



A systematic review of thematic representation in the plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Poile Sengupta

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide a systematic review of gender portrayal of three popular Indian English playwrights namely Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta. A critical thematic analysis of the selected dramas is used to analyse how the following playwrights in India are reflecting, challenging and interrogation of the entrenched patriarchal norms in its postcolonial socio-cultural reality. The study relies on some of the available literary criticism, in order to get a sense for the general trends involved in gender bias, resistance and transformation in modern Indian English literature in the form of a drama. In his noir and hyper-realistic productions, such as *Harvest and Lights Out*, Padmanabhan highlights the commercialization of the bodies of women and the invisibilization of the violence against women in technologically geared societies. Respectively, *Brides Are Not for Burning* by Dina Mehta is centered on the domestic sphere and analyzes the domestic violence, familial oppression and the ability that women have in societies with limited scope. Poile Sengupta's interventions add to this line of argument, exposing internalised aspects of the gender oppression that exist in 'institutional settings', which examines psychological trauma and institutional injustice, as well as the moral distortions within institutional structures of middle class lives. While the dramas diverge in style, content and focus, it is found that all three playwrights have a feminist thrust which questions the traditional stereotype of the geeta Daaru ka Sarreal, India ka Chota Kanaya, the passive Indian woman. Their works in this manner bring women to a centrality of dramatic discourse, so agency, resistance and identity formation are all in focus. In this study, it is concluded that the modern Indian English dramas are a critical forum to forge a new definition of gender relations and progressive feminist sensibility.

Keywords: Thematic representation, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta

Introduction

Analyzing the dramatization of gender from a postcolonial perspective on the plays of these three astute Indian English author/directors—Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Poile Sengupta—develops a useful vantage point for understanding issues of patriarchy, identity, and power in Indian English's contemporary drama. Brought to public view through acting, drama has a distinct place in literature, which reflects the society's values, inequalities and changes. In comparison with other types of literature, drama reveals social reality not only in terms of narrative, but also of enactment, so that the spectators can witness and judge relations between man and woman up close and personal as they play themselves out on the stage. This performative aspect enables drama to be an effective tool to unveil visible and invisible framings of gender bias within social structures. In the case of Indian English drama, gender bias is not always explicit and visible, but can also manifest in more subtle ways, such as in the portrayal of characters, the words they use and how they comment on them, the themes the play focusses on, and the way the play is drafted (Showalter, Elaine, 2013) ^[1]. The lack of women's voices and reinforcing passivity and dependency stereotypes are strong patriarchal notions. Different methods of storytelling and acting contribute to these biases and impact the audience's perception and interpretation. However, a systemic analysis of the representation of gender must not only include the textual material of plays – both their own and those referenced by other – but also consider other aspects of their performances. The chosen playwrights

illustrate this complexity through their variety of depictions of women from different social, political and psychological backgrounds, providing a rich source for critical analysis. Historically, the roles assigned to women in literature have been very constrained, usually by the male norm, and have included a range of stereotypes: subservient wives, sacrificing mothers, quiet victims, and so on. In the past these kinds of depictions have perpetuated patriarchy, which has limited many women's identities to domestic and submissive roles. But, in an era of modern Indian English drama, the feminine image is definitely more sophisticated and discerning. Women become complex, conflicted and resistant in the works of Padma Nag, Mehta and Sengupta; men innocuous. While exploring various topics such as female body as object or product, home and domestic violence, psychological conflict, and social injustice, they also write about gender issues contributing to the larger conversation about gender in literature. In addition, gender is not only seen as a biological difference but rather as a socially constructed gender which is built upon culture, economy and politics. Caste structure and familial configurations and practices affect gendered roles, and thus are important factors arising in the Indian context that perpetuate inequality. Representations of lived experiences through Drama offers a forum for critiquing and questioning these constructs and their implications. This portrays conflicts and tensions among characters, provoking viewers to consider issues of inequality and social injustice. The playwrights highlight various aspects of gender discrimination through stories of women both as victims of

violence and as the persons trying to assert themselves in limited cultural norms. In her drafts on technology against exploitation and dystopian control, Padmanabhan shifts her eyes to a realm of institutional oppression and marginalisation in Mehta's drafts and interpersonal conflicts in Sengupta's. Such divergent views offer a broad perspective into gender bias in the English drama of modern India (Subramanyam, Lakshmi, 2002) ^[2].

