Chapter 1

Introduction: Origin and Development of Indian Drama and Badal Sircar
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Drama is the reflection of life in many ways and can also be said that it plays a significant role in making people aware of their present as well as the past. It has been aptly said that, “The stage constitutes a very important chapter in the social and political history of a people, and the bend of national genius cannot be fully comprehended without its study. . . . it is no exaggeration to say that a ‘nation is known by its theatre’” (Gupta i). The beginning of dramatic art in India has been traced back to more than two thousand years ago. Suniti Kumar Chatterji in his Introduction to Indian Drama throws light on the journey of drama in India in the following words, “. . . starting from a few centuries before Christ right down to the end of the classical period of Indian history, that is up to the advent of the conquering Turks and the establishment of a Muslim State in North India, drama has been one of the finest expressions of Indian culture” (5).

A study of the growth and development of drama in India makes it clear that it has been an advanced literary genre since ancient times. Broadly speaking, there are two views about the origin of Indian drama. According to one, Indian drama came into being under Greek influence. The other view is that it is of divine origin deriving several characteristics from the four Vedas.

According to the first view, Indian drama came into existence under the influence of Greek drama which is believed to come into being in the fifth century BC. The establishment of Greek drama can be traced to the religious rituals of the worship of Dionysus, the son of Zeus (the greatest of Greek gods) and Semele (a mortal). His worship symbolizes the return of spring season. In the religious ritual, goat dances were performed to the accompaniment of dialogues. In due course, the dialogue segment was increased and more characters were added. These characters, through dialogical conversation, had begun to perform the traditional story cycle. Its impact on Indian drama is described in the following words:

. . . there are well-read scholars who maintain that India has borrowed the drama from Greece. Ever since the days of Alexander the Great,
Greek colonies were thriving at the seaports and trading stations of the East. It is quite possible that these settlements of wealthy Greeks kept up a native stage so that they might beguile a few hours pleasantly, after a busy day. . . . Ujain and Kanouj, where the early Sanskrit theatre took root and flourished, may have come in contact with Greek trade and culture. . . . Kalidasa and Bana had perhaps some acquaintance with Attic wit and letters. (Horrwitz 76)

According to the above claim, it is obvious that after the conquest of India by Alexander, India came into an intimate contact with Greek culture. The Greeks had established theatres in Ujjain and Kannouj for their entertainment and these were the cities from where Sanskrit drama has taken its origin. As a result,

It was assumed by some scholars that since the ancient Greeks and the ancient Indians came into such intimate contact with each other from the 4th century B.C. onwards, and particularly after the invasion of India and the conquest of part of the country by Alexander the Great, it was but natural to expect that Greek drama should influence Indian drama. (Chatterji 7)

Another critic Prof. Albrecht Weber tells about the establishment of Indian drama under Greek influence as, “. . . the necessary impetus to creation may have been given by the contact of Greece with India, through the representation of Greek plays at the courts of the kings in Baktria, the Punjab, and Gujarat, who brought with them Greek culture as well as Greek forces” (Keith 57). The Greek origin of Sanskrit drama is also supported by the word yavanika which means a curtain which is an important feature of stage-craft in Sanskrit drama and is also assumed to have some association with the Greeks. E. Windisch, a critic of Indian drama, claims that the Greek invaders were called Yavana by Indians in the ancient times and it is supposed that the Sanskrit word yavanika is a derivation of this Yavana which came into Sanskrit usage in due
course of time. So it can be said that the word *yavanika* is of Greek origin and it endorses the Greek origin of Sanskrit drama. But another interpretation of the word *yavanika* questions this claim, according to which it is a Middle Indo-Aryan or Prakrit adaptation of an Old Indo-Aryan or Sanskrit word *yamanika* which originated from the root word *yam*, meaning to bind or to fix and used for a curtain with ropes to fix it. The claim about the Greek origin of Indian drama is proved wrong for another reason. In the plays of Bhasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka and Kalidasa, the predecessors of Sanskrit drama, there is no mention of *yavanika*. The first use of this word is found in the plays of Rajshekhara of twelfth century. In this way, the attribution of the word *Yavana* to Greek has no association with the Sanskrit word *yavanika*. In this regard, Hemendra Nath Das Gupta states,

> When the stage itself was in a highly advanced stage of development, the word Yavanika might have crept into the dramatic code of India independently of any borrowing from outside. That we do not hear of the word before the drama of Karpurmonjari by Raj-Shekara in the 12th century A. D., is enough proof of the late introduction of the word into the dramas of India. (49)

Greek plays are also different from Sanskrit dramas in essence, attitude, arrangement and principle. Affirming this, E. P. Horrwitz, a lecturer of Sanskrit at Trinity College, rejects the notion of Greek influence on Indian drama and says,

