of aggression and many theories explaining aggregation a human behaviour. Their claim is that aggression ensues when some internal compulsions and needs are not met or they are frustrated by reality. Some psychological explanations claim that the individuals who suffer from anxieties, low self esteem, low impulse control and lack psychological security exhibit aggression. Ethological theories of violence are elucidations of aggression in terms of the ‘warrior instinct’ of the original homosapiens, struggling for survival in the food gathering and hunting societies. Ethological theories are Darwinian and explain aggression as being adaptative for primitive minds living in savage environments. ‘Dominance’, for these theories is an ethological construct where some individuals of groups take on leadership roles for group survival.

A narrow concept of violence may suggest an act of illegal, criminal use of physical force, but it is also includes exploitation, discrimination, upholding of an unequal economic and social structure, the creation of an atmosphere of terror, a situation of threat, reprisal and other forms of political violence.

g. Violence on / against Women

While these concepts of violence are interrelated, the specificity of violence related to the situation of women demands a closer and critical look of the aspects of structural violence i.e., acts of violence that are exercised on the part of the family and society.
Women globally and Indian women, live in a social environmental where violence is an immediate reality, overriding socio-demographic differences of cultural background, class, education, occupation, etc. Feminist definitions of violence use ‘power’ and ‘domination’ as the operative constructs to explain male violence against women. Within the scope of this definition, violence is criminal behaviour, perpetrating fear, misery, injury, sickness and possibly death in the victims. Usually women grow up in a climate of fear and violence.

The feminist view of violence proposes that violence against women is perpetrated by intentional agents in situations of control to manipulate and obtain specific, often but not always sexual, goals by the use of actual or implied threats to well being or even survival of those in less endowed situations. Within feminist concerns, the intentional agents are usually male and the victims, usually female.

It is an everyday fact of life that a huge percentage of women all over the world are victims of domestic violence. Wife-beating knows no class, race or religious distinctions. Woman battering is not just a aberration in the behaviour of a number of disturbed men; it is a violent manifestation of male domination over women and the patriarchal attitude that sees women, especially wives, as the property of men. Technology has greatly enhanced the capacity to cause injury to another human being. Here one remembers the recent ‘tandoor’ case of homicide, where a housewife was decapitated and roasted in the traditional tandoor of a hotel by her husband (India Today. 23, September 2005). The Indian colours of violence are somewhat different in the types of violence perpetrated against women. In the west, violence against women is usually perpetrated by men, especially in domestic contexts, where violence is the highest. In the Indian context however, domestic violence often also involves in-laws, especially the (mother-in-law).

Violence against women like all other historical phenomena of violence, must be seen in a socio-economic and political context of power relations. It is
produced within a class, caste, gendered society in which the male power dominates.

Over the past few years, the phenomenon of women burning and rapes has registered a sharp increase throughout India. In Delhi on an average of two women die of burns every day. In Bombay, a survey which was conducted in 2003 from several police stations indicated that, one woman was burnt to death every five days. In Bangalore, suicides and ‘dowry deaths’ nearly doubled in 2002 as compared to the previous years.

The dowry witch-hunt has taken its heaviest toll in the middle class urban areas, the burning of women for more money and domestic goods in the form of dowry is quite widespread in the slums and rural areas. Investigations have indicated that women burnings is prevalent all over the country, it is most acute in Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, the Western Uttar Pradesh and the Saurashtra region of Gujarat.

Historically, power relations responsible for violence against women include economic and social forces, which exploit female labour and the female body. The violence that women face takes varied institutional forms and is increasing exponentially today. The family which is often seen as a source of nurturance and care, is often a site of violence. Female infanticide, wife battering, dowry harassment, incest, and many other violent acts are regularly perpetrated within this so-called ‘private sphere’ of a women’s life. Religion, tradition and customs have therefore often been used to suppress and violate a woman’s basic rights. Genital mutilation, honour-killings, witch-hunts are some examples of violence against women. The growing number of dowry murders, that are a direct outcome of increasing consumerism and devaluation of women; female feticide that is fostered by new forms of reproductive technology; the total destruction of women’s livelihoods in the process of industrializing agriculture; the absolute
exploitation of women's skills and labour in sweatshops of the corporate free market; are but some cases of the growing violence against women.

