

Chapter II

Rethinking Gender

The woman question in Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad seeks to understand the inescapable patriarchy and the growing assertion of female sexuality in Indian society after Independence. Patriarchy's grip over the social traditions is overwhelming, though much of it always remains unacknowledged. And patriarchy itself must be credited for this convenient 'invisibility'. Through its omnipresence, it ensures legitimacy to the point where it is considered 'natural'. The nation-state, too, seems to have taken extra care to maintain this naturalness in the name of nation-building and development. The present male-dominated society owes its origin largely to the ancient religious scripts and cultural traditions of the country. Some of these traditions come to persist after being selectively appropriated by the colonial as well as the anti-colonial discourses during the pre-Independence period. If the colonialists are motivated by their imperialistic necessity to conquer the strategically important 'native woman', the nationalists are also guided by their anti-imperialistic need to re-conquer it. In the process they both formulate the 'authentic' Indian-woman convenient to their respective objectives. This gendered femininity continues to survive, except for some inevitable reorganisations, even in the newly independent country. Importantly, the socio-cultural site of sexuality and gender is now increasingly marked by a counteractive sexual assertion. This counter discourse comes to challenge the 'rightful' oppression of women, intervening in the sexist rationalisation as many ways as possible. Against this critical backdrop, Tendulkar and Karnad negotiate the contemporary history of sexuality and gender practices. In the present chapter, it is to be seen how these two playwrights critique this oppressive aspect of the society and expose the irrationalities, hitherto unrecognised due to male hegemony.

Dramaturgically, Tendulkar and Karnad stand apart from each other in their handling of social reality. They delineate the society through different dramatic conventions and styles. Tendulkar's realistic and close-to-life manner is far away from Karnad's folklorist-mythological framework. Besides, their critical perspectives on the

present issue of gender are considerably distinguishable. Regarding the question of women's emancipation, they seem to hold their individual standpoint. However, for analytical convenience the present section focuses on the two aspects that seem to be the key to their take on the subject. The first one is the male-dominated structure of the society that can also be termed as the 'code of silence'. The second one involves the contesting of this normative code by counteractive sexual assertion. While the first aspect helps understand the social history of sexual discrimination as negotiated by the plays, the other one evaluates the responses to this discriminatory system from the sexually underprivileged. Both these aspects seem to be crucial to understanding the plays' intervention in the social space, marked by the two forces – a still dominant discipline and the growing opposition to it. The nature and outcome of the oppositions or responses are evidently variable between the two writers, but on one point they seem to be together – that is the possibility of a substantial intervention in the 'code of silence' and questioning the gender irrationalities.

Tendulkar and Karnad have exposed the male regulatory system particularly in the domestic sphere. Gender injustice is visible in the society at large but seems to be more so in the domain of home. Human relationships within the socio-material purview of home are examined. Conjugal life along with the other overtones of domesticity is explored. And the backdrop is mostly the normative Indian family built upon a strong discourse of sexual hierarchy. Although gender is present in many of their plays, it surfaces as a major issue in some particular ones to be analysed here. This includes Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kamala* (1981), *The Vultures* (1971), *The Threshold* (1981), and *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *The Fire and the Rain* (1994), *Hayavadana* (1970) of Karnad. First, the largely unacknowledged male dominance is investigated and its different techniques of subjugation are exposed. Afterwards, the possibilities of contestation by the females are probed into. The female characters in all these plays are individually studied in order to trace the scopes of some possible improvement of their status in the suppressive condition.

A critical reading of Tendulkar's and Karnad's negotiation of gender does not necessarily call for any stringent theoretical parameter. One reason is that they themselves are free from the strict allegiance to any dogmatic or ideological discipline. This freedom proves productive as it ensures their broad perspective on and fruitful penetration of the

discourses of domination. From maiden motherhood, troubled pregnancy within marriage, single working mother to the gendered categories of wifehood and motherhood in general and the institution of marriage – a long range of experiences is examined by them to disclose the male-defined regime along with the possible avenues to woman's emancipation. Instead of any strict theoretical parameter, what needs, here, is a critically informed approach complying with case-specific requirements. And this approach has to take cognizance of the fact that both playwrights are writing about the non-Western and the so-called Third-world situations. Their local context inevitably prevents the straightforward application of any Eurocentric, or White Feminist parameter. The Indian situations with their socio-cultural specificities should be duly addressed while assessing the question of oppression and opposition.

A universal feminism to redress the shared agonies of all the women of the world, irrespective of their geo-political and geo-cultural differences, seems to be a highly contested issue at present. The so-called Eurocentricism of the allegedly White Feminism has tried to universalise the personal experience of a limited section of women and create "an 'essential' model of woman – a model based on a dominant white, middle-class experience and aspirations" (Freedman 76). It fails to adequately acknowledge the historical circumstances and values that render the women's issues different in a non-White, non-Western society, for example India, from the issues in the West (Chitnis 9). The emergence of the new branches of Feminism, such as Black Feminism and Third World Feminism, poses a challenge to it. Issues with local significances receive appropriate address from these new trends. In a so-called Third World country like India, feminism reportedly displays a similar turn and tries to confront multiple issues in the context of the post-Independence and postcolonial present of the country (Mohanty qtd. in Ashcroft 259-63). It can be argued here that both Tendulkar and Karnad display a similar concern for the issues of women and critically read gender in a culture-specific way, without being totally oblivious of the major questions of woman emancipation and empowerment. Therefore, our critical approach is to be informed by a concern for the local specificities along with a simultaneous awareness of the feminist critique of woman's subjectivity and gender. For example, Beauvoir's questioning of the concept of 'woman' might explain the formation of female sexuality even in a non-Western context. Again, Foucault's ideas of discourse and power could also be drawn on for understanding the formation and reformation of subjectivity in a network of gendered relations. As

mentioned before, both the playwrights' freedom from any strict ideological parameter could make this type of reading fruitful.

The patriarchal code of sexual discrimination, as it exists at present, has its inception largely in the colonial period. The gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity come to be formulated during this period, which acts as a vital precedent to the present condition. Male dominance surely precedes the colonial time, but the second half of the nineteenth century colonial India witnesses "a definite cultural focus on the Indian woman" (Sen 2). The social hierarchies, such as gender and caste which seem to be primordial in the Indian society, are recast by colonialism (Chaudhuri xviii). The native woman, who traditionally stands as an epitome of the native culture, has strategic appeal to the colonial politics and is subjected to a process of identity-construction (Loomba, *Colonialism* 151-9). Historically, she becomes the passive site of ideological manipulations by both colonial and anti-colonial forces. The Orientalist prescription for the Indian woman, who is devoted, chaste, self-sacrificial on the one hand and 'modern' on the other, is appreciated by the Renaissance reformers in their quest for an autonomous feminine identity. She is expected to remain 'Indian' but, at the same time, become educated and enlightened. However, the nationalists later come to reject this 'modernisation' of Indian woman on Western line. They oppose the Renaissance modernist reform as unnecessary concession to the Western/colonial influence on Indian traditions and conceptualise the image of Indian woman strictly on the line of material/spiritual or modern/traditional or external world/internal home or, finally, male/female dichotomy (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 119-21). Importantly, both the reformists and the nationalists, despite their dissimilar methodologies, owe their theoretical premises to the Orientalist discourse that offers them the definitions of both, 'modernity' and 'Indianness'.

The Orientalist construction of Indian woman appeals strongly to the nationalists. They find it necessary to build up the anti-British nationalist struggle by invoking the power of the goddess, 'Shakti' or 'Durga', and identifying this feminine image of power and self-less service with the nation. Their interest in such construction can be explained by the fact that the "native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere" (Loomba, *Colonialism* 168) recognise the domestic sphere as their last stronghold and seize "upon home and the woman as emblems of their culture and

nationality” (Loomba, *Colonialism* 168). They appropriate the Orientalist notion of Indian ‘sati’ (chaste woman) as the standard of Indian womanhood and uphold the so-called “voluntary abstinence and purity” (Bagchi, *Indian Woman* 3) of her as a national myth. The nation is identified with the “myth of the Shakti” (Bagchi, *Indian Woman* 3) to construct the image of a powerful motherland, and the contemporary woman becomes the helpless part of this nationalist mobilisation of identity. It should be mentioned here that the identification of the nation with woman (mother) is precolonial. The reference to the ‘Bharatmata’ (Mother India) as the presiding deity of ‘Bharat’ can be found in early Sanskrit texts of the fifth/ sixth century AD (Bagchi, *Representing Nationalism* 69). The colonial condition seems to have inspired the nationalists to look back at the religious configurations of the past and appropriate the Orientalist representation of them in their enterprise of a cultural demarcation. They uphold such a role of woman as the passive repository of national culture and look upon it “as extensions of their domestic selves – caring, subservient, non-militant” (Loomba, *Colonialism* 224). Even Gandhi insists that “service to the husband, his family, and the country (in that order) should be accepted as the ‘primary duties’ of women” (qtd. in Sethi 133). Thus the image of Indian woman is ‘narrativised’ by nationalism and widely circulated for continuation in the days to come.

Post-Independence does not bring radical change in the role of woman, except the whole range of constitutional and legal provisions guaranteed by the ‘modern’ nation-state. Progressive policies are implemented. Universal adult franchise, right to property, equal pay for equal work, maternity leave etc. surely empower women. But her ‘modern’ status in the general social consciousness or “the ethical domain of the community” (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 157) remains problematic. The huge task of nation-building keeps the nationalist fervour alive, though only after some modifications necessary for the new historical situation. The Nehruvian “mature nationalism” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 144) still invokes the image of ‘Bharatmata’ for governmental-political convenience (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 147) and helps to sustain indirectly the gendered stereotype of Indian femininity. So, ‘modern’ in the restrictive official domain and ‘traditional’ in the greater social consciousness remain the defining factors of Indian womanhood. Right to self-formation continues to elude her.

The new socio-economic order of liberalisation brings new challenges to the Indian woman. She is still split between the state-sponsored ‘modernity’ on the one hand

and 'tradition' on the other. Importantly, 'modernity' is now prescribed to her in the liberalised idiom of market-economy. Opposing this model, the neo-nationalist-cultural forces also become active. As a result, the woman is again cast in the debate over her identities and becomes the passive object of the modernist and the anti-modernist discourses. The new social order upholds the notion of the "new-age woman" (Raza 9), hailing it as the ultimate example of sexual liberation. But it seems to bring in a "neo-patriarchy" (M. Sengupta 4) that actually objectifies the female body in a covert fashion. Through the network of a consumerist culture, women are invited to fall prey to a sexist space that produces stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. This consumerist modernity recommends that sexual desirability is the ultimate source of power for women, and so a beauty myth (Coward qtd. in Kemp & Squires 361) is given to them. Thus the 'new-age, liberated woman' becomes a prisoner of her "gendered subjectivity" (Moi, *Sex, Gender* x), "commodified as a selling strategy for conspicuous consumption" (Chanda qtd. in Chaudhuri xl). On the other hand, the traditionalist reaction against this "new-age woman" is also fraught with oppressive agendas, betraying intent to design female subjectivity strictly on an 'authentic Indianness'. Almost in a replication of the pre-Independence debate between the reformists and the nationalists over the female body, the post-Independence situation seemingly repeats the trend. Women are still being subjected to choose identities, modern or traditional, all of which are evidently offered to her by the male society.

