

Conclusion

The last four decades in Indian theatre correspond with the period generally considered to be the most productive for women theatre practitioners. This is the period when women's voices finally came out of the 'closet' and explored different forms of theatre to find suitable expressions. Women playwrights and directors engaged with women's issues both thematically and dramaturgically. The early 1970s plays dealing exclusively with gender injustices were initially branded as feminist plays, but, from the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Indian theatre proliferated into multiple forms in order to accommodate the multitude of women's voices in theatre which was until then forced to remain content either with following the prevailing male-dominated theatre structures or imitating the 'Western' feminist theatre.

Having its inception in the socio-political activism in the 1970s and the contemporary experimentalist theatre, the 'feminist theatre' catered only to recognizing and exposing gender discrimination and subordination of women. But, it was never enough to mainstream the women's issues and destabilize the male gaze in exposing the social mechanisms that stereotype women and their roles both in the domestic and public spheres. Hence, the Indian women theatre practitioners sought to enhance the scope of theatre in India in order to produce a more inclusive dramaturgy that can accommodate not only the traditional approach to male-female relationship in the Indian context but also represent the ever-changing nature of the gender dynamics with respect to the change in socio-political, cultural, communal, religious and economic structures. Thematically, they widened the scope of writing plays in order to comprehend the issues of women living in the fringes as well as in the 'centre'; voice their regional concerns as well as the national; contextualize women's experiences instead of essentially valorizing the female. Hence, a host of plays were

written whose issues ranged from domestic, public, ethnic, religious and political violence on women to challenging the stereotypical representations of women as either victims, comforters or seducers, from restructuring the position of women amidst the nationalist narratives, exposing the politics of class-caste matrix to engaging with women's economic, social and sexual freedom in a consumerist society, which though largely continues to be reserved for the masculine desires, is increasingly providing space for women's desires. But in producing such diverse plays the Indian women playwrights and directors have been often criticized for lacking any 'rudimentary ideology'. Kinnari Vohra argues in this regard:

To start with, the plays ... do not always provide a feminine aesthetic and sensibility. It is true that some of these plays ... take up women's issues and their concerns in a relevant manner, but they are few and far between. But above all, what one detects is the absence of a rudimentary ideology. For women's theatre to proliferate, one will have to consciously contribute to a genre, which will have its own basic, underlying principles. (Vohra)

But, lack of any homogenous ideological position liberates Indian women theatre practitioners from any dogmatic approach. Free from committing to any rigid ideology, they could preserve their unique approaches with respect to the changing structures of society and politics. Though initially associated with either the Gandhian socialists or the Left, they remained largely at a distance from the mainstream political parties and sought to produce 'uncorrupt' criticism of the body of Indian socio-political culture. But in the early 1970s, any woman writer dealing with woman-centric themes would be easily categorized a feminist. In that case, either the mainstream national/ regional political parties tried to usurp the feminist voices or they were ignored as 'wishy-washy' feminists. B. Jayashree, Poile Sengupta, Gitanjali Shree, Iripinder Bhatia (Hindi), Neelam Mansingh Chaudhury (Punjabi), Binodini, Shanoli Mitra, Usha Ganguli, Sushma Deshpande, and Qudsia Zaidi are some of the female

playwrights who started their career as playwrights and directors during this period. Though most of the playwrights avoided 'radical' feminist approaches, a large number of plays were composed questioning the basic social structures. In their love of representing 'reality', they often espoused strong criticism of the conventional theatre structures and pilloried men in general. But such plays did not go unquestioned and hence attracted adverse reception too. Kinnari Vohra speaks of *Saavar Re*, a play by Mohan Agashe and Swati Chitnis, which was a revolt against the onslaught of some feminist plays in India. The play states quite clearly that the breach of trust between men and women in the Indian family structure is the product of unproblematic toeing of 'essential' feminist propositions such as Kate Millett's pronouncement against the continuance of the family system - 'family must go' (Vohra 25). Vohra informs that *Saavar Re* exemplifies the anti-feminist stand in Indian theatre which considered the imitation of radical 'Western' feminist proposals as adversely harming the women in India instead of men.