> The Greeks recognize, whereas the author of Shakuntala ignores the unity of time and place. The Greek chorus, in the character of a moral judge, is entirely unknown in his productions. On the other hand, the happy blending of tragic and comic incidents, which is characteristic of Indian quite as much as of Shakespearean plays, is altogether against the rules of the Athenian stage. The keynote of Greek poetry is joy and
pride of life, but Sanskrit dramas, though they all end well, generally moralize on the text that life is but vanity and vexation of spirit. (77)

The other view about the origin of Indian drama is that it came into being in Devaloka and from the Vedas. The knowledge of dramatic art is believed to be created by Brahma (the Creator of the Universe, according to Hindu belief) in Heaven. A. Berriedale Keith says, “Indian tradition, preserved in The Natyasastra, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama, claims for the drama divine origin, and a close connexion with the sacred Vedas themselves” (12). The same view is supported by E. P. Horrwitz who states that after the creation of the world, in the golden age, peace and harmony prevailed on earth. Gods and men walked together. After the end of the golden age, the silver era came,

. . . when mankind turned aside from the Divine Will, and everybody followed his own direction. Strife and bloodshed came into existence, but God was merciful, and separated the sexes, creating male and female, that love once more might bind the self-willed race. No sooner did the heart feel drawn to outward things than men lost his power of introspection. The five organs of sense were evolved in order that gods and mortals might quench their thirst for worldly pleasures. Indra, delegated by the other gods, approached the throne of the Godhead, and said: “O Brahma, we wish to feast our eyes and ears on a dramatic spectacle; deign to create the merry play for our enjoyment”. (21)

On the request of Indra, Brahma contemplated earnestly and created the Natya Veda—the Veda of the theatre. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta holds the same view with some alterations. He says, “Dramatic art is said to have its birth in the region of the gods, and Mahadeva or Shiva—one of the great Hindu Trinity—was its originator. . . . Brahma learnt that art from Shiva and created the fifth Veda called the Gandharva Veda, otherwise known as the Natya Veda” (1). In creating the Natya Veda, Brahma took some characteristics from the four Vedas. Bharatamuni writes;
The recitative (pathya) he took from the Rgveda, the song from the Saman, Histrionic Representation (abhinaya) from the Yajus, and Sentiments (rasa) from the Atharvaveda, [and] thus was created the Natyaveda connected with the Vedas principal and subsidiary (vedopaveda), by the holy Brahman who knows [them] all. (4)

There is another reason for the creation of the Natya Veda by Brahma. The varna system is in vogue in India from the ancient times. On the basis of varna, the society is divided into four groups; Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. During the ancient period, the first three groups were the privileged ones and the fourth group was considered the most inferior because it was neither able to read nor hear the four Vedas. In the Vedic period, human beings and gods commuted between Devaloka and earth, as is stated above by Horrwitz. So the Shudra-s went to Indra with the request that there should be some source of entertainment for them. Indra considered their request and went to Brahma. Keith says in this respect that, “. . . the gods approached the all-father and bade him produce something to give pleasure to the ears and eyes alike, a fifth Veda which, unlike the other four, would not be the jealous preserve of the three-twice born castes, but might be shared by the Shudras also” (12). Thus, Brahma created the Natya Veda by deriving the recitation, singing, histrionic representation and sentiments, the four qualities from Rigveda, Samveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda respectively. Brahma, then, gave the Natya Veda to the gods but the head of gods Indra refused to take the responsibility of dramatic representation. There was a strong reason behind Indra’s refusal,

Indra’s argument appears to have been that since drama, as enjoined by Brahma, was to be objective, the gods by virtue of their passions and commitments and particularly their unending conflict with the demons would be found to take a partisan view. Only the Sages who had mastered all emotion, and contained within them the wisdom of the universe could undertake this task. (Benegal 2)
So he assigned the duty of performing the art of drama to the great sage Bharatamuni and his one hundred sons who spread its knowledge in the world through *The Natyasastra*. Though in the process of its development, drama derived several characteristics and components from epics and Puranas, Bharatamuni’s *The Natyasastra* is the most reliable source as far as the origin of dramaturgy is concerned. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta gives the examples of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bhasa and the younger son of Sita, Lava who upheld the view that Bharatamuni is a great playwright and stage-manager and his work is the oldest and most trustworthy. Gupta says,

Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti both have mentioned Bharatamuni in connection of dramatic art, the former has described him as a playwright and the stage-manager of the gods, and the latter called him as Tauryatrika Sutrakara or the earliest writer on triple symphony (i.e., the union of song, dance and instrumental music). (3)

Mention of Bharatamuni is also found place in the plays of Bhasa who flourished probably in-between the fourth century BC to the second century AD. Bharatamuni is the master of dramatic art, a good director and stage-manager, and he and his one hundred sons have full command over the Vedas. Bharatamuni has full authority not merely on Vedic learning and its ethos but also in literature, fine arts, Ayurveda, astrology, mathematics and architecture. His proficiency in the relation between the physical stimulus and psychic response, and between psychic states and expression through physical movements are truly remarkable. Bharatamuni was so proficient in dramaturgy that, “... almost everything connected with drama, or the stage is named after him, and the oldest and most authoritative treatise on Indian Dramaturgy is named after him as “Bharata Natyashastra”” (4).

