



PORTRAYAL OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION: A STUDY OF THREE INDIAN ENGLISH CRITIC WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

India has been a land of articulate feelings, eloquent speeches and diverse cultural manifestations; Indian drama comprises all the three. India's tradition of drama goes back to Bhasa, the Sanskrit dramatist (fifth century B.C.E.), continuing through Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti. The *Natyashastra* by Bharata Muni is the oldest text on dramaturgy in the world. However, Indian English drama has always lagged behind poetry and fiction. As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar pointed out in 1962:

Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity nor, on the whole, of high quality. Enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English, but seldom for actual stage production. (Iyengar, 226)

This is primarily because of lack of opportunity to stage the plays. There is also the problem of language. In his Foreword to *Kanthapura* (1938) Raja Rao had talked about the difficulty of conveying—in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own even while recognizing that English is the language of our intellectual makeup. Shashi Deshpande has pointed out that the problem is more acute in the case of drama, which is why Indian English drama lagged behind drama in Indian languages:

Reading a novel is a private matter. It is somehow possible to read the words of an Indian speaking English without too much discomfort, since the words register on the mind without being spoken aloud. But to hear the words being spoken by an Indian, especially by someone who would not be speaking English in real life, seems not just unnatural and wrong, it destroys the very illusion that drama seeks to create.

Apart from this, drama needs to use colloquial language, which increases the problems of writing in English. How does one get the different voices varying according to region, class, caste, education, etc.? What kind of English does one give an uneducated person, for example? How do we 'translate' the language when there are possibly no words in English for what is being spoken? These problems arise in fiction as well, but fiction writers and poets have struggled with them for years and most have reached a kind of language that seems to work. The dramatist's job is much harder, because the actor is 'speaking' directly to the audience; nothing comes in between. The impact

is immediate. Besides, the characters are not on a page, but right there, in person, before you. (Deshpande, xi)

Krishan Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted, or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* (1831) is considered the first play written by an Indian in English. Shanta Gokhale says, —It was less a play and more a dramatized debate of the conflict between orthodox Hindu customs and the new ideas introduced by Western education. While anyone interested in English plays preferred to see those written by native English speakers, the majority of Indians preferred those performed in an Indian language (337). Yet Indians continued to write plays, in spite of a lack of theatre. M.K. Naik observes, —From 1831 to 1980, not less than 500 plays by Indian English writers had appeared; and during the short period of the last twenty years [1960-2000], about 75 have been published. But, of course, numerical abundance does not necessarily spell qualitative richness (201).

In the initial stage we have Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) writing between 1890 and 1920. The notable feature of Sri Aurobindo's plays is that they depict different cultures and countries in different epochs, with a variety of characters, moods and sentiments. He wrote eleven verse plays, including five complete five act plays—*The Viziers of Bassora*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Rodogune*, *Eric: A Dramatic Romance* and *Vasavadutta*. Prema Nandakumar believes that Sri Aurobindo's plays are worthy of the stage, —Sri Aurobindo's plays have been staged with great success by the students of Sri Aurobindo Ashram's Mother's International School in New Delhi (177).

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) occupies an important place in Indian drama. He translated many of his Bengali plays into English in the period 1913 to 1936, making extensive changes in the text. Self-translated plays—fall into two broad groups: thesis plays and psychological dramas. In the first group may be included *Sanyasi*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Chitra*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Natir Puja* and *Red Oleander*.

To the second belong *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer* (Naik, 101). Tagore's plays reflect his creativity and innovation, and his concern with the status of women in society. His plays reveal an insight into a woman's mind. Women are recurrent figures in his plays, such as Vasanthi in *The Ascetic*, Aparna in *Sacrifice*, Princess Chitra in *Chitra*, and Prakriti in *Chandalika*.



Sarojini Naidu's younger brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1898-1990) was a poet, dramatist, musician and stage and screen actor. Seven verse plays on the lives of Indian saints like Pundalik, *Chokhamela* and *Eknath* were published in *Poems and Plays* (1927). *Five Plays* (1929) are in prose, and dramas of social protest. The historical novelist A. S. P. Ayyar (1899-1963) authored six plays between 1926 and 1942, including *The Slave of Ideas* and *Sita's Choice*; he focused on women's rights and exposed the evils of society, such as caste and superstitious beliefs. T.P. Kailasam (1885-1946) wrote both in English and Kannada. He is regarded as the father of modern Kannada drama, because his plays in Kannada had social themes and humour.

