

Chapter 4

'Her' City: Indian Women Playwrights

Peter Brooks, a renowned theorist of the stage says, "A man walks across the empty space whilst someone is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (Brooks 11). Interestingly, Western and Indian dramaturgy were shaped by man, centered on him, and saw the world through his eyes. The woman's *Voice* was basically unheard till the twentieth century, especially the woman playwright's voice. The plays studied in this chapter engage in decoding the experience of the city as told by women. The emergence of women playwrights in Indian theatre has been rather late. Initially there were only a few women playwrights who preferred to write about their own experiences within the four walls of the house. Varun Gulati and Maithili Anup say in the Introduction to their book *Contemporary Women's Writing in India*, "Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers was undervalued due to the bastion of male privilege. One factor contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of the women wrote about the enclosed domestic space and their perceptions of the experience within it. As a result it was taken for granted that women could not think beyond the boundaries of the four walls of the home." (Gulati xi) However, the women's movement of the 1970s changed the scenario forever and ensured that women take up subject positions for themselves. Several theatre groups have since come up in the urban centres of the country which try to address women's struggles through theatre. These include Stree Mukti Sangathan in Maharashtra, Dongari Sangathan in Pune, and Theatre Union and Saheli in Delhi. Theatre Union Staged *Om Swaha* in 1980 under the direction of Anuradha Kapur. This play which challenges the consumerist tendencies of the urban society in asking for dowry, is unique in showing a double resolution. The first where the girl eventually dies as she succumbs to the pressure of patriarchy, and the second, where she educates and empowers herself. In doing so it not only challenges hegemonic traditions of the society but also signals a welcome change. The feminist geographer Doreen Massey states, "spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility), are gendered through and through" (186). A typical example of this gendering of space is that a male writer/artist who roams around the city does not

play the same role as a woman artist or writer who traverses the city plays. She does not have easy or safe access to the lanes and by lanes of the city, its buildings and neighborhoods such as the golf course, the restaurant, or a dimly - lit underpass; nevertheless, as she can scarcely avoid the gaze of everybody else and she may not be a detached spectator distanced from her surrounding environment. While these differences may be taken as a disadvantage by some, it also provides women writers with the opportunity to more closely identify with the populace and to produce work that echoes this awareness.

Tutun Mukherjee says, “Women's voices have been heard in the dramatic space only in mimicry-repeating the words written for them by men and performing the roles envisioned for them by the male imagination.” Drama wasn't a commonly favored genre for women. Therefore the logical question arises if women made meaningful contributions to several other art forms, then why did they not compose plays? Females as dramatists are rarely represented on the literary graph. Though they have excelled in other categories, they seem to have hesitated from writing great plays. Their absence as playwrights, though, should not be taken as their complete absence from the drama circles. They have performed varying roles, and found a multitude of representations. Women have unquestioningly agreed to speak words authored for them by male writers, and willingly played the positions given to them by the male bastion. They didn't attempt to write their own pages. By becoming unseen in their presence, they reinforced the existing production dynamics in theater, and intensified its institutionalization. However, with the coming of a generation of young, elite, dynamic, city-bred women playwrights such as, Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta, Annie Zaidi, Mallika Thaneja, women playwrights have gained new grounds. Leaving aside previous concerns of domestic issues and ‘women’s welfare’, they have now taken up bold and complex issues that characterize life in the cities. Issues of rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, female sexuality, identity crisis, alienation, problems of managing work and family together, are issues that constantly figure in the work of these writers. Performers like Maya Rao, Jyoti Dogra and Amruta Mapuskar are also performing on contemporary issues following unconventional techniques such as monologues and non-scripted plays. Shayoni Mitra rightly says in her essay *Dispatches from the Margins: Theatre in India since the 1990s*, “A coterie of highly skilled artists and astute intellectuals now form a feminist core within

theatrical practice, and much of this new Indian avant-garde is based in Delhi and exists alongside and in spite of national theatre, often chipping away at its traditionalisms and conservatism from within” (Mitra 80).

Theatre, being a medium that communicates directly to the audience, falls into the public domain among many other things; and women, traditionally considered fit to inhabit only the domestic room, were kept away from articulating themselves in theatre. The same relates to Indian theater, which stayed exclusive to men for decades, but which, with the recent emergence of "feminism" in the 1970s, gradually opened broad avenues for Indian women to articulate their own voices. It also tried to create a "feminist" space. Yet nationally, radical theater was blamed for indulging in essentialism and thus becoming a platform for women's oppression along the lines of gender and caste. Indian women playwrights and producers struck a different note here by starting to build a theater that vowed to highlight disparities that distinguish women from women and avoid any homogenization of their experience.

Urbanization, industrial development and economic growth opened up new opportunities for women in employment. Immediately after independence, however, things were not easygoing for them. The 1960s and 70s witnessed dark and depressing socio-political upheavals in India: the 1960s in political terms reflected the steady deterioration of certain traditions and mores associated with the period of pre-independence. The Congress party faced a debacle in the fourth General elections and none of the parties could prove their majority. A coalition government was formed, giving rise to horse-trading among the MPs. Within three years, India waged two battles-China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965, crippling its economy further. Significant parts of rural India were affected by food shortage which took a toll of thousands of lives. An economic crisis soon followed, leading to jobs being downsized. Under the rule of the Communist Party of India, agricultural discontent erupted into armed revolution of starving peasants. Naxalbari, a small district town in north-eastern Bengal was the place from where such unrest initiated and by 1967 it spread to other parts of India, as far as some villages in Andhra Pradesh. While it grew into a full-scale revolution through the 1970s, its influence on the cultural scene was sensed. About the same time, the dalits began

working to express their claims for equal rights. The assertive statement of rights by the downtrodden highlighted a previously ignored patch of grass in the Indian society, and fired up responsive writers and artists from urban middle-class backgrounds, who turned their attention to the cultural history of the lower / marginalized Indian order— the landless peasants, dalits, women, tribal people— and their existential issues. The subaltern classes had created a parallel literature. Theatre with clear ideological content found place in it. Almost around this time street theater also made its emergence; hundreds of men and women were writing and staging radical works, agit-prop plays and violent political protest plays. By then, Street theatre had arisen as a powerful platform to illustrate women's issues. It became an interactive way to reveal and relate the experiences of female viewers and express their point of view to the world. Many of the Indian women playwrights and performers develop their plays within these frameworks of social and economic change and rising urbanization, of struggling with modernity and postmodernity, and of reinterpreting national and global ties. Recurrently, in these narratives we discover attempts to chart these developments. The chapter works to create a mapping of city-spaces and the power dynamics within them as represented in the works of such playwrights, discussing how more official representations of the city override women's spatial and cultural representations of the same city. Most of these plays could rightly be called contestatory geographies in their own right. Through theatre, Indian women playwrights respond/react to the restrictive cartography of urban societies and their realities and create mappings that consider the complex transformations of the city-space over the years, particularly with regard to gender relations.