The era in which Bharatamuni lived also supports the view that *The Natyasastra* is the oldest and most authentic exposition of dramatic art. Adya Rangacharya, Bhasa, Kalidsa, Bhavabhuti and Abhinava Guptacharya claim that Bharatmuni lived between the seventh and the ninth century AD, but Pandit Haraprasad Sastri gives priority to Bharatamuni over Panini and asserts the second
century BC as the date of The Natyasastra’s composition. But there is another view which claims Bharatamuni’s period earlier to this; that is, to the third or the fourth century BC in which Shilali and Krishasa, who were the predecessors of Panini, flourished (Gupta 15-16). Thus, evaluating from all aspects, it seems that The Natyasastra was composed between 4th and 2nd century BC and Bharatamuni is the first influential writer of the most authoritative treatise on dramaturgy. It is a voluminous writing which “… embodies all the physical, theoretical and conceptual ideas of traditional Indian drama” (Benegal 2). All the dramatic elements such as; thought, theme, idea, action, plot, character, language, music and their usages find place in it.

The book; that is, The Natyasastra is in the form of dialogues between the author and a group of sages who wished to know about The Natyaveda—the knowledge of the performing arts, such as dance, music and drama. The description of the origin of the fifth Veda begins with a bow to Pitamaha (Brahma) and Mahesvara (Shiva). In the ancient past, some sages visited Bharatamuni to know about the origin and development of dramatic art. The author, in response, presented a detailed description of the various facets of drama, including the nature, theories, and techniques of the theatre with all its components of speech, body-language, gestures, costumes, decors and the states of mind of the performers. It is also evident that, “Written in archaic form of Sanskrit” the text has “… about six thousand (5,569 – to be exact) sutras or verse-stanzas spread over thirty-six chapters” (Sreenivasarao). Some passages are in prose. Bharatamuni gives a detailed description about the origin of The Natyaveda which has been discussed earlier. Brahma included in The Natyasastra the “Semi-historical Tales” which would lead human-beings to “duty”, “wealth” and “fame” (Bharatamuni 3). The subject of The Natyasastra is not limited only to the techniques of dramatic presentation but contains “good counsel” and “collection [of other materials for human well-being]” for the guidance of people and for their present and future life (4). The book is enriched with the teachings of poetry, drama, music and dance and also comprises the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture.

Bharatamuni, while constructing the dramatic art, realised the need of females as co-actors for the production of the play. Brahma, then, provided apsaras, Narada,
the divine musicians and other accompaniments to perform a play on the stage. The first play was performed at Banner Festival (Jarjara or flag-staff) which celebrates Indra’s victory over danavas and asuras. The theme of the play is the defeat and slaying of daityas by the gods. The performance was disturbed by the demons because, “The demons naturally were upset at seeing that they had been repudiated. They created an uproar during the performance, so it became necessary to have a playhouse” (Deshpande 15). Bharata along with his sons went to Brahma and requested him to protect the performance. Brahma ordered Viswakarma (the architect of the gods) to build a playhouse of the best kind and Viswakarma erected the playhouse for an unharmed staging.

The Tandava dance; that is, the expression of violent emotion, was contributed to drama by Lord Shiva. His spouse Parvati added the tender and voluptuous Lasya while the four dramatic styles which were essential to the effect (rasa) of play was contributed by Lord Vishnu. These styles (vrtti-s) are Bharati, Sattavati, Kaisiki and Arabhati. The source of these vrtti-s are Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda respectively. Bharati vrtti is that in which speeches are in Sanskrit language and “… it is employed only by male actors who announce their own names” (Rangacharya 169). In sattvati vrtti, vigour, good behaviour and justice are the main features. There is an excess of joy and absence of sorrow in it. In sattvati vrtti “… there is abhinaya of speech, gestures and episodes described in vigorous words and the final result is also powerful” (170). Kaisiki vrtti is that in which female characters are in plenty and love, dance and music are its prominent features. In arabhati, “… one finds daring (of a wrong kind, in the form) of deceit, fraud, falsehood, bragging, garrulosity, etc. In this there would be falling, jumping, crossing and many kinds of magic and conjury” (171).