His English plays such as *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna* (1964) and *Keechaka* (1949) present a fresh look at figures from Indian mythology. But most of these playwrights wrote their plays to be read and not performed.

Bharati Sarabhai (1912-1918) was a member of the Indian National Congress, a Gandhian who took an active part in politics. She is the only significant woman playwright of this period. *The Well of the People* (1943) is based on a true story published in Gandhiji's *Harijan*. It is a verse play, poetic and symbolic, about a widow who arranges to dig a well for the untouchables. *Two Women* (1952) is in prose and presents a fascinating group of women, mainly Anuradha, Urvashi, Sudha, Lata and Miss Boulton. Anuradha is a typical Hindu wife married to a westernized white man, exposing the differences in the married life. Urvashi, Anuradha's friend is an unsuccessful dancer and a singer. Both of them decide to renounce the world and go to the Himalayas. Anuradha's husband falls sick and the news brings Anuradha back to the family household while her friend falls in love and feels contented with her life. Both of them realized the teaching of *Gita* that doing one's duty is better than shying away from it. The long speeches by the characters detract from the stageability of the play.

Things started changing with the arrival of Asif Currimbhoy (1928-1994) on the Indian English drama scene. He was one of the first playwrights to produce plays that could be performed. He wrote twenty-nine plays in all, using a variety of theatrical devices like monologues, choruses, chants, songs, slide projections, sound effects and mime. Four plays of his plays deserve serious attention: *The Doldrummers* (1965), *The Dumb Dancer* (1961), *Goa* (1964), and *The Hungry Ones* (1965). *The Doldrummers* was banned in India. It was only in 1969, after writers like Khushwant Singh and Mulk Raj Anand wrote letters of protest to the *Times of India*, that the ban was lifted and the Little Theatre Group in Delhi staged it. Other playwrights of the period who wrote stageable plays were Gieve Patel with his *Princes* and *Savaksa*; and Pratap Sharma with his *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970). Nissim Ezekiel, better known as a poet and literary critic, wrote *Three Plays* (1969) comprised of *Nalini: A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem: A Tragi-Comedy*, and *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce*. *Nalini*, a full-length

play in three acts, is a social satire with its witty and interesting dialogues. *Marriage Poem* is a one-act play, centred around the failure of an upper-middle-class marriage. The wife craves the attention and love of husband who is indifferent. The husband is caught between dreams of another woman and his duty towards his lonely wife. *The Sleepwalker* satirizes the fascination of Indians for Americans. The play presents a subtle criticism of American and Indian society.

CHAPTER 2 BREAKING STRUCTURES OF PATRIARCHAL CONSTRAINTS: DINA MEHTA'S PLAYS

Dina Mehta is a playwright, editor and fiction writer based in Mumbai. *The Myth-Makers*, her first full-length play, about the Hindi movie industry and the early rumblings of communalism in Mumbai, won the Second Prize in the Sultan Padamsee Memorial Playwriting Competition held in 1968 by the Theatre Group, Bombay (it was tied with Gieve Patel's *The Princes*). *Tiger, Tiger*, a play on Tipu Sultan, won an award at the second Sultan Padamsee Playwriting Competition in 1978. *Brides Are Not For Burning*, on dowry deaths, won the first prize in a worldwide competition sponsored by the BBC in 1979. *Getting Away with Murder* was on the shortlist of seven specially commended radio plays out of 902 entries submitted for the BBC World Playwriting Competition, 1989. *When One Plus One Makes Nine* won an allIndia competition on the subject of family planning and was telecast by Doordarshan in 1984. *Sister Like You*, a play on domestic violence, was shortlisted for the British Council New International Playwriting Awards, 1996. Mehta has also published two novels *And Some Take a Lover* (1992) and *Mila in Love* (2003). She is a short story writer of distinction, with two collections to her credit: *The Other Woman and Other Stories* (1981) and *Miss Menon Did Not Believe in Magic and Other Stories* (1994).

Dina Mehta focuses on the precarious position of the Indian woman, and the Indian woman's concept of self in a patriarchal society. Woman internalizes the negative image this socialization provides. —Just as a society dominated by racist ideology consigns the black population to an inferior status makes it believe in this ideology, a society based on sexist ideology condemns the woman to an inferior sex and made her believe in it (Mukherji, 52). As a result of this social requirement, a woman comes to believe that she is not important in herself, for herself. She comes to feel unworthy and undeserving. A woman is hesitant about her own initiatives. She is reluctant to speak for herself, to voice her own thoughts and ideas or to act on her own behalf. The life of a woman is defined almost entirely through interpersonal, usually domestic and filial, relationships. Her identity exists mainly as being-for-others, rather than being-for-herself. This identification of self, entirely as a response to others' needs and definitions, leads to loss of autonomy.