Rape and sexual assault is one of the ugliest and most brutal expressions of masculine violence against women. While rape was one of the earliest issues around which women's groups mobilized, dowry murders became another flash point. Systematic investigations by women's organization in different parts of the country revealed that what was perceived as kitchen accidents or suicides, in which increasing number of young brides were losing their lives, were in fact cold blooded murders. Domestic violence is another form of invisible violence, this issue was voiced as a sign of unequal relations between husband and wife and a form of violence and control exercised by men over women.

Sex-pre-selection is one of the most blatant and basic forms of violence against women where they are sought to be eliminated even before birth. While many would like to believe that the most apparent forms of oppression of women are particular to a traditional or feudal society, it is increasingly obvious that modernization too puts a women's life in peril. Modern technologies like amniocentesis are being used to determine the sex of the child leading to abortions of female fetuses. The population control lobby feels that since abortion is legal in India, sex-selected abortions cannot be banned. Some use the woman's rights and pro-choice argument to justify this stand. The pro-choice argument is dubious as in reality it is not the free choice of the women concerned but the choice of a patriarchal system of which this act is one symptom.

h. Violation against Children (The Victims of Abuse)

Generally, there are three types of child abuse, namely, physical, emotional and sexual.
Physical abuse

Boys are more battered than girls. Older children are more abused physically than younger children. Non-working children are beaten more than the working children. A large number of the physically abused children belong to poor families. This shows that there is a significant relationship between poverty and physical abuse. In a very large number of cases the perpetrators of physical abuse are members of the family (father, mother, sibling).

The main modes of battering children are slapping and beating with fists, hitting with different objects, kicking, choking and/or strangulating, binding with rope and tearing hair.

Child labourers are exploited, exposed to hazardous work conditions and paid a pittance for their long hours of work. Forced to forego education, shouldering responsibilities far beyond their years, becoming worldly-wise, when their peers have yet to leave the cocoons of parental protection, these children never know what childhood is.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse includes a constant lack of supervision of parents towards their children. Parents are indifferent and unresponsive and do not pay due attention towards their children. It was found that emotional abuse has a great effect on a child’s conformity to socio-cultural expectations and a large number of the victimized children were compelled to indulge in activities that violated the social norms or which are labelled as ‘deviance’. These children were absent from school, absent from work, they cultivate the habits of stealing money, they were hostile towards others, addicted to drug etc.
Sexual abuse

Technically, abuse is defined as verbal or physical behaviour by a person (perpetrator) towards another (victim), an act that could significantly upset, demean, harm and be traumatic. Abuse can be verbal, psychological and physical.

Globally, adolescence is in a crisis. The reports of gun-toting school children in the U.S. killing or injuring classmates points to their increasing psychological trauma and social alienation. In contrast, Indian children are more victims than offenders. Even in progressive states like Kerala, Delhi, Bombay etc., children are increasingly becoming victims of abuse and torture, including sexual abuse, according to a survey conducted by the Torture Prevention Centre of India. The survey shows that adolescence is indeed experiencing and confronting a tortuous context in Kerala. This was manifestly demonstrated by recent reports of two teenaged school girls becoming mothers. A 12-year-old school girl was sexually violated by an auto-rickshaw driver in the neighbourhood and she has become a mother. Another 15-year-old girl was impregnated by her own uncle, her mother’s sister’s husband. Both girls, still in their skirts, holding infants against their breasts and a permanently scarred innocence and destroyed childhood are forced into motherhood at an age when they should have been playing.

However, it is not girls alone who are becoming victims of abuse. Sexual abuse of boys too is making headlines, with the abuser being their teachers, coaches, older friends and servants. So both boys and girls are vulnerable.

Thousands of children in India today suffer silently from sexual abuse; in most cases the offenders being people whom nobody would suspect.