Brahma describes duty, games, money, peace, laughter, fight, love-making, killing of people as the themes of plays and defines a play as,

…”a mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions, and which depicts different situations. This will relate to actions of men good, bad and indifferent, and will give
courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all.

(Bharatamuni 15)

The performing of puja in the playhouse before the performance with offerings, homa-s, mantra-s, plants and japa-s was ordered by Brahma in The Natyasastra which is equally applicable to modern Sanskrit, Hindi and, to some extent, to Indian English plays. Performance of puja is one of the essential elements of stage-craft which is very important for the success of a play. He also described the evil consequences of not executing puja in the following words, “He who will hold a dramatic spectacle without offering the Puja, will find his knowledge [of the art] useless, and he will be reborn as an animal of lower order (tiryay-yoni)” (17). So it is necessary for the stage manager to execute puja before starting the play.

In The Natyasastra, there is description of three types of playhouses; oblong, square and triangular. The size of the playhouses may be large, middle-sized and small. The size varies with the usage of playhouses, “The large playhouse is meant for gods, and the middle-sized one for kings, while for the rest of people, has been prescribed the smallest [theatre]” (19). The theatre-house which was meant for mortals was sixty four cubits long and thirty two cubits broad. In Bharatamuni’s opinion, a play-house bigger than the above mentioned size would not convey the expressions and voices of the performers to the spectators properly. The Natyasastra also contains all the detailed descriptions of the characteristics of the playhouse suitable for human beings. It includes the formation of oblong, triangular and square playhouses, laying of the foundation stone, the stage division and decoration, installation of the gods, offering of the puja and so on. The stage was used to be built as a two-storied building. The representation of the celestial action should be performed in the upper storey and the actions and performances of the earthly beings must be presented in the lower one. The king, queen and other upper class men and women should sit in the upper part and the common folk should sit in the lower area.

The description of the rasa-s (sentiments) and bhava-s (emotions) are also found in The Natyasastra which must be used by the natya experts during the dramatic performances. The rasa-s are recognized as eight, viz., Sringara (erotic),
Hasya (comic), Karuna (pathetic), Raudra (furious), Vira (heroic), Bhayanaka (terrible), Bibhatsa (odious), and Adbhuta (marvellous). Emotions (bhava-s) are of two kinds; Sancari and Sthayin and there are different sub-varities of the two bhava-s. Rasa is the cumulative result of bhava-s. Sage Bharata points out the relationship between the rasa and bhava: “... sensitive spectators, after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through words, gestures and feelings feel pleasure, etc. This (final) feeling by the spectators is here explained as (various) rasa-s of natya” (Rangacharya 55). The eight Sthayi bhava-s, thirty-three Vyabhicari bhava-s and eight Sattvika bhava-s are the source of expression of the rasa-s in poetry.

The Natyasastra also deals with the acting, gestures and symbols (mudra-s) of the main and subordinate parts of the body which are necessary for the success of a play. Abhinaya or acting is the medium of carrying to the spectators, the meaning of a written drama which is classified as four types: first is angika which means physical acting, second is vacika which means verbal representation, third is sattvika which means internal or mental expression and the final is aharya which includes external features like costumes, props, make-up and décor.

Four kinds of pravrtti-s (local usages) are introduced in The Natyaveda. On the basis of the difference among regions, dresses, languages and customs, this pravrtti is divided into four kinds i.e. Avanti, Daksinatya, Panchali and Odramagadhi. The division of pravrtti depends on the use of different vrtti-s (styles) as, “Different regions prefer different styles like the Bharati, Sattvati, Kaisiki and Arabhati. Because of this, four pravrtti-s (regional styles) have been devised” (113). The productions of plays are of two types viz. sukumara and aviddha which depends on the construction (yukti) of the play. In sukumara, tender or sensitive type human beings are the characters and the plot deals with the day to day life and experiences of men and women. Aviddha type has violent movements, cutting, striking, fighting, magic, etc. The characters are in costumes and most of them are male. Gods, demons and rakshasa-s are the characters of this type of production.

Bharatamuni also describes the nature of the play in The Natyasastra. Nature (dharma) of the play is classified as Lokdharmi (realistic) and Natyadharmi (dramatic). In Lokadharmi, men and women behave naturally, without any change and modification. He observes as stated by Rangacharya, “A play in which men and
women, in their own nature, without any change (avikrta), without any gestures, behave naturally is Lokadharmi” (115). Natyadharmi is defined as, “A play in which speech is artificial and exaggerated, actions unusually emotional, gestures graceful, is Natyadharmi (dramatic). That also is Natyadharmi in which voice and costumes are not from common use” (115).