Mehta deals with the negative image this socialization provides. For instance, the insecurity of a single woman past her prime, as exemplified in Pramila, forms the theme of *The Myth-Makers*. *Brides Are Not for Burning* deals with the scourge of



dowry. The characters of Laxmi and Malini stand at two ends of the spectrum of Indian womanhood. While Laxmi is the conventional, submissive daughter-in-law, who is tortured and humiliated for bringing insufficient dowry, her sister Malini is a fighter who will not take things lying down. The vulnerable girl child, the trauma of child sexual abuse, childlessness and infidelity are the issues dealt with in *Getting Away with Murder*. The struggles of the modern Indian woman to overcome these —body blows are seen in Malika, Sonali and Raziya.

Dina Mehta's first play *The Myth-Makers* is structured as three long acts, the first and third set in the bed-cum-sitting room of Pramila, while the second act is set in the house of Savitri, an actress who is throwing a party to celebrate the success of her latest film, *Rose of Kashmir*. The play opens with the ageing Pramila sitting in front of her dressing table mirror, getting ready to receive her lover Sandip Joglekar, the producer of the film. Through her gestures (*—She touches the slight pouches under her eyes, the sickle lines round her large, unhappy mouth, then sits gazing in despair. . .*) it is clear that she is very worried about her physical appearance. She repeatedly asks her maid servant Mukti, *—Do you think he will come for me tonight?!* and the young woman's only answer is, *—You said he was coming.!* This dialogue is repeated four times, to suggest the stasis of Pramila's life. Pramila expects that Joglekar would come and take her to the party. She has rescued Mukti from the streets, because she rouses her maternal feelings; she admits that *—the child I never conceived haunts me everywhere. . . But I keep her locked in that room with my paintings and my past.!* The right wall of the room on stage has a door which is locked. Mehta uses sound effects to recreate Pramila's past — Pramila hears knocking, and declares that it is *—the child I myself was!* who wants the door to be opened. Mukti assures her, *—There is no knocking, baijee! I swear.!* She has told Mukti not to open the street door to Anand, but he lets himself in because the latch is defective. Anand is a fearless journalist, with a very poor opinion of Joglekar's films. He loves Pramila, though she is fourteen years older than him, and asks her to go with him to Delhi. He is injured, and we learn that he got hurt when trying to save Krishnamurthy from some ruffians who attacked him. Krishnamurthy is an old retired journalist who talked to Anand about a scandal from the past — a building collapsing on the heads of fifty workmen because the contractor had used faulty material. Anand has been receiving threats, and advised to keep quiet. He warns her that Joglekar will soon tire of her, and suggests that she should resume painting. He opens the locked door, though Pramila is terrified. Through effective use of lighting, the playwright projects images of the past which Pramila describes — her father who was a leather-worker, the untouchables' colony and the dirty pond. Then a younger Pramila is shown sitting at the table, working on film posters for Joglekar; she is attracted towards him, and is helpless when he seduces her. There is a thunderous knocking at the door, and Pramila imagines that it is Rajan, Joglekar's brother-in-law, trying to stop them. The sound brings Pramila back to the present — the knocking is by two rough men who want to meet Joglekar.

The act ends with Anand going away, while Pramila asks her maid for the fourth time, *—Do you think he will come tonight?!* Act II is set in Savitri's drawing room; she is reading out Anand's review of Joglekar's latest film to Suresh, the ageing actor who is the hero, and Rajan, Joglekar's brother-in-law. *—If I see this Anand fellow, I will *speet* [sic] in his face, there is so much wrath in my bosoms.!* Savitri is offended when Rajan corrects her English, *—The word you want is *_bosom_*.!* None of the other guests have turned up, and Suresh Kumar (described by Anand as *—the simpering, rotund hero with three chins!*) repeatedly asks for dinner to be served. Rajan has managed all of Joglekar's business affairs; his conversation with Savitri and Suresh reveals him as a complex character, dominated by Joglekar, though he bitterly resents his ill-treatment of his sister. Rajan also blames Joglekar's mistresses — Pramila and Savitri — for his infidelity. Savitri had asked Joglekar to bring Savitri to the party, but suspects that he must be with Lulu, a young and beautiful dancer. Their conversation is drowned out by the big crowd staging a demonstration on the street outside Savitri's house, shouting slogans against outsiders — Gujarati, Sindhis, Sikhs, Punjabis and South Indians. Joglekar arrives with Lulu, by driving through the crowd which has held up the other guests; when Savitri repeatedly asks about Pramila, he declares rudely, *—Late nights do not agree with her.!* The two men who had come to Pramila's house had come here too, but Joglekar refuses to meet them. The act ends with the news of Krishnamurthy's death.