The Indian Women playwrights and directors therefore gradually produced a theatre of their own which was free from following both the 'Western' feminist and the traditional Indian conventions of play-writing and theatre production. But simple rejection of the conventions did not imply the production of women's theatre, for 'even conventional forms can be used to depict the entrapment of women within social institutions'. (Mukherjee 17). The women playwrights and directors in India, instead, premised their plays on projecting women as 'conscious' and responsible subjects around whom the performances evolved. They explored variety of forms in order to accommodate the range of issues that the diverse social milieu threw up. As much as they represented the variety of Indian contexts, the forms of theatre production for women, the settings and the subjects, were decided by the 'agony, anger, and suspicion about *patriarchy*' (Kamble 33) (italics mine) identifying it and separating it from the 'male' as a set of ideologies that sought to promote gendered injustices.

For any playwright, according to Kamble, priority is that the plays should be comprehensible to the target audience and the performance should be participatory. Rather than offering entertainment for the audience and aesthetic appreciation for the readers and critics, they (playwrights) intend to educate, instruct, and inform' (33) (bracketing mine). While educating, instructing and informing through theatre have been traditionally realized through 'realistic' approaches to social events, they have also been criticized on the ground that too much of realism sometimes naturalizes 'the status quo of the patriarchal system and covertly positions the reader/ spectator within that ideology.' (Mukherjee 18) The purpose of women-centred theatre, instead of producing therapeutic effects on the audience, is to 'dislodge' their equipoise and make them recognize the contexts which either stereotype women or motivate them to revolt against the status-quo. But the history of post-independence Indian theatre reveals that it has always grappled with the questions of stage/ audience, text/ performance relationships. The stage was less looked upon as a separate platform held tightly with planks on either side but a place amidst an actively participating audience rather than an assembly of passive onlookers. Indian playwrights and directors like Ebrahim Alkazi (*Insafkaghera*, 1972), Rudraprasad Sengupta (*Kharirgondi*, 1978), Habib Tanvir (*Sajapurki Shantibai*, 1982), and few others have drawn from Bertolt Brecht the techniques of engaging with the audience and presenting before them an alternative understanding of time and history through non-linear narratives and anti-realist staging in order to produce a rational rather than emotional effect. But the Indian women playwright-directors chose to espouse a dramaturgy that is interstitially located between 'realism and Brechtian non-realism' (18). For example, C. S. Lakshmi's *Crossing the River* (2000), originally composed in Tamil is structured as a forum to equate a woman's voice from the stage with that of the voices of women in the audience. The play unfolds with only one character, Sita (from the epic Ramayana), and puts forward alternatives to the traditional

representation of Sita as the epitome of silence. In this play, Sita embarks on a search for an authentic existence so that she can reframe her identity. Instead of building a conventional character, Lakshmi therefore chooses to 'trouble' the audience by making Sita assume multiple identities. She critiques the traditional one dimensional portraits of Sita as the victim of a patriarchal social structure. If considered as an exponent of Augusto Baul's 'forum theatre', the play must articulate the voice of the audience, but it refrains from following any set pattern of dramatic conventions. Lakshmi allows the content of her play to dictate the form. Neither realist nor absolutely non-realist, in its structure, the play foregrounds a multitude of questions which Sita answers with disgust, despair, wrath and conviction.

Which Sita?

Which Sita are you?

Are you Kamban's Sita?

Valmiki's Sita?

Or

Sita of Tulsidas?

Are you the Maya Sita

created

to bear

the pain and sorrow for the real Sita?

Or

are you the Sita of

people's tales?

A different Sita, are you?

What difference does it make?

Which Sita I am

Which is the real Sita

and which

the false?

All are real and all false.

I am Sita

made up with words

bound in words

imprisoned in words.

I am Sita

made up with words

bound in words

imprisoned in words.

I am Sita

that authority creates.

I am Sita

that authority creates.

I am Sita brought up

with words,

Be this way

Stand this way

Sit this way

Lie this way

Think this way.

...

I am Sita of a kind,

Sita with many faces

living through

many times

many spaces.