Figures from latest studies should alarm any parent: One in every 10th child is sexually abused in India at any given point of time. Every 155th minute, a youngster below 16 years is raped. Any every 13th hour, a child below 10 is raped.
World wide, child abuse is a growing problem. "Over 50% of children in India are sexually abused, a rate that is higher in any other country" says.

Lois J. Engelbrecht, founder of Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). And this could well be underestimate as most cases go unreported because of the social stigma and many children live a life of denial.

The World Heath Organization (WHO) described a possibility of one out of every four girls and one out of every six boys being sexually abused.

The Delhi based Sakshi Violation Intervention Centre in a 1997 study that interviewed 350 school children found that 63% of the girl respondents had been sexually abused by a family member, 25% raped and 30% sexually abused by the father, grand father or a male friend of the family. A 1999 study by the Mumbai based Tata Institute of Social Sciences revealed that 58% of the 150 girls interviewed had been raped before they were 10 years old.

‘RAHI’ a Delhi based organization that provides support to victims of sexual abuse, reports that out of the 1,000 upper and high middle class college students interviewed, 76% had been abused as children, 31% by someone known to the family and 40% by a family member and 50% of them raped before the age of 12.

When an adult involves a child in sexual activities for his/her gratification, the child is said to be sexually abused. Every child is vulnerable to sexual abuse. The abuse may be verbal, physical or emotional. It can involve forcing, tricking, threatening or pressuring. This is an abuse of power and a violation of a child’s right to a normal, healthy, trusting relationships. It can deprive a child of his/her capacity to enjoy childhood leading to immediate and long term complications, beginning with emotional or behavioural problems, abnormal sexual behaviour or
psychiatric disorders. Learning difficulties, aggressive behaviour, suicidal tendencies and drug abuse are common after effects.

i. Violation against Sexual Minorities: Hijras

Every year December 10th is observed as Human Rights Day all over the world. Despite the fact that human rights are guaranteed for every human being irrespective of their class, caste, religion, gender, sexuality, race, language, nationality, ethnicity or political beliefs, human rights of sexual minorities are blatantly violated everywhere in India, forcing many to lead a sub-human existence.

The prevailing civil laws for marriage, adoption, inheritance, property, insurance, pension, gratuity, housing, etc., deny space for sexual minorities (lesbian and gay), as they recognize only heterosexual marriages and families as legitimate. The Indian constitution recognizes only two genders: male and female.

Hijras have no space in it. Non-recognition of gender makes it impossible for hijras to avail employment opportunities, education, housing, health facilities, property rights, marriage rights, ration cards / passports / voter identity cards etc.

Most hijras face sexual harassment at workplace from male colleagues. These situations leave hijras with very few choice, and many choose sex-work for a living.

Very often sexual minorities face physical violence, verbal abuse, emotional backmail and rejection from families too. Many are thrown out of their homes and denied a share of the property. Sometimes sexual minorities are forced into unhappy ‘heterosexual marriages’ by their families where, not only sexual minorities, but also their spouses and children face oppression. Some families opt for unethical, unscientific, misinformed and outdated psychiatric treatment to ‘cure’ their children of their ‘sexual orientation/gender expression’ and subject
them to dangerous drugs, electric shocks and aversion therapies. These methods cause enormous harm and destroy sexual minorities physically and psychologically. All these shows society’s ignorance, prejudice, bias and intolerance towards sexuality minorities.

In our patriarchal society, lesbian/bisexual women are doubly oppressed as sexuality minorities and as women, having very little access to any public space. Homes become prisons for them. Families often separate lesbian couples and force lesbian / bisexual women into heterosexual marriages.