Words are the soul of dramatic representation so one should be very careful and particular about words, verbal representation, prosody and metrical patterns of a composition. As stated in The Natyasastra, “The vocal abhinaya (i.e. the words used) are nouns, verbs, particles, prepositions, compound words, derivative nouns, euphonic combination (sandhi) and case-endings” (116). The languages spoken in a drama are Sanskrit and Prakrit and the grammatical rules vary with the use of language. The rhythmic meters are classified into three groups; sama (even), ardha-sama (semi-even) and vi-sama (uneven). The definition and necessity of meter are explained as,

It is called a metre when fewer words are rhythmically woven into a line. And those syllabic metres are based on words. There is no word without a rhythm and no rhythm without a word. So when rhythm and word combine, a metre results which illuminates a play. (118)

In The Natyasastra, Bharatamuni gives an account of ten kinds of faults and ten kinds of merits of a poetical work or a play. The faults (dosha-s) are: circumlocution, superfluous expression, want of significance, defective significance, tautology, want of synthesis, logical defect, metrical defect, hiatus and slang. The merits (guna-s) are as follows: synthesis, perspicuity, smoothness, concentration, sweetness, grandeur, agreeableness, directness of expression, exaltedness and loveliness. According to him, four kinds of languages based on intonation (kaku)– Atibhasa (super-human language), Aryabhasa (noble language), Jatibhasa (common language) and Jatyantarbhasa (language of other animals) should be used in performing a drama. A brief account of the four languages is given below:

The first is intended for gods, the second for kings. Both are in Sanskrit (classical) style, well established over the whole country. The
Jatibhasa is of various kinds, mixed with foreign words common in Bharatavarsa. The last one is for rustics, foresters and animals, birds, etc. which are characters in a drama. (Bharatamuni 138)

Bharatamuni also describes the qualities, uses and characteristics of recitation, “In it there are seven notes (swara), three voice registers (sthana), four Varnas (lit. manner of uttering notes), two ways of intonation (kaku), six Alamkaras and six limbs (anya)” (346). The seven notes are: Sadja, Rsabha, Gandhara, Madhyama, Pancama, Dhaivata and Nisada. The breast, throat and head are the three voice registers, and acute, grave, circumflex and quivering are the four accents. Intonations are of two kinds; first is, entailing expectation (sakanksa) and the other is entailing no expectation (nirakanksa). Bharatamuni explains it as: “A sentence which has not completely expressed its [intended] meaning, is said to be entailing an expectation (sakanksa) and a sentence which has completely expressed such a sense, is said to be entailing no expectation (nirakanksa)” (347). The six alamkara-s are high, excited, grave, low, fast and slow and the six limbs of enunciation are separation, presentation, closure, continuity, brilliance and calming. The Natyasastra gives an analysis of these alamkaras and limbs in connection with different sentiments (rasa-s). The rules related to two kinds of recitation; that is, vulgar (prakrta) and refined (samskrta) are also found in The Natyasastra. Seven well known dialects (Magadhi, Avanti, Pracya, Suraseni, Ardhmagadhi, Bahlika and Daksinatya) are used according to their different positions and the modes of address which must be used by the characters according to their position viz. superior, middle and inferior characters to each other and for women during the performance of a play.

Various kinds and usages of plots, sandhi, avastha, artha-prakrti, sandhyantara and anga which are considered very ideal for creating poetic diction during the dramatic productions are available in The Natyasastra. There is a vivid and detailed description of the aharya (means costumes, make-up, embellishments and ornaments for both women and men); and of the making of head-gears and weapons as; jarjara and dandakastha. The description of various stages of love in women and men, different natures and kinds of men and women, which should be used in the presentation of a drama on stage, is also available in The Natyasastra. Bharatamuni,
in his book, not only gives the rules and guidelines for dramatic performances but also for dance and music. Four kinds of musical instruments can be used during performance: stringed instruments, avanaddha, ghana and susira.

