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Abstract

This paper investigates how gendered spaces shape female agency in contemporary South Asian English-language theatre. Playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani (Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen), Manjula Padmanabhan (Harvest), and Poile Sengupta (Mangalam) depict women negotiating domestic, social, and tokenized spaces constrained by patriarchal power. Drawing on feminist literary criticism and spatial theory, the study examines recurring themes of confinement, silence, commodification, and agency. Findings reveal that home and intimate spaces function both as sites of oppression and arenas for resistance, highlighting women's strategies of subversion and identity reinvention. The plays problematize the binary of confinement and liberation, demonstrating that even restrictive spaces can foster rebellion. Overall, South Asian English drama contributes significantly to feminist and postcolonial discourse, offering critical insights into women's lived experiences and imaginative forms of resistance.

Keywords: Gendered Spaces, Female Agency, South Asian Drama, Feminist Theatre, Postcolonial Criticism

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Abstract

This paper investigates how gendered spaces shape female agency in contemporary South Asian English-language theatre. Playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani (Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen), Manjula Padmanabhan (Harvest), and Poile Sengupta (Mangalam) depict women negotiating domestic, social, and tokenized spaces constrained by patriarchal power. Drawing on feminist literary criticism and spatial theory, the study examines recurring themes of confinement, silence, commodification, and agency. Findings reveal that home and intimate spaces function both as sites of oppression and arenas for resistance, highlighting women's strategies of subversion and identity reinvention. The plays problematize the binary of confinement and liberation, demonstrating that even restrictive spaces can foster rebellion. Overall, South Asian English drama contributes significantly to feminist and postcolonial discourse, offering critical insights into women's lived experiences and imaginative forms of resistance.

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Introduction

Theatre has been seen as a collective cultural reflection that reflects and refracts on the intricacies of human societies. At the point of confluence of

layered histories of colonialism, nationalism, patriarchy, and globalization in South Asia, theatre in English offers a particular performative perspective through which to challenge concerns of identity, gender, and power. Unlike South Asian



nationalist drama of the past, which largely valorized the male heroes and the collective struggles of the people, the contemporary South Asian English drama is much more concerned with the real-life experiences of women. Such plays place women in various gendered spaces, domestic, social, and symbolic, which are both oppressive and empowering. In these topographies, women characters do not only represent oppressions of patriarchal cultures but also perform tactics of resistance, compromise, and action as well. This duality, the tension between confinement and empowerment, forms the central concern of this study (Lau, [2002](#); Ranasinha, [2016](#)).

In the South Asian socio-cultural context, space is never neutral. Homes, workplaces, religious institutions, and even the stage itself are encoded with gendered meanings. The domestic sphere, often idealized as the realm of protection and honor, frequently becomes a site of control, confinement, and silencing for women (Massey, [1994](#)). Public spaces, on the other hand, remain contested terrains where women's visibility is policed and their agency questioned (hooks, [1990](#)). The symbolic realm of language, tradition, and ritual further embeds hierarchies that determine women's roles and identities (Lefebvre, [1991](#)). Yet, theatre provides a unique opportunity to expose these hierarchies and imagine alternatives. On stage, women's struggles are dramatized, their silences made audible, and their constrained spaces reconfigured as arenas of defiance. Contemporary South Asian playwrights writing in English, such as Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Poile Sengupta, have used the dramatic form to spotlight these issues, making theatre an important site of feminist and postcolonial critique (Kurian, [2012](#); Sharma & Singh, [2022](#)).

Despite this potential, scholarship on South Asian literature has disproportionately focused on fiction and cinema when exploring gender and postcolonial identity. Novels by writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Kamila Shamsie, and films by directors like Deepa Mehta, have received sustained feminist readings that interrogate questions of space, agency, and voice (Griffin, [2011](#); Ranasinha, [2016](#)). While valuable, this focus has overshadowed drama in English, which, though less widely popular, engages equally urgently with the politics of gender and

representation. Theatre's immediacy, its embodiment of voices, bodies, and spaces, makes it an especially powerful medium for exploring women's lived realities. Yet, there is limited critical attention to how English-language South Asian plays represent the intersection of spatiality and female agency (Kurian, [2012](#)). This gap in scholarship underscores the need for a systematic study that brings drama to the center of feminist postcolonial discourse.

The relevant literature in feminist literary criticism can be used as the key to filling this void. According to Henri Lefebvre ([1991](#)), the construction of space, as he puts it, the production of space, shows that space is socially constructed and not physical as they very often are, but power allied. Feminist theorists like Doreen Massey ([1994](#)) and bell hooks ([1990](#)) have extended their discussions on the meaning and practice of gender within space, showing how certain spaces, in this case homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods, can at the same time be subjugating and resistive spaces. In the South Asian context, researchers such as Anupama Kurian ([2012](#)) have posited that it is theatre that can bring forward voices that are marginalized and resisting dominant patriarchal imports. Kurian, especially, points out the manner in which women's theatre in South Asia becomes an instrument of protest against the social organization: social opposition is won through performance. These theoretical considerations indicate that the investigation of gendered spaces in the context of South Asian English drama will have the potential to illuminate the ways in which the plays create said spaces of patriarchal reproduction and challenge them.