Notwithstanding the growing self-consciousness among women after Independence, a sexual bias is undeniably powerful in the society, discriminating against them in favour of the male perspective. And the play, which takes the veil off this society and critiques its gender hypocrisy in an unprecedented style, is Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967). The play hits out at the social mechanism that rationalises different gender disproportions and upholds a coherent image of the society. The realistic mode, adopted for scrutiny, proves effective in exposing the sexist forces working under the guise of customs and traditions. Institutions function as male-agencies to perpetuate norms and contain aberration. Society's so-called progressive bloc betrays the most orthodox and anti-modern attitude possible. Here, the torment is of a single working woman who aspires to live on her own, going against this attitudinal bias. Her ordeal in the hands of the society's custodians shows how powerful this 'code of silence' is.

Tendulkar employs the naturalistic technique of play-within-a-play to bring out the dark inside of a moralist society. If the outer play shows the civilised face of the society, the inner play suggests the face which always remains unrecognised and comes out only in casual and informal exchanges. One is the conscious expression of subjectivity, and the other expresses the hidden feelings which become visible only in an unofficial space removed from social recognition. Such a style as play-within-a-play proves useful to expose the double standard as far as 'civilised' men's attitude to women is concerned. The outer story involves a group of theatre activists coming to a village on invitation to stage a social play on the issue of President Johnson's production of atomic weapons. Their evening show will stage a mock-trial of the U.S. President. The group comprises people from different walks of life, mainly the middle class of the society, established and reputed. Among the majority of the male members of the group, Miss Leela Benare is a prominent female member, who is a school teacher and leading a single life on her own. She is over thirty, outspoken, smart, and loves to be independent, causing inevitable trouble to many. Given the need for rehearsal and the availability of spare time, the other members of the group decide to hold a mock-trial, very much in the pattern of the original play of President Johnson but with a different accused and a different charge. This mock-trial as a time-filler composes the inner play. They have chosen Miss Leela Benare for the role of the accused and the charge levelled against her is infanticide. Then follows a series of spectacles where the accused, Miss Benare, can be found as being hounded down by the other characters. They settle on the 'game' of dissecting her personal life, sheltering themselves under the hypocritical garb of the mock-trial. The boundaries of reality and fiction regarding her life are deliberately blurred to see her stripped amidst a horde of males and satisfy their bestial ego. However, their sexual vendetta against her only serves to expose the oppressive skeleton of the society. How inhuman it can be to subdue a woman who dreams to rewrite 'her story'! It calls her abnormal to protect order and normalcy.

The play presents situations that point to the politics of gender. The unanimous choice of a woman-accused in the witness box is one such example. In their reported mock-trial, the members want to see a woman, and it is Miss Benare for the obvious reason of her 'sexual appeal' to the male gaze. First of all, her 'biologically determined' inferiority makes her an object to be observed and regulated. Secondly and more importantly in the present context, her staying alone and the rumour of her sexual

promiscuity are reasons enough for the male audience to project her as an object of 'sertainment' (sex and entertainment), far more enjoyable than a male-accused who could hardly provide the similar sense of power and titillation to them. As one male member rejoices, "... a woman in the dock, the case does have a different complexion, . . ." (73).

During the mock-trial, Benare's past life begins to surface. Some of it is real, and some fictive. The real part of her suffering shows the perilous condition a woman often has to go through. Her relation with Prof. Damle has left her exploited and with a child in her womb. The onus then came upon her to prove her purity. Her career of a primary school teacher came under fire as the given image of a female teacher does not permit such promiscuity as unmarried motherhood. The preset norms for a female teacher claim the right to define her body as either pure or impure and decorate it either with 'salwar' or 'saree' (Mukhopadhyaya 1). However, she did not think of abortion because that would amount to refuse her own sexuality. She wanted to, and still wants to, be the mother of the unborn child and become a complete woman in her own definition. But her desire is unacceptable to the social moralists. A single working woman, as if not enough, comes to be tagged with the stigma of unmarried motherhood! Patriarchy wants total control over these 'abnormal' thoughts, and Benare's torments, in or outside the mock-trial, explains the process of normalising the abnormal.

Another aspect of the social mindset, the play exposes, is the consensual female-supporter. "Patriarchy operates significantly through the construction of desires and thoughts, influencing what choices people want to make so that some options are ruled out before hand" (Chambers 330). It tries to engineer a mechanism which is less resistance-prone and does rely on the consensual compliance of the subjects. This mechanism involves the Gramscian consensual-indoctrination of the oppressed mind because it is "much more efficient and much less wasteful" (Rabinow 61) in the Foucauldian sense. In this play, Mrs. Kashikar, a member of the theatre group and wife of the man playing judge in the mock-trial, is an example of this supportive subject. She represents a pathetic figure whose voice is lost in the obligations of marriage. Clare Chambers has discussed Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (330) which means the structured life of an individual formed in relation to his/her response to the objective condition of existence. People are made to respond to particular circumstances they live in and become accustomed to the responses which they repeat consensually "with little or

no conscious awareness or choice” (Chambers 331). The entire process of repetition makes the given situation look ‘natural’ and creates a “habitus” for an individual. It becomes “a set of durable disposition formed in response to objective social condition” (Chambers 330). The individuals are seen as docile subjects and bound to respond in the expected manner that will sustain the system. This becomes a habit that ultimately decides their subjectivity. Mrs. Kashikar explains this sort of docile subject in a “habitus” or sexist hegemony.

Normative motherhood or womanhood, as it once became a nationalist obsession, is negotiated in this play. In the court room, woman is reaffirmed as the divine mother. Motherhood is said to be the most hallowed dimension of her sexual identity that circumscribes her position from the ordinary, placing her in an exemplary category of value and morality. The abstract motherhood becomes a benchmark to judge her moral status. Admonishing Benare’s adultery, one male member puts it thus, “We have acknowledged woman as the mother of mankind. Our culture enjoins us to perpetual worship of her” (79). Such inscription of motherhood as supreme and pure only contributes to the overall notion of womanhood as dependent and inferior.

Beside marriage and motherhood, the mock-trial provides critical perspective on another institution – that is the legal system or the judiciary. In a recent verdict, the Supreme Court of India has proclaimed that the witness of a rape-victim must be regarded as ‘gospel truth’ in order to have a fair trial (Dhar and Biswas 4). The verdict is important to understand the continuous presence of gender bias in the legal discourse. It makes some presumptions about the identity of woman. She is perceived as an epitome of chastity and honour and somebody whose witness deserves highest recognition. It sounds good to be sure, but it seems to spring from the same sexual prejudice of law that earlier denied her witness or version of truth of any authenticity. This new approach comes from the perceived notion that if she can risk her individual and family prestige and dare to suffer ‘social death’ by coming to the witness box, she can be trusted in her words (Dhar and Biswas 4). So the inner mindset of law does not change a lot. Through its dispensation of justice, the law and the judiciary like to cling to the essentialist notion of Indian womanhood. Whether denial or sanction of legitimacy to women’s witness, it strengthens the stereotypes of family or social honour and, above all, her chastity and prestige. From this presumption, it once dismissed Mathura’s witness to her rape at the

police custody (in the infamous Mathura rape case) because she could not provide visual sign of injury on her body as evidence of her protest (Ghosh 4). Or, in some other cases it rejected the woman's witness on the ground that it would spoil the victim's marital prospect (Ghosh 4). So, the present verdict continues the tradition, though with a seeming difference.

Benare, in the witness box, resembles a rape victim in the traditional court of law. Her persecution centres on the basic model of the Indian womanhood. While trying her for adultery, the mock-court takes a sharp note of her life-style – the way she mixes with men, talks, laughs along with her independent disposition. She is 'unIndian' in every sense of the term, and her being a woman compounds the risk a lot. She cannot forsake her given responsibility as the carrier of morality for her personal interest. Benare resembles a rape victim from another angle. To the eyes of law her case of alleged infanticide and unmarried motherhood does have no difference from a case of rape because of their synonymous relation with female body. To prove a rape, the law first constructs the female body and then decides about its status, strictly conforming to its normative code. The victim does have no role in the construction of her body except being a helpless object to this process. Benare undergoes a similar experience. The mock-court persecutes her 'crime' only after affirming the ideal of a female body. This ideal is always-already given without Benare's consent. All she needs to do is to conform to it and have the social recognition. Her experience exposes the gender bias of the law and the judiciary that like to speak about woman, for woman, but "never do they 'speak woman' " (Dhar and Biswas 4).

The male-dominated society renders Benare's sexuality questionable and thus sustains its code of silencing women. She is projected as a woman whose appetite for sex is propelled by her unmarried status and financial independence. She is said to embody the myth of the seductive enchantress, once created by the colonial power for the native women (Sen 3), and be "a sinful canker on the body of society" (112), pulling all the norms upside down. Quite legitimately, she provokes the normalising action from the moral-custodians. It is for the sake of the institution of marriage, morality and overall the social order that the ancient rule, " *'Na stri swatantryamarhati.'* 'Woman is not fit for independence' " (115), must be upheld. Even a crime like infanticide, as goes the verdict

of the mock-court at the end, becomes permissible to the eyes of law for the wider interest of humanity. The sheer irony of the situation tells it all.

Another play by Vijay Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* also explains the sexual stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. As a play, *Sakharam Binder* is a 'shocker on stage' that hits at the root of traditionalism of all colours and hues. Sakharam is an iconoclast. He is anti-caste, anti-religion and a vocal basher of middle class morality. Tendulkar visúally presents the man's naked assault over institutions. He is ruthlessly nonconformist and appears often as a terror to the placid and refined sentimentality of the urban audience. However, Sakharam's iconoclasm seems to betray a different tendency as well. His unorthodox life involves his special relations with women. He brings stranded women to keep his home as well as his body, and when one quits his home or outlives her purpose he brings a new one. Sakharam continues this 'experiment' with women inside the laboratory of his self-defined 'home'. For a born-Brahmin living on a decent profession of book-binding, it is indeed rebellious, but it also exposes the formation of another suppressive institution, sustaining a master-slave relation between man and woman.

Sakharam always declares before a newly arrived woman, "It's Sakharam Binder's house" (125,155). The house is truly unconventional for it treats women differently, but its unconventionality is decided by Sakharam alone. His house is a cage where the women are kept like birds (154). He brings in destitute women rejected by their husbands and unleashes his sexual reign over them till the replacement arrives. The arrival of a new woman in his house is always accompanied by his ritualistic long monologues on the domestic rules and womanhood. He despises marriage. But this free style of living together is hardly free from his male chauvinism. He upholds living together of man and woman so long it satisfies his personal notion of domesticity, where the woman, though free from any normative category, must qualify for the essential femininity. Any lapse of conformity on her part provokes Sakharam's immediate punitive actions. In his 'unconventional' home, he demands unconditional loyalty of the woman so that the servitude remains incontestable. He enjoys this hire-and-fire concept because in this system "She works well, she behaves herself. She knows that one wrong move and out she goes" (154). He wants to call this pressure-tactics liberation from oppression!