The third act is again set in Pramila's bed-cum-sitting room, with Pramila still waiting for Joglekar, and telling the maid Mukti to go to bed. She hears knocking, and Dina Mehta uses a spotlight to show the locked door bursting open, a bright little girl coming out and dancing around happily with the powder puff before going back into the locked room. Pramila once again hears Rajan's voice, trying to prevent Joglekar from seducing her. Mukti ushers in Rajan, who requests Pramila to save her friend Anand; Krishnamurthy is dead, and it is dangerous for Anand if he gives evidence against the three miscreants who attacked him. When Mukti sees Joglekar coming, Rajan quickly slips away through the back door of the flat. Pramila assumes that Joglekar has come to take her to Savitri's party, but he indicates clearly that he has come only to stop Anand from testifying in court. He tells Pramila that she should use every means to stop Anand, because his speaking out could ruin Joglekar's political ambitions. He confesses that he was the contractor whose building collapsed. He even suggests that Pramila should sleep with Anand, if that would buy his silence. Enraged Pramila tells Joglekar to get out, and he points out that he owns the flat and everything in it. Pramila wants to go away, but lacks the strength to do so; the play ends with the same two men —with dead eyes! knocking at the door in search of Joglekar, their future leader.

The playwright reveals Joglekar's lack of morals by showing him attempting to seduce Lulu with the same words that he used on Pramila, that he is attracted to her by the *—luminous purity of light on your brow . . . makes me think of those diadems that brides wear . . .!* This technique of repeated dialogue is employed to reveal the psyche of all the characters—Suresh



repeatedly asks for food and drinks to be served; Savitri denounces Lulu to show her sisterhood with Pramila; and Pramila shows her subservience by repeating —Do you think he will come for me tonight?! Dina Mehta also uses sentences in other languages – the actor Suresh slips into Hindi when he is angry. The crowd off-stage is heard shouting slogans in Marathi, this adds to the realism of the play.

Most cultures do not have a positive image of a single woman. Singleness is never seen as a choice, but as something which befalls a woman and which, therefore, engenders sympathy. *The Myth-Makers* encapsulates the vulnerable position of a single woman in an androcentric society, and her vacillating mind. Pramila, the aging actress in *The Myth-Makers*, invites the sympathy of the readers. Living in the world of filmdom which is characterized by insecurity, she sees her lover, Joglekar, as her only prop. Pramila's dependency on Joglekar can be seen in her frequent questions to her servant, Mukti, as to whether he will come. In spite of her knowledge that he is unfaithful to her, she needs him, and is willing to accept whatever little he can give her. —I know I count for nothing. I accept that I am nothing! I am willing to accept anything from you! (Act 3). When Joglekar stands near her, —conscious of his power! (stage directions), and cradles her against him, she clings to him with her eyes closed:

—All evening and half the night, I waited for this... to feel my happiness protected...! (Act 3). Women assumes positions of subservience and dependency because the social and economic structures in a patriarchal society force them to do so.

A traditional Indian woman feels that she has no identity apart from her husband. Her life revolves round him. —Confined to the home, a child among her children, passive, no part of her existence under her own control, a woman could only exist by pleasing man. She was wholly dependent on his protection in a world that she had no share in making: man's world! (Friedan, 72).