I am

Another Sita

anotherSita.
...
I am a woman
I am a man
I am an object
I am the thing
ferreted out by rulers.
I am Ravan
if Rama so wishes:
...
I am you
all of you,
all of you asking questions.
I am the body of your questions.
There is strength
left still.
I shall cross the river
I shall cross the river
To see the new world
To assume a new form
to create a new Rajya.(Mukherjee 434 – 439)

Composed in verses, the play therefore aims at confronting the audience's state of mental equipoise. It also hints at a new project at the end. What Sita displays in the play is her disenchantment with the 'Ram Rajya'. She is led to explore not merely the *reality behind the illusion* of Ram Rajya but also to seek the *reality in illusion* in her search for a 'new world', 'new form' and a 'new Rajya' (439).

That the element of illusion or at least fantasy is always present in 'reality' in order to sustain its 'charms' and motivate the desired effect, has never been ignored by the Indian Women playwrights and directors in the last two decades. In *A Tale from the Year 1857: Azizun Nisa*, Tripurari Sharma recognizes the aspect of inherent fantasy in the idea of 'nationalism' which creates the ground for a distorted or at least a twisted texture of reality. Hence, it may be said to suggest a classic case of seeking *reality behind the illusion* as well as *illusion in the reality*. Azizun is indoctrinated in the idea of militant nationalism administered by the rebel soldier, Shamsuddin. Azizun is warned by her fellow courtesans not to involve herself in the rebellion and continue her pursuit of art. But she had already surrendered herself to the desire of participating in the rebellion which was touted as the nationalistic struggle. The desire to participate in the nationalistic struggle and prove herself as a rebel in the national cause leads her to a hysteric slaughtering of British women and children. This is how desire inscribes itself in the perception of reality – by distorting it (Zizek). The otherwise objective nationalism is transformed into an absolutely subjective phenomenon. Tripurari Sharma never justifies Azizun's choice of the bloody massacre of innocent British women and children. The indiscreet bloodshed is rather shown as the result of frustration in the unsuccessful armed rebellion of her fellow nationalists. Hence, the play displays Azizun's lack of objective perception into the ideals of nationalism and nationalistic struggles. She suspends the basic tenets of humanity and compassion before the 'desire' to be lost in the illusion intrinsic to the 'reality' of failure.

If desire distorts reality, Mamta G. Sagar in her *The Swing of Desire* identifies the recognition of reality to be inherently conditioned. Pratap's anonymous sister is caught in the patriarchal illusion that playing the docile submissive wife in conjugal relationship would assure her the status of 'muse' before the husband. The obvious intonation is towards the traditional masculine desire of control over women. But desire may have the element of

insatiability in it and may produce complex ramifications soon after some initial fulfillments. Hence, the woman is expected to be conditioned according to the changing wishes of her husband. The play therefore suggests that the failure of marriage for the Sister is in misrecognising the nature of inscriptions of patriarchal desire on the institution of marriage. The Sister may have enjoyed libidinal pleasure while living in the illusion of marriage, but in failing to offer intellectual camaraderieto her husband, she is painfully driven to confront the reality of her husband's desire which now wishes for an intellectual partner in his wife than a woman who has reduced herself to his sexual desires. As an audience, looking at a play being unfolded on the stage may be subjected to similar forms of deceit but there always remains a certain amount of detachment. Unfortunately, the detachment has evaporated for the Sister, making her a slave to the illusion of 'happy' conjugality. The play, however, blames the Sister for the willing surrender of her ego before the husband's desire and instead of sympathizing with her, subjects her to further torture by making her the 'object' of ignorance for her husband. Courage to remain detached would have provided her the space to recognize the 'reality' inherent in the illusion of marriage, as it does to Manasa. The latter sees through the 'illusion' of her married life with Pratap and finally leaves him in order to build a career of her own. In fact, it is the realization of the 'reality' of self-abnegation in the marriage to Pratap that initiates Manasa's desire for the pursuit of her career.