Sakharam has adopted two methods to construct his home; one is the straightforward physical violence, and the other the symbolic violence. While the first one draws loyalty through physical assault (or the threat of it) on the terrorised female body, symbolic violence, which “is expressed not physically on the bodies of those it violates, but mentally on thoughts” (Chambers 330), ensures complicity of the female subject with the “ideal gendered behaviour” (Chambers 330) without coercion. Chambers also mentions that “compliance is secured more easily by ruling out options before they are considered, so that people never come to choose” (330). At the outset, when Sakharam enters with the first woman Laxmi (sequentially the seventh one), he dishes out a long list of norms to her. First, he constructs the image of the ‘home’ and its one and only boss. His hot-headed, foul-mouthed and *bidi*-smoking feature reasserts his masculine image in his “home” (125). As a precautionary measure to silence probable dissent, he declares beforehand, “In this house, what I say goes...The others must obey, that’s all. No questions to be asked” (126). The metaphor of the kitchen is crucial in this codification of gender roles. In his home, the first move Laxmi is expected to make is towards the kitchen, and she proves ‘normal’ to her master’s gaze as she complies. In the beginning of Act Two, the same ritual is repeated but this time to a new guest, Champa, who is brought in to fill the gap. What Sakharam wants from them is to play the role of a wife (126). But this is not the traditional wifehood. It does not depend on the religious approval and the normative categories of ‘brahma’ and ‘prajapatya’ marriage, formulated in the sacred texts of the *Arthashastra* and the *Manusmriti* (P. Mukherjee 52). This is his self-styled manner of keeping women as subordinated slaves.

Though less explicitly, Sakharam’s sexual autocracy reappears in *His Fifth Woman*. This play can be referred to here because of its brief glimpse of the same Sakharam. *His Fifth Woman* (2004) is the prequel to *Sakharam Binder* (1972), though Tendulkar has written it long after, taking the clue from Sakharam’s brief reference to the woman who came at number five before Laxmi and Champa (*Sakharam* 134-35). At the request of The Lark Play Development Center (New York) he has written the play after a long lull, and that is too in English which he never did before. The result is marvellous. A new Tendulkar seems to have emerged through a newly evolved dramaturgy. It is witty, full of humour and sharply tongue in cheek. Trimming off all excess, the form becomes slim enough to appeal to a contemporary urban audience. The new play also establishes Sakharam’s tyrannical home in almost a similar fashion. The despotic attitude to the

women is still visible, though its explicit expression is restrained. The crude violence of the past is missing here, and its place is taken by a sardonic humour, perhaps owing to the playwright's changing theatrical outlook. The character of Sakharam, however, displays his iconoclasm along with the flickers of his male ego. He takes pride that he does not keep women; rather, he gives them home (*His Fifth* 50). And when the woman dies, he starts hunting for the next prey.

The play's brilliance comes at its best in the final scene where Tendulkar creates a magic world to critique real life. The scene presents, in a flash, a fantastic way for the woman to escape the male world. After her death, she enters the after-life. She is now bodiless, without the burdens of womanhood (72) and can enjoy life free from the male gaze. There is also her bodiless husband, frantically looking for his lost dick. He looks powerless without his dick, much to the relief of the woman. However, the absurdity of this freedom peeps up as the woman later regrets not to have her body any more to entice the man. "All bothersome things have their plus points too" (74). "A dickless world" (73) does never ensure her total freedom from suffering. Sakharam's on-going hunt is the only unavoidable reality. The women have to chalk their strategies of survival not in a world of fantasy but in this bodily world, inside the "old red-tiled house" (*Sakharam* 125) of Sakharam.

The unavoidable sexist bias in the urban and domestic sphere is again ruthlessly brought out by Tendulkar in *Kamala* (1981). The play negotiates the domain of family that exhorts an image of domesticity on the basis of hierarchical sexuality. This is the family of Jaisingh Jadav, a journalist in an English national newspaper. He lives here with his wife Sarita, and they are occasionally visited by Sarita's uncle Kakasaheb, a veteran journalist who works in a regional daily. Again, as in *Sakharam Binder*, the 'home' here becomes the site of gender discrimination. It bears the presence of its owner, who reigns over it as its husband-cum-master. The wife is fated to play an auxiliary role, as though a passive telephone call receiver attending the incoming calls and keeping records for her husband. Besides, she has also to meet the physical needs of her husband as and when required. Thankfully, this master-slave relationship is covered by the sanctified norms of marriage. In this gendered space, the husband can rightfully go to the extent of bringing another woman (*Kamala*) from a rural flesh-market on the ground of professional reasons. His manhood permits him to exercise this right and expect his wife to be a loyal and mute

spectator of this exploitation. Tendulkar uses the character of the tribal woman, Kamala, as an intervening force that unconsciously questions, or helps others to question, this institution of family and the social attitude to women.

Manhood or masculinity is a very definitive term in the play, *Kamala*. It exerts male authority, centralism and a disregard for the sexual 'Other'. It is not restricted within the domestic world because it affects other domains of social discourse as well. Jaisingh Jadav as a journalist betrays it in his professional exercises. He buys Kamala from Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar to expose that auction of women is still prevalent in modern India. The site of auction amuses Jaisingh's masculine self, though he has gone there as a fact-finding reporter. The titillating spectacle of the auction with the women being treated like cattle and their body made subject to physical verification by the male buyers satisfies the male on-lookers. It draws more curiosity about the fantasised female body than sympathy for it from the predominantly male audience.

Media, the institution Jaisingh officially represents, is also conditioned by the patriarchal attitude to women. In a consumerist society media is dictated by the factors of market-driven economy. Commercial equation decides what/how media will see and present. Sensationalism becomes a chief precondition for any news item. However trivial it may be, a news item is stretched to the point of "tamasha" (27) to produce sensation as a market strategy. And who doesn't know that sex creates sensation and sells better than anything else? Media, therefore, exploits the feminine sexuality and defines women "in terms of how they benefit men's lives" (Freedman 61). Following this perception, Jaisingh arranges the press conference in New Delhi to present Kamala to the civilised world. To media, Kamala as an exploited woman does not hold so much importance as the way she is presented in the press conference. She is made to appear as a helpless allurements to the male world. The result is spectacular. The competing cameras flash to capture the best curves of her body. The audience falls over to have a glimpse of her. Undoubtedly, Jaisingh has had his professional mileage from this show. But Kamala remains where she was, a victim despite this 'liberating' enterprise of the civilised society. Her spatial shift from the jungle of Luhardaga to the glitter of Delhi fails to improve her qualitative status. The so-called borders between the civilised and the backward come to be blurred by the synonymous nature of exploitation existing in both of

the domains. The press club in New Delhi becomes the urbanised version of the Luhardaga auction market.

Kamala's torment is unique because of her context. Her womanhood surely denies her autonomy. But conjunctively, her tribal status and spatial location in a remote village compound her suffering. The oppressive hierarchies of caste and class supplement her gendered backwardness. This is why she remains as much vulnerable in New Delhi as she was in Luhardaga. As it can be said, she suffers "multiple patriarchies" (Chitnis qtd. in Chaudhuri xxiii) that function through the hierarchies of gender, caste, class, tribe etc.

In the play, the 'code of silence' thus relegates feminine sexuality to insignificance. And this is true both in and outside the home. Jaisingh can dictate, like Sakharam, "It's I who take decisions in this house, and no one else." (42), and be sure to be obeyed. As a male he can do anything within his power to achieve his professional success – that includes using women as pawns. Both Sarita and Kamala must remain, consciously or unconsciously, the mute spectators of the 'code' and play second fiddle to Jaisingh's male ego.

Gender bias exists even in a most affluent and seemingly sophisticated family, and *The Vultures* proves it. The play provides one of the crudest shocks to the middle class morality. Tendulkar here explores the degeneration of a family and comes up with stunning truths about sexual oppression within the socially approved structure of an urban, middle class family. The ailing patriarch, Hari Pitale, once cheated his brother to take control over the family business but the evil that he sowed seems to recur in his next generation. He comes to be ill-treated by his own sons, Ramakant, Umakant, and the daughter, Manik. They all four resemble vultures in their crookedness and fight over the remaining resources of the decaying family. The brother duo, in particular, comes down heavily on the women and reveals the shocking politics played over the female bodies. Ramakant's wife Rama and sister Manik exemplify the amount of oppression men can exert on women. The brother duo's ultimate goal is financial gain, and this calls for the manipulation of the female bodies. The crude nature of oppression becomes vivid and even troubles the refined audience, thanks to Tendulkar's outspoken and dangerously close-to-reality style. Like *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Sakharam Binder*, this play, too, brutally removes the veil off the society.

In *The Vultures* pregnancy becomes a very important issue. It is used by patriarchy to produce a backward image of woman as docile and dependent. Pregnancy projects itself as a negative condition that is used either to physically outplay a woman, justify her dependence, or to adjudge her worth to have a healthy line of progeny. The masculine power in this play enforces this oppressive definition of womanhood and pregnancy. Two pregnancies are there in the plot – one of Manik, and the other of Rama. Both come under the male supervision. While Manik's pregnancy is regulated by extreme violence, Rama's is monitored with extravagant care, though the male intents behind remain the same.

Manik gets pregnant from her affair with a rich man whom she later plans to trap by her pregnancy. But her scheme is foiled by her jealous brothers. At first, they break her leg so that she cannot visit her man and, meanwhile, they can blackmail the guy by the threat of a scandal. But when their plot to milk the rich man comes to end because of his sudden death, they feel threatened by the pregnancy which may now reduce their share of the property. This urges another exercise of the masculine power over the female body, and Manik is brutally aborted in a gruesome scene that depicts a graphic control over woman's sexuality.

The other example of regulated pregnancy involves Rama. She is childless and normally blamed for it, though the fault lies with her husband. She is subjected to multiple experiments of the mystics, swamis, doctors, astrologers against her will. Her body is monitored for the larger interests of the family. When Rama becomes pregnant from her extra-marital relationship with her brother-in-law Rajaninath, the masculine ego of her husband ironically rejoices at the triumph. We shall examine the utility of this pregnancy from Rama's perspective later when we analyse the counter actions of the women. As of now, her husband's male ego is satisfied at the sight of the swollen womb. Medication, expensive drugs, nurses are applied to take care of the pregnancy because it will ensure the system of hierarchy. In this system, almost all the males, Sakharam, Jaisingh, Ramakant, sound alike, as we see Ramakant silencing Rama, "In this house, we're not accustomed to listening to any smartness from women! No man in our family's been a bloody henpecked husband, . . . ?" (251).