Sexual minorities face harassment, abuse, ridicule, discrimination everywhere: in the streets, at work places, school / colleges, hospitals etc. Physical / sexual / verbal abuse, emotional and social alienation, and psychological trauma become the everyday lived realities for most of them. This society destroys their self-confidence, make them ashamed, lonely and fills them with low-self esteem and feelings of depression. Some of them are forced to end their lives. Because of their unique sexuality and gender identity and the overlapping factors of class, caste and sexuality, society maintains these sexual minorities in the bottom of the social hierarchy and keeps them at the fringes of society. They are subject to formidable problems of oppression, humiliation, discrimination and violence and face a daily threat to their very existence. Because of the stigmatized nature of their sexuality, these sexual minorities never found a voice in nationalist or subaltern histories. Heterosexist look at them as lurid, sleazy and evil. These sexual minorities remains in the grip of gender stereotypes and the heterosexist ideology.

j. Communal Violence

The incidence and intensity of violence, which has become part and parcel of Indian social life, has been continuously increasing and consequently undermining and disrupting the process of nation building. There is nothing
extraordinary or unique about the nature and causes of communal violence. There are riots not only between the Hindus and Muslims but also between the Hindus and Jains, Hindus and Buddhists, Hindus and Christians and Hindus and Sikhs. Intra-communal violence is also quite frequent.

Before 1947, the phenomenon of violence (communal and caste) was perceived in the context of the British colonial manipulation and the struggle for freedom. The Indian leaders followed a strategy of accommodating the demands which were likely to generate violence in the social life of the people. The demands which could not be negotiated necessitated confrontation which the national leaders were not always successful in handling. The partition of the country may be instanced here as one of the failings of the freedom struggle (Puniyani, Ram. Communal Politics. Mumbai: J and P Publishers, 2003).

After independence the old framework to understand and to handle the phenomenon of social violence proved to be inadequate. The influence of politics on all spheres including religion and culture and the growing number of disputes due to difference in language or region posed problems. Eruption of violence on the basis of region religion, community, caste, sex, etc., created not only the law and order problems but also made the people wonder whether the objective of equality and freedom could at all be achieved in a society characterized by all kinds of inequality, hierarchy and exploitation of the 'have nons'.

The people of India who are multilingual believe in different religions, follow various cultures, and perceive historical traditions differently and this is bound to present diversities in social and political life. The forces of religion, language, region, etc., divide the people and at the same time strengthen the feeling of caste or communal solidarity and communal unity. Religion and caste, by aligning with politics, tend to generate communal violence and also perpetuate backward-looking and oppressive institutions attached to religion or caste mentality.
It is believed that the existence of several groups and their operation in socio-economic life generates an area of conflict and disharmony. From 1990 onwards, the country witnessed unprecedented communal violence. Hundreds were killed for no fault of theirs. The intensity and spread of violence was such that it shook the nation and it can be said without exaggeration that after 1947 such violence had not been witnessed in the country. It was not only the scale and intensity but also the cruelties committed during that wave of communal violence that were unprecedented; women and children were killed either by stabbing or burning. In many cases the limbs of these children and women were cut before killing them. Some of them were first stabbed, then burned while still alive.

Thus, it will be seen that not only our secular values but also our human values are at stake. The lopsidedness of our values can be judged from the fact that we do not hesitate to kill maim thousands of people just for the sake of a mosque or a temple. At present, communal rage is sweeping India. In Gujarat Carnage of 2002, nearly thousands of people, both Hindus and Muslims died in Post-Godhra riots (Ibid). There are reports everywhere of gang-rape of young girls and women, often in the presence of members of their families, followed by their murder by being burnt alive. No nation can survive if a section of its population follows such methods against other sections and if the intimidating section happens to be the majority religious group.

k. Violence and Theatre

Theatre rests on the pivot of conflicts. All drama, irrespective of genre, focuses on three kinds of conflicts, man vs man, man vs society, man vs himself. Writers through the ages, especially writers of tragic drama have endeavoured to depict the unrelenting cruelty that besets man in his personal and social life. From the earliest Greek tragedians to the contemporary playwrights of cruelty, from
Sophocles to Seneca and Jean Genet to Peter Weiss or Girish Karnad or Tendulkar or Mahesh Dattani all of them depicts violence in its various forms.