Pramila suffers from this dependency syndrome, which is an outcome of the conditioning one receives from a patriarchal society. It is seen both in the young and the old, the wife and the mistress. The dependent woman fails to develop internal criteria for an evaluation and definition of self as her self-esteem and sense of worth become dependent upon rewards bestowed upon her by others. The consequences of the dependency syndrome are many, and adversely affect the actualization of a woman's potential. Too much of dependence on a husband or a man leads to a further decline in the self-image of woman. It leads to insecurity, feelings of inferiority and self-pity as she advises her maid, Mukta, —You have to be subtle to keep your man – particularly if you are fighting your wrinkles with cold cream! (Act 1). She sees other women as enemies or potential rivals. A kind of masochism can be seen in women who accept the dominance of men. Then continues the consequences of this dependency syndrome:

In her low self-esteem, the depressed woman views herself as deficient in characteristics that are important to her feminine identity, such as, intelligence, health, beauty, personal attractiveness

and popularity. She may describe herself as inferior and inadequate. She is also pessimistic and she expects the worst and rejects the possibility of improvement. She criticizes herself for various deficiencies and blames herself for happenings that are in no way connected with her. (Al-Issa 101-102)

CHAPTER 3

PLACING WOMEN CENTER STAGE: POILE SENGUPTA'S PLAYS

The emergence of women playwrights has opened new vistas in modern Indian Drama. It becomes all the more important because theatre was considered as a realm belonging to the patriarchal setup. But women playwrights today are contributing immensely to make deeper and long-suppressed dimensions of life, in a way that only they know and can write about. Women playwrights do not seek to resolve issues, nor end with author-defined conclusions. Rather, they invite audience participation in dealing with the emotions evoked, and the questioning of stereotypes.

Poile Sengupta is one such dramatist. Her work asks for reformulation of conventional paradigms and meaningful social intervention, and the re-examination of the basic knowledge about social and literary dynamics. Playwright, poet, novelist and children's writer Poile Sengupta (née Ambika Gopalakrishnan) was born in 1948.

She has an M.A. in English from Delhi University, and has taught at Indraprastha College and Miranda House (Delhi). She has written three one-act plays and eight full length plays for adults: *Mangalam* (1993), *Inner Laws* (1994), *A Pretty Business* (1995), *Keats was a Tuber* (1996), *Collages* (1998), *Alipha* (2001), *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001) and *Samara's Song* (2007). Six of them were published by Routledge in *Women Centre Stage* (2010). Most of her plays have been directed by her husband Abhijit Sengupta. Some of her plays like *Mangalam*, *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha*, *So Said Shakuni*, and *Alipha* have been directed by Joy Micheal for Yatrik on the Delhi stage. Poile Sengupta is also a theatre person, founder of a group, Theatre Club and has acted on stage and in films. Her book of poems *A Woman Speaks* was published by Writers Workshop in 1991. Her short story —Ammulul was shortlisted for the 2012 Commonwealth short story prize. Her novel, *Inga* (2014), has the same feminist concerns as her plays.

Her fiction for children includes *Role Call* and *Role Call Again* (2003), *Vikramaditya's Throne* (2007), *How the Path Grew* (1997), *The Story of the Road* (1993) and *The Way to my Friend's House* (1988), published by leading publishers like Rupa, Puffin and the Children's Book Trust. *The Exquisite Balance* (1987) won an award in the UNICEF-CBT competition. Her stories have also been included in several anthologies, such as *The Puffin Treasury of Modern Indian Stories*, *The Puffin Book of Funny Stories*, *Favourite Stories for Boys* and *Favourite Stories for Girls*, and *A Clear Blue Sky*. In 1968, she began —A Letter to You! a humour column for



the children's magazine *Children's World* that ran for nearly three decades. She has written columns for children in *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, *The Times of India*, Bangalore, and in *Midday*, Mumbai. A set of seven one Act plays for children – *Good Heavens!* – was published by Puffin in 2006. She has also written a full length play for children, with the title *Yavamajakka!*

Mangalam, her first full-length play, won the award for its socially relevant theme in The Hindu-Madras Players playscript competition, 1993. It is a play within a play. In Act II, a progressive, upper middle class urban family discusses a play they have seen the previous day. "Everything about the play was false," (*Body Blows*, 128) says Suresh, to his mother, who is a friend of the playwright. —It was just a thunder and lightning script, a commercial film script, the *dabbawallah* type. You think real people actually speak that way to each other? (128) he asks. Act I turns out to be the play they have seen. It is about a conservative, middle-class Tamil Brahmin family that is mourning the loss of the mother, Mangalam, who has been a victim of domestic abuse for 31 years. When Mangalam's sister Thangam arrives, skeletons tumble out of the closet. As the family continues to discuss the play, it dawns on the mother and her daughter Sumathi that their lives are no different from the characters they have been commenting on. Disturbing truths about their own family are revealed. They realise that like Mangalam and Thangam, they too are helpless.