As discussed above, in the tumultuous mid-to late-1970s context, a theatre of social relevance and also the women's movement began to show the path ahead. A variety of stereotyped issues found speech and recognition through theatre. The 'Woman's question' reached the Indian theater scene in a substantial way during the 1980s and 1990s. While feminist theater was a burgeoning cultural form in the 1970s, it originated as a partner of experimental theater and the Women's Movement. It was in this type of experimental theater and the progressive Women's Movement that women's theater in India found its idiom; it was also the source and inspiration for the content of such plays. It was searching for a description, and seemed to have found some, finally. It was all in the late 1970s that we really hear the voice of a woman

"speaking" in Indian theatre, not merely constricted to the role of actors performing their character on stage crafted by the man, but by composing plays for themselves and also performing under their own direction. What it has suggested most notably, among many other issues, is the concept of a "women's language" extending onto "woman's theatre" and its possibility to create an entirely new kind of discourse in theatre.

This feminist theater often involved a redesigning of the structure of plot / story, challenging the meaning and presentation of character both on stage and in script. Direct action and continuity in the rational structure of the plot took a back seat and indirect action and disjointedness in the development of the plot prevailed. Non-linear storylines were adopted and any perpetuation of caste, class, ethnicity, gender, religious stereotypes was rejected. This new idiom in theatre criticized male-dominated discourses in its defense of feminist themes. It confronted patriarchal power structures and institutions that imposed conformity. Kaplan says, "When women are freed from constant reproduction, when they are educated equally with men in childhood, when they join the labour force at his side, when wealth gives them leisure, when they are necessary and instrumental in effecting profound social change through revolution- at these points women will protest and breakdown the taboo".(Kaplan 77). These fortifications of social and cultural oppression ought to be broken, and in reality, woman playwrights have shaken these walls in the last few decades and trespassed into yet another restricted area. It must be said here that theater provides an exceptional freedom of speech and content which "makes the advent of women writers into theatre both necessary and exciting." (Mukherjee 13) Among other things, this offers them an agency for affecting societal, sociological, cultural and behavioral change: "The result is manifest and one may confidently claim that feminine intervention into cultural practice is actually transforming the received ideas about culture, creativity and representation." Says Tutun Mukherjee; one could not agree more.

Female Indian playwrights added in a meaningful way to the growth and development of theatre from the late nineteenth century, though not adequately. Several notable attempts were made in the 1940s and 1950s, but there was no significant proliferation of texts produced until the last three decades of the twentieth century. Indian women's lives are much more constrained than their western counterparts'.

Relationships between women, their aspirations and their path towards liberation represent the thematic concerns identified and shared by all playwrights. The playwrights, although not completely immune to the impact of Western feminism, have tended more to sensitize the receptors of their works to the problems they face as a part of the Indian society. This corresponded with the emergence of women playwrights as individual cultural producers who managed to liberate the field to accommodate women's experiences and perspectives with' the novelty of their gendered perception, innovative semiotics' and delicate treatment of social issues. This is important in terms of the effect and development of 'Women-Centered Theater' in India because as Tutun Mukherjee says, "theatre as a patriarchal hegemony is quite capable of absorbing female texts, nullifying their cutting-edge, and even turning feminine concerns into new commodities for male consumption."(Mukherjee 15). These slice-of-life pieces give unique observations and new perspectives on it. Grouped together as Women's Drama, it takes shape as a reenactment of heartbreaking narratives, interactions, memories of female characters who refuse and resist any form of consented or unconsented oppression. They traverse Indian life's cultural and social realms and are hypnotizing in their depth and detail, as well as in their hidden and visible brutality, which after all forms part of their daily experience as a woman. These women playwrights, are celebrating "the great adventure called women's lives."

Sengupta says, "the focus has gradually shifted from the relatively narrow concerns of 'women's welfare to the new ideology or programme of 'women's empower, direct and produce plays that tell their story of suffering, resistance, and dreams. This has happened in two different directions—with a group of women directors producing plays in Hindi and regional languages by employing non-linear, anti-realist dramaturgies and, on the other hand, women playwrights writing in English and predominantly in the realist tradition." (Sengupta 22) It is basically the second group that forms part of our study in this chapter.

Much of women's playwriting, as also feminist theories, emphasizes the breaking free from the interior spaces of the home. Luiza Lobo, takes note of "a new vein in women's writing which, while

privileging the subjective, breaks out of the home both physically and stylistically, venturing into an epic mode and the tangled web of city streets” (163). Nevertheless, in the urban plays under review here, many of the stories by women overturn the perceptions of gendered spaces in contemporary theatre. By (re)turning inward to domestic space, they question sexist assumptions. Writing also emanates from within, off the streets, but not generally to praise female subjectivity or to criticize sexist agendas in the family and community. Instead, these stories turn "home" into a voyeuristic scene or a metafictional zone. These plays, instead of romanticizing the internal subjective realm, show the traumatic reality of urban interiors. The protagonists of these plays battle inside the domestic interior space, are victims of fragmented identities, struggle with the informal immigrant economy, or with neighborhood gossip and stigma. One such play is Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (1984), based on a real life incident of gang rape that occurred in Santa Cruz area, Mumbai, is a play very characteristic of city life. The play questions the nonchalant attitude of Mumbaikars Bhaskar and Leela, as they silently witness a heinous crime of rape every day, for fear of their own safety. Through this play Padmanabhan actually wants to bring to light the indifference that the city-dweller shows to wrongs happening around him. Every day we read about incidents of rape in the newspapers, spare a sigh or two, and continue to live our lives happily in the cities; until one day we ourselves become victims of the same crime. The play has multiple ellipses, giving the reader the feeling of eavesdropping on ongoing debates, turning the violence and its denial into a dark, repetitive loop. The play turns the case of the gang-rape, commented on by the residents with banality and approval, into an episode of systemic socio-political violence. The domestic urban interior space is neither secure nor private, but burdened with alienation and denial. Padmanabhan here wants to implicate the spectators for their inaction and complacency in situations like this. Frieda, the silent maid in the play could possibly be a representative of the marginalized classes in the city who are only allowed a victim status and not a voice. They are allowed anonymity and not identity. Hence, Frieda has to be silent amidst the cacophony of the city.

Lights Out (1986) pulls out a few significant symbolic characteristics of the highly individualistic and fractured mental life of city-dwellers. As mentioned earlier, it presents a real-life and disturbing incident of gang-rape, abuse, and horrific violence perpetrated on a vulnerable woman in an apartment in the

typical middle-class urban neighborhood of Mumbai. Strangely, this was overlooked for weeks together. *Lights Out* shows not just the schizophrenia of city-life but also strikes a chord with the audience who is also implicated at the end of the play. Through subtle use of theatrical space and technique, the play exposes the fault lines that exist in our mind, which we exemplify in our response to city life. The setting of the play is the sixth floor of a residential tower, where the Bhaskars, a family of a middle-class executive, live. Leela, two kids and the maidservant, Freida live there. The role of Freida requires extra attention since she remains mute throughout the play. The action starts with Leela asking Bhaskar repeatedly if he has "reported it" to the police. The issue that Bhaskar and Leela are trying to discuss is the disturbing shouts and cries that come from the building across the street every night.