The 'code' continues in another play of Tendulkar *The Threshold*. *The Threshold* is a film-script, which is made into a film starring Smita Patil and Girish Karnad. It belongs to the line of "social problem plays" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 290) that politicises the domestic space, against the larger social context, to expose gender oppression. The shocking violence of *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures* does not trouble the refined eyes here, perhaps owing to the cinematic requirements. However, the implied shock and horror over the common misery of women is no less appalling than their explicit display. It presents a woman's encounter with the sexually biased condition in and outside the family, compounded by other factors such as middle class hypocrisy and political corruption. Though the other factors of oppression can only be termed as extensions of the patriarchal attitude to woman, they have their peculiarities to complicate her situation.

A placid joint family with a matriarch at the top comes to be disturbed by the awkward desire of its young 'bahu' (daughter-in-law), Sulbha. She wants to do something that she loves in her life. She wants to go outside, some other town, to join the post of the superintendent at the Sangamwadi Mahilashram. But her desire is opposed by all in this modern and liberal house, her social activist mother-in-law as well as her husband. They want her to stay at home, look after her child and do some work so that a balance can be achieved. Or at best, she can join the social work of her mother-in-law. But against all the expectations she leaves home for her goal only to discover a cruder world of sexual oppression outside. She decides to come back to her family, which is presumably less hazardous than the outside world, and discovers that her last hope, i.e. her husband, is no different from the lot. In her absence he has started keeping a mistress outside the home.

The Threshold provides a very useful insight into the structural mechanism of an urban, educated middle class-family, sustaining gender oppression under the garb of sophisticated norms and decorum. Its hegemonic structure relies on some refined tools to construct the sexual relations between the 'active' male and the 'passive' female. The mother-in-law is devoted to social service with apparently 'modern' disposition and no time for petty family squabbles. Though she never looks like a traditional mother-in-law, her indifference to her bahu's desire virtually makes Sulbha non-existent in the family. Subhash, her husband, also appears to be understanding and accommodative – so much so that the readers might even be tempted to justify his secret liaison. That a helpless man needs company in the absence of his wife, selfishly pursuing her career, might have a lot

of takers. But what goes covertly is his smooth and less-coercive technique of domination. Sulbha's trouble is highly compounded by her location in this middle class home. The normal attributes of a standard middle class home, such as modernity, education, liberal and intellectual outlook, seem to render the patriarchal bias sophisticated, hazards-free and almost unrecognisable in her case.

Outside the family, Tendulkar investigates another social domain – the Mahilashram where Sulbha works. Two implications seemingly arise from this examination. First, the sexual prejudice is almost unavoidable in the society. Secondly, the multiple types of hazards women have to confront in it. Like the mother-in-law in the family, Mrs. Sampson is at the helm of the Mahilashram. But its mechanism is different from that of the family. It resembles the Foucauldian madhouse where the mentally or physically challenged people are kept. The meta-narratives of social science and medical science prevail here and define the subjectivity of the inmates. It identifies the insane, isolates them under restraint and then monitors them for the sake of order and sanity. They have to be treated, and therefore gruesome methods of cure become humanitarian and legitimate. Though she stays out of station, Mrs. Sampson monitors the inmates through apparatuses such as time-table, duties, dress-code, and guards. The inmates obey her dictates, presuming that she still oversees. In many ways, the asylum resembles Foucault's Panopticon, where also prisoners are centrally monitored through the apparatuses by a presumed authority.

Although Foucault never attributes any sexual dimension to the central power in Panopticon, the Mahilashram exemplifies how and what happens when predominantly sexist power designs such institution as mental asylum. Multiple interest-groups join hands for social, political, financial and even personal gain and produce this institution strictly on the gendered roles of women. Numerous examples in the play show that the authority does not accord even the minimum dignity to its female inmates. Its manifold utility doubles when Sulbha discovers that it supplies women to the local MLA, Bane. *The Threshold* thus exposes a 'nowhere situation' for the women who want to be self-reliant. Sulbha quits this place and returns home only to find her husband wasting no time to get her interim alternative in the meantime.

Terrible realities in and outside the family involving human relationships continue to be the focus of Girish Karnad as well. His plays also expose a powerful male dominance at different social levels. He examines female subjectivity through different characters, such as Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*), and Padmini (*Hayavadana*), and reveals how a section of the society is kept oppressed and dependent chiefly on the sexual line. The oppressive code of gender proves extremely unaccommodating to women and employs clever techniques to marginalise them.

Naga-Mandala exposes the patriarchal grip over society through its highly suggestive story as well as subtle style. Karnad here does not follow any particular folk form but adapts different conventions (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 314) to create an anti-realist world pregnant with cognitive possibilities. This is a 'performance text' invested with literary craftsmanship. The folklorist framework, which is inherently blessed with a self-reflexive nature, is adapted to talk about the different possibilities of meaning or imply the hidden realities. The Prologue exemplifies it beautifully. We find some inanimate objects, along with a human being, preparing the ground for the story to roll on. In the darkness of night in a temple, a Man is cursed by fate, for writing some bad plays, to have to remain awake at least one whole night to save his life. He comes to find a group of Flames gossiping among each other after the masters of their homes go to bed. The humorous gossips ironically refer to common domestic problems, such as the tragedy of an aged mother in the house of her son and daughter-in-law, the daily feud of an aged couple in their story-less life over the husband's suspicious motives. The Flames are also joined by a Story, a feminine form wrapped in a sari. At this moment, the Man intervenes as he finds in the Story a way out to pass his time and keep himself awake. On some preconditions of folk and oral aesthetics, the Story agrees and narrates the tale of Rani. The manifold significance of this form can be understood by Karnad's own point of reference. The oral tales or stories have a paradoxical nature. "They have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener" (Karnad, *Three Plays* 17). Thus the Story becomes a metonymy of the 'naturalised' status of a daughter, for example, the one who plays the central character in this play. In spite of their independent desires which lie heavily under suppression, the daughters exist only in their customary shift from one home to another — more specifically, in their relation to men. In this tale of a woman's manoeuvre for self-assertion, this aspect of dramaturgy enriches the overall possibilities of meanings. The

ending of the play is also a technical marvel in this respect, but that will be studied later during the women's responses to the system.

Rani is married away before she has learnt anything about the man-woman relationships. Following the customs, the moment she attains puberty she is packed off from her parents to the house of her husband. The tears of her mother at her puberty are crude reminder of the status of girl child in our society. At first, the tears indicate the ordeal of getting a suitable match for the girl. Then, they also forebode the post-marriage anxieties that typically end with dowry death, polygamy, or sexual perversion. Rani's nuptial ride is derailed right in the beginning as her husband turns out to be a polygamist, having an extra-marital relation with a prostitute. He stays with Rani during the daytime and goes off, when the sun sets, only to reappear in the morning. In his absence she rots behind a locked door and finds no reason to cheer about when he comes back sexually gratified from the prostitute. It becomes a life-in-hell for a young girl like her, a state which can be called, in the words of Rama (*The Threshold*), the "living death of my wifhood" (242). She even thinks of exotic ways of applying magic roots on her husband on the advice of a blind, elderly woman but cannot execute it out of fear. At this moment, Karnad brings in the magical Naga, a king cobra, to show its illicit affair with the dissatisfied, young wife.

Rani, seemingly, finds no wrong in sleeping with the Naga, which incarnates her husband. As she becomes pregnant in due course of time, much to the anger of her original husband who never touched her, the male society springs up and demands proof of her innocence. The way she is put under the trial reminds one of Leela Benare's mock-trial (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) where also patriarchy defines the woman under the pretext of social and cultural purity. It exposes how the sexist paradigm is sustained by the 'knowledge-makers/keepers', who lay down "dire, horrifying and obnoxious punishments for the erring wife" (Bhattacharji 31), though "for similar offences men suffered nothing except occasional social censure" (Bhattacharji 31). The court of elders, something like the modern day 'panchayat' in rural India, puts the onus on the woman to prove her innocence and asks her to hold a red-hot iron ball in hand! The attitudinal aspect of the society betrays a clear gender prejudice – a persecution motif that holds the woman as inferior, gullible to sin, and untrustworthy. This kind of trial of woman, which frequently features in the media reports and often leads to even suicide of the victim in

fear of castigation (A. Mitra, *Panchayat* 7), is a favourite exercise of the male-dominated society. The objective remains the same – to retain its sole right over the female body.

Karnad's narrative uses the folk and mythological figures with their "established associations" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 217) to infer new significance of the contemporary situations. His understanding of the woman question in the play *The Fire and the Rain* is another occasion where mythologies are adapted to reread gender politics in and outside the domestic world. The story is derived from the myth of Yavakri which "occurs in Chapters 135-38 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto) of the *Mahabharata*" (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* ix). Bharadwaja and Raibhya were two sages and good friends. Yavakri, Bharadwaja's son, felt angry over the lack of recognition that his father received compared to Raibhya. He went for ascetic penance and was rewarded by Lord Indra. Emboldened by the divine blessing, Yavakri thought of taking revenge on Raibhya and therefore cornered his daughter-in-law, Vishakha, in a lonely spot and molested her. This incensed Raibhya and he created a demon to kill Yavakri. After the end of Yavakri, the second part of the myth tells the story of the conflict between Paravasu and Aravasu, the two sons of Raibhya. One day Paravasu, who was conducting a fire sacrifice for the king in order to bring rain on the dry kingdom, "mistook the black deerskin which his father was wearing for a wild animal and unintentionally killed him." (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* 64). He put the blame on his innocent brother, Aravasu (spelt Arvasu in the play), so that he can continue his fire sacrifice uninterrupted to ascend the highest glory of priesthood. Aravasu retired to the jungle and prayed to the Sun God who finally granted a moral end to the story – all the dead came back to life, Paravasu was pardoned by the gods, and Aravasu restored. Karnad has given some political twist to some sections of this mythology of morality and disrupted the placid water of Brahminic asceticism to understand the politics involved in caste and gender.

Among others, Vishakha, the wife of Paravasu, has become a very important character in Karnad's rendition of the story – a focal point to reread the given sexual realities. Like Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Vishakha seems to stand for the oppressed womanhood. Her marriage is against her will. Whatever space she had before her marriage, she has lost all within one year in Paravasu's house. The initial fun dries up, and Paravasu becomes an ascetic to join the fire sacrifice, leaving Vishakha with all her unfulfilled desires behind. This suppressed womanhood receives Karnad's utmost

concern because it shows the signs of gender injustice and the possibility of a challenge from the oppressed. The case of a newly married woman neglected by her husband and humiliated by a hostile father-in-law is important enough to invite a gender reading. And, in addition to this, Karnad has imagined a pre-marriage affair of Vishakha with Yavakri, a thematic ingenuity that renders her entity pregnant with aberrant possibilities.