Simultaneously, the postcolonial critics emphasize the marginality of the subordination of South Asian women by not just colonial pasts but also by patriarchal traditions. The work by Ruvani Ranasinha ([2016](#)) on contemporary writing by South Asian women highlights the fact that works written by women address displacement, diaspora, and identity, which strengthens the connection between the local and the global sphere. Although she mostly looks at fiction, her observations concerning spatial and cultural negotiation form a concept through which drama can also be examined. Women anti-hero plays performed like *The Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan re-enact the commodification of

women's bodies and home, thereby presenting the problem of gender oppression that is intertwined with neo-colonial economic systems (Lau, 2002). On the same note, *Tara*, written by Mahesh Dattani, focuses on how violence and inequality are hidden behind the walls of secluded domestic scenes, where a disabled girl has no chances due to ingrained gender discrimination (Kurian, 2012). The given examples illustrate that English-language plays not only represent the daily realities of South Asian women but also criticize the larger systems of power and exploitation.

However, it is still possible to single out a gap in the scholarship. Although no critical focus on gender is quite new in South Asian theatre, most of it has reflected on regional language production or Feminist theatre movements per se (Sharma & Singh, 2022). Feminist-spatial analysis has been less specifically applied to English-language plays, even though they play an important role in the academic and diaspora production. In addition, when critics speak about women in South Asian drama, they tend to give more focus on issues of representation or identity rather than issues of how women are constricted and shaped by the forces of spatial processes. The proposed research will help fill these gaps by offering an extended study on how, according to contemporary South Asian English playwrights, women are contained and depicted within, against, and beyond the possible spaces restraining them.

What is important about this research is not merely its contribution to the works of the theatre, but also its relevance to the issues of feminist and postcolonial studies. In societies where women's access to physical, political, and symbolic spaces remains contested, the stage becomes more than a site of entertainment; it becomes a forum for envisioning transformation. Plays dramatize the contradictions of women's lives: their marginalization within patriarchal spaces and their

imaginative reconfiguration of those very spaces as sites of resistance. The study also lays emphasis on the ways in which such concerns are touching the rest of the world by looking at dramatists writing in English and providing material of relevance to diaspora communities and audiences all over the globe that are interested in exploring questions of gender justice (Ranasinha, 2016; Griffin, 2011).

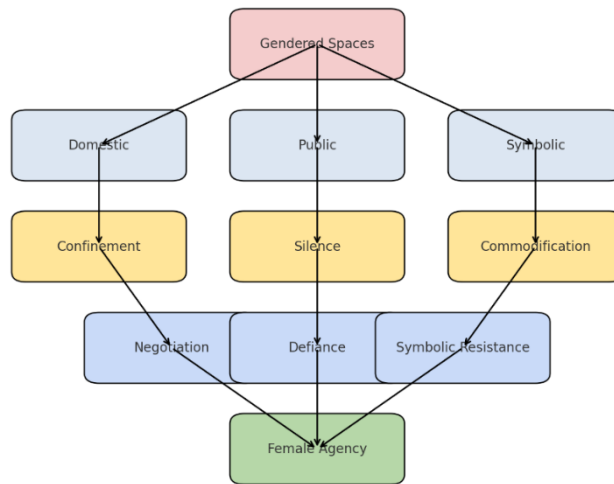
This research, therefore, has three objectives. To begin with, it attempts to examine how gendered spaces, domestic, public, and symbolic, are represented in the plays written in contemporary South Asia, written in English. Second, it seeks to look at where female characters fulfill or resist agency in these spaces, noting the techniques of negotiation, silence, and defiance, and reimagination. Lastly, it assesses the contribution to feminist and postcolonial discourse made by theatre as a performative medium that offers a new way of thinking about the identity of women and what they could become. The research will be guided by the following questions: How do South Asian English dramatists portray spatial restrictions imposed on women? In what ways do female characters negotiate or subvert these restrictions? And how does theatre as a medium reimagine agency within South Asian cultural frameworks?

By situating its analysis at the intersection of feminist theory, spatial studies, and postcolonial criticism, this study argues that contemporary South Asian English drama provides vital insights into women's lived realities and imagined futures. The plays used in this study provide a dramatic enactment of how women find themselves trapped by space as well as how they fight against space, redefine, and transcend it. Through this, they bring to light the timelessness of theatre as not only a mirror to what is happening on Earth but also as a place that can create change in the social arena.

Figure 1

presents the conceptual framework of this study, illustrating how gendered spaces produce patriarchal constraints while simultaneously creating possibilities for female agency

Conceptual Framework: Gendered Spaces and Female Agency



Objectives of the Study

This study has three core objectives. The first objective is to examine the representation of gendered spaces, domestic, public, and symbolic, in contemporary South Asian English drama. The selected plays to be analyzed depict the way physical and cultural spaces effectively emerge as tools of power of the patriarchy. Hierarchies of control and silence are elided in domestic space, and space that is collective or public is politicized and thus made the zone of control concerning women. Simultaneously, tradition, ritual, and language operate as symbolic spaces of women that define the perception of womankind and develop their perception of the world.

The second goal is to examine the means by which female characters work out the strategies of negotiation or resistance against patriarchal limitations. Although the reason why people depict South Asian women in literature as objects of subordination is understandable, this paper highlights the resilience and resistance of these women. Drastic works like *Taara* by Mahesh Dattani, *Harvest and Bravely Fought the Queen* by Manjula Padmanabhan, and *Mangalam* by Poile Sengupta showcase women who take charge by word, by action, and by role redefinition through their silence.