Style (vrtti) is the source of all dramatic works and from this vrtti arises the ten forms of plays. These ten forms are: Nataka, Prakarana, Samavakara, Ihamrga, Dima, Vyayoga, Anka, Prahasana, Bhana and Vithi. A brief analysis of the forms will be helpful. A Nataka deals with a well-known story, a hero of exalted nature, a royal sage and his family. There are super-human elements which speak of the various aspects of glory, grandeur and success of love-affairs. A Nataka consists of acts and prologues, various rasa-s and bhava-s, sorrows and pleasures. In a Prakarana, the story, structure of the play and the hero are the original creations of the writer. The themes are the deeds of a Brahmin, a trader, an officer, a purohit, a minister or a merchant. Plot is original in a Prakarana but all other details regarding rasa-s, bhava-s and development of plot are the same as in the Nataka. Gods, asura-s and well-known estimable heroes are the characters in the story of a Samavakara. Samavakara is divided into three acts and in its three acts, there are three kinds of deceit, calamities and sringara-s; and it has twelve important characters. Ihamrga has as its dramatic personae the divine males who are involved in fights over divine females. In it, the anger of women is developed and the sringara rasa is based on quarrels among female characters or abduction of a woman or of painful experiences. The Dima deals with a well-known story and dignified heroes. Earthquakes, eclipse of the moon and sun, falling of meteors, battles and fights with dreadful weapons, deceit and jugglery, dissensions among many violent persons and gods, asura-s, raksasa-s, bhuta-s, yaksasa-s and naga-s are the themes of the Dima. Vyayoga has many male characters but they are royal sages not divine persons. It is a one act play which depicts battles, fights and conflicts in it. In Anka, the male characters are other than divine and it has the karuna as the prominent rasa. This kind of play is also known as Utsrstikanka. There are plenty of lamentations by women after the end of battle and violent fighting. Prahasana is of two kinds, pure (Shuddha) and mixed (Sankirna). The pure Prahasana deals with the mockery of guru-s, ascetics, Buddhist monks and learned Brahmins by the low characters through their comic dialogues. In Bhana, there is only one actor. The actor acts either his own experiences or some other person’s. It includes various episodes and plenty of movements. Vithi is a one act play in which
there may be one or two characters of high, middle or low status. All the rasa-s can be included in this play.

Three types of male and female characters, as mentioned in The Natyasastra, should be acted in a drama: Uttama (superior), Adhama (inferior) and Madhyama (middling). But according to his character a hero is of four types: Dhiroddhata, Dhiralalita, Dhirodatta and Dhiraprasanta. The heroines are also of four types: Dhira (steady), Lalita (charming), Udatta (noble) and Nibhrita (quiet). In The Natyasastra Bharatamuni also discusses the distribution of roles into a drama as, “The acarya, i.e. a director, must first find out what qualities a particular role requires; that way, he will not come to trouble” (336). For example; for the role of the gods the acharya “. . . should select an actor of sound limbs, well formed body, grown-up in age, not fat, not lean, not tall, not short (lit. hump-backed), vivacious, with a good voice and a handsome face” (336). Likewise, there are the rules for the selection of the roles of amatya, army chief, kancuki, queen, princess, sage and other minor characters. Bharatamuni, through The Natyasastra, strives to bestow an artistic form and content; that is, drama to a vulgar source of entertainment. He says with pride that parents can watch a dramatic performance in company of their sons and daughters-in-law.

A description of the descent of drama from the Heaven to earth is also available in The Natyasastra. The reason why the descendants of sage Bharata have been called Sudra-s is also described. All the sons of Bharatamuni, being intoxicated with the knowledge and expertise of the dramatic art, began to make fun of the sages. In course of time, the themes and formulation of plays had been corrupted by vulgar passions. The sons of Bharatamuni yielded the dramas in which they treated the subjects that were not tolerable, “full of wicked deeds”, stimulating the indelicate passions, “. . . cruel, unworthy of any praise and in which they caricatured the sages by means of buffoonery” (556). Seeing this, the sages cursed them that if they continue this evil practice their evil knowledge would be destroyed and the sons of Bharatamuni “. . . will appear as being no followers of the Vedas and will attain the conduct of the Sudras” (557). But, on the request of Bharatamuni, the sages took their curse back. After a lapse of time, the kingdom of Heaven came under the possession of king Nahusa who was influenced by the musical performance and drama that were
conducted in the Heaven. He, then, requested to bring the dramatic performances by the gods on the earth; “Then for such a performance the king said to the gods with folded palms: ‘Let the drama [produced] by the Apsarasas be performed in our house (i.e. on the earth)’” (558). On the request of king Nahusa, Bharata, with the permission of Brhaspati (the leader of the divine performers), ordered his sons to go to the earth and entertain the mortals with their dramatic performances.

Thus, the above details indicate that drama has taken origin as a divine art from the Vedas and *The Natyasastra* is the most authoritative treatise on Indian dramaturgy since the ancient age. In it, all the essential elements of drama viz. the dramatic dictions, dances, kinds of playhouses, kinds of plays, plots, sentiments, emotions, styles, gestures, costumes, make-up and their usage find a detailed description.

Before the establishment of proper drama; that is, drama which consists of every components of dramatic art and stage-craft mentioned in *The Natyasastra*, great epic dramas such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were produced. Proper drama is believed to be established by Asvaghosa, the court poet of the Indo-Scythian king Kanishka, probably of the first or second century AD. All his plays follow the classical tradition of dramatic art formulated in *The Natyasastra*. Some of his plays are *Prakarana*-s and consist of nine acts. The characters of high esteem spoke Sanskrit and used both prose and verse while the *vidusaka* (jester) and other men of low rank spoke Prakrit. Keith informs us that in the drama of Asvaghosa “... the Vidusaka served to introduce comic relief” (82). In Asvaghosa’s plays, the benediction was uttered at the close of the play by Buddha, a divine instructor, and not by the hero while according to *The Natyasastra* the benediction must be uttered by the hero. So, it is noticeable that he tried to do some experiments in the technique. The appearance and conversation of allegorical figures such as; *Buddhi* (wisdom), *Kirti* (fame) and *Dhrti* (firmness) is also another characteristic of Asvaghosa’s plays which have been adopted by later dramatists. Various meters referred to in *The Natyasastra* were also found in his plays as essential elements of the dialogues.