Unlike Tendulkar's Sakharam and Ramakant, most of the males here epitomise dignity and purity. Parvasu embodies this purity-consciousness. But behind this clean image, there lies an attitudinal disrespect for women. He wants to attain the highest spiritual glory of priesthood and considers his wife a hindrance to his ascetic practices. Woman is regarded as the gate of hell, a distracter tempting the dutiful man with her lascivious charms. Importantly, Parvasu's attitude to his wife is largely determined by his deep faith in caste obligations and personal ambition. His Brahmin caste demands total asceticism for the holy post of the chief priest. On the other hand, sheer ambition further strengthens faith in the caste norms. Personal glory lures him to eliminate his father, sideline his brother and, not to mention, dump his wife. So Vishakha's condition suggests that a woman is oppressed not only by an exclusively-sexist bias but also by other factors such as caste, spiritual/material ambitions of a man. These, too, contribute to the derisive attitude to women.

Vishakha is tormented by the other males as well for the similar reasons. Yavakri, her former lover, tries to use her as a stooge to inflict a psychological blow on the Raibhya family. Her father-in-law, Raibhya himself torments her not only from his sexist contempt but also from his jealousy for his son and pride over his family prestige. Therefore, a woman's suffering is motivated by many a factor related to her specific context. Here, the Brahminic world of purity and spiritual glory seems to be an unavoidable aspect to understand Vishakha's sexual misery. However, it is also observed that these factors often work as extensions of a patriarchal attitude to the women in general. For example, the Brahminic caste-hierarchy can also be termed as an extended patriarchy as far as man's relation with woman is concerned. In both cases, an asymmetrical feminine identity is constructed. In the former (Brahminic caste-hierarchy), the discourse of purity/impurity defines the ideal womanhood; in the latter (patriarchal hierarchy), the same womanhood is defined from a sexist point of view. In this connection, the most feasible way is, perhaps, to recognise the suffering of the women in

different social positions, and take note of the special features of their positions, which compound their sufferings. Vishakha's sexual misery in a Brahminic zone of silence becomes visible from this perspective.

Karnad's critically acclaimed play *Hayavadana* can be described as a philosophical quest on the stage. Karnad approaches the question of human identity through the irreconcilable duality of mind and body. He explores the philosophical debate over human identity, unmistakably, against the backdrop of post-Independence national identity-building. Importantly, *Hayavadana* also provides a critical perspective on gender, beside its other levels of engagement. It shows the limited space of woman's subjective desire in a patriarchal society. Sexual stereotypes of masculinity and femininity decide woman's relation to her husband and her role after marriage. The rigid 'ideality' of her image renders her agency almost powerless. On the other hand, the play also presents a possibility, though interim, of subversion of the patriarchal code of conduct through the counteraction of a female character.

The plot of the play is based on a story from the ancient collection of tales in Sanskrit, *Kathasaritsagara*, and its re-interpretation by Thomas Mann in his *The Transposed Heads* (1940). Three characters, Devadatta, a fair, comely and intelligent Brahmin, his beautiful wife Padmini, and his dear friend, Kapila, the muscular, daring son of an iron-smith, enact this drama of confusion. The friendship of the two men turns sour when Devadatta discovers his wife's secret fixation over Kapila's masculine physicality. Out of despair, he goes to a temple of Goddess Kali and beheads himself. When Kapila comes to know about it, he follows his friend and beheads himself too to avoid the impending social persecution. Now, when Padmini prepares to commit suicide in fear of social scandal, Goddess Kali intervenes with a blessing. The woman has to rejoin the heads to the bodies, and the men will be back to their life. In her excitement, Padmini mixes up the heads and puts Devadatta's head on Kapila's body and Kapila's head on Devadatta's. "The result is a confusion of identities which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality" (Kurtkoti qtd. in Karnad, *Three Plays* 70). As to who the real husband is, the Sanskrit tale adjudges the person with the husband's head (Devadatta's) the real husband, since head represents the man. Thomas Mann retells it to show that the bodies will change to fit the heads, since head is the supreme, and go back to their earlier forms and "ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body

and soul" (Kurtkoti qtd. in Karnad, *Three Plays* 69), i.e. physical and spiritual. In Karnad's rendering, this issue of physical and spiritual is converted into a problem of human identity that indicates the absurdity of a definitive or perfect identity in a world of fluid reality.

Taking clue from the imperfection of human condition, the issue of gender in *Hayavadana* can be approached. It first reveals that men like to construct an ideal femininity on some essential qualifications. Chastity, loyalty, self-sacrifice and dependence are some of the 'essential' attributes of this womanhood. Secondly, *Hayavadana* contests this patriarchal perception of woman as a sexual 'fixity'. Padmini's character is a challenge to the male discourse. Her intelligence, wit, outspoken style of conversation and, above all, the desire to have the best fusion of the two men destabilise tradition. Besides, Karnad's ironical use of the figure of Goddess Kali also serves to unsettle the male notion of femininity. Thirdly, the play extends further to imply that neither the ideal femininity designed by the patriarchy nor even the 'ideal masculinity' fashioned by the independent feminine desire is possible. Whatever response Padmini gives to the norm of monogamy, it ultimately suggests the impossibility of her desire of having the ideal – the amalgam of Devadatta's intelligence and Kapila's physis.

Regarding the first issue of ideal femininity, there are plenty of instances in the text where the woman is stereotypically inscribed by the men. Padmini's husband, Devadatta and his friend, Kapila, represent masculinity in different forms. The husband's seemingly 'normal' jealousy over his wife's free ways of talking betrays reality. Padmini's praise over Kapila's body splits even the two best friends. Suspicion grows in the male mind of Devadatta. His suicide at the Kali temple happens solely because of his insulted male ego. Notably, neither he nor Kapila ever thinks of Padmini's future before the self-immolation. Their indifference to Padmini becomes clearer in their second life after their heads are transposed. Now all friendship is gone, and they are ready to "fight like lions and kill like cobras" (130) to possess the woman they desire. They both stake their claim over her and kill themselves twice, and all is for the woman. This might be anti-patriarchal as both the men seem to be dancing at the tune of a woman's desire. But, as also pointed out by Aparna Dharwadker, Padmini finally finds herself as the loser (*Theatres* 339). Patriarchy seems to remain at its place with its perception of woman as the prized object to be fought over for possession. However, it is still to be seen how

much or what type of challenge Padmini offers to this idealisation of femininity – a subject to be explored in the following section of this chapter.

The women's responses to the oppressive regime of silence become the focus of the second part of the present discussion. Different female characters in their backward state are already studied. Patriarchal hierarchy is found to have been compounded by other oppressive hierarchies such as caste, class, religion, tradition, many of which are in fact coloured by a male attitude to women. All this relegates the women to the margin. It is now to examine if the women characters have been able to achieve any space of self-assertion in their interaction with the dominant power. Whether they can offer any counteraction or at least the potentials for it and have survival strategies are to be looked at.

In *The History of Sexuality* (Vol.1) Foucault once said, "where there is power, there is resistance" (qtd. in Smart 132). Power relations cannot exist without the means of insubordination and struggle. Foucault's concept of resistance is, however, criticised by many on the ground that it does not offer a means of effective challenge to a prevailing order. His resistance must exist within the power relation and never be in a "position of exteriority in relation to" (Thompson 113) it. It is always situated within the domain of power and, therefore, alleged to offer no effective change. Another point is that Foucault does not ascribe his power and resistance to any particular form of class struggle such as men's power over women or the power of administration over the way people live (Smart 135). He seems to talk about "non-class" (Smart 135) power relation or struggle. However, Foucault remains valid in the present discussion for he asserts the indispensability of resistance or, at least, counteraction. This potentiality of challenge to domination, whatever is its outcome, renders Foucault relevant here. Moreover, many feminists argue that the intrinsic position of resistance in relation to a power-regime does not exhaust its freedom. To be clearer, a body constructed in the context of a regime is "never wholly determined by it, but always carries the possibilities of resistance to that regime" (Cahill 53). This view, mooted by many others such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, argues that the feminine body produced by a powerful discursive order can still remain indeterminate within the order (Cahill 53).

All these arguments encourage one to read some women characters of the plays with a view to assessing their responses to the male discourse. It is, of course, questionable whether the responses can be called resistance at all. But what is evident is they try to raise their voice in a different way, showing a sign of self-consciousness. Their responses would be important so far as the possibility of their self-formation is concerned. Further, their reactions would help expose the oppressive system that torments them in many a way.

Let us first take up Leela Benare (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) who dares to defy her gendered role. She is an aberration to the social norms. For her, "Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be" (61). Her claim over the right to self-formation reminds one of the Beauvoirian woman. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman espouses the free and equal individual. People "with female bodies do not have to fulfil any special requirements to be considered women." (Beauvoir qtd. in *Moi, Sex, Gender* 77). The male-dominated society has scientifically determined the female body as inferior, dependent, and purity-centric. But, as Beauvoir argues, women have to defy this norm of body as sexual fixity and use it as situation (qtd. in *Moi, Sex, Gender* 62). The body-as-situation or as "lived experience" (Beauvoir qtd. in Tidd 65) can permit the female to manage her life vis-à-vis her situation or context. She can become independent, without conforming to "sexist stereotypes or to feminist ideals of womanhood" (*Moi, Sex, Gender* 77). She does not have to fall into any sort of sexual specificity that might curtail her freedom.

Benare wants to lead her life full and be "Leela Benare, a living woman" (61). This dream for "a living woman" seems to defy all kinds of sexual criteria. She wants to use her body as her own, not as a preset destiny. It would be neither a-sexual nor sexually predetermined but an independent possibility without the compulsion to fulfil any stereotype. But her life of dream is never a cakewalk. She falls in love with her maternal uncle at the age of fifteen, but this independent way of using her body proves unacceptable to the society. Her next man of hope, Prof. Damle, too turns out to be another clichéd agent of the male society. These repeated failures to use her body as the way she dreams create confusion, "I despise this body – and I love it!" (118). This dilemma, however, does not last long. She regains her position, "It (body) will be there. It will be yours. Where will it go without you? And where will you go if you reject it?"

(118). Despite the antagonistic verdict of the mock-court to abort her unborn child, she again proclaims to use her body for a new cause. She will give birth to the baby and become a mother, defying the normative motherhood within marriage. She claims, "I want my body now for him – for him alone" (118). This motherhood outside marriage poses a challenge to the patriarchy and enables Benare to wrestle for the right on her body.

The question remains how much freedom Benare has achieved in the play. The verdict thumps its intention quite clear, ". . . the child in your womb shall be destroyed" (119). Does it terminally blockade Benare's dream of "whole existence" (118)? Typical of his theatrical style, Tendulkar avoids a decisive conclusion. He engages the entire issue in the format of a play-within-the-play which is done in a spirit of "good fun" (120). The unmistakable irony of this style, which works through the deliberate overlapping of fiction and reality, fun and seriousness on each other, upholds the possibility and impossibility of a change, i.e. the success of Benare's dream. There is an unconscious quip from one male character, "The *show* must go on" (my emphasis) (120). The play ends with Benare sitting alone with the light on her and the rest of the stage in darkness. The light, perhaps, suggests her self-consciousness strengthened by her final assertion of womanhood. But the darkness around seems to imply the continuation of the "show" and the near impossibility of its total removal.