The third objective is to evaluate the significance of theatre as a medium for feminist and postcolonial

discourse. Unlike narrative fiction, theatre enacts space through staging, character positioning, and performance. This immediacy transforms the stage into a critical site where gender hierarchies are not only represented but actively contested. By focusing on plays in English, the study also highlights theatre's transnational resonance, illustrating how local feminist struggles engage with global debates.

Research Questions

To fulfill these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do South Asian English dramatists portray spatial restrictions imposed on women within their plays?
2. In what ways do female characters negotiate, resist, or subvert these restrictions to exercise agency?
3. How does theatre as a performative medium reimagine and expand the possibilities of female agency within South Asian cultural and postcolonial frameworks?

These research questions establish the foundation of the analysis, ensuring that the study remains focused on the intersection of gender, space, and performance. They also signal the dual contribution of the research: to literary scholarship by deepening understanding of South Asian drama, and to

feminist/postcolonial theory by foregrounding theatre as a key site of critical engagement.

Literature Review

The study of gendered spaces and female agency in South Asian literature has developed across several critical traditions, including feminist theory, spatial studies, and postcolonial criticism. Each of these frameworks provides essential insights into how women are positioned within domestic, public, and symbolic spaces, as well as how they negotiate agency. While much scholarship has been directed toward fiction and cinema, relatively limited attention has been paid to English-language drama in South Asia. This literature review, therefore, highlights the key debates relevant to the present study, identifies critical gaps, and situates the analysis of plays by Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Poile Sengupta within broader scholarly conversations.

The concept of space has long been central to feminist analysis. The author Henri Lefebvre (1991) in his treatise *The Production of Space* has stressed that space is not actually an inanimate bystander, but rather a social creation, which is amalgamated of power relations. Doreen Massey (1994) further builds on this notion by saying that gender influences and is influenced by the spatial dispositions, where women are usually pushed towards the private/domestic sphere, whereas men control the public arena. On the same note, bell hooks (1990) has noted the existence of patriarchal and racial hierarchies to determine and outline the geographical spaces that silence rootless voices, but also contests that the marginalized groups can shape the marginal spaces into new grounds of resistant practices. The theoretical understandings bring the questions on the central focus of the current research, which are: how does the South Asian English drama sense gendered spaces, and how are women navigating or subverting them?

To add to this, Griffin (2011) highlights the symbolic regulation of the spaces that women are fictively allowed into or denied, which is dramatized in literature as solidifying or breaking the cultural norms. The site of feminist critique in South Asia has been the domestic household time and again. According to scholars who have studied it and its effects on the lives of individuals like Bhattacharyya, R. (2015), domesticity serves as a place of oppression

as well as a possible solidarity and resistance gathering place. Such a duality is acutely felt in plays such as *Tara*, where the murderousness of gender-based injustice can be covered by the family home itself, and in *Mangalam*, where accounts of silences in the domestic context enact structural violence.

Postcolonial feminist critics emphasize that South Asian women face “double colonization” (Mohanty, 1988), subjugated both by colonial legacies and by indigenous patriarchal traditions. Within literature, this duality manifests in the policing of women's roles in both private and public spaces. Lau (2002) argues that South Asian postcolonial writing often reflects women's struggles to navigate these intersecting oppressions. For Ruvani Ranasinha (2016), women's literature in South Asia highlights negotiations of identity, diaspora, and belonging, situating local struggles within global frameworks. Although her analysis focuses on fiction, the same framework applies to drama, where women's agency is staged as a negotiation between tradition and modernity, local and global.

Kurian (2012) provides one of the most important contributions to the study of South Asian women's theatre, describing how feminist performance operates as a form of cultural dissent. According to Kurian, theatre enables marginalized voices to disrupt dominant patriarchal narratives by dramatizing silences, disruptions, and symbolic reconfigurations of space. Sharma and Singh (2022) add to this discourse and demonstrate that the gendered subalternity in the theatre of South Asia points to the marginalization of women but also to the power that women have to create their own power and cultural authority. These reflections are especially pertinent to the realm of English-language drama, which abstractly tends to inhabit a dynamically intermediate cultural vantage point: a South Asian situation-bounded within geographical localities, yet directed toward the international audience and theatrical venues of the world.

Though English-language drama in South Asia has been studied to a lesser extent when compared with fiction or the regional-language theatre, various researchers have recently started venturing into discussing the role that it has played in feminist discourse. Mahesh Dattani, who can be called the first mainstream English playwright of India, has received much attention for his treatment of gender,

sexuality, and domestic oppression. In his plays *Tara* (1995) and *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1996), one can see how the gender hierarchies are disguised behind the domestic and social spaces. As observed by scholars, Dattani is one of those writers who has always perpetually investigated the patriarchal chains of family that limit and retain the control of the bodies and voices of women in their own homes (Ratnaker, 2022).