One of the important characteristics of postindustrial urban living is the concept of the "outsider", which is paradoxically linked to a curious sense of anonymity which it creates. This is also the case with several marginalized communities in large cities who are refused civic rights and services from the state and are therefore considered second-class citizens. The character of Frieda is a classic example of such enforced anonymity in city life. The muteness of Frieda and the special mention of the playwright in the directorial statement of allowing the audience to wonder what she thinks is an outstanding example of using theatre to reach, capture, and clearly define the issue of anonymity in the city. She's visible; yet she's speechless or helpless. She is a "absent-presence". She stands for the inescapable erasure of voice of the urban self itself, especially if one is a victim and a perceived 'outsider'. Padmanabhan writes about Frieda, "She remains constantly in sight, performing her duties in a mute, undemanding way. The other characters pay no attention to her, except to give her orders...The audience should be allowed to wonder what she thinks" (Padmanabhan 134). Although it's quite possible that Freida might have been exploited, it's more relevant that she's a regular presence but not once is she allowed to speak. She can best be compared to the spectator who is also outside the realm of the dramatic text, and sits as a complacent observer; not only in reel but in real life as well. The playwright, however, takes a dig at such middle-class complacency in her directorial notes at the end of the play and in the process rightly implicating them. This also highlights the theater's ability to

expose the silence enforced on some of the city's voices rendering them voiceless and powerless in the civil society.

In forceful statement on the problem of spectatorship in the city, Manjula Padmanabhan skillfully uses the inherent possibilities of the dramatic genre. The spectator is also vicariously experiencing the same layer of reality when witnessing what the protagonists think, discuss or allude to in the play. The audience hears screams throughout the discussions between Bhaskar and Leela. Viewed from this perspective, *Lights Out* is also a profound commentary on the current concept of modern urban spectatorship. Besides being stock spectators in town, Leela and Bhaskar also have many of the incredibly interesting features of being a modern urban spectator. Firstly they are yet to decide if they are "inside or outside" of what they watch. This is intimately connected to the notion of responsibility. When we read closely, these two features are also basically dramatic in one way. These features of spectatorship are also endemic to the process of watching a play. As viewers, when we watch a play, we are constantly negotiating whether we are 'inside or outside' of the script, the theatrical space and place. We also try to get rid of any obligation or commitment whatsoever and try to dodge all that is disagreeable to the sensory experiences, distasteful, impermissible or uneasy to remember. Consequently, the concept of 'seeing without responsibility' is interestingly similar to the prevalent notion of spectatorship in the process of viewing a play in the contemporary urban space. Leela says: "That we're part of...of what happened outside. That by watching it, we are making ourselves responsible" (Padmanabhan 35)

The 'scream' is a significant recurring motif in the play. Screaming as a loud, untraceable, disturbing and frightening sound, not physically attributed to any particular character on the stage, is the central feature of this play's theatricality. It is also indicated through the dialogues between the characters that the apparent act of torture, which is the cause of the screams of the prey, could also be a "staged drama, a performance!". This is a way of denying the grim reality staring them in their faces, an escape route.

"Leela (turns to Bhaskar): Well, but what about the screaming!

Mohan: Is it for help?

Leela (turns to Bhaskar): Isn't it for help?

Mohan: Or is it just in general? That matters, you know. After all- it could just be some, you know, drama..." (Padmanabhan 35)

Lights Out becomes a metaphor for "a theatrical act and its reception." We as viewers try to distinguish between the authenticity of everyday experience and the unreality of a theatrical performance. In the play, Leela's dilemma remains unsolved as the three of them keep debating if they should help the victim. They are yet to decide if the cry is authentic or inauthentic. The city's controls on information and communication silence the story such that the narration and its dialogue cover up the event rather than communicating it. The inferences they draw, and the rationale they use, delineates the idea that there is indeed a fine dividing line between human action on-stage and beyond it. The play ends on a hopeless note on the brutal rape and torture of women:

Naina: " Its all over"-

"Leela (disappointedly). Oh! Then it must be over for tonight!" (Padmanabhan 128)

This sums up the tragedy and irony of life in the so called liberated space of a city. As the curtain drops, a small note written on it greets the spectator:

"This play is based on an eyewitness account. The incident took place in Santa Cruz, Bombay 1982.

The characters are fictional. The incident is a fact.

In real life, as in the play, a group of ordinary middle class people chose to stand and watch while a woman was being brutalized in a neighboring compound.

In real life, as in the play, no-one went to the aid of the victims."

Manjula Padmanabha presented the play *Harvest* in the International Play Competition of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation. The concept note of the festival called for plays that depict "the challenges facing humanity in the 21st Century". The winning entry was Padmanabhan's play *Harvest*.

The dystopian drama set in 2010 Mumbai, imagines a futuristic world in which a transnational company based in the US, The Interplanta Services not only offers organ transplants but also full body transplants to its rich, aged and sick customers. These bodies and major organs are 'harvested' from poor citizens living in various parts of the world. They are contractually obligated to participate in this trade in return of monetary benefits which assure them of a better survival. That such a massive industry could be deemed legal, financially viable, and morally uncontested at a time not very far from *Harvest's* scripting, suggests that there are many issues surrounding humanity even to the day. The perpetual question of remains- "what constitutes humanity"? Lack of employment and economic crisis have forced the poor people in urban areas of third-world countries like India to become a group of organ traders. Newspapers abound in instances of such rackets where organs and wombs are sold off as a commodity to the rich first world or even the privileged sections of our own country.

Padmanabhan's work envisions how the coloured subjects are also gendered, representing not only a site of overall susceptibility but also a focal point of significant criticism that calls for the eradication of racial and gendered debts. The play suggests that destitute and racially stereotyped women, by commodifying their body parts as well as by engaging in reproductive labor, generate an unstable 'grammar of life'¹.

Padmnabhan focuses initially on the man of the house, in a series of "surrogacies and substitutions" (Kim 218) that will be disclosed as the play unravels. However, the focus shifts gradually to the wife, Jaya, who eventually emerges as the subject that once espouses and subverts "racially gendered debt" (Kim 215). In the first scene of the play, Om Prakash, a twenty-one-year-old man who has just been thrown out of his job as a clerk in Bombay, announces to his family that he's been able to find a new job. The exhilaration on his face shows that this job offers him a better prospect than the previous one. Om ecstatically says,

¹ Title of an article by Jodi Kim, "Debt, the Precarious Grammar of Life, and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1-2, 2014, 215-232.