After Asvaghosa, a number of dramatic poets came to the fore whose geniuses are unequalled. First among them is Bhasa and thirteen plays are credited to his genius. His manuscripts were found in the extreme south of India, Kerala or Malabar.
and were written in the local dialect. Some plays attributed to him are *Madhyamavyayoga*, *Dutaghatotkaca*, *Karnabhara*, *Urubhanga*, *Pancaratra*, and *Carudatta* etc. Second is Sudraka whose *Mrichchhakatika* or *The Little Clay-Cart* is a comedy that gives a realistic and brilliant comic depiction of first to third century Indian society after Christ. After Sudraka, came Kalidasa, the contemporary of king Vikramaditya and one of the nine jewels of the king’s retinue. *Malvikagnimitra*, *Sakuntala* and *Vikramorvasi* are the plays credited to him. Three plays – *Priyadarsika*, *Nagananda* and *Ratnavali* are written by Harsa, the king of Sthanvisvara and Kanyakubja. Keith says,

Three dramas, as well as some minor poetry, have come down to us under the name of Harsa, unquestionably the king of Sthanvisvara and Kanyakubja, who reigned from A.D. 606 to 648, the patron of Bana who celebrates him in the *Harsacarita* and of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-Tsang who is our most valuable source of information on his reign. (170)

About 700 AD a person of great genius namely Bhavabhuti who was skilled in grammar, rhetoric, logic and *mimansa* came on the literary scene. *Mahaviracharita*, *Malatimadhava* and *Uttararamacharita* are the three plays that were written by him. These plays were performed to the accompaniment of music, dance and decoration.

In the dramas of ancient times, the people of high position used to speak in Sanskrit while the ordinary men conversed in a variety of Middle Indo-Aryan or Prakrit. Since the gulf between Sanskrit which is the language of dramatic performance and Prakrit which is the spoken language of common Indians or the vernacular language had become wider, Indian drama came to its downfall. In course of time, Sanskrit drama had become the source of entertainment only for learned scholars, who were patronized by and limited to the courts of Hindu kings. Under the rule of Muslim Turks of Central Asia, Indian (Sanskrit) drama died a natural death because in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, drama was an unknown literary genre. When Sanskrit drama was dying under Muslim rule, “. . . attempts at literary self-expression were made after 1200 A.D. through all types of literature” (Chatterji 10). During the
Muslim rule, both in North and South Indian vernaculars, the short lyrics and dramas had begun to be produced under the influence of classical Sanskrit literature. The themes of these lyrics and dramas were both the expression of religious and amorous sentiments. This was the time when regional dramatic styles and regional theatres started emerging in the absence of an integrated national theatre. After the decline of Sanskrit drama different regions developed their regional styles;

From the 17th century onwards, smaller shows were performed in every state of India like Jatra and Nautanki in Bengal, Bhand Jashin in Kashmir, Bhavai in Gujarat, Lalita, Khele, Dashavtar and Tamasha in Maharashtra; Yakshagana, Bayalata, Attadata, Doddata and Sannata in Karnataka, Veedhi-natakam in Andhra Pradesh, Ramleela and Rasleela in Rajasthan, Rass and Jhoomer in Punjab and Kutiyattam, Mohiniattam and Kathakali dance dramas in Kerala. (Shah 45)

Translations and adaptations of the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in various languages were being done during the entire Muslim rule and in the early phase of British rule. In Bengal, Northern Bihar and neighboring regions of Eastern India, a new form of drama had taken birth, with rudimentary dialogues of two or more actors accompanied by songs. In the seventeenth century a similar kind of drama was developed in Nepal and “... quite a large number of such dramas in Nepal owe their origin to the Newar kings at Patan, Bhatgaon, Kantipur or Kathmendo and Kirtipur” (Chatterji 11). These dramas derived their themes from the Sanskrit epics, the Puranas and from the folk epics in the modern Indo-Aryan languages. The songs were sung in classical Hindu melodies and the stage directions were in “... Tibeto-Burman Newari ... the prose conversation sometimes in Bengali, sometimes in Maithili or in Kosali or Awadhi, and the songs are also, in these dialects, but mostly in Maithili” (11). This kind of drama was structurally similar to the Hindustani song play Indar Sabha (1853). This play was composed by Amanat, the court poet of the Awadh ruler Wajid Ali Shah and is one of the earliest examples of Urdu theatre. Indar Sabha fuses “... episodes based on medieval Islamic romances with Hindu mythology, music, and dance styles of the region, and Hindi with Urdu
languages” (Lal 153). The popularity of this play helped in the development of the art of drama in Indian languages like Hindi and Urdu.