Theoretical Framework for Gender Representation in Indian English Drama

Feminist literary and dramatic theory have been utilized in the theoretical framework to analyse the gender representation in Indian English Drama in given socio-cultural settings. In a systematic review like this one, theory becomes a way to look at patterns found in the literature and selected plays in order to interpret these patterns. The issue of representation of genders is not a simple matter of the text alone but is also compounded by issues of performance, characterisation, dialogue and audience reception. The social aspects of drama differ from other branches of literature: dramas capture the social, situation the roles, and bring them to life, thus providing a medium which examined the social construction of roles, their reinforcement and their challenge. The study in Indian English drama illustrates a discussion in which the sphere of gender is not only a topical subject, but also an issue that structures the development of the plot, character interactions, and ideologies. The playwrights discussed, namely Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta, do not merely describe the gender as a subject that is matter of concern but also as one that is conflictual and transformative, thus requiring a theoretical trick that combines the dimensions of feminist critique and drama analysis.

Among its principles, this framework focuses on historically and socially constructed gender, and not just biologically determined gender. Crises in Indian society with regard to gender roles are rooted in cultural norms, family structure, and institutional norms, and are explored and questioned in drama. The conceptual analysis of these constructs helps to recognize that they point to patriarchal ideologies which dictate women's portrayal in pieces of literature. Meanwhile, modern plays challenge these models, showing women as active subjects, dotting on the capacity to change who they are (Sree, S. Prasanna, 2011) ^[3]. The theoretical approach, in this study therefore, is not geared towards finding oppression, but towards also finding resistance, negotiation and transformation in the context of gender discourse. The study places selected plays in this context, making it possible to relate literary analysis with the greater feminist discourses and also offers a framework for analyzing the depiction of gender in Indian English drama.

1. Feminist Literary Theory and Dramatic Representation

Feminist literary theory is one of the fundamental ways that gender relations or power structures are incorporated into texts of the drama genre. Feminist criticism in Indian English Drama emphasizes the role of women characters in the context of the male characters and the degree of passivity and active agency that the former exhibit, suggesting that the female 'character' is either made into a passive object or a free agent endowed with agency. The

chosen dramatists use different dramatic produce to investigate these elements. For example, dystopian settings, domestic stories, and socio-political backgrounds are utilized to uncover multiple elements of gender inequality: objectification, domestic oppression and institutional control. The concept of feminist theory is able to be structured as a way of recurrently identifying these patterns in various plays and critical analysis. Gender representation is not limited to talking part in drama but also includes working with the elements of use, e.g. body, position, silence, movement and the effects of the stage. These are factors which help build up meaning and shape audience constructions of gender roles. It is important to note how feminist analysis is not only textual but also performative analysis, thus it is important for dramatic studies (Niranjana, Seemanthini, 2001) ^[4]. These performative aspects are significant in the works of Padmanabhan, Mehta, and Sengupta in becoming foci for the conflict between the individual voice and social expectation. This study uses feminist literary theory to analyze these playwrights' interrogation of the dominant images and the places they allow for others to tell a different tale of "womanhood".