"We'll have more money than you and I have names for! Who would believe there is so much money in the world?" (Padmanabhan 10)

What is even more intriguing is the fact that Om's new job hardly requires his services on a day to day basis. His mother is surprised, rather shocked to know that he shall draw a salary for doing nothing. In reality Om has made a futuristic contract with the Interplanta Services where he has signed off his organs and his full body to the clients of Inter-Planta Services. To use economic terminology here, we can say that whenever there is a "demand" from a sick-dying client of the US based firm for an organ transplant or a full-body transplant, Om has to 'supply' his body parts. In this case one is reminded of Marx who says about labour in the era of Capitalism, "these newly freed men became sellers of themselves, only after they had been robbed of their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by old feudal arrangement" (Marx 875). Marx was perhaps talking about waged labour, and he could not have in his wildest dreams imagined that this would be true of a global market of organ trade and surrogacy which perpetuates in the most gruesome manner the discourses of race, gender and class. Padmanabhan, through her play, is staging a serious and strategic intervention by envisioning a near future when an internationally endorsed industry would engage in the predatory activity of organ trade in the global cities.

At the time when Om accepted the job he was not required to donate his organs instantly. In reality, Interplanta doesn't let him know which organs he would actually need to donate at which time. Om is essentially forced to pledge all of his vital body parts within this contractual system. He is obliged under this racial liability because he is an underprivileged destitute of the Third World and the only earning member of his family. Padmanabhan consciously chooses an impoverished, colored family of the Third World as the 'other' of a first world company with a white, blonde, woman representative. *Harvest* suggests then that the racial stereotypes have not been erased as much in the era of late capitalism and the destitute, brown, Third World is perpetually under the hegemonic control of the white, rich First World.

Although Ginni has essentially exploited Om, Jaya fails to yield. Padmanabhan in projecting Jaya as the voice and epitome of a defensive response, shows a debt bond that does not so much

agree to pay a bailout or ask for a pardon; instead demands that the exploitative contract be abolished completely. It is disclosed towards the end that Ginni was merely a computer-animated image of Virgil, an aging man who has already undergone four full-body transplants. When Om's chance to give his first donation comes, they take Jeetu, Om's brother, instead. The reason for this being Virgil was not only interested in buying a healthy body for himself, but by taking Jeetu's body (who was once Jaya's lover) he could seduce Jaya and use her as a surrogate for his progeny.

“Virgil: we look for young men's bodies to live in and young women's bodies in which to sow their children.

Jaya: What about your own?

Virgil: We lost the art of having children.” (Padmanabhan, 86)

Jaya's is a “young woman's body” in which he wishes “to sow his children”, but he doesn't want to endanger his life by going to the Third World. Thus, he tells Jaya to get impregnated by assisted reproduction. In the absence of any real touch or contact, Virgil's trick of seduction is still necessary as he wants to “interpellate”² Jaya as a willing surrogate mother, just as he had “interpellated” Om as a willing donor. Jaya, a dishonest wife who gives the impression of having very little influence in the household except to denounce her husband's actions sneeringly, eventually turns out to be a face of resistance and an agent of rebellion. She declares straightway that she does not want to be “a widow by slow degrees.” (Padmanabhan 21). She realizes early on in the play, the implications and underpinnings of Om offering himself to Ginni almost as a sacrificial lamb. Through Jaya's protests, Harvest dramatizes how impoverished families are forced to engage in exchanges that “precipitate the precarious grammar of life” (Kim 225); oddly in order to keep their families alive.

² The term interpellation was an idea introduced by Louis Althusser (1918-1990) to explain the way in which ideas get into our heads and have an effect on our lives, so much so that cultural ideas have such a hold on us that we believe they are our own. Interpellation is a process, a process in which we encounter our culture's values and internalize them.

Padmanabhan's most direct contribution in *Harvest* occurs in the end of the play, when it becomes clear that Jaya would not eventually give up to this fragile language of life. Therefore, it cannot be ascertained if she will agree to carry Virgil's child and in the process honour the motivated contract that they have been forced to enter. Unlike Jeetu, she denies being a gestational surrogate and rent out her body parts. Here again, Padmanabhan casts critical light on a booming "womb" industry in which women from poor Third World countries are alarmingly being hired for childless western couples to be a gestational surrogate, India being the oft-chosen country for most of these underhand dealings. The playwright makes Jaya resist this renting of wombs and captures her attempts to reverse the self-other dialectics by way of negotiating the deal to her favour. Jaya says, "Look, I've understood you now. I know you are stronger than me, you are richer than me. But if you want me, you must risk your skin to get me." (Padmanabhan 89). By demanding that Virgil undertake some kind of threat, Jaya attempts to change the prevailing system in which poor subjects are forced to be risk-bearers, to carry on the survival of basic needs. She also claims that people like Virgil who rejoice in the power of money, too have some debts to the world. Refusing to succumb under pressure, Jaya emerges as a strong woman who finally says:

"I'll die knowing that you, who live only to win, will have lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. And I'll get more pleasure out of that first moment of death than I've had in my entire life so far. And in the meantime I want you to practice saying my name correctly. It's Jaya, J as in Justice, as in Jam." (Padmanabhan 91).

As she herself says that the only thing that is left with her is her "death". Thus the interior of the urban household becomes a site of exploitation and torture,

The isolation of the Prakash family in the prison of their homes can be read as a metaphor for the alienation and isolation of city-dwellers. Like the Prakashs' who are tied to the virtual reality of the "Super Delux Video Couch model XL 5000 with over 750 video channels from across the world" (Padmanabhan 77). City life is also devoid of sociality in a world dominated by virtual media. The video couch in the play is a substitute for real human interaction and socializing. Even among themselves the family members have very

little touch and interaction. So they are in a self-imposed exile of sorts. *Harvest* thus takes up the themes of urban alienation, capitalism and exploitation and brutally exposes the reality of the urban homes.