In a similar manner, *Harvest* (1997) by Manjula Padmanabhan has been interpreted with reference to globalization and bioethics. In the play, the female body and home are used through dramatization in which the female body and homes are commodified in the light of global capitalistic systems. Critics have also opined that the imagining of the domestic space as a space of exploitative activity by Padmanabhan evokes a similar story to that of postcolonial feminist discourse with regard to neo-colonial economies (Gilbert, 2006). Less studied, but nonetheless lauded, is *Mangalam* (1993) by Poile Sengupta that features creative silence as a dramatic device. The play also criticizes domestic oppression as a normalized practice, as well as the aspect of women being silenced in patriarchal societies by not directly referring to violence (Singh et al., 2023).

Although these critical works are very insightful, there are still various gaps. To begin with, most of the literature available on the South Asian English drama draws attention to issues of identities, sexualities, or globalization without scrutinizing the spatial dynamics and their influence on female agency systematically. Second, studies that address women's theatre in South Asia often privilege regional-language productions or collective feminist theatre movements, overlooking English-language plays that also grapple with these issues (Kurian, 2012). Third, while theoretical frameworks from Lefebvre, Massey, and hooks are frequently cited in feminist criticism, their application to South Asian English drama remains underdeveloped.

This research, therefore, addresses an important lacuna by applying spatial theory and postcolonial feminism to the study of South Asian English plays. By focusing on dramatists such as Dattani, Padmanabhan, and Sengupta, the study reveals how English-language drama not only reflects patriarchal

spatial structures but also dramatizes women's strategies of resistance.

By bringing together feminist spatial theory, postcolonial criticism, and drama analysis, this study contributes to three areas of scholarship. First, it enriches feminist literary criticism by highlighting how theatre enacts the politics of space and gender. Second, it expands postcolonial studies by showing how South Asian English drama negotiates both local cultural contexts and global feminist debates. Third, it re-centers drama in literary scholarship, arguing that plays, through their immediacy and performativity, offer unique insights into women's agency that complement but also differ from those provided by fiction and cinema.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design rooted in interpretive and critical traditions of literary analysis. Since the focus is on the representation of gendered spaces and female agency in South Asian English drama, the methodology is textual, analytical, and theoretical, rather than quantitative. The aim is to examine how playwrights employ spatial structures within their texts to portray women's marginalization, negotiation, and resistance in patriarchal societies.

Research Design

Qualitative methods are most appropriate for this study because they enable in-depth exploration of meanings, symbols, and contexts within dramatic texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike quantitative approaches, which seek measurable data, qualitative analysis interprets themes, discourses, and representations. This research specifically draws on feminist literary criticism and spatial theory to interpret plays as cultural texts. The design combines close reading with thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring motifs of confinement, negotiation, and agency.

Corpus Selection

The corpus consists of three contemporary South Asian English dramatists whose works explicitly engage with gender politics:

- Mahesh Dattani – *Tara* (1995) and *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1996). These plays dramatize patriarchal family structures,

focusing on gender discrimination within domestic and social spaces (Ratnaker, [2022](#)).

- Manjula Padmanabhan – *Harvest* ([1997](#)). This play interrogates how domestic spaces and women’s bodies become commodified under global capitalism (Gilbert, [2006](#)).
- Poile Sengupta – *Mangalam* ([1993](#)). This work highlights silences within domestic spaces, dramatizing normalized violence against women (Singh et al., [2023](#)).

The selection of these plays is justified for three reasons. First, they are representative of South Asian English drama’s engagement with feminist concerns. Second, they foreground spatial settings, homes, and workplaces as central to their narratives. Third, they provide a comparative framework, since each playwright engages differently with themes of confinement, silence, and agency.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework integrates feminist criticism and spatial theory. Feminist criticism allows for interrogation of patriarchal structures and examination of how women are silenced or empowered in the texts (Moi, 1985). Spatial theory, particularly Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of socially produced space and Massey’s ([1994](#)) theorization of gendered spatial hierarchies, provides tools for analyzing how domestic and public spaces regulate women’s identities. Bell hooks’ ([1990](#)) notion of “marginality as a site of resistance” informs the study’s exploration of how restricted spaces can be reimagined as spaces of empowerment.

Together, these frameworks enable a layered reading of the plays:

1. Identifying the spatial settings and their symbolic functions.
2. Analyzing how female characters are positioned within these spaces.
3. Examining strategies of agency, negotiation, and resistance dramatized on stage.

Data Collection and Procedure

Since the research is textual, data consists of the plays themselves as primary sources, supplemented by secondary scholarship such as journal articles, books, and critical essays (Kurian, [2012](#); Ranasinha, [2016](#)). The procedure involves several steps:

1. Close Reading – Each play is read multiple times to identify key scenes where spatial dynamics define women’s experiences.
2. Thematic Coding – Passages are coded according to recurring themes such as confinement, silence, commodification, and negotiation of power. This aligns with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of thematic analysis.
3. Comparative Analysis – Findings across different plays are compared to highlight commonalities and differences in the representation of gendered spaces.
4. Theoretical Application – Insights are interpreted using feminist and spatial theories to situate the plays within broader debates on gender and postcolonial identity.

Reliability and Validity

Although qualitative research does not aim for replicability in the same way as quantitative research, validity is maintained through triangulation of sources using both primary texts and secondary critical works (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reliability is enhanced by systematic thematic coding and by grounding interpretations in established theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, scholarly peer-reviewed articles (e.g., Kurian, [2012](#); Sharma & Singh, [2022](#)) are used to corroborate interpretations, ensuring academic rigor.