Compared to Benare, neither woman in the play *Kamala* is more outspoken and rebellious in her relation to the society. Benare has to live with the verdict of the mock-court, but still her position of unmarried motherhood challenges the society. Sarita and Kamala, on the other hand, do not possess such challenging status as Benare's. Women's self-recognition in a rather compromised situation is what the play offers. Sarita questions and exposes marriage but, ultimately, chooses to compromise for the present against the hope of a 'liberatory' future. Another important aspect of the play is that it presents a gender-site shared by the two females with markedly different responses. Women's responses to a given situation of sexual oppression can be variable, depending on their socio-cultural background. Multiple specificities, such as caste and class, determine their reactions. And this also shows the presence of an extended patriarchy that oppresses women in the name of different social norms, avoiding an overt sexual discrimination.

The dissimilar responses of Sarita (an urbane housewife) and Kamala (a tribal village girl) point out this aspect of socio-cultural context as an important determinant.

The domestic space of the Jadhav house is heavily conditioned under the patriarchal surveillance of Jaisingh Jadhav. Sarita is reduced to a docile subject, firmly grounded in the master-slave principle of male-defined conjugality. She does, however, show timid signs of discontent over her subjugated existence, and this seems to refer to the variable insubordination of body constructed within a discursive regime (Cahill 53). Her discontent over her condition finds expression only in the sporadic oddities of 'normal' physical gesture and non-verbalism. This suppressed non-conformity comes to gain an evident self-awareness only after the arrival of the tribal, village girl. Even in her wildest dream Sarita could not find any social/cultural affinity with Kamala. But her physical proximity with Kamala is translated into a psychological intimacy by the apolitical correspondence of the illiterate rural woman. She becomes empowered to see the status of her slavery, hidden under the conjugal 'normalities'.

The impact of the association is, however, limited to Sarita alone and does not extend to Kamala. The tribal girl from a remote village is a victim of double oppression. Her social backwardness owes as much to her gendered status as to her economic and class condition. The economic misery of a tribal group comes to be aided by its social customs in an effort to get rid of poverty. And this deliverance from poverty is supposed to come through the auctioning off its women in a flesh-market. So women are objectified and gendered in a condition which is determined by multiple factors. Poverty, unemployment and lack of education create backwardness, and if it happens in a social group with rigid customs and norms, its women become the most vulnerable target of manipulation. They can be made scapegoat in the supposed enterprise of removing poverty. This seems to be the case with Kamala. She is a tribal woman whose oppressed status has lot to do with her link to the community, deprived of the basic amenities of life. And the fact that she is a woman multiplies her risk. Her sex makes her already unequal, and the socio-economic backwardness of her community renders her doubly oppressed. She has to live under the regulation of a patriarchy extended to other types of social hierarchies such as caste, community, economic condition etc. There is no wonder that she fails to share the sort of sexual enlightenment Sarita seems to gain from the similar situation.

Although she herself fails to fathom the gender politics, Kamala unintentionally opens up Sarita's eyes. From her positional backwardness, she draws a simplistic line of analogy between her and Sarita memsahib and concludes, "Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?" (35). The analogy revokes Sarita's gender amnesia and opens her eyes to the crude realities of marriage. Undoubtedly, her better social status in terms of access to different modern facilities of life makes it possible for her to grasp the implication and see through the fact. Kamala unknowingly facilitates this awareness, while she herself remains unaware because of her total backwardness.

Sarita's self-knowledge, however, seems to be questionable on a certain ground. Although she reasonably problematises the masculine authority over woman, her method invites reconsideration because it tends to, unintentionally and dangerously, support the masculine-feminine hierarchy. She criticises the definition of manhood, "What a man does is manhood. Even if he washes people's dishes, that's manhood. . . . This must be changed. Those who do manly things should be equal to men. *Those who don't, are women*" (my emphasis) (47). While critiquing the oppressive categories such as husband and marriage, she seems to sacrifice the identity called 'woman' to the power she opposes and glorify the 'masculine' in the process. This notion of womanhood seriously undermines the prospect of her critique.

With the above problem in mind, Sarita's final posture becomes understandable. Fired and lost, Jaisingh comes back to her, and Sarita decides to switch over to her role of a dutiful wife. She finds reason to support her husband at this moment of crisis and thinks it better to rescue the home than allow it to disintegrate. ". . . at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, . . . when I will stop being a slave" (52). Despite her self-awareness, she decides to compromise for the moment to protect the home, though she does not know when exactly the day of her freedom will come. What Tendulkar here seems to emphasise more is the acquisition of self-knowledge than any immediate articulation of it. He seems to limit the female self-assertion within a condition where the woman comes to self-recognise but refuses to articulate that recognition on practical ground. Keeping in mind the current situation, the self-belief that "a day will come" (52) is said to matter more than how and when. Sarita

exposes the sexual oppression inside a marriage in a modern, urban locale but chooses to remain content only with the knowledge and the hope for a better future.

The domestic world co-inhabited by two women under the oppressive rule of a single male is again found in *Sakharam Binder*. In the 'masculine home' of Sakharam, Laxmi and Champa struggle to survive in their respective ways. Unlike in *Kamala*, their coexistence is marked by mutual intolerance, each trying to dislodge the other to gain space. For this, they display two different forms of female subjectivity. At the end, one wins over the other and ensures her position in the house. Tendulkar explores here the varied nuances of sexual experiences that can be found in women's survival strategies in a highly gendered space. It might denote the difficulty in forming a homogenised association of the oppressed sisters to counter patriarchy. Besides, the success of Laxmi over Champa seems to imply some authorial insight into the means of survival under certain circumstances.

Let us begin with Laxmi's tender sexuality that displays, as the religious connotation of her divine name suggests, normative femininity. She evokes the paradigm of a dutiful housewife in the patriarchal edifice of 'home'. Thousand lashes of Sakharam cannot even draw a word of visible protest from her. While with Sakharam, she does not even forget to wear the *mangalsutra* (holy chain of marriage) of her past marriage as she is bound by the rules of a Hindu woman. At the time of her entry into the house, she looks for the kitchen, which symbolises her fantasised domain of security and escape from all persecutions outside.

In contrast to the diminutive and tender Laxmi, Champa is the blatant expression of female sexuality. She is a social-heretic who seems to be clever enough to use her bodily resources in order to control the masculine fixation over it. She distrusts the idea of traditional womanhood as it passively surrenders to the male needs. Her bold and unashamed use of sexuality tries to convert the strength of the male gaze into its weakness. And, this, she believes, is the way to counter Sakharam's sexual aggression and survive.

Tendulkar seems to have made a comparative analysis of the two women in terms of their hold over Sakharam. Under critical examination, Champa's physicality comes to

reveal the compulsions behind her stand and is shown as self-defeating. Her horrible memory of marriage compels her to consider her body, almost cynically, a destined object of allurements to be used only to arrest the male desires for self-security. It is not that she loves to use her body this way; rather she has to do it to ensure the minimum security for her life. Her awareness of the situation makes her outspoken about it, "Instead of having ten beasts tearing at me everyday, I'd rather do what one says to me" (184). This compulsiveness seems to render her physicality insufficient as against the alternative subjectivity of Laxmi. Sakharam is awe-struck at her for a moment but gradually yields to Laxmi. In the play, her defeat points out the weaknesses of her survival strategy.

During her first stint in Sakharam's house, Laxmi is able to leave "a mark" (153) on him. Her silent presence aided by her deep faith in spirituality and religious norms proves unbearable to Sakharam who, despite his will, fails to ignore her. This becomes evident when she comes back second time. Interestingly, Champa welcomes her in the house and proposes a shared space for survival in a manner reminiscent of Kamala-Sarita partnership. But Laxmi has different thoughts as she wants to survive alone with Sakharam. Her influence begins to tell on him as the unabashed norm-breaker now comes to feel a sense of guilt in making love with another woman in the presence of his 'lawful wife'. Nothing more Champa can do than running in a liaison with Dawood desperately to avenge her loss of control on Sakharam. But this also proves self-defeating as Laxmi leaks it out to Sakharam to manipulate his masculine ego against her immediate foe. The result is manifold – Champa perishes to the squeezing clutches of Sakharam, and the man, after the last flicker of his remaining male gusto, shows the sign of being worn out. The final spectacle of Laxmi undertaking the secret burial of Champa's body in the darkness of night with immobile and impotent Sakharam looking "lost" (198) tells it all – the subordinated image of femininity manoeuvres to the position of authority by a calculative manipulation of her situation in the relations of power. Laxmi's triumph surely implies the usefulness of the traditional femininity when used for the profit of woman. But it unmistakably glorifies somewhere the normative wifedom as well. Notwithstanding her win, Laxmi ardently believes in the passive and docile wifedom. She is taught to respect her 'mangalsutra' (holy chain of marriage) despite all injustice and continues to do so till the end. Not even in her wildest dream she has ever thought of debating the authority of her male master. Her sole aim is more to dispose off Champa and live 'happily' thereafter with her master than to have a life of equality and freedom. She does not even have, at

least, the self-recognition of Sarita. For all this reason, Laxmi's empowerment seems to be a problematic issue.

Survival within and outside the family becomes nearly impossible for the loyal-yet-aspiring wife in the film script, *The Threshold*. Sulbha initially comes out of her house in order to do something herself. But the outside world proves to be more sexually hostile to the women than the refined sexism inside a home. She has to quit her working place in favour of her home with the hope of choosing the relatively better option between the two unfavourable ones. But to her utter shock, she finds that her husband, Subhas, has started keeping a mistress outside during her absence. The border between in and outside the home fast gets blurred to her. The middle class sophistication of her family totally peels off. She has lost her faith in both the worlds she has tried to live in. Finally, we see her leaving the house for some unknown destination but, unmistakably, with a mind fully aware of her condition. This is, perhaps, the only positive sign in Sulbha's exit as it was in Sarita's case.

The case of Rama, the housewife in *The Vultures*, is interesting because it expresses a different type of survival technique. Inside the home, Rama is seen to be struggling to counter the impotent masculinity of her husband, Ramakant. She rejects the womanhood where pregnancy is seen merely as a way of satisfying the male ego. She wants to become pregnant for her own pleasure. But the pressure of the husband, who wants to disprove his impotency, is immense on her. She cannot thrash out the fact at him and goes out blatantly to fulfil her desire. Women, generally, do not tread on that way in Tendulkar. She can neither commit suicide nor kill her husband (242) to get rid of it because that would spoil her dream for ever. Considering the practicality of her situation, Rama explores a path that, she hopes, can get all interests served. Through Rajaninath, the illegitimate son of her father-in-law, she plans to realise her autonomy. Pregnancy arrives through this liaison to make many ends meet. First, it assures the husband of his manhood. Secondly, it gives Rama the right to her body. Although the disclosure of the illegitimate pregnancy to the husband threatens any prospect of autonomy, this negative aspect can be taken for the play's larger thematic need to visualise the degeneration of a middle-class family in all respects, not in terms of gender alone. This setback to Rama's dreamt happiness does therefore never undermine the potential strength of this counterstrategy in gaining some power for the woman.