Shashi Deshpande writes in her Introduction to *Women Centre Stage*, “It is a truth universally acknowledged that anyone in India who writes a few short stories will move on as swiftly as possible to writing a novel. Poile Sengupta is perhaps one of a very small minority who voluntarily moved from short stories to drama.” (Deshpande ix). *Inner Laws* was been written by the prize-winning playwright Poile Sengupta, way back in 1994. And after all these years, the play still has a universal appeal and continues to be staged in the urban centres of the country and most recently in Alliance Francaise, Bangalore in January 2020. *Inner Laws* was staged by Theater for Change and Urban Chaupaal; the choice of such locations point to the urbanity of the play. The play is a sarcastic "sit-com" that revolves around five daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law duos. In an interview to *The Hindu*, Sujatha Balakrishnan, the founding member of Theatre for Change says, “When I was doing my masters in psychology in the early 2000s, I read psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar’s *The Inner World*, which goes beyond the clichéd mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. In the book, he writes about the “Maternal Entralment Theory”, which is about the mother-son relationship in Indian families. He writes that this theory revolves around how the son looks upon the mother as an authoritarian position. This relationship affects the mother-daughter-in-law relationship and other relationships”³. It would not be wrong to say that the play endorses this theory as the play cites the main cause of this antagonistic perception of this relation to be patriarchy’s projection of women as women’s worst enemy. The play is an attempt to re-negotiate the traditional mother-in-law daughter-in law relationship which has been essentially perceived to be antagonistic. The characters of the play are a group of elite, English-speaking, club going mothers-in-law and daughters-in law. They have both formed the MIL club and the DIL club respectively, the main idea behind which is to demonize their respective mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. However, close to the resolution of the play it is seen that most of the allegations have been blown out of proportion by both parties. The play tries to resolve the differences between these

³ See Sravasti Dutta. "Those hilarious in-laws." *the Hindu*, [Bangalore], 16 Jan. 2020.

women by showing them their potential to be happy with and for each other. It motivates the viewing public to ponder, and debate and finally attempt to reshape the perceived human behavior to this relationship into a more agreeable bond and a better social order.

This antagonistic relationship primarily breeds out of India's joint family system, where two unknown women, are expected to share a house after marriage. They share not just the same house but the same dining room, kitchen, living area, and as an extension, the same male's attention. This is uncommon abroad where there is no such sharing of space or attention. Therefore the relationship between these two females is not as easy as the mother-relationship daughter; contrarily, they develop some sort of a mutual hostility. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the mother who is now a mother-in-law has a feeling of insecurity bordering on jealousy towards the conjugal relationship between the son and the daughter-in-law.

Inner Laws (1994) goes a long way in creating a “womanist language” in theatre. All the characters in the play are women. This is the uniqueness of the play. However the all-woman cast of the play should not loosely categorize it as a ‘feminist play’. It can rather be called a play for women, about women who agree to disagree, and also laugh at their own follies; something which Shashi Deshpande calls, “the final stage of Feminism”(Deshpande, xii). Deshpande writes in her introduction to the play: “I believe strongly that women can meet in peace and joy once they have shed their mawkish notions of themselves. Women share a robust, almost Rabelaisian sense of humour and with their natural predilection towards nurturing, can bring delight and celebration into their world.”(Deshpande 72).

With the exception of the central preoccupation with the “in-law relationship”, the play mocks other societal issues like the prevalent notion of beauty, education, female attractiveness and the meaningless lifestyles we indulge in. Newly emerging socio-cultural norms have been cultivated by capitalists. Leading among them is the beauty, fashion and entertainment industries that target women and offer them a false understanding of themselves. They propagate the false stereotypes of fairness, slimness and hypnotize them to such an extent that a woman internalizes these ideas. Nevertheless, the play does not criticize an

individual, the characters are only reflective of the perspective they uphold, the argument and the satire not being wild or damaging.

Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, so Said Shakuni (2001), by Poile Sengupta is an innovative play that deals with villains (as opposed to heroes) from two great epics— the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The play provokes sympathy for the demons of the epic. These characters are given depth by associating a humane angle to them. The play highlights the injustice inflicted on these characters and the pre-conceived nature of their portrayal for generations. They meet at an airport as common co-passengers. They eventually begin speaking directly about the way history has treated them. The two characters have been given modern speech, choice of clothing, and attitude.

The title, outdated as it may seem, disguises the contemporaneous nature of issues being addressed in the play; these being the futility of revenge, violence, the received (biased) notions of history, the vilification of deviant characters etc. For this, the play erratically goes back in time to the two epics. *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*-and draws them into the relevance of the present day. For the first time in Indian Theatre, two coveted villains, Shoorpanakha and Shakuni share the theatrical space. In the play, however, they have no name. They are just MAN and WOMAN. Sengupta explains that she was captivated by the myth about the Kauravas imprisoning and murdering the Shakuni brothers while Hastinapur was extended northwest to Quandhar. Shakuni was the only one to survive. His dice was built from the bones of his brothers and the ultimate motive of his life was to take revenge. Shoorpanakha stands for all the female members of the society who are daring enough to stay single and proclaim their desire for male intimacy without resorting to a pretentious modesty. Such women are perceived to be a threat to the patriarchy and are thus described as *rakshasis* or demons who must be kept in check, imprisoned and punished before the chauvinistic establishment can be upset. Michael Foucault says that the state castigates any voice of protest as "Fallen"⁴, because of its perceived threat to the established order of society. A woman who articulates her sexuality and her physical desires is branded as a woman who has fallen from

⁴ Term used by Michael Foucault.

grace. Sexuality is a normal and natural instinct. However, for women it is blasphemous and unethical to articulate her sexuality. It should be held in check, unlike male sexuality. While the two defiant characters cross paths in a contemporary situation, the world is threatened by yet another crisis.

The two *dramatis personae* are normally considered villains in popular imagination. Shoorpanakha is almost always portrayed as disgusting and grotesque; she is the one who provokes Ravana to challenge Rama for a battle, in her willingness to exact revenge. Shakuni, on the other hand, the Kauravas' crafty brother, is the kingpin of the disastrous battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Nevertheless, although both protagonists are vital to the dramatic plot, they are overlooked once their purpose is served. Ultimately, in Sengupta's tale, it is Shoorpanakha who discourages Shakuni from triggering another vicious cycle of violence. Sengupta tries to investigate the results if the narrative is retold according to their point of view. She continues to ask whether these protagonists have been denied something by the society. What is more interesting is that whether such injustices are meted out even in today's world, to anybody who refuses to be a part of the crowd, any deviant, minority, subaltern? Sengupta asks the audience, "to question ourselves about our received sense of history and myth." (Deshpande 242)

The author's note to the play reads: "The evening before the play premiered in 2001, the world saw on television, the horror of the 11th September attacks on the twin towers of the world trade centre in New York. The co-incidence was chilling. And so was the reminder that the consequence of revenge remains a relentless unending tragedy." This precisely sums up the idea behind writing the play.

Doreen Massey states, "spaces and places, and our senses of them are gendered through and through" A woman performer or playwright who navigates the city does not receive the same treatment as a man. This gendering of space is a common phenomenon of urban life. The female might not have easy or convenient access to certain alleys or offices, monuments and neighborhoods, playgrounds, pubs or a dimly lit boulevard; furthermore, she cannot be a detached observer removed from her surroundings, as she can barely escape others "gaze". Instances of rape in the cities have become a common issue. Sadly, even in the twenty- first century people have not been able to get over the prejudice of blaming a woman's clothes to be

responsible for her rape. Mallika Taneja, part of Tadpole Repertory, a city-based theatre group, staged *Thoda Dhayan Se* (2013), a play based loosely on the Shakti Mill rape case. The play lacks a proper script. The actor's monologue mainly comprises suggestions on being careful that we receive from friends, relatives, parents so that we remain 'safe'. The play is a stinging satire on the objectification of women, the patriarchal discourses of 'appropriate' women's behavior and the 'propriety' of her clothing. *Thoda Dhayan Se* is a strong satire that targets those who associate women's clothing with their abuse. The play's first reading was on an October evening, at a studio in south Delhi. Little did one realise then that it was slated to win a prize at Zurich Theatre Spectakel for performing the English adaptation of the play entitled *Be Careful*.