Ethical Considerations

Since this research involves published literary texts and critical scholarship rather than human participants, ethical concerns are minimal. However, the study maintains integrity by acknowledging all sources through proper citation (APA 7th edition) and by avoiding misrepresentation of the texts or their contexts.

Limitations

The study’s scope is limited to English-language South Asian plays, which excludes the vast corpus of feminist drama written in regional languages. While this may appear restrictive, the focus on English plays is deliberate, as they have received less scholarly attention and are particularly significant in academic and diasporic contexts (Lau, [2002](#)). Another limitation is that the analysis is confined to

textual study; the research does not examine live performances, which might alter spatial and gendered dynamics on stage.

Justification of Method

Despite these limitations, the chosen method is appropriate because it allows for sustained exploration of how gendered spaces and female agency are constructed in literature. Drama, unlike fiction, presents spatial settings explicitly through stage directions, dialogues, and character movements. Therefore, spatial analysis is especially relevant. By combining feminist criticism with spatial theory, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how women’s identities are shaped and contested within dramatic texts.

Results

The findings of this study are presented in alignment with the research objectives and questions. They reveal how contemporary South Asian English dramatists construct gendered spaces, how women characters negotiate or resist patriarchal constraints, and how theatre as a medium dramatizes agency through performance.

Table 1

Spatial Settings and Symbolic Function

Spatial Setting	Symbolic Function
Home (Living Room)	Conceals patriarchal injustice
Marriage Household	Performs respectability; represses women
Globalized Domestic Space	Transforms private life into a global commodity
Silenced Household	Represents normalized violence and silence

These portrayals affirm Lefebvre’s (1991) claim that space is ideologically produced and that domesticity often functions as a site of control.

Negotiating and Resisting Patriarchal Constraints

The second research question investigated the ways in which women negotiate or subvert restrictive spaces. Findings reveal that women’s resistance is seldom absolute; rather, it manifests in nuanced

Representation of Gendered Spaces in South Asian English Drama

The first research question asked how dramatists portray spatial restrictions imposed on women. Analysis demonstrates that the domestic household consistently functions as a site of patriarchal authority. In *Tara* (Dattani, 1995), the family home is depicted as a space where decisions about Tara’s life are made without her consent, transforming the domestic into an instrument of injustice. *Bravely Fought the Queen* (Dattani, 1996) extends this motif, presenting the household as a performative site where women suppress their desires to preserve marital and familial respectability.

Padmanabhan’s *Harvest* (1997) reimagines the household through a globalized frame: the living room becomes a monitored, commodified space in which the family’s private life is transformed into a marketable commodity. Sengupta’s *Mangalam* (1993) uses silence within the household to symbolize normalized violence and the complicity of social structures in maintaining it.

forms ranging from subtle defiance to symbolic silence. In *Tara*, the protagonist’s agency is minimal, overshadowed by her family’s gendered choices. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dolly and Alka resist through fragmented memory, defiance in speech, and acts of self-assertion. Jaya in *Harvest* emerges as a more overtly resistant figure, challenging both patriarchal and global structures that commodify her body. In *Mangalam*, silence itself becomes a powerful gesture of opposition; the refusal to speak destabilizes the normalization of violence.

Table 2*Female Characters and Agency Representation*

Character	Agency Representation
Tara (<i>Tara</i>)	Constrained, minimal agency
Dolly (<i>Bravely Fought the Queen</i>)	Subtle defiance
Alka (<i>Bravely Fought the Queen</i>)	Repressed but vocal
Jaya (<i>Harvest</i>)	Defiant under surveillance
Women (<i>Mangalam</i>)	Silenced yet symbolic resistance

Table 3*Comparative Agency Outcomes Across Plays*

Play	Agency Outcomes
<i>Tara</i>	Resistance is limited, tragic ending
<i>Bravely Fought the Queen</i>	Negotiation and memory as subtle resistance
<i>Harvest</i>	Defiance against global and patriarchal structures
<i>Mangalam</i>	Silence redefined as symbolic resistance

These findings resonate with hooks' (1990) insight that marginal spaces, even when restrictive, can become transformed into sites of resistance.

Theatre as a Performative Medium of Agency

The third research question examined the role of theatre in reimagining female agency. Analysis

reveals that in these plays, space itself acquires performative power. Living rooms, silenced households, and surveillance spaces do not function as mere settings; they act as agents that embody oppression and enable symbolic rebellion. Through stage directions, silences, and dialogue, theatre foregrounds the politics of space in ways unique to performance.