Drama has to be performed under some constraints and religious taboos because of the pressure of ethical notions. Hence, violence was not directly shown on the stage at first, but has only reported. During the Elizabethan period some of the violent deeds were shown on the stage, but still it was not a free stage. Jacobean theatre used some liberty in dealing with violence. Violence took other shapes / mostly verbal. Cruelty towards females is basically verbal, such as the degradation of women as sexual objects, making sexist remarks, derogating woman as weak, making bawdy, vulgar references and using words with double meaning. In Restoration plays, to some extent there was an anti-woman sort of language. But once against after the Restoration prudery was restored in nineteenth and the twentieth centuries because of the middle class audience. In twentieth century because of the European influence, violence came back through the generation of “angry young men” like Osborne and Beckett. Now physical violence became the medium and very brutal scenes were shown on the stage. Modern Indian playwrights were not exceptions to that. Unlike in the classical drama, nothing is a taboo for Modern Indian playwrights. Violence, Death, murder, disrobing and rape are introduced right on the stage.

If we look at the plays of Karnad, he possess a unique caliber to create beauty out of evil. Many of his plays have an unhappy ending. Violence, bloodshed, murder, impersonation, treachery, bribery and adultery seem to have an upper hand in his plays. In Tughlaq we see violence, bloodshed, murder, bribery, impersonation, treachery. Initially, Tughlaq is a man imbued with lofty idealism. But soon we discover him blood thirsty and brutal. Tughlaq has a genuine interest in speaking about murder and death. Tughlaq is so cruel and selfish that he kills his father and brother to usurp the throne. He sets out to murder everybody who happens to be a stumbling block on his way.
In ‘Hayavadana’ and ‘Nagamandala’ violence is manifested through adultery. In ‘The Fire and the Rain’ Girish Karnad take as his subject the chain of murder, revenge and jealousy within the learned families of Raibhya and Bharadwaja. The central action of the play revolves round the motif of revenge, futility of superficial knowledge and the frailty of human nature. In the play Karnad tries to fathom the mystery of evils residing within human beings. He is not interested in the external evils, but in the evils residing within man himself. The play is based on the myth of Yavakari and his fruitless penance which appears in Mahabharatha. The first act of the play predominantly deals with the motif of revenge and the nature of evil. Karnad fully exposes evils residing within human beings which do not allow them to progress towards beatitude. Even after ten years of rigorous penance Yavakri fails miserably to control his lust for vengeance. He fails to vanquish jealousy, hatred and lust. He seduces Vishaka. Yavakri’s sole purpose is to destroy the happiness and reputation of Raibhya and his son Paravasu. His knowledge does not help him to get rid of his evil nature. He lives in perpetual hell created by him and carries hell everywhere. His only aim is to bring out the disaster of Raibhya and Paravasu. He is possessed by evil desires, he spread violence everywhere. On the other side, Paravasu kills his father with his own hands and returns to the city where the fire sacrifice is going on. He is the chief priest. He has polluted himself with the blood of his father. Even Indra is not free from the evils of jealousy and hatred. In fact his is the most vicious character in the play. He kills Vishwarupa and Vritra because he is envious of them. So we see lot of bloodshed in the play.

Like Karnad, Tendulkar portrays the ruthless violence that we find in our society. Many critics think that Tendulkar’s plays deal with violence in its various forms. In his play ‘Ghasiram Kotwal’ we see lot of bloodshed and violence in the city of Pune. The play is a dramatic exposition of the latent violence, treachery, sexuality and immortality that characterizes contemporary politics. Ghasiram, a
Chapter 3  A Theoretical Overview of Gender and Violence