One may consider Manasa's waking up to 'reality' as disenchantment with the traditional institution of marriage. But mere disenchantment is not enough. It must lead to a more appropriate cognitive reaction as well. Kusum Kumar has engaged with the representation of 'reality' in a more complex way in *Listen Shefali*. In the play, Shefali is portrayed as a woman who would never compromise with socio-cultural injustices. She had not only rejected all the 'benefits' endowed to her for being a woman from the lower caste, but also, moved out of her relationship with Bakul, the son of a politician in realizing that she was

being used as a political tool for garnering minority votes. Throughout the course of the play Shefali emerges as a rebel against the political system which sustains caste discrimination through government sanctions and produces the illusion of social upliftment. Shefali, who is intelligent and educated enough to see through the 'political illusion', champions the cause of the lower caste women but does not represent them. Political trickery has the capacity of producing an overwhelming 'false consciousness' on the immediate everyday reality. To Shefali's mother, a marriage with Bakul would lend her family the opportunity to liberate themselves from poverty. Failing to convince Shefali, she marries her sister to Bakul. Shefali fails to 'demonstrate' the reality behind Bakul's marriage to her sister and reacts to her marriage with a stoic acceptance. Hence, Kusum Kumar recognizes and projects the subtle tension between the multiple forms of realities underlying the apparent dislodging of the 'illusion' of patriarchal and socio-political institutions. Shefali's failure to react in a cognitive way may seem incongruous with her nature, but Kumar intentionally ends the play at this moment, in order to sustain the tension between absolute frustration and stoic acceptance. This is typical to Indian women playwrights and directors for they are more concerned with sustaining the process of reaction than enforcing a therapeutic completeness.

In engaging with forms of reality, the Indian women playwrights have also provided serious space for subjective psychological articulations. Dina Mehta in *Getting Away with Murder* has portrayed Sonali as a troubled survivor of child sexual abuse, struggling to draw boundaries between actual perpetrators of violence and her caregivers. She has been subject to private surveillance of her uncle in her childhood and she continues to feel being 'looked at' by her mother-in-law, unknown to the fact that the latter has been employed by her husband only to prevent her from harming herself. For Sonali, her brother, Gopal escaped the child sexual abuses only because he was a boy and not a girl. She is desperate to regain control over her body and go through the pregnancy process only if a boy child is detected in

her womb. Sonali's friend Razia is a doctor but caught in the expectations of an orthodox family, she has accepted the fact that the desire for child in a man must be satiated. Hence, the play articulates through Sonali and Razia the narratives of a male dominated society where women as victims of sexual abuse or patriarchal orthodoxy either continue living in psychosexual trauma or reduce themselves to passive recipients of social injustice. But in the course of the play, Dina Mehta seeks to redefine the traditional perceptions on patriarchy. While Sonali's uncle and Razia's husband are portrayed as male orthodox chauvinists, Sonali's husband on the other hand represents the man who is prepared not only to accept Sonali's decisions in child bearing but also to provide his wife the comfort and time to recover from the psychosexual trauma of her childhood. Gopal is presented as a man who champions the cause of the marginalized, especially the woman. Hence, instead of considering men as synonymous to patriarchy, Mehta argues that patriarchy is a set of ideas which is either endorsed or rejected, depending upon the process in which the individuals are indoctrinated.

Poile Sengupta drags Mehta's arguments further. Composed in 1994, her *Inner Laws* deals with the interpersonal relationships of women in a joint family system and instead of demonizing the male, critiques the social institutions of marriage and joint-family for women's experiences of domestic hostility. She identifies the traditional antagonism between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law as a forced relationship between two almost strangers expected to share the same home, kitchen etc. Sengupta opines, 'What makes the hostility even more serious is my belief that many women actually prepare themselves for the antagonism, much before the marriage is arranged. And this has to be seen in the larger context of marriage negotiations and the ubiquitous dowry system' (Sengupta 71). Using a woman-only cast of ten women representing ten different viewpoints, the play critically brings together contradictions not to destroy any but to put them in various contexts. Honest

revisiting of the male-female relationship therefore has been a common feature in Indian women's theatre. This has provided the women playwrights and directors greater access to women's actual conditions of life and existence and helped them articulate the continuously changing dimensions of femininity and masculinity.