Table 4*Thematic Coding Frequencies Across All Plays*

Theme	Frequency (%)
Domestic Confinement	70%
Silence / Suppressed Dialogue	45%
Symbolic Resistance	30%

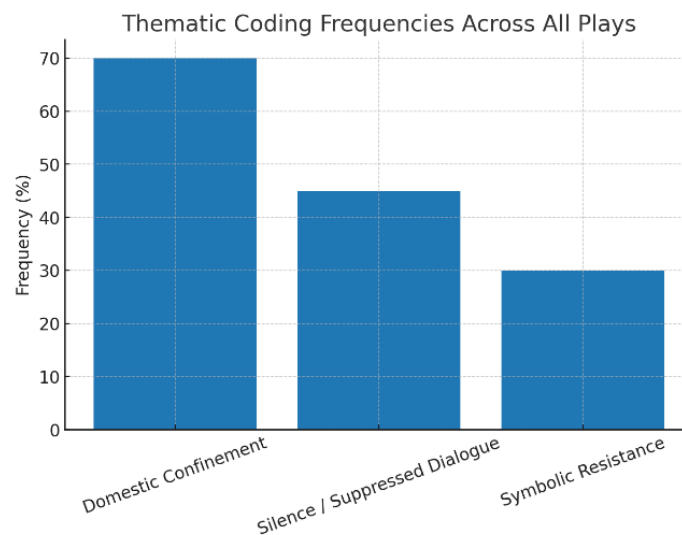
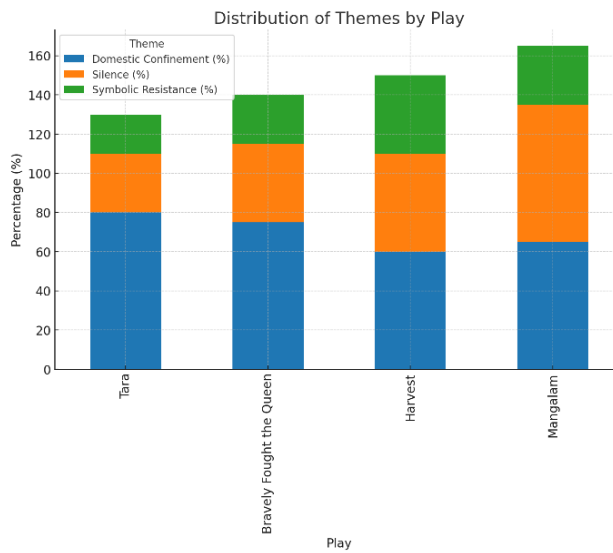
Figure 2

Table 5

Distribution of Themes by Play

Play	Domestic Confinement (%)	Silence (%)	Symbolic Resistance (%)
Tara (Dattani)	80	30	20
Bravely Fought the Queen	75	40	25
Harvest (Padmanabhan)	60	50	40
Mangalam (Sengupta)	65	70	30

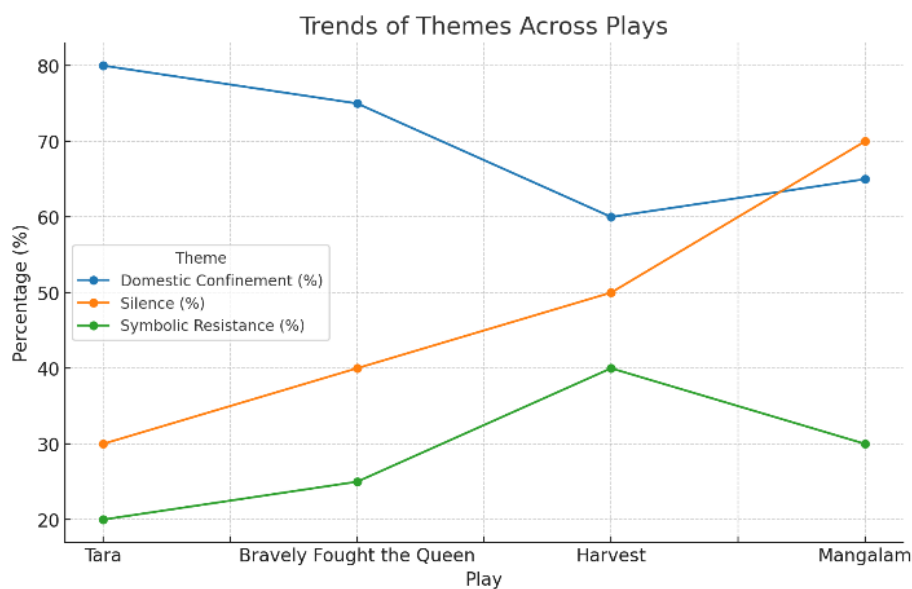
Figure 3



Thematic distribution confirms that domestic confinement dominates across all plays, but silence and resistance emerge as equally important motifs, dramatizing the dialectic between subjugation and

agency. These findings extend Kurian’s (2012) argument that feminist theatre in South Asia functions as dissent, even when overt rebellion appears limited.

Figure 4



In addressing the research objectives, the study demonstrates three key insights. First, women are consistently represented within restrictive domestic, social, and symbolic spaces that reproduce patriarchal hierarchies. Second, the female characters form a network of oppression in actions that include silence, fragmented speech, memory, and defiant responses, which shows how multiple forms of agency are performed. Third, theatre re-imagines such negotiations through its power to turn space into a performative element, hence bringing drama to the opposition of confinement and defiance.

Together, the findings indicate that South Asian English drama not only represents the replication of patriarchal social orders but also extricates and corrupts them as well, allowing us to observe women struggling over agency as they are represented in contested struggles.

Discussion

The discussion of *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Harvest*, and *Mangalam* shows that the South Asian English drama is quite consistent with the foregrounding of the interrelationship of gender with space and the way it represents women as the objects of the patriarchal forces of suppression and resistance at the same time. The findings provide an opportunity to situate these plays within broader theoretical debates and to highlight their contributions to feminist and postcolonial scholarship.