Mallika's play was a bold move by a woman playwright, for she was not sure if the audiences in Indian cities were prepared for a woman stripping on stage. In the play an actress stands in the middle of the stage in her lingerie and keeps covering herself with clothes. She keeps doing this until she can no longer pile any cloth on herself. In the end she mockingly asks the audience, "*Main kaisi lag rahi hun?*" It is followed by a monologue by the same lady where she questions the male dominated discourses of the society. The play received an overwhelming response in Delhi as also in a small town like Jaipur. Mallika now performs to small groups of urban audiences in their flats, societies, college fests etc. Mallika says in an interview with India Today, "we deal with the problems that limited accessibility causes for artists and audiences. You will find a cinema hall in every locality in the city but you won't find a place to go listen to some music or watch a play. Instead of putting the blame on the larger public, the difficulty of life in this city and an overall dwindling interest in the arts, we have to make the arts reachable and easily accessible." She goes on to say that it is her vision to transform the city-scape through art.

As mentioned earlier the play was a response to the rape of a photojournalist in Mumbai in 2013. Taneja remarks, "It also happened because of December 16. It happened because, when I used to go to theatre workshops by bus, some man thought it was okay to keep his hand on my crotch. It happened because, when I was going home from college, some guy fondled my breasts. I am not separate from my art.

Everything in my life has led to this,”⁵ Mallika is one who believes that she is not separate from her art. Her art springs from her life. The playwright knew that she was venturing into a forbidden territory. Initially, Taneja performed the play in her undergarments (for about two years). A number of organizers did not want her, fearing indecency. At present she has even done away with the undergarments. She says she feels free from sartorial regulations in doing so.

Taneja also speaks about how women are carelessly tossed around the concept of “responsibility”. Oddly enough, they are supposed to do all they can to keep themselves ‘safe’ from abusers. “Be Careful!” this is what young girls are instructed to do in terms of actions, behavior and manner of dressing. Apparently a harmless suggestion, the proposition points to a deeply rooted idea in many cultures that it is the duty of women to defend themselves, to be extra-careful in terms of protecting themselves from their abuse. This sinister concept lowers the accountability of a person who could cause them harm; Mallika Taneja has fought vigorously to counter this deep-rooted irony. Being vigilant, in the words of Taneja "careful", is a major aspect of life in India, especially female experience in cities. Living in Delhi, Taneja condemns the hypocrisy engrained in a “vision of women as potential victims.” Her body strips a traditional culture bare, piling layer upon layer, exposing its unseen contradictions. Her play is a grotesque parody of the society we inhabit; she begins the performance by staring silently at the audience's face for minutes together, before proceeding further. Then she piles clothes, one on top of another, while chaotically talking about all the things women must be mindful of. She's piles at least fifty clothes on herself by the end of the show and also a helmet on her head, and still the atmosphere is fraught with a question she doesn't ask— “ can I finally be safe enough by being this careful?”

Mallika says, “The country we live in today, or rather, those ruling the country fear a strong voice, especially that of a woman’s, because for them, this ‘transgression’ is too much.... They fear camaraderie so they kill dialogue and divide citizens based on religion, caste, gender. But art bridges all these differences.

⁵ See Dipanita Nath. "In Her Skin: Mallika Taneja on feminism and her play Thoda Dhyan Se." The Indian Express, 1 Nov. 2015.

Art can pose a real threat to our increasingly fascist state machineries.”⁶ Mallika’s is a voice that dares to shout out and stare the injustices in the face. But as her work speaks volumes on issues such as sexual assault, body, guilt, dignity, equality, gaze, blame and accountability, she realized that there was no other choice but to continue the act by showing a totally naked woman's body- the body which is the site of all the blows. In this, Taneja was inspired by the Meitei women who protested naked against the rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama. She agreed that nudity was essential to her art. Drawing on the common dictum, “Clothes maketh a man”, Taneja asserts “ clothes do not maketh a woman”; the not being central to the argument.

Thus this chapter seeks to show how women writers respond to the changing urban milieu. It shows how they respond to the dreams and disorder of the city and also how they deal with it. It registers their joys, trials and tribulations associated with their inhabiting these Indian cities. This chapter demonstrates that while they face the same challenges of urban life as men, the population explosions triggered by internal migration, the rapid changes influenced by globalization, the difficulties of travel and relocation forced by inadequate infrastructure, the challenges of tending to career - life compounded by the dissipation of the postmodern human condition, women playwrights propose innovative approaches to these situations, as their perspectives are profoundly influenced by questions of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality or social background. Also, it shows the struggle of women playwrights in India to compete with their male counterparts and form a sizeable community of women playwrights. Women have come out of their shell and have finally taken the subject positions. Their focus now is not only on waging a war with men, but on the exclusivity of women’s experience. By using non-linear plots, bold resolutions, indirect action, female gaze and also by assertively taking on subject positions women playwrights have proved that they have more than ‘bodies’. They have a mind of their own; they do not need to be given roles by the patriarchy. Just as in

⁶ Article by Runa Mukherjee Parikh. "‘Thoda Dhyan Se’: This Woman Tears Down Victim Blaming, Act by Act." The Quint, 27 July 2018.

the cities they are carving a niche for themselves, in theatre also they are devising their own scripts and characters.

In conclusion we may say that all the plays undertaken for study are exhibitory of an apartheid inflicted on women. However, there is a growing awareness of the "physical, mental and moral violence" that they have been subjected to. Women have begun to look them in the eye and script a strong critique of the societal, historical and political fabric that compelled them to continue living in this violence, almost always as victims; sometimes strangely as patriarchal agents and culprits of the same violence. The violence faced by women has many facets. It is subtle and insidious and difficult to recognize, presented under the guise of respect, idealization, concern or protection. The negative impacts of violent acts on a female psyche are deeply complex, hard to comprehend and even harder to eliminate. These plays constitute an empowered output that underscores one of our society's most fundamental concerns. In the course of this chapter I have chosen to look at women writers as a means of uncovering the feminine and feminist voice within the intense production of urban writing over the last few decades. The role of gender in the urban performance and story-telling has been highlighted by the plays under study. The recurrent themes in them are the ones that define city life today including belonging and displacement, nostalgia, loneliness and alienation. Each of these plays provides women with a powerful agency for the staging of urban design. A close reading these plays expose three central topics that form an interrelated network of feminist urban designs: a regression into intimate, private space; a celebration of the body and sexuality; and a challenge to the concept of the documented city. Also it traces the need and the subsequent emergence of a 'womanist' language in theatre. The present discussion thus takes note of these key issues, an evaluation of the narrative techniques placed at the disposal of these urban problems by the women playwrights, and the manner in which these concerns interweave with each other to reconfigure urban imaginaries.