2. Evolution and Approaches in Feminist Dramatic Criticism

Feminist dramatic criticism has grown and changed over the years, paralleling the changes of the feminist field of thought and literature. Incentive from early feminist criticism is that women either have no representation in literature, or that their representation is strong. First feminist criticism was aimed at the lack or underrepresentation of women in literature and the increase in visibility and representation. But current thinking takes this thought further by discussing the construction, performance and negotiation of gender in particular settings. In the context of Indian English drama, this dramatic change in the portrayal of women is significant as they moved beyond stereotypical and passive depiction to more complex and powerful ones. New feminist theories have taken into account intersectionality, subjectivity and performativity, which provide insight into multiple female experiences. These methods affirm that the analysis of gender in social studies needs to take into account other social categories like class, caste and cultural background (McNay, Lois, 2000) ^[5]. This has resulted in the development of a more sophisticated approach toward the study of characters and stories in dramatic criticism, with an emphasis on the function of power through the various levels of society. The selected playwrights demonstrate this advancement through characters who are women and must deal with various forms of oppression and yet who still assert their agency. Their productions demonstrate that they have moved away from traditional narrative and are helping to evolve a critical and inclusive feminist approach in Indian English drama.

Postcolonial Feminism and Indian Dramatic Context

The postcolonial feminist perspective offers a significant perspective to analyse the portrayal of women in Indian English theatre which relates to the socio-cultural and historical realities in which women are not mere consumers of a fantasy but creators. This allows the study and analysis of women's representation in Indian English drama in the light of the postcolonial feminist viewpoint, with particular attention to the socio-cultural factors and historical contexts

involved in their women's experience, which are not mere consumers of a fantasy but creators of one. However, postcolonial feminist analyses are focused on context, and the conditions of colonialism and indigenous culture and socio-political lines impact gendered roles in different ways—at different intensities and in differing configurations—that cannot be generalised, as is often seen in universal feminist formulations. This perspective is critical for Indian drama, given that no understanding of a woman's representation in the Drama can be achieved without taking into account the multiple interplays of colonialism, norms, and institutions in India. The plays chosen by Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan and Poile Sengupta examine these dilemmas, having strong female voices who do face multiple marginalisations, but also seek agency in restricted spaces (Sharma, S., 2015) ^[6].

Indian English drama demonstrates the conflict between the old and the new, and the portrayal of gender relations. Women are frequently trapped between two worlds, one cultural and the other modern, that both call for a mixture of conformity and autonomy and self-expression. These contradictions can be critically examined using postcolonial feminist theory which emphasizes the power relations experienced in the colonial and postcolonial worlds. It acknowledges that inequality against women in India is not just due to the weight of the patriarchy, but as influenced by colonialism, nationalism and social reformist groups. In dramatic narratives these influences appear as the conflicts, concerns and symbolism of characters. As these elements facilitate different approaches to dominant ideologies, the selected playwrights challenge or provide alternate conceptions of women's identity and agency. In this sense postcolonial feminism not just situates the gender representation, but also offers the discursive structuring for how resistance and transformation are towards Indian English drama.

1. Theoretical Dimensions of Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism's theoretical dimensions is based on its criticism of western system of feminist universalism and the indigenous patriarchy system. It departs from the notion of shared experiences among women, presenting different viewpoints citing cultural, historical and socio-economic influences of the contexts in which the experiences take place. In postcolonial countries such as India women often find them self, facing a combination of colonial heritage and stood in as a part of the deeply rooted patriarchy which is referred to as "double marginalization." Such is the case in dramatic representation and in particular in the negotiation of gendered identity within intersecting sets of power and perception. Postcolonial feminist theory enables an examination of the construction of gender in the Indian English dramatized world within culture and the power relationships. It points to the manner in which social norms, family roles and past discourses shape women's identities. Concurrently, it de-emphasizes the passivity of women as they strive to break from and to re-imagine those imposed roles. The playwrights in two of the selected are taking on these theoretical components through their characters, who in most cases, are breaking with tradition. Their works illustrate a non-static but a dynamic process of negotiation and resistance in the representation of gender. This study uses postcolonial feminist theory to explore the issues of gender and to afford critical analysis of drama text that aligns these with the postcolonial context.