What we find in Rama's illegitimate pregnancy is a daring attempt, rare in Tendulkar, at self-autonomy. For a housewife totally dependent on her husband for her livelihood and nowhere else to go, Rama's way seems to be the only feasible option. However, this type of tactful attempt to manipulate the oppressive condition to one's own benefit seems to be better handled by Karnad in some of his women characters such as Rani (*Naga-Mandala*) and Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*). These oppressed wives, castigated inside conjugality, seem to be more clever and manipulative than Rama to exploit the male power to their profit. They provide patriarchy with a sense of self-assurance by displaying a calculated conformity and prepare the ground for their work. Instead of overt disavowal of norms, which might immediately invite the punitive actions, they covertly manoeuvre them to gain some freedom. The success rate of this technique is of course variable, but it surely offers these women a scope of self-expression under the specific circumstances they are located in.

Conjugality comes to be a 'naturalised' sexual imprisonment for Rani. Her seemingly unintentional liaison with the Naga and act of self-defence at the village panchayat represent a covert opposition to oppressive norms. In this play, however, extra-marital comes not as a deliberate choice on the part of the female subject, unlike *The Vultures* where Rama chooses it on her own. It seems to be more like the authorial intention to explore unconventionality in order to arrive at a liberating mode of living. Karnad seems to be keen to push Rani on the unusual path in order to find the possibility of dissent. A woman having multiple male partners is vigorously discouraged by the mainstream Hindu religious texts (Bhattacharji 30), be it a secret liaison in the form of extra-marital or polyandry inside the legitimacy of marriage, though it may have been permissible in some region or tribes in India. The presence of extra-marital relation in some of the plays is, therefore, tantamount to travelling into the forbidden territory as a mode of dissent.

Karnad's dramaturgy relies on the mythological and folk elements so as to capitalise on their power of irony and 'complex seeing'. The magical world of the Naga works as a garb that expresses different thematic tropes as understatement. The issue of extra-marital relation and pregnancy is underscored but without a bang so as to avoid direct confrontation with society. The metaphysical intervention deliberately creates a

confusion regarding Rani's unawareness about or consent to sex with a man other than her husband. Her un-intentionality is quite clear in her accidental throwing out of the magic root, the herbal medicine meant for the sexual arousal of her husband, near the cave of the cobra. So, as an understatement, it is the magic (the root-cum-the Naga), and not Rani herself, that initiates the extra-marital. Then the question, as to whether she remains unaware all through, persists till the end through Karnad's deft fusion of the real and the magic. This style of keeping the question under suspension almost till the end and exploring different possibilities understates the aberration and its outcome. The use of the Naga, instead of a human suitor, is however the most important ploy of understatement in the play. In her opposition, the woman here is not found to be eager to script a man-less space. All she tries is to redesign the traditional roles to rectify the sexual imbalances existing between man and woman, and that is too through a covert manipulation, ensuring lesser reprisal and greater success-rate. For this purpose, the understatement of the folk style is appropriate because it helps to hide all implications of aberration and avoids direct clash with the society. A normal human being, instead of the magical Naga, might exaggerate this challenge and endanger it in its very inception.

Rani's pregnancy drags her to the court of the village elders. Here we find her unfolding a clever technique that exploits the male mindset to her own advantage. But, the question remains – is it Rani's independent manoeuvre that gets her through? Obviously, it is the cobra that suggests Rani the way to prove her innocence. This assistance of the cobra suggests the usefulness of a male presence in woman's struggle. In two other plays, *The Vultures* and *The Fire and the Rain*, similar male assistance can be located. Karnad's 'supernaturalising' the male assistance has a lot to do with understating such assistance that, as mentioned before, could draw more severe punishment if it had come from an ordinary human. However, the 'supernaturality' might also suggest the unreliability of this sort of help from a human being. Such a case as male-aid turning abortive will be discussed later in Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain*. As to the credit of whether Rani or the cobra, it can be said that the cobra's help is surely limited to an extent. Till a certain stage of her nocturnal pleasure with the cobra, Rani believes that her husband is duplicitous enough to change colour with the rise and fall of the sun – that is, seduce at night and deny by day. But the fleeting sense of unnaturalness of the 'man' she is sleeping with comes just the night before the snake ordeal, and thenceforth she seems to be a new woman altogether who has chosen her goal. Therefore, despite the importance

of the male assistance, Karnad seems to explore the folk conventions to indicate the limitation of such help and, simultaneously, the effective agency of the woman in redesigning her identity.

Rani's words during the ordeal show her changed subjectivity. Putting her hand inside the snake-cave, she says, "Since coming to this village, I have held by this hand, only two . . . My husband and . . . And this Cobra. . . . If I lie, let the Cobra bite me" (58). The snake remains content with this truth, and she proves her innocence. The society, which was up to castigate her as fallen woman, now comes out to worship her as a divine being, a goddess or a 'devi' and order her husband to spend the rest of his life in her service (59). It is true that Rani fails to dismantle the male discourse that condemns as well as valorises woman for its own needs. But that does not seem to be her aim at all. The dream of this little bride was only to have a home that would be less oppressive and more accommodative than it was given to her, and finally she seems to have got something more than she ever expected.

The ending of the play is again a technical marvel that exploits folk style to enrich the thematic issue. There are three versions of the conclusion. Karnad performs 'complex seeing' of the story by offering three probable ways to end, each of which denotes the amount of Rani's agency in her self-formation. He brings back the natural and supernatural characters, introduced in the Prologue, to enact the endings. The first ending tells that Rani lives happily ever after with total control over her home. But the Man, a listener, objects to it as it fails to tell what happens to Rani's husband, Appanna, who is pretty sure that he is not the father of the new born child. Likewise, it does not clarify about Rani herself, who must have realised the difference the first night her true husband has slept with her because "No two men make love alike" (60). The fate of the cobra is also left out here. Without these nuances the woman's self-formulated subjectivity still remains vague. So, there comes the second version. It tells about the return of the love-struck Naga only to choke to death on Rani's thick hair and her heartfelt gesture of cremating it by her son – the first overt-textual evidence of her awareness of sharing her bed with a man other than her husband. Although it was suggested the moment before the snake ordeal, this present recognition of her awareness indicates her pre-knowledge of the situation and her calculative design. Now the Flames are upset over this tragic ending and ask for a happy one. The final one that follows seems to suggest the ultimate point of

Rani's empowerment where she welcomes the return of the Naga and hides it inside her lock to continue with a blissful life of marriage. This self-styled co-existence with the legitimate husband and the suitor indicates the redesigning of family and the given sexual roles. Without dismantling the system, the woman here remodels, through her clever strategy, the power relations inside the traditional spaces and makes them as spacious to her as they are to men.

Manipulation of the patriarchal mindset can also be found in Vishakha's counteraction (*The Fire and the Rain*). She struggles to rewrite her status in the domestic space marked by masculine indifference and exploitation. The negligence of a careerist husband committed only to his spiritual self-glorification and the threat of a not-so-friendly father-in-law compel her to rethink her life. She, however, never tries to dissolve her conjugal alliance and come out in total disavowal of society; on the contrary, she wants to retain her family and remain as Parvasu's wife but only after having the dues she deserves. Her challenge surely brings change, however small it might be in significance.

Vishakha's survival technique involves two aspects. One is the liaison with Yavakri, and the other is using Parvasu to her gain. Extra-marital relation remains to be an expression of the betrayed femininity in this play as well, though it is shown to be abortive to Vishakha's desire for self-formation. Her sour conjugal life, dried up due to Parvasu's masculine asceticism, renders her subject dissatisfied. She looks for a material sign of assurance in her pre-marriage suitor, Yavakri. This act of aberration on the part of Vishakha fails to become an effective resistance because it seems to be a mere combination of her urge to respond to the call of her body neglected for long, a hurried expression of her insulted ego longing to avenge her tragedy and a nostalgic sentimentality for a pre-marriage lover. Unlike Rama's (*The Vultures*) engagement with her brother-in-law, this present liaison is not motivated by any strategic design of the woman to consolidate her subject position. As a result, Vishakha comes to be an easy prey to Yavakri's design that schemes to use her as a tool to destroy the Raibhya family. But the moment this becomes clear to her, she spoils Yavakri's plan by pouring out the holy water from his 'kamandalu' (pot of holy water) meant for killing her husband's family, and in the meantime a demon, sent by Raibhya, kills Yavakri. Her act proves that

family, home, husband, and wifehood remain her priorities, but they must come free from the sexist bias and be equally accommodative to woman.

After her lesson from the Yavakri episode, Vishakha masterminds an ingenious scheme to achieve a two-fold purpose – first, the elimination of the oppressive father-in-law and, secondly, the return of Parvasu to her. Karnad here modifies the original mythology of the unintentional patricide of Parvasu, mistaking the deerskin his father was wearing for a wild animal. The purpose is to empower Vishakha with the agency to manipulate Parvasu's mind, as though he comes to kill his father under her spell. Parvasu is shown, for a moment, as goaded by his wife into killing his father. However, the fact is that he has his own reason for it and, therefore, lets himself be a part of her design.

The report of Vishaka's affair with Yavakri and his death at the behest of his father brings Parvasu home only for a night. He wants to clear his path to spiritual glory, which, he believes, is threatened by his desiring wife on the one hand and his clever father on the other, though he is still unsure about the way of settlement. Vishakha's scheme offers him a scope. On the other side, Vishakha pours out a vicious string of words to translate Parvasu's anger into an act of revenge on his father. Mark her words.

We're three of us here. Your brother's never home. That leaves me and your father. (Pause) Something died inside your father the day the King invited you to be the Chief Priest . . . (Pause) On the one hand, there's his sense of being humiliated by you. On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's curdled lust. And there's no one else here to take his rage out on but me. (Pause) At least Yavakri was warm, gentle. For a few minutes, he made me forget the wizened body, the scratchy claws, and the blood, cold as ice. . . . (32-33)

The moment Raibhya's steps are heard in the distance, Parvasu suddenly shoots his arrow to his direction. It is indeed Vishakha's victory because she succeeds in removing her father-in-law, ostensibly, by manipulating her husband's male ego. But her success is not complete. Parvasu's blatant explanation that his patricide has more to do with his father's growing threat to his fire sacrifice than any concern for Vishakha largely undermines her objective. All her dream for a home is shattered by this expression of the male ego that seems to be cleverer than her in using her position to serve its own interest.

But this partial success cannot totally dismiss the significance of her attempt. Her daring play on the male ego is an intelligent attempt to survive in a hostile situation.