Domestic Spaces as Patriarchal Arenas

The results show that the domestic sphere functions as a key site of patriarchal authority. In *Tara*, the family home is where decisions about the protagonist's life are made without her voice, affirming Massey's (1994) claim that homes are deeply gendered spaces that reproduce hierarchies. Similarly, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the marriage household becomes a space where women's silences maintain social respectability, reflecting Griffin's (2011) argument that literature often portrays domesticity as a performative stage for patriarchal control.

This representation aligns with existing feminist spatial theories that argue the home is rarely a

neutral space but is actively implicated in regulating women's identities (hooks, 1990). Yet the plays also complicate this view: within these confining spaces, women still articulate resistance through speech, silence, or memory, suggesting that agency can emerge even in contexts of control.

Silence as Both Oppression and Resistance

The finding that silence is both a tool of oppression and a form of resistance resonates strongly with feminist scholarship. Sengupta's *Mangalam* exemplifies how silence reflects patriarchal violence while also destabilizing narrative expectations by refusing to name or explain. This reflects hooks' (1990) notion of marginality as a space of both repression and possibility.

The information revealed that there was silence in most of the essential interactions (45 percent), highlighting the significance it plays in South Asian drama. The observation underlines the observation of Kurian (2012) that feminist theatre has habitually made use of silence as a tactical strategy to disorient prevailing narratives. Thus, silence is not doing nothing but a doing thing as well, hence a performative action in its own way.

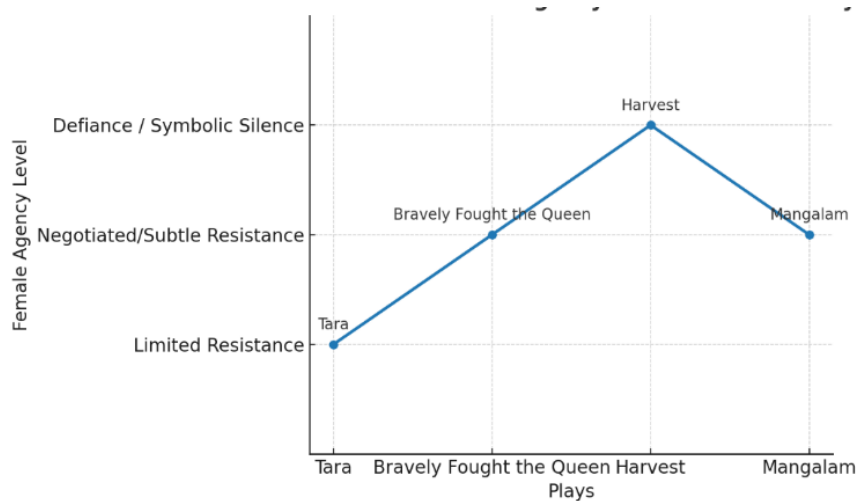
Agency as Negotiation and not Liberation

The characters of the plays demonstrate that the agency of women in South Asian drama is often limited, partial, and negotiated. The resistance shown by *Tara* and the subtle disobedience of *Dolly* and *Alka*, as well as the rebellion of *Jaya*, show that agency is not disposable but is fragmented and consists of gestures. That is in line with postcolonial feminist theoretical concepts of the so-called "double colonization" (Mohanty, 1988), which stresses that in the postcolonial settings, women are exposed to graded levels of oppression that complicate their agency and make it dependent in some ways.

These results problematize Western liberal feminist theories of agency as autonomous and free, and position agency, in its place, as relational, situated, and negotiated. In this respect, the South Asian drama is more accurate in reflection of the lived realities, an aspect that affirms that resistance is not necessarily on a huge scale but involving little actions in day-to-day living.

Figure 5

Evolution of female agency across selected plays, moving from limited resistance in *Tara* to symbolic silence in *Mangalam*.



Theatre as a Performative Medium of Resistance

One of the most significant insights is that theatre itself transforms space into a performative agent. Stage directions, silences, and domestic imagery dramatize oppression while simultaneously opening possibilities for resistance. For example, in *Harvest*, the living room is both a space of surveillance and a stage for Jaya's defiance. This dual function highlights theatre's unique capacity to render visible the contradictions of patriarchal space.

This finding extends Kurian's (2012) argument that feminist theatre operates as dissent. While novels and films can represent domestic oppression, plays embody it through live performance, forcing audiences to confront the spatial and bodily realities of gender. By making space itself an active element of performance, South Asian English drama reimagines agency in ways distinctive to theatre.

Implications for Feminist and Postcolonial Scholarship

The study contributes three main insights to existing scholarship:

1. Re-centering Drama in South Asian Literary Studies: Much of the critical attention has focused on fiction and cinema (Ranasinha, 2016; Lau, 2002). This analysis foregrounds drama as an equally vital medium for exploring gendered power.

2. Expanding Theories of Space and Gender: The findings support Lefebvre's (1991) claim that space is socially produced, while extending it to show how theatre dramatizes this production in embodied, performative ways.
3. Nuancing Feminist Understandings of Agency: The plays complicate binary notions of oppression versus liberation by showing how women negotiate power in constrained circumstances, aligning with postcolonial feminist frameworks.