2. Colonial Legacy and Gender Construction in Indian Drama

The colonial legacy has not bridled gender role and its portrayal in Indian literature and drama. The colonial regimes would sometimes represent Indian society as always malevolent towards women as the basis for colonial intervention. This stereotype not only reflected the attitude of Indian women being passive and subordinate but also affected the perception of gender roles in the society. Nationalist movements responded to this by casting women as symbols of cultural identity and moral qualities, isolated to the domestic sphere, where they are seen as "preservers" of tradition. This mixed influence has engendered a intricate structure in which gender identity was garnered and conveyed. The legacy of the colonial can be heard in the continuation and challenge to these constructed roles in an Indian English drama. The issue of women's roles was sometimes evident in the earlier drama and many of them featured women in narrow and stereotypical roles (Patwa, N., 2015) ^[7]. In the modern day however, the view of women is challenged by contemporary playwrights by creating women as an active participant in the creation of their identity. These are the playwrights who explore this inheritance by revealing the conflicts between expectations of the culture of the past and the culture in the present. The representation of domestic areas as sites where control and resistance collide thus demonstrates that historical structures still have an impingement. These representations, when challenged, influence the study of gender roles in Indian English drama to reconsider gender roles, and allow for the possibility of other inclusive and dynamic representations.

3. Intersectionality and Contemporary Gender Representation in Drama

Intersectionality is a core tenet of postcolonial feminist analysis, where gender must be approached as a complex of other social factors like class, caste or religion, economic status and more. These overlapping issues play a big and important role in women's experiences and representation in drama in India. The Indian English playwrights are using these dimensions to represent a diversity and complexity of female identity in non-monolithic generalized terms. For "Modern Drama," intersectionality enables the development of a more complicated examination of the overlapping forms of oppression and how they affect the agency of people in different ways. For instance, different socio-economic groups may have different problems, from being economically dependent to socially marginalized. Evidence of these differences can be found in the stories and descriptions of women in the chosen plays in which they experience several levels of inequality. Intersectionality also suggests areas of resisting and solidarity, as characters tackle the challenges and stand up for themselves (Biswas, P., 2013) ^[8].

Demand for the relevance of intersectionality has grown ever stronger in the studies, highlighting the new and topical aspects linked to digital harassment, working environment discrimination, and the recalibration of family relations. In response to these changes, Indian English Drama focuses on the current issues and broadens the women's purview discussion. These are the works of the playwrights chosen, who each provide a character that is fully representative of the complexities of modern gender relations, yet grounded

in cultural settings. The methodology helps to place drama firmly as a means of exploring the intersections of identity, and then challenging the structures that sustain inequality.

Gender Bias in Indian English Drama: A Systematic Review of Literature

In this section, the researcher has made a systematic review of the literature, which includes the available Indian English drama-related research. This review aims to highlight commonalities, concerns and salient critical approaches regarding the portrayal of women in representational works (dramatic literature). A typical presentation of gender bias may not be overt, but may occur in the way that the story is told, in characterizations, in dialogue and in choices of symbolism. The reported literature has consistently shown that Indian English drama has been a mirror of Indian socio-cultural realities and a discourse which has challenged dominant and patriarchy value systems (Marbaniang, E. L., 2008) ^[9]. This explores the scholarly context for the study of selected playwrights and introduces their work into the wider feminist and literary discourse by drawing on the insights of past research. Children and the issue of gender bias has been discussed by scholars at various levels such as at the personal level, family level and institutional level in dramatic text. Initial research has tended to address issues concerning marginalisation and stereotyping of women; recent research investigates more complex areas of agency, resistance and intersectionality. Development of critical approaches shows a progress from descriptive analyses to more complex ones, reflecting the process of attaining deep understandings and interpretations involving dimensions of socio-political aspects and the character of the performance. This systematic synthesis finds that Indian English drama has gone through much change, from traditional perspectives to more progressive and critical perspectives of the women. Concurrently, subtle and explicit references to and articulations of the notions of patriarchy continue to be focal points in current research.