Afterword

The thesis is about how the interconnections between city and theatre are reflected in modern Indian drama/theatre from the 1970s to the present. In the twentieth century, the overall success of theatre and the character of the city became entangled on many levels. The transformation of the world from rural to fast-changing urban societies has brought about significant changes in the way theatre is conceived, produced and performed. Thematically, theatre has, since its birth, been continuously preoccupied with the portrayal of lived spaces, behaviours, and environments of the city. It has long had a striking and distinctive capacity to capture and convey the spatial complexity, variety, and social dynamism of the city through its themes, acting and dramaturgy. In the course of the dissertation I have suggested that theatre in India from the 1970s onwards is predominantly an urban phenomenon. The city takes centre stage for playwrights (and directors) of the era. The different types of theatre undertaken for study might appear under familiar labels of Street theatre, Theatre of Roots, English Theatre, Women's Theatre; but viewed from the perspective of the city; they are all City Plays. They articulate urban *angst*, boost an urban revolution, map the power struggles within the city and in the process give voice to the voiceless. In doing so, they endeavour to bring the margins to the centre. Desmond Harding says in *Writing the City*, "the city is both a memory and an essential ground for modern life, and that when we read/watch urban theatre we not only recover a sense of collective urban history, but also perceive more clearly our own relationship with the cities in which we live by way of imagination. In other words, we remember or even foreshadow our own lives in symbolic ways that enrich our present existence."

The Urban Age is a story that reflects the transition of the world from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban one. But India has not yet completed this phase of transition. A complete transition seems unlikely in the near future. India still has a vast majority of the rural population as the country has become rapidly urbanised and its post-independence megapolises are replete with all signs of consumerism and capitalist culture. Indeed, many of India's main cities have colonial origins, Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay being some of them. The decision to move the British capital to Delhi was made due to an unrest

triggered by growing nationalist consciousness. The post-colonial scenario saw disastrous population transfers that crowded both Delhi and Mumbai with refugees from across the border. India now has a cluster of cities, including Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and the new cities of Bangalore, Pune, and Ahmadabad are struggling to find a significant position for themselves. Even after independence the cities seem to be trapped in a colonial hangover, at once indulging and trying to break free from Western/ Colonial modes of life and art. Liberalization has resulted in a great change in the Indian society, especially in the urban middle class who negotiate their life in the cities and upcoming towns. Many of these include migrant communities from rural hinterlands. While some succeed in making their place in the city, others fade away into oblivion and darkness. A large scale revamp has been done in city infrastructure as cities sparkle with the glitter of shopping malls, amusement parks, multiplexes, advertisement hoardings, huge apartment complexes. On the flipside, most of this infrastructural development is devoid of systematic town planning and as a result new cities have sprung up from the heart of old cities. New Delhi and Old Delhi provide a perfect example of such unplanned development. The large scale migration to cities has subsequently put a pressure on its resources. The cit(y)zens of this 'new India' are at some level aware of and impatient with the problems in its cities: the traffic jams, the failures of infrastructure, the bureaucracy and red-tapism, the growing levels of pollution and the increasing rate of crime . It is ironical that the same new India cannot imagine its life outside these cities and can never think of going back to the rural origins. The government wants to turn India into a modern, economic powerhouse and, for this purpose, is making all sorts of capital expenditure in the cities. However, with so much of advancement to offer these cities are still sites of gross inequalities of economy, gender, class, religion and opportunity. Its streets witness jubilation and joy, revolution and rage -- and theatre in the city is nourished by these everyday urban realities. It is in the context of these conditions that surround cities in India (especially since the 1970s) that its theatre should be analysed. Indeed, interest in the relationship between city and theatre has been growing significantly as a result of the emergence of various thematic and formal representations of city in various fields such as urban studies, sociology, culture studies and performance studies, and hence this area was taken up for research. The core academic goal of this work has been to contribute to the study of the theatre and analyse its connection to the city. The

city is a site of possibility because it gives us a common ground to interact with others and develop new relationships, and structure our lives; and it is through these interactions, dialogues and differences that theatre nurtures itself and enlivens the stage. Therefore this work has tried to make visible this coalescence of culture, history and language in the act of reading and performing Indian plays that emerged in Indian cities from the 1970s to the present, taking into account its themes, dramaturgy, space, spectatorship and performance.

The thesis argues that that urban life has been an essential part of theatre in India, especially since the 1970s. It traces the trajectory of modern Indian drama written in English and translations from regional languages to Western-style realistic proscenium representations of myth and mythology and its subsequent incorporation of every aspect of urban spatiality, embracing within itself both the public and domestic realms. The kinds of theatre taken up for study in the four chapters of the dissertation were chosen for their ability to express the spatiality of the city. The Introduction gives a kind of outline of theatre history in India and traces the slow but steady entry of the city into theatre. In doing so it also sheds valuable light on the theoretical assumptions on the city and the idea of the city as told by philosophers down the ages. The Introduction problematizes the city and explains as to why the city has been chosen for study. Recent years have seen many new theoretical approaches to space and spatiality. Modern Indian Drama, when analysed from these perspectives of spatiality given by Soja, Lefebvre, Carlson, Harvie and Mumford, appears to be an urban-based enterprise, making it fit very well within this theoretical frame. It posits itself well into new spaces and enters into new areas of enquiry on language, location and theatre. Chapter 1 of the present dissertation throws open a new approach to the represented spatiality in Indian drama written in English. As far as Karnad is concerned, it is important to note that the playwright himself translated his earlier plays, originally written in Kannada, into English. But he switched to English as the language of original composition from the 1990s onwards. Most of his early plays are focused on Indian history and ancient Indian mythology and legend, and he contemporized them in light of present realities. In the new millennium, he transfers interest towards city-based themes, but his interest in folklore continues in plays and he becomes the pioneer of Roots' new canon theatre. *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*

employ folk conventions and combine them with contemporary issues relevant to urban audiences to constitute a hybrid genre, “urban-folk” drama. Karnad deeply realised that India was being increasingly urbanised, and an urban audience required the new canon. Innovation and experimentation were the main ideas in the roots movement which saw tradition and modernity in an inclusive way. Other playwrights in this genre include Vijay Tendulkar and Habib Tanvir.