However, the need to put forward the female issue by reclaiming the spaces women have been traditionally denied, has remained the primary focus for the Indian women theatre practitioners. Plays were written and staged on the life, works and role of women who were notable yet denied historical importance. Plays on Binodini Dasi, one of the most talked about women theatre personalities in the early 20th century Bengal, Akka Madhavi, Meera Bai and Manimekalai (known for their contributions to the spiritual history of the country) and others who have participated in their own capacities to the fields of literature, science, politics, music etc., have contributed to the production of a new scape in the Indian Women's theatre canon. Amal Allana's *Nati Binodini*, Tripurari Sharma's *AzizunNisa: A Tale form the Year 1857* and C.S. Mangai and V. Geetha's *KaalaKanavu*, can be cited as examples here. Apart from digging deep into the Indian history for retrieving women's spaces and participating in consciousness raising drives, the Indian women's theatre has provided space for women working as sex-workers as well. Groups like Komal Gandhar, Sanlaap, Jabala, Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad, etc. have been operating in different parts of the country and composing and producing plays on the daily lives, hopes, aspirations, frustrations and discriminations faced not only by the women sex-workers but also by their children. Plays like *My Mother*, *The Gharwali*, *Her Maalak*, *His Wife* (2006) and *I am that Woman* (2007) are notable for their accurate representations of the plight of women sex-workers.

Diverse in their range, the plays by Indian women playwrights therefore created enough scope for dramaturgic innovations. While theatre production has always been a collaborative affair, composing plays or rather developing the play script in collaboration has become

commonplace for Indian women's theatre. Plays like *Umrao* (1993) and *Navlakha* (2001) have been developed, directed and presented on stage by Anuradha Kapur in collaboration with Vidya Rao, Geetanjali Shree and Nilima Sheikh. Often these plays have been criticized for not providing a clear 'convergence into' the climax (Subramanyam 212). But as Anuradha Kapur argues, narrative closure is a regular feature in the 'masculine way of telling the story, which has an ending.' (212). For the Indian women's theatre on the other hand, it is important to disengage with the masculine structures of narrative. Hence, a play like *Umrao* neither seeks to produce any well-built character nor does it aim at a convergent climax. It may rather look like a collage with uneven boundaries than a well-knit finished product. The last scene of *Umrao* may be specially mentioned here, for it provides an alternative *mis-en-scene*. Nilima Sheikh, a painter by profession, who has also designed several theatre productions has designed the framework of this scene:

She painted eight scenes on wheels which had no particular locale, had nothing to do with a specific period, and in the end, these scenes formed a configuration. Each one of them had a golden background, and depicted quotations from miniatures, a tree, kites, the edge of a cloud and other figuratives. These scenes would be moved on to the stage according to the lines of the play. At the end, the screens made a backdrop with *Umrao* lying down with her feet towards the audience, and the other characters standing around her like set pieces or memory images. Before *Umrao* lies down, the screens turn around and shed a golden light on her to provide an iconic element to the scene. As *Umrao* slowly turns around, one wanted to show her not only as growing old but also as moving beyond it, as one who has a beginning and an end, so that as one phase has finished another has started. (214)

Such elaborate stage designs which 'metaphorically' supplemented the actions of the play have become a regular feature in the Indian women's theatre. Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry

may be specially mentioned here. Her productions are particularly marked with well thought out designs complemented by the use of delicate detailing in costumes, props, lights and ‘make ups’. While in *Fida* (1996), there is a comprehensive use of daily rituals of worship, water and sand grains, in *Yerma* (1992), Yerma’s joy, sexuality and passionate desire is embodied in the animated use of water which she splashes on herself. In *Kitchen Katha* she uses vegetables and food in order to access the human emotions. Chowdhry’s productions are not merely unique for her use of props and designs but also female impersonators known as the Naqqals. The latter is a group of actors who performed the roles of women on stage. The constant shuffle between ‘‘doing’ a woman on stage and being a ‘man’ in real life’ (Mangai 124) have lend theatre with new problematics for the ‘on and off stage selves do continually inform each other’ (125). Veenapani Chawla too experimented with the traditional forms of theatre, dance and marshal art and combined them in her productions. She has presented Vinay Kumar in the role of a woman, Brahhanala, for her production of *Brahhanala*, an episode from the Mahabharata. Kumar moves in and out of his characters of Brahhanala, the disguised dancer and Arjuna, the warrior and destabilizes the conventions of representing masculinity and femininity on stage (120). Anuradha Kapur’s *Sundari: An Actor Prepares* further explores the nuances of performance both as man/ woman and woman/man. The slipping into the role of a woman on stage; the psychological and physical preparation for it and then reverting back to the gendered role of man in actual life, with a backdrop of a failed family life of the actor-director, Jaishankar Sundari, is a classic case for what Anarudha Kapur claims to be the concern of women directors in order to ‘make visible this (the) process of showing ... how men and women are made’ (bracketing mine) (Kapur 10).