1. Historical Shifts in Women's Representation in Indian Drama

The literature shows that portrayal of women in Indian English drama has undergone a marked change from time to time, keeping pace with the changes in the socio-cultural context. In the early dramas, women were frequently portrayed in a limited role which included domesticity, sacrifice and moral virtue. Such representations were culturally shaped, and advocated by traditional patriarchalism and colonialism, which fixed female bodies as "passive" and "subordinate. Such portrayals served to reinforce the gender hierarchies by restricting women's identities to heterosexual stereotyping of their roles within the family and society. It has been noted that such representations upheld the gender hierarchy and bounded women to the narrow definition of what they were expected to be and do in the culture and family. but the 'post-Independent' era brought about progressive changes in these depictions touched by social reform organizations, education, and the awakening of feminist awareness (Deshmukh, A. S., 2016) ^[10]. Dramatic texts started to portray women as more complex and dynamic as characters who can question and challenge the structure which oppresses them. Recent research has focused on the representation of individuality, agency, and psychology in

Indian English drama as it moves beyond stereotypical representation. This change is especially noticeable in the writing of women playwrights who have pushed against stereotypical views and cultural mores concerning gender roles. In spite of such progress, gender stereotypes have not been eradicated, as evidenced by the traditional stereotypes that still exist in the literature, revealing the continuing struggle for change while maintaining the continuity of representation.

2. Patriarchal Structures and Gender Stereotyping in Drama

The impacts of patriarchy on the representation of gender in Indian English Drama has been the theme of a substantial literature. The narrative framework can be permeated by patriarchal structures, for example in character roles and in relationships, themes, and story development. Women are often portrayed in stereotyped female roles which are expected in society, like when she is an obedient wife, a self-giving mother, or a woman who has submissive morals. These representations also have the effect of narrowing the definition of femininity and reifying the unequal relationship between males and female characters. It also has been pointed out through scholarly analyses that symbolic representation is one way to perpetuate gender stereotypes. This might be the woman's body, which is frequently seen as a risk to be controlled, a base for ethical convictions and a battle for honour – attitudes encouraged by culture (Chakravarty, Radha, 2008) ^[11]. Recent research from our times, however, has shown a trend among playwrights to question and defy these perceptions. Modern drama features women as confident and independent characters, both challenging traditional stories and providing other viewpoints about gender roles. The works of Padmanabhan, Mehta and Sengupta mark this change and critique the norms of patriarchy and discomfort with the simple view of contrary norming. This literature reinforces the need to look at both the continuance and changed representation of gender stereotypes in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of gender bias concerns in drama.

3. Institutional and Socio-cultural Dimensions of Gender Bias

In addition to individual and familial contexts, institutional and socio-cultural contexts also help to contribute to the gender bias in Indian English drama. Various institutions have been identified by scholars as factors affecting the portrayal of female characters in dramas, among these are law, religion and social customs. They sometimes claim to be neutral but in reality they contribute to the maintenance of inequalities by controlling behaviour and to women's lack of autonomy. Dramatic narratives often display male vs. female mindedness; the institutional control and individual agency, thus the systematic source of gender bias. The literature reviewed highlights the importance of socio-cultural values in influencing gender expectations especially on family, marriage and morality. Women are frequently expected to be the symbols of culture; their roles and duties are confined within narrow ladders of social constraint and expected to keep up with the culture (Jain, Jasbir, 2001) ^[12]. Coinciding with this, the modern drama mirrors the evolution of society such as the transition from rural to urban life, from the traditional role of female home-makers

to that of women who are proving themselves in various aspects of economic life, and from the change from simple life of the past to that of modern times which have to deal with city life. These shifts have created a new arena for conflict and negotiation, as women come to grips with how to reconcile their own goals with those expected by the world, scholars observe. The picked playwrights explore these themes through characters who question and rebel against the structures that limit them, making the competing experiences and challenges of gender representation in a rapidly changing socio-cultural milieu clear.