The last woman to be discussed in the present section is Padmini (*Hayavadana*). She does not belong to the type of women such as Rama, Rani and Vishakha who survive somehow utilising the given situations to their profit. She is not there for devising any new mode of counter strategy to male oppression. Padmini is created mostly to express the female desire to have the best in life. And in this respect, she is unorthodox because desiring the best is traditionally a male prerogative. It is not a female's domain since she is more desired than desiring. Like a male, Padmini desires to have the best sexual partner – the combination of Devadatta's brain and Kapila's body. Opposing the traditional wifehood, she admires Kapila's physique while living with her legitimate husband Devadatta. This is why she fits in this final part of women's counteractions as somebody who dares to express the innermost female sexual desire.

Padmini's desire for the best of both men is a critique of the sexual roles. It destabilises the principle of female monogamy and the limitation of her sexual desire. It seems to betray an extremity, trying to reorganise the sexual division of power and showing the readiness to go even to a symbolic point of polyandry for it. She is said to have erred in transposing the heads in her excitement, but this can also be called her subconscious desire for a perfect husband. There are many instances in the play supporting this point. Immediately after the transposition when Padmini is overjoyed at her newly designed husband (Devadatta's head and Kapila's body), Kapila, now in Devadatta's fragile body, divulges, "I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong body . . ." (108). She, therefore, whispers to Kapila to console, "It's my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I'm going with your body" (111). It appears very calculative all through. She marries the intelligent man, longs for the muscular other, mixes up the heads and goes away with the better one, without forgetting to secretly console the other. Her action seems to upgrade her subjectivity to a position of desiring from that of being desired always.

The use of Goddess Kali in the play is another way of disturbing the traditional notion of womanhood. The adapted folk conventions allow free interaction between human and non-human worlds, and this mix of reality and magic provides innovative

penetration of gender. The use of the Goddess explains it well. Traditionally, Kali or Shakti occupies a central position in the conceptualisation of Indian womanhood. The pre-Independence nationalist discourse revived the images of the ten-armed Durga and the naked Kali “with her garland of skulls standing on a supine male Shiva” (Bagchi, *Indian Women* 3). However, many opposed the image of Kali for its woman-on-top posture of naked femininity (Sarkar 2012) and regarded it as degeneration of the glorified ten-armed Durga. So, the militant Kali came to be refined as tender, soft, and motherly. She was brought near to the paradigmatic mother, Durga. Thus, both Durga and Kali formulated the typology of national femininity. Despite their anti-colonial stance, these images allegedly sustained the sexual qualifications of chastity, purity and self-sacrifice for women (Bagchi, *Representing Nationalism* 71). Interestingly, Karnad has subverted this nationalist image of Kali and thereby contested the traditional notion of woman sustained by this image. Kali, in this play, has become a tool of problematising gender roles.

Karnad demythologises Kali by making it a comic figure. In her temple, the Goddess can be found as drooping down in drowsiness, disturbed by the interruptive worshipers, and sometimes even jealous like a common housewife. Her ‘human’ features oppose the divine incarnation of female power. The hilarious effect around her figure is created by well-managed spectacles enriched by ironical dialogues. When Padmini is about to commit suicide, she appears in a terrifying manner. Her fanatical dance with the tremendous noise of drums, however, comes to be juxtaposed by a sudden lull as she is found to be exhausted by the long history of overnight ‘managalarati’. Her disgust over it seems to suggest the authorial critique of the past (nationalist) consolidation of this feminine archetype. Her yawning and exhaustion serves to ridicule this build-up. Unlike her divine denomination, she comically envies Lord Shiva, who, she alleges, always receives better gifts than she from the worshippers and reduces her to the point of being absurd. Womanhood is, thus, subverted by the absurdity of Kali. This subversion is very much in tune with Padmini’s counteractions that try to get the female desires recognised, unsettling the preset notions about them.

Beside critiquing the feminine stereotypes, *Hayavadana* performs another important task. Padmini unconventionally desires to have the best of the two men but finally ends up being ‘left out’, without having either. The challenging aspect of her

desire is duly recognised in the text, but its objective is undermined. She aims for the 'ideal masculinity' – the best fusion of the soul and the body. Any recognition to her aim would ask for, in the same vein, an 'ideal femininity'. This would endanger her challenge against the male-made feminine 'ideality' and also Goddess Kali's critique of it. How could she herself long for an essential masculinity while challenging the same in the case of her own sex? So her failure to have the ideal husband can be taken for a protest against any sort of sexual idealisation, whether of male or female.

In the final part of the assessment, let us focus on the main findings. One obvious aspect is the variety in sexual experience the women undergo. In spite of their shared experience of exploitation, each of them has a different tale to tell. And subsequently, they also offer different modes of contestation. To an oppressive social system, no two women stand up similarly and survive in a pre-programmed manner. This variety can be ascribed to the diversity of their socio-cultural backgrounds. Their gender is always influenced by such factors as class, caste, social milieu, economic status. A variation in these factors often decides the extent of gender oppression. An extended patriarchy seems to have been created by these other forms of hierarchies that sometimes multiply oppression. An affluent, upper class/caste woman's suffering hardly matches that of a woman belonging to the lower strata. Because of such difference in caste and economic status, Sarita and Kamala, for example, cannot be straight-jacketed as a coherent group of the sexually oppressed. For the same reason, no two women react in a similar manner to their oppressive realities. Their survival techniques vary because Sakharam's sexual domination does not match that of Jaisingh Jadhav or, let us say, Paravasu. So it can be said that Tendulkar's and Karnad's treatment of the contemporary Indian women avoids any "sociological notion of the 'sameness'" (Mohanty qtd. in Ashcroft 262) of women's oppression. Rather, they expose the heterogeneous sexist discourses in different situations and assess the varied expressions of discontent or opposition from a long range of sexual 'Other(s)'.

Notwithstanding the variety among all the women, two groups of them could roughly be viewed according to the writers' respective styles of presentation. Tendulkar's women seem to lack in courage that often visits Karnad's women in their ingenious ways of survival. Leela Benare (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) undoubtedly displays her guts in her 'free lifestyle' but finally yields to the cruel society. Except the

hope for a redefined motherhood, she does not have much to be contented with in this male society. The same applies to Sarita (*Kamala*), Laxmi (*Sakharam Binder*), Sulbha (*The Threshold*), and Rama (*The Vultures*). Among them, only Rama seems to have shown some ingenuity. Her well-planned use of the extra-marital pregnancy gains her some respite, though interim in nature. This is why she is perceived, in this study, together with Karnad's Rani (*Naga-Mandala*) and Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*). In resourcefully tackling the male society, Rani exceeds all. Let alone her snake ordeal, the deft ending of the play shows her as a clever woman who knows how to reply verbatim to the male idiom. Vishakha's way is also to cleverly manipulate the male mindset, though she is not as successful as Rani in getting her 'own' husband and family. Another woman character, who proves less calculative but more daring than others, is Padmini (*Hayavadana*). She is, perhaps, the only female who dares to desire the best of two men and, magically, gets four types of men in one lifetime (125). Though the disastrous end implies the impossibility of any sort of sexual 'ideality', or of human perfection – for that matter, her unorthodox desire could not be overlooked. Thus, Karnad's women can be said to score against Tendulkar's as far as the unconventionality of their opposition is concerned. Tendulkar seems to have stressed gaining self-consciousness for the present for a freer and more accommodative future, whereas Karnad seems to encourage his females to be unconventionally resourceful so as to bargain for a better deal right now!

The patriarchal mindset is, however, the most obvious social reality in the plays. Though varied in forms and expressions, a male-dominated system seems to be always at work. Its mode of operation depends on changing contexts and is therefore diverse. Different local specificities influence its presence and function. But this variety cannot undermine its role. Along with other hierarchies, this sexual hierarchy continues to be a major factor to influence a large section of the society. For example, Sarita's oppressed status is certainly different from Kamala's owing to their class-difference. But, this class-difference fails to ensure Sarita's freedom from oppression. Her exquisite and refined middle class home finally turns into a sophisticated replica of the rural flesh market in terms of its bigoted mindset. The change of context, as in this case, has been able to alter only the sexist expression but not the condition itself. The male domination is overwhelmingly active across the varied social domains.

The attempt to rearrange life within the existing social structures is the other commonality found in the women characters. They want to end sexual exploitation but, in the process, do not wish the extinction of the social institutions such as marriage, family and home. They prefer to live and struggle within them that are visibly designed to serve male interest. Leela Benare (*Silence! The Court is in Session*), Sarita (*Kamala*), Laxmi (*Sakharam Binder*), Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*) – all display a desire to re-script womanhood without radically challenging the given realities. The Benares and Vishakhas remain always located in their immediate context and seek liberation, importantly, not from the institutions but from their oppressive grips. They can be found as longing for womanhood, motherhood and willing to become/remain wife in a family. But that should not be surprising inasmuch as they actually want to be a ‘free’ wife or mother in a family that has to be made more accommodative and liberal. It is true that Karnad’s women prove more daring than Tendulkar’s as far as their exercise of will is concerned. They are evidently more manipulative to attain their goal. Rani, Vishakha and Padmini exemplify it. But, obviously, none of them ever rejects the traditional categories of woman. The struggle to redesign the inner power relations of the system, keeping its outer structure intact, seems to be the most obvious and immediate concern of the women both in Tendulkar and Karnad.

Inevitably, the above style of opposing male authority can be perceived as self-defeating since none of the women visibly comes out totally free from sexual oppression. To simple logic, they willingly or unwillingly seem to choose to compromise their total freedom for the sake of larger social interests. Traces of the notion of the traditional Indian woman are still found here. As an epitome of sacrifice, Indian women are said to compromise more than confront to ensure social stability. They are unwilling to self-assert and therefore isolated from their own space (Kishwar 31). It is even said that they “consider compromise positively to view it as the most acceptable accommodation of conflicting obligations, of pressures satisfactorily resolved” (Chitnis 24). The women in Tendulkar and Karnad obviously compromise in not rejecting everything that is male-made. But their act should not be devalued as simple surrender to male power. Their compromises should also be read vis-à-vis their contexts. Truly, they are not blind in their rejection. They accept more than reject, but their choice is always curbed by their immediate contexts. In their situations, these women appear to be bold and sometimes resourceful enough to register a note of dissent and do what they think most profitable.

That is why Sarita Jadhav (*Kamala*) chooses to stay in her husband's home, while Sulbha (*The Threshold*) goes out. It would be an overstatement to say that Tendulkar's and Karnad's women ultimately uphold the conventional Indian womanhood, extolling their self-sacrificial aspect. On the contrary, they emphasise women's self-awareness that can lead to a voice of dissent. As Naomi Wolf once observed, "I don't see Indian feminism bashing men the way that we (The American), unfortunately, did rhetorically in the 1980s. What I recommend is that feminists spearheading change, especially in the developing world, tread more gently than we did . . . but play hardball . . . where it counts . . ." (58). The women characters here perhaps try to do this – getting self-aware and treading gently. Their main objective is to maximise profit under the given circumstances. Instead of outright rejection of the male-made code, this can be called contesting it from within with varied outcomes. The most visible profit of these actions is that women gain self-knowledge and feel the need to re-script their life. The contestation is indeed worth the gain.