While the use of female impersonators has enhanced the scope for complex representation in Indian women’s theatre, engagement with folk forms and folk artists has further complimented it by going beyond mere synthesizing cultural legacy with new forms of

theatre. Tripurari Sharma's collaboration with the Nautanki artists for her plays in Alarippu workshops and performances, not only provided Sharma deeper access to the lower rungs of the society but also addressed the gendered structures of the form itself. 'Nautanki women found the proscenium separation of actors and audience as granting them protection and dignity as artists and women which is a significant departure from viewing the art form as merely a colonial legacy' (Mangai 249). A. Mangai too have engaged with the traditional Therukkoothu form and drawn from them the techniques of impersonation, designs, costumes and make-ups for her play *Pani Thee*. Such use of indigenous forms of theatre and theatre workers may have been a regular feature for the Indian theatre practitioners but there has never been any attempt towards identifying them with the 'theatre of roots'. Indian women playwrights and directors have engaged with the folk forms and sought to evolve a dramaturgy that accommodates their own idiom.

While engaging with diverse forms of indigenous performance traditions has been a feature of Indian women's theatre, it has also increasingly problematised the importance of dramatic texts for theatre productions. I have discussed at length in the introduction of this thesis, about the evolution of play-texts from being written by an individual playwright to being adapted from novels or epics, from being assembled from multiple sources to being devised in collaboration with other playwrights, playwright-directors, novelists, lyricists, music composers etc., from piecing together interviews to being 'organically' grown in workshops. But the traditional method of translating play-texts into performances on stage is gradually receding and making way for autonomy of performances with little or no scripts. Instead of remaining true to the scripts, these performances seek to prioritize engagement with the audience. Propensity towards emancipating 'performance' from the dictatorship of dramatic texts, has initiated contemporary theatre practitioners like Maya Krishna Rao to perform on stage with minimal or no text to rely upon. Performing without the guidance of

text and sometimes with minimum or no rehearsal, lends the actor the freedom to go beyond the conventions of theatre *making*, for, according to Rao, 'making' inherently involves the element of entering a 'precentered box'(Rao). Rejecting 'precentered box' for the sake of liberating performance from the authority of play-texts, has led towards the production of postdramatic theatre, a term introduced by Hans-Theis Lehmann in his book *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999).The *postdramatic* is associated with those *avant-garde* traits that seek to reject the conventions of dramatic theatre and evolve a performance aesthetic, unique in its own right. According to Deepa Punjani, 'postdramatic' in the context of Indian theatre may be seen as a term that provides 'historical insight into the multiplicity and diversity of Indian theatre traditions that defy mere conventional definitions of drama' . Punjani is also of the view that 'postdramatic' as an idea can be helpful in understanding 'the differentia as well as folk, classical, street, agitprop, immersive, site-specific, the praxis between art-installation and theatre, video art and theatre, theatre and contemporary dance, theatre of scenography and technologies – all of which are present in the Indian landscape' (Punjani). Maya Krishna Rao's *Loose Woman* and Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry's *Nachiketa* and *Naked Voices* may be considered as some of the examples. What is explicit in this evolution from script based productions to performance based productions is that there is a certain shift in the vocabulary. Chowdhry's opinion on her directorial style after a recent production of *Nachiketa* in London may be reiterated here: 'I don't do homework or follow any school. For me, the play emerges when actors' bodies move in spaces. I improvise and give meaning to the air in those spaces. Everything has to be instant' (Deepak). But such a shift in vocabulary of theatre production is not to vouch for the death of play-texts. Rather, it must be seen as one of the episodes in the evolution of theatre production, for, a quality play-text always retains the capacity to initiate and drive the action on stage. For an actor, words on the play-text, which almost always have a web of contexts associated with them, can still produce an impulse that conditions his