As the playwright points out, —A play within a play as a dramatic device is certainly not new; . . . It is used as a means to lend perspective to an issue. But in *Mangalam* I have used the same actors in both 'plays' as an indication that nothing really changes; the sameness of it all, to me, is deeply disturbing! (*Women Centre Stage*, 1).

Mangalam is the protagonist in the play within the play, whose death becomes, in a way, the basis for much of the action. Through the First Act, we can feel her 'absent presence', through references to the time of her life when she was alive. At first, we are told that she probably committed suicide by swallowing pills, but we are not given any reason for her having done so. It is only the narrator's choric commentary that provides insights like —women die many kinds of deaths; men do not know this! (*Body Blows*, 102). Gradually we learn that she was carrying someone else's child when she got married to Dorai. Her sister Thangam's response to this accusation is, —Did you ever think that it could have been forced upon her? (122). Not willing to relent on this, Dorai is keen on presenting himself as the victim, until Thangam retorts, —What about that married woman who used to come to the temple everyday and take *prasaadam* from your father? She took *prasaadam* from you also, didn't she? (121). While any hint of a woman's unchaste conduct can malign her reputation for life, a similar act on a man's part is forgivable and can be easily ignored. Dorai has the audacity to justify himself, —It's different for a man! (121). The shamelessness with which such private aspects of a woman's life are openly discussed, slandering her reputation even after her death, is nothing more than a war of ideologies between the characters, none of whom are really sensitive to the loss of Mangalam. It is at the end of the First

Act that we get to know that Mangalam was molested by her own sister Thangam's husband, alongside which news, Dorai's daughter Usha too arrives, having left her husband's house, because the oppression there had got the better of her.

Domestic space, which is the marker that tradition sets for the preservation of women's chastity (Sita was abducted when she crossed the boundary marked by Lakshman), has now become a space of sexual violence and has led to an impasse for women. In the course of all this action, what becomes significantly clear, is that the woman Mangalam's body has all along been treated as an 'object': by the molester as an object of gratification, by her father as an object for the preservation of familial dignity, and by the husband as an object for venting out his frustrations and grievances. Thus, the woman's body is nothing more than a pawn used by homosocial men in exchanges that preserve the kinship structures in society. (Kaushik)

Sengupta here is voicing some feminist concerns but that does not mean she is presenting the world in black and white. If there are some cruel and insensitive husbands like Dorai, there are men like Vikram too in modern times. When Sengupta was asked in an interview whether she would categorise her work as feminist. Her reply was:

I find it unacceptable to be categorized as a —Feminist!. I am a writer with the consciousness of a woman; I cannot escape my gender, but it is not my sole identity. My women characters live in a troubled, patriarchal world but they are strong and capable of speaking and acting for themselves...In *Mangalam*, I also depict the emergence of the new male, Vikram, who on page three of newspapers would be called the metrosexual male. (Interview, 614)

The second act is set in modern times. The same actors take different names except for Thangam, who never came on stage in Act I. When the act opens, young Suresh is speaking over the telephone, flirting with one girl while going out with another girl. Sumati, played by the actor who was Usha in Act I, is arguing with her younger brother Suresh about the play they have seen (Act I). Suresh holds the belief that those things portrayed in the play never happen in modern times. Thangam tells them how an executive in a multinational company raped his sister-in-law. Sumati questions, —...wasn't there anything in it that reached out and touched you, raked your memories, made an old scar throb again? (129). Even the Thangam of modern times, mother of Sumati and Suresh, ends up like Dorai's wife in the play within the play. She suffers terribly in her marriage to Sreeni as he maintained a steady extramarital affair.

Sumati describe the freedom men enjoy, —The man seems to have all the advantages. He can have a roaring good time and he can pick and choose and drop and choose again! (148). Sumati admits that women are just objects of possession in a patriarchal society when she tells Suresh that: —the way you talk about girls, about women, you don't seem to have a speck of respect for them...the moment a woman doesn't fit into the category of being a mother or a sister, she's baggage, sexual baggage! (129). Sumati finds herself a victim and is aware of



the patriarchal setup, which is responsible for the blatantly unjust treatment of women and for the stifling and oppressive system of gender roles. Even in this educated and modern household, gender discrimination is present in subtle and various ways which are hurtful to women. And this son preference influences the siblings' feelings for each other. Suresh says to Sumati, —You hated me. You thought Amma loved me more than she loved you! (130). Sumati responds, —She does! (130).

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