Brahmin of Kanauj comes to Pune to make his fortune, but he suffers from an unexpected humiliation at Pune when he is wrongly accused of thievery and, therefore, arrested and imprisoned. Nobody listens to his honest explanations and clarification. Ghasiram is deeply hurt and humiliated by the people of Poona. So, he wants to avenge this on them, but he feels powerless. He wants to get power by becoming the Kotwal of the city. Ghasiram knows that Nana Saheb, the Chief Minister of Peshwa king has a notorious weakness for women. Ghasiram who has a beautiful daughter called Lalitha Guari, wants to use her as a bait to attract Nana Saheb and get some power. Somehow he succeeded in his plan Ghasiram exercises his opportunistic will to satisfy Nana’s need and consequently get a great reward for it. He gets appointed as the Kotwal of Poona—the police superintendent of Poona. Empowered with the authority, Ghasiram beings to take revenge of the Brahmins. Ghasiram’s progresses from a common man to the beast in the history of moral degradation, social degeneration and spiritual regression of man by punishing and killing the people mercilessly. After that he wants to make the marriage of his daughter a way of exercising power. But Nana enjoys sex with his daughter and gets her killed when she becomes pregnant. Ghasiram starts acting out his fury caused by the death of Guari. He starts murdering people. People say “The Kotwal has acquired a penchant for human blood” (Tendulkar, Vijay. Ghasiram Kotwal. Trans. Vasant Dev. Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1985). They are greatly frightened. Prisons are over crowded and some die of suffocation. Pune drenches in a pool of blood.

In Sakharam Binder, Sakharam speaks vulgar language, drinks liquor, smokes and indulges in mechanical sex. The cruel, prejudiced treatment of Sakharam by his parents has caused him to behave rebellious in order to overcome his powerlessness and joylessness. In the play Sakharam is apparently crude, aggressive and violent. Women like Champa and Laxmi suffers in the hands of Sakharam. Sakharam in the guise of providing shelter for destitute women forces all types of exploitation both physical and sexual. Sakharam beats Laxmi with his
belt, he even kills Champa. Sakharam uses physical force against women in order to give vent to his frustration. He treats women as mere sex objects.

Tendulkar’s play, ‘The Vultures’, depicts violence in an upper middle class family. Hari Pitale Cheats Sakharam, his own brother, in business and prospers. His sons Ramakant and Umakant and his daughter Manik inherit his culture of loveless individualism. They all form a family of vultures. Ramakant, Umakant and Manik like their father, are ever ready to cheat one another to get more money and they do not hesitate to kill one another to get a great share of the property. Ramakant does not want to pay his servant’s properly. He and his brother hate each other and they both hate Manik, their own sister. And all the three hate their father. They prefer money to a man. One day, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik learnt that their father has got a large sum of money in a bank. So, they become united and pay fake reverence to their father. He feels happy because his sons have successfully sent his brother out. But they soon start fighting and hurt their father deliberately in their fake fight. They create such a panic that he begs them not to kill him. Finally, he yields and writes a cheque. They get the cash and spend it on liquor. The loveless people seek pleasure in liquor and violence. Ramakant and Umakant exhaust their share of money and want some more. So, they decide to blackmail the Raja of Hondur who is in love with Manik. They want to prevent her from informing her lover about their blackmailing him. Therefore, Ramakant suggests that they should break her leg for this. So, they successfully break the leg of their own sister. They hope to get twenty thousand rupees from the Raja of Hondur by blackmailing him. Later, they learn that the Raja has died of heart attack. They feel greatly frustrated and fail to contain their frustration. So, they plan to kill Manik and her baby fathered by the Raja of Hondur. So, Ramakant kicks Manik very hard on the belly while Umakant holds her fast. Thus, they cause abortion of their own sister. It is the cruelest scene in the play.
This chapter has made an attempt to explain Gender and violence on the way theatre has tried to depict these through their plays. Instances have been quoted from Karnad, and Tendulkar’s plays to provide a glimpse into the engagement with violence in most of their plays.

Dattani’s engagement with Violence is in many ways not very different from what the other Playwrights have done. The departure however, is the way in which he makes a foray into areas, untouched by others: Homosexuality, Child Sexual Abuse, hijara’s etc., not to mention the sensitive portrayal of gender violence.

The next two chapters intends to make a reading of his plays from this point of view. The fourth chapter begins with Gender in Dattani’s plays.