performance on stage. But, at the same time, the trained actor has the ability and opportunity to not only improvise but also enhance the meaning of the words through his performance. The action, gestures, movements, pauses, modulation of breath, the *abhinaya* only go on to add layers of meaning to the play-text. Hence, in the context of contemporary theatre production, play-text is no more the end but one among the many means of producing the theatre-viewing experience. The meaning of the play may change for the director and further change for the actor while performing. Hence, the play-text is reduced to a part of the collective that produces the 'theatre' for audience. Anuradha Kapur, while delivering her lecture on 'Is the playwright dead? The continued relevance of playwrights in today's multimedia world' in the Hindu Lit for Life 2014, rightly sums up the process of theatre making as follows:

The writer, the word, the image is germane to theatre making in the same way as the actor, the director, the *mis-en-scene*, the scenography is germane. Different moments in history, different protocols of play-making stress different configurations. Sometimes, the story may drive the text and sometimes the *mi-en-scene* and sometimes the actor and hopefully altogether may drive what you experience. (Kapur et al.)

As the Indian women's theatre continues to evolve in its own right, a conclusion to this thesis may be drawn by referring to the seminars and the workshops that have been and are being often organized since the 1990s onwards. 'Expressions' organized by Madhushree Dutta and Flavia Agnes in 1991, provided a platform for women from various art forms across the country. The participants not only contributed to the concerns and commitments as women practitioners but also inspired the women's literary, theatre and art festivals. A. Mangai in *Acting Up* (2015) informs that along with Mina Swaminathan she formed *Voicing Silence* in 1993, whose performances ensured that at least half of their members were women. In order

to encourage women's participation beyond the formal aspects of theatre, they started organizing *Kulavai* festivals and workshops. Mangai gives a detailed account of the *Kulavais* in *Acting Up*:

In the first *Kulavai* held in 1996, we had a scroll on which the respective word for ululation in all the languages represented in the meet was recorded. It was like the quilt made by women and men acknowledging the abstract call of celebration made by women in many countries, including India. The 1996 *Kulavai* was a National Workshop-cum-Seminar on Women and Theatre; the 1997 *Kulavai* was a State-level workshop of Professional Women Artistes from various genres and districts of Tamil Nadu; the 1999 *Kulavai* was a Regional Workshop on Community Theatre at the South India level; in 2002, *Kulavai* was a National Seminar-cum-Festival of Women Directors titled 'Towards a Feminist Theatre'; the last *Kulavai* in 2003 was a National Festival of solo shows by women' (Mangai 244).

The National School of Drama in Delhi organized the Asian Women's Theatre Festival in 2003 and South Asian Women's Theatre Festival in 2010 in order to initiate and enhance international dialogues on the participation of women in theatres across Asia. The international festivals were followed and complimented by the Government of India sponsored Women's Theatre Festivals throughout India (244). Jyoti Mhapsekar, Sushama Deshpande and Waman Kendre are credited with organizing the 8th International Women Playwrights' Conference in Mumbai, which was jointly hosted by the Academy of Theatre Arts, University of Mumbai and Stree Mukti Sanghatana, a Non-Governmental Organization working since 1975 for gender equality in diverse social and cultural fields. These are only a few among many seminars, workshops and festivals which are organized regularly with the specific purpose of increasing the dialogue amongst the Regional, National and International Women Playwrights and directors. Apart from these, some of the veteran Indian women

playwrights, directors and playwright-directors like Usha Ganguli, Tripurari Sharma, A. Mangai, Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry, Maya Krishna Rao, have theatre groups and companies of their own which not only stage the plays written/ directed/ performed by themselves or in collaboration but also provide platforms for young Indian women playwright-directors. Hence, it may be said with conviction that in their attempts to exploit the traditional Indian theatre space, the Indian women playwrights, directors, 'auteurs' and performers have gradually produced a niche of their own, that can accommodate varied 'languages' of theatre production by women in India.

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Abstract

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Introduction

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