Chapter 2 focuses on the markedly urban tendencies of Protest theatre in India. In India a radical change was sparked-off by the anti-fascist movement of the Communist Party of India under the banner of Indian People's Theatre Association which called for a move away from proscenium theatres. The emergence of several forms of protest theatre in India such as street theatre, agit-prop theatre etc. was closely linked with the political theatre in Kolkata starting around the 1940s and showing marked leftist leanings. It emerged as a means for the lower classes to liberate themselves and intensify the revolution against the existing ruling classes. This kind of theatre which flourished in the hands of stalwarts such as Safdar Hashmi, Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt was urban in terms of theme, location and dramaturgy. In fact study reveals that it actually arose as a response to the problems faced by the working classes who had migrated to the cities and faced extreme exploitation at the hands of capitalist mill-owners, corrupt politicians and the police. The most preferred location for such theatre was the street, the platform, the *nukkad* etc. However, one would naturally be tempted to ask, why? The answer to this question is multiple. One reason is that these locations offered greater viewership and anybody and everybody can watch a play performed by the theatre activists. The boundaries of class, caste and economic status seem to melt in them. It is a meeting place where all people share a common ground. Even people who cannot afford to pay for a stage ticket can watch a play and relate to it. Playwrights of this era come up with several themes through their revolutionary plays dealing with religion, class, poverty, and communalism. The most popular form of Protest theatre today is Street theatre which remains very popular till the day and survives in university and college troupes, NGOs who use it to create awareness on various issues. Street theatre therefore is a voice of the voiceless in the city.

The thesis also identifies the emergence of English, over the years, as the language of urban India. The scepticism which obstructed playwrights from writing plays in English even if they wanted to has to a great extent been eradicated. English language plays are no longer castigated as “un-Indian”. Chapter 3 deals with plays written and performed originally in English. Indian English-language playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani, Abhishek Majumdar, Ramu Ramanathan are symptomatic of the radical turn in Indian theatre roughly around the 1980s. Shayoni Mitra notes, “But this now prolonged history of producing English plays at the university level has paid dividend by producing a fresh crop of mostly self-supported playwrights writing in English. Ramu Ramanathan, Rahul Da Cunha, Anuvab Pal, Ran Ganesh Kamatham, and Annie Zaidi, among others, have all had their works produced. This new generation seems once again to be enjoying the heteroglossia of open linguistic practices that one marked the cosmopolitanism of Parsi Theatre” (Mitra 89). This new group of writers is themselves city-bred in terms of their education, careers and background, and reflect the new urban India as it is. They explore the corpus of urban spatiality hitherto unexplored in urban theatre – both external and internal (psychic). Dattani explores spaces ranging from the shady areas of cities, as in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, to public parks, coffee-shops and streets, as in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *30 Days in September* and *Final Solutions*, to the interiors of posh homes and offices as in *Tara*. He also addresses the issue of conventional gender role allocation, social conditioning and the gendering of urban spaces by the hegemonic discourse of patriarchal culture in plays such as *Dance Like a Man*. These playwrights counter the assumption that the city, being accommodative, fosters plurality and heterogeneity. In reality, however, urban life or the city deploys its own kind of hegemony and castigates anybody who does not follow its dictum, as an ‘outsider’.

Indian Women playwrights writing in English -- such as Manjula Padmanavan, Poile Sengupta and Annie Zaidi -- continue to explore new theatrical strategies. This forms the crux of the discussion in Chapter 4. Indian women's theatre came to limelight with the Western feminism movement. These gender-based problems made it into the public agenda. The women's movement in India has highlighted many social problems, such as dowry deaths, female foeticide, sexual harassment, ignorance, illiteracy, gender inequality in families and society, etc. It has shown that women are capable of rational thought and are no less than

men. In the 1970s, the advent of urbanisation and industrialization produced jobs for women. This inspired emerging sensitive women writers of India to speak of several tabooed subjects. Women's revolution in India and socially responsible Indian theatre opened the way for voicing the female's concerns and their experiences of the city. The theatre of women became a catalyst for social change. Manjula Padmanavan's *Lights Out* (1986), which has been discussed in detail, is set in a drawing-dining area of a sixth floor apartment in a building in Bombay. The play boldly exposes the urban disease of voyeurism that shocks the urban viewer out of their complacent sense of security and comfort. Today, women writers in urban centres of the country continue to write on critical topics such as sensuality, subjugation, alienation, migration, crisis of identity, sexuality etc. Contemporary female authors were often considered to be inferior to their male colleagues, their spectrum was limited and they usually restricted themselves to the portrayal of the experience of the confined domestic space. Despite the constraints, they have increased considerably the perception of the role of women in society. A female writer's depiction of female characters is often truthful and accurate. A male playwright's depiction of women and their problems appears to be a little uninspiring because he fails to consider the female psychology and viewpoint. Women playwrights have now produced plays that criticise the institution of marriage and family hierarchy, after successfully establishing themselves as incredibly talented artists. They have written/performed plays that tear down the unjust cultural boundaries with powerful, nuanced female characters. Women now do not need men to be their mouthpiece. They have taken it upon themselves to have a *voice* of their own and speak out to the world through their plays. In many cases they have not been able to find exact solutions to their problems, but they have at least registered a protest. Women playwrights have come out with issues such as domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, female sexuality, and the problems of being a working woman and a homemaker simultaneously. The innovation has been not only in terms of theme but also dramaturgy. Women directors have worked without traditional scripts; actors have acted *impromptu* on stage, used single actors, portrayed the female body as a metaphor for their fragmented life. Playwrights such as Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta, Mallika Thaneja, Annie Zaidi have signaled this welcome change through their work.

Thus the theatre genres and playwrights undertaken for study constitute “a poetics of urban modernism in which the rhetoric of the metropolis is transformed into a *Weltstadt*: a topos of the imagination where the city becomes the world” (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 5). This in turn becomes an essential idea on which theatre thrives. As a cultural sign, the city is the essential ground of modern existence, of modern life as urban life, and modern consciousness as urban consciousness. Thus when we read urban play-texts or watch performances we not only recover a sense of collective urban history, but also perceive more clearly our own relationship with the cities in which we live by way of imagination. In other words, we remember our own lives in symbolic ways that enrich our lives in the present. Representations of cities are not simply portraits of the present or past consigned to museums of the literary imagination. This thesis therefore has not only focussed on theatre alone, or city alone, but on the relationship or conjunction between the two as it has played out in a wide range of geographical and historical contexts and, particularly, as it may help us to comprehend and respond to large social and cultural processes such as globalization, liberalisation and socio-political changes . The thesis as broken up into four parts maps the development of theatre subgenres and their urbanity, continuities and discontinuities vis-a-vis the city. It analyses the representational strategies that were used by playwrights and directors to capture the fragmentation and opacity of the cities. It is therefore a detailed study of the postindependence city and its theatre in the context of late capitalism, migration, globalization, and postmodern culture, and the challenges these pose to our times.