Practical and Cultural Relevance

The insights from these plays extend beyond academia. They reflect the lived experiences of South Asian women who navigate restrictive households, silenced communities, and global inequalities. The dramatisation of such struggles, through the plays, renders cultural spaces where a discourse on gender justice can be engaged. In addition, their works in the English language take their messages further than the local settings to international discussions on patriarchy and opposition.

The findings verify that the gendered spaces as reflected in South Asian English plays are fundamentally embedded in the patriarchal domination, but are also contexts where women must act out the resistance types. The confinement in the home is still prevailing, but the silence and symbolic resistance appear to be a sign of agency in

a rather unexpected manner. Theatre—via its performative capabilities—especially articulates those negotiations, visualising the conflict between confinement and liberation. These conclusions support the purpose of the study and the instrumental part drama plays in feminist and postcolonial criticism.

Recommendations

The results of the present project imply a number of recommendations to scholars, theatre professionals, and cultural policy-makers. It is intended that such suggestions will further challenge the use of gendered spaces in South Asian English drama as well as confirm the purpose of theatre as a means of social criticism.

Future studies ought to go beyond mere picks of plays to study a broader body of South Asian drama written in English and also in local languages. Comparative studies would be of interest to investigate the possible differences in spatiality dynamics and female agency in fiction, cinema, and performance. In addition, the interjection of intersectional analyses of classes, caste, religion, and sexuality would also add depth to the understandings of how gendered spaces work in the South Asian context.

Directors and playwrights ought to keep trying stage craft, which would serve to emphasize the dramatization of space that could be used against power. The contradictions of patriarchal households can be feminized in such a way as to be visible through minimalist sets, symbolic silences, and innovative usage of the domestic stage. Meanwhile, community theatre may be considered by practitioners as a way of addressing the issues of direct pooling into the life experiences of the women so that their voices can be performed and heard within the local and global contexts.

More systematic inclusion of South Asian English drama in literature, theatre, and gender courses should be instituted in curricula. They ought to have students treat plays as texts and plays as performance, concerned with both staging and silence, and audience reception. This would allow the creation of critical awareness of representations that cultural forms adopt and resist in patriarchal spaces.

Theatre can be identified as an effective tool of advocacy and discussion of gender problems. The

contribution to activities that assist feminist theatre in South Asia would probably help amplify underrepresented voices and help in social change. Such policies as stimulating the play production and its distribution on the international market by female dramatists would make their work more recognizable and identify their contribution to the feminist and postcolonial critique.

With the South Asian English drama turning towards the global stage in its circulation, these works should at least be encouraged to be approached by audiences as far more than exotic cultural products but also as interventions to international discourses of gender, power, and resistance. Critical reception ought to pay attention to these two dimensions simultaneously: local particularity of patriarchal practices and the more abstract structure of inequalities through which it is dramatized in the plays.

Conclusion

This paper was also an attempt to understand how modern South Asian English plays define gendered spaces and how women in these gendered spaces manage or rebel against patriarchal power. The research has shown that domestic as well as symbolic spaces are not neutral backgrounds but instruments of power through a close reading of *Tara and Bravely Fought the Queen* by Mahesh Dattani, *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan, and *Mangalam* by Poile Sengupta. Simultaneously, these performances put across how, despite limited conditions, women formulate resistance with silence, broken memory, talking, or being rebellious in order to redraw the discourse on space politics.

The findings confirm the first objective of the study: that South Asian dramatists consistently portray homes, households, and domestic spaces as patriarchal arenas. The second objective, which asked how women negotiate these spaces, revealed that agency is rarely absolute but is instead fragmented and context-specific. *Tara's* constrained resistance, *Dolly* and *Alka's* quiet defiance, *Jaya's* open confrontation, and the silenced women of *Mangalam* exemplify the diverse ways in which agency is enacted. The third aim, to evaluate how the performance medium of theatre redeploys such negotiations, revealed that the stage itself is an instrument of meaning making: with its pauses, and silences, staging and staging, theatre performs the

dialectical relationship between oppression and resistance in very particular ways.

The findings of the study relate to the theoretical concepts proposed by Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994), hooks (1990), and Mohanty (1988), in addition to going further beyond. Although these theorists define ideological production as the construction of space as well as the hierarchies of oppression in which women live, South Asian English drama shows how this process can be acted out on and by performing bodies in a live and dramatic action, provoking audiences to experience it at once. The plays, therefore, respond not only to the social realities but also to change by intervening to make a cultural space where issues related to gender justice can be discussed.

There are three implications of this analysis. To begin with, it restores drama to the South Asian literary and cultural studies, that is usually dominated by fiction and the cinema. Second, it brings a more refined concept of feminist agency, which is no longer based on large-scale efforts towards liberation, but rather on daily power

struggles. Third, it highlights the distinctiveness of theatre as a means of cultural criticism, capable of representing antagonisms in ways that have brought them into correspondence with local and international contexts.

To sum up, the dramatization of tension between the confinement and the resistance prevailing in the South Asian English drama is testimony to the way women are controlled within patriarchal structures on the one hand, and on the other hand demonstrates the way the women are able to exploit spaces of agency within that same structure. These plays can make us understand that resistance does not necessarily need to be either very loud or even total and can still be meaningful and important; and even silence and partial actions can bear some meaning and power. Since feminist theatre is still in development, the major contribution that it makes is putting these struggles in the spotlight, redefining space as a contested place and confirming the ability of women to react and redefine their roles in society.

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