4. Emerging Trends in Gender Discourse

The data produced from the provided new literature on gender in the discourse of Indian English drama shows that there is a remarkable expansion in the overall thematic span of gender discourse in Indian English drama. In modern times things have changed and new aspects of society have been brought into view, like body autonomy, workplace discrimination, digital bullying and psychological trauma. These themes reflect the changing nature of concerns around the themes of domestic oppression to more diverse and intersectional lens on gender inequity. A second trend that has been noted by scholars is the increasing importance of the experimental methods of narrative and performative aspects, allowing playwrights to explore the confines of their social issues with innovative methods. An emerging definition is also the importance of intersectionality, which is the effect of the two or more social category, such as the interaction between gender and class, caste and class and economic status. Through this method, a more holistic examination of women's experiences is enabled and challenges the idea of a unified and universal identity of women. There are also references in the literature of a greater profile for women playwrights significantly adding to the diversity and inclusivity of gender within drama. All of the above changes suggest a gradual shift in cultural identity of Indian English drama, moving from representation of gender to interrogation and redefinition of it.

Gender Representation in the Plays of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Poile Sengupta: A Thematic Analysis

To view and discuss the results of the previous systematic review of literature, this section provides a thematic analysis of the theatrical representations of gender in the works of Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta. The study highlights the portrayal of genders in these dramas, the critique of the conservative approach to gender and the development of agency among women in varied contexts. Though having thematic concerns and setting differ, while the form of the narration varies, each of the three writers look at socio-cultural issues and situations in an Indian context (and their portrayal of women therein). Their works together show that the depiction of the gender in the Indian English drama is not stagnant but dynamic and debatable concerning the tradition and transformation. One of the main ideas of the playwrights chosen, is the questioning of fellow patriarchy systems that control women's lives (Prasad, Amarnath, 2006) ^[13]. Gender bias takes many forms, and not only those of agency violence and exploitation, but also those of subtle mechanisms of control at the family, societal and institutional levels. The

term 'genre' applies to these playwrights whose use of different kinds of dramatic devices, from dystopian imagination to domestic realism, from social critique to political statements, casts doubt on their legitimacy. Their plays, meanwhile, emphasize the strength and creativity of female characters, their strategies for dealing with constraint, resisting it, and refashioning them. Thus, this thematic analysis highlights the continuity and development of messages which question the dominant gender ideologies and the existence of other narratives that emerge.

1. Gender Representation in the Plays of Manjula Padmanabhan and Dina Mehta

Manjula Padmanabhan's and Dina Mehta's plays provide different, but complementary, angles on the theme of a gender portrayal and its consideration in varying socio-cultural contexts. Particular features of the works include their use of dystopian and hyper-realistic setting which exacerbates the reality of Gender exploitation and objectification. In *Harvest* and *Lights Out*, the female body is represented as a space of commodification and control, embodying the interactions of gender, technology, and consumerism and power. The stories reveal the dehumanising nature of systems that turn women into things such as objects of exchange, in order to question traditional patriarchy and its continued presence today. While the characters of women in such extreme situations are brought under scrutiny in Padmanabhan, they can respond with awareness and resistance against the limitations imposed on them. On the contrary, Dina Mehta's plays are about domestic spaces as the main arena of gender conflict and everyday possibilities of oppression under patriarchy in the family space. Her play *Brides Are Not for Burning* is about dowry violence and how domestic abuse is systemic and ingrained in society, highlighting its effect on women. In portraying female roles, Mehta highlights the challenges these characters face emotionally and psychologically, and their ability to rebel in limited spaces. While this is a socio-political commentary as overall character, Mehta's is grounded in realism and depicts interpersonal dynamics and subtle power dynamics in the household (Tandon, Neeru, 2006) ^[14].

Both playwrights, however, share a condemnation of the patriarchy and an attention to agency for the female characters. Their works reveal the various ways women negotiate within or resist oppressive systems, whether in an overt or subtle manner. Where there is some overlap between the work of Padmanabhan and Mehta is their emphasis on the continuum of control and power and the representation of women, and their strong interest in the critique of traditional representations of women. These playwrights have not only introduced the female characters in the dramas that question and defy their situation but they also do so in an authentic manner.

2. Gender Representation in the Plays of Poile Sengupta and Comparative Insights

In Poile Sengupta's playings, there is the continuing pursuit of gender representation, but the emphasis this time is on institutional structures and their perpetuation of inequality. She addresses topics like legal injustice, social marginalization, psychological trauma, and many others, themes rarely explored in conventional narratives. The plays employ a feminist visual framework that visualizes women

as persons confined amongst layers of power and oppression, one that goes beyond the household sphere and into the wider socio-political sphere. By showing and highlighting these "other" voices she reveals institutions' shortcomings in upholding justice and equality while reinforcing gender bias. The theme of finding the space of silence and speaking voice is a major aspect of Sengupta's work. Her plays are frequently notable for their focus on the oppression and silence faced by women, exploring the importance of what could be called "apathy society." In many of her plays she speaks out against oppressive experiences faced by women, showing how apathy from society can lead to injustice. Meanwhile, although her characters are usually resilient and have moral sensibilities, they cannot just go with what was told and asserted their own existence in the oppressive structures: This institutional anarchism that accompanies his work sets it apart from the work of Padmanabhan and Mehta's thematic focus as well (Surendran, K. V., 2002) ^[15].

In comparing the three playwrights a few similarities and differences emerge with regard to how gender is portrayed. All three writers' work is on the theme of the ubiquity of patriarchy, its influence on women's lives, but they have different focus and techniques for developing dramatic scenes. The choice of dystopian settings in both text focus texts is meant to alert the reader to the extreme impacts that are possible when the whole question of the exploitation of the genders becomes an issue in a "globalized" society; at the same time the domestic realism in both texts reminds the reader of the life realities that go on in family structures when the question of gender exploitation is asked. In contrast, Sengupta brings gender into institution and social-political contexts for a more critical examination of systemic injustice.

Conclusion

The systematic review of the gender representation in 3 contemporary Indian English dramas — Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Poile Sengupta, offers an insightful account of the vast shift in gender representation in recent Indian English drama. The analysis is used to clear the ground and prove that although the feminist roles were usually assigned to passive and subordinate women, the authors and modern playwrights have created modern female roles as complex resistance, negotiation and self-expression characters. Selected playwrights go on to critically discuss the various types of patriarchy systems seen at personal, domestic and institutional levels in various thematic ways. By focusing on spaces outside the home, Padmanabhan's investigation into the exploitation and commodification of technology unveils the gender as a part of the larger socio-spatial agenda of power and control, while Mehta's conceptualizing of domestic space illuminates an ongoing gendered dynamic in family relations. Through his work Sengupta brings this critique to bear on institutional structures, while reflecting on marginalisation, silences and social injustice. In combination, their plays offer a multi-layered perspective on gender bias, one which spans both the continuity of oppression as well as the transformative possibilities. This review also confirms that the phenomenon of gender in Indian English drama is social construction and context specific as it is influenced by the cultural, historical and socio-political contexts. This study analyzes the available literature up to Dec 2022 and thereby

promotes the conversation on Feminist Literature criticism and emphasizes the need to focus on the text and performance of drama. In sum, selected playwrights not only capture social reality, but also provide alternative narratives to dominant, and even misguided, norms, highlighting the need to support gender equality and to be critical of the status quo. The study further suggests the area of future research for upcoming development of gender issues and performancebased interpretation in contemporary theatre.

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