The British came to India in the beginning of the seventeenth century as traders. Before the battle of Plassey in 1757, they did not pay any attention to the establishment and growth of their own cultural and civilizational trends into the foreign land nor did they feel any need of entertainment. For them, India was only a colony “. . . from which to cart treasure back to their home country” (Benegal 62). If they worked for the political, social and financial progress of India, it was only with the intention that it helped in their own enrichment. As they were rulers, they were superior to the natives and “. . . the Indian way of living was characterized as uncivilized, the Indian intellect was considered backward, Indian culture-its painting, sculpture, music, dance, drama, literature-was derided as ludicrous, grotesque, absurd or simply laughable” (62). In such an atmosphere, it was difficult for any creative art to make headway. After the successful establishment of their trade and commerce, the colonizers felt the need for entertainment. To feel homely, they brought their theatre forms and companies which had affected the progress of the folk theatres and regional dramatic styles of India. The folk theatres remained limited to the lower-class people only while the British style proscenium theatre had become the source of entertainment for upper-class elite people. Before 1857, the year of India’s first war of independence, foreign drama companies especially that of Britain came and performed English plays or English translation of Sanskrit plays. After that, few more dramatic companies had been established in the urban areas such as Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala by the native elites under the influence of these Western models. Though, in these companies the languages of performance were Hindustani, Gujarati, Urdu, Persian, Sanskrit and other native languages but “. . . structurally as well as in environmental effects, it followed the 19th century European Opera of the undistinguished variety” (Mathur 25). The Parsi community started their own dramatic company which is now called Proscenium theatre, in Bombay “. . . in which romantic lyricism was debased into meaningless verse recitation, tried to copy the spectacular form of the early 19th century western theatre, without approaching the broad human plane of the contemporary western drama” (25). In this way, before the first war of Indian independence various theatres had been set up in different regions
of the country which were influenced by the Western models, structurally, environmentally and thematically.

During the entire period of colonialism, British style proscenium stage with little alteration was in vogue in India, particularly in Bengal. The modern Indian theatre derives its organizational structures, textual features, and performance conventions from British theatre. It influences the indigenous people so much that it supersedes the traditional folk theatre of India. Regarding this, Aparna Dharwadker observes:

The influence of Western textual models produced a body of new “literary” drama and dramatic theory in several Indian languages, led to a large-scale translations and adaptations of European as well as Indian canonical plays, and generated the first nationalist arguments about the cultural importance of a national theatre in India. (3)

As the plays of Badal Sircar who is a renowned theatre personality of Bengal, is the main concern of the present thesis, the rest of the chapter will deal with the origin and development of Bengali drama.

Bengal is one of the biggest provinces of India and it has a separate indigenous literary tradition that is rich in poetic and dramatic expressions. The origin of Bengali drama is not clear yet it seems that it has taken birth about twelfth century AD. Prabodh C. Sen depicts the origin of Bengali drama as, “A stage in the transition from . . . primitive origin to drama proper seems to be represented by the Gita-Govinda of Jayadeva, the court poet of King Lakshmana-Sena of Bengal (twelfth century A.D.)” (39). Gita-Govinda was composed in Sanskrit yet it followed the fashion of vernacular archetypes of Bengal. It is poetic in form and acted as a play in the accompaniment of dance and music. The love of Krishna and beautiful Radha, their separation, agony and the final re-establishment are the themes of the play. There is no proper dialogue, all the three characters involve in a kind of lyrical monologue to be performed in turn and the other two are expected to listen. Towards the end of the
reign of Lakshmana-Sena, Bengal came under the control of Muslim rulers followed by a period of cultural chaos for some centuries.

In the sixteenth century, the great Chaitanyadeva appeared to the cultural and spiritual scene of Bengal. He was a highly skilled actor and had a fascination for drama. A play namely *Rukmini-haran* by Chaitanyadeva was played in the fashion of *jatra* at the house of Chandrasekhar of Navadvipa in which Chaitanya played the role of Rukmini. The *jatra* is similar to drama but the main point of difference is that unlike a drama *jatra* requires no fixed stage, scenes or curtain. It is performed with dance, song and music and has much less dialogue, action or plot. *Jatra* form is still popular in Bengal and it can be considered as the earliest form of developed regular drama. Originally, *jatra* meant a religious procession in the accompaniment of mimic dance, song and other festivities. These *jatra*-s were performed at various junctures as; “The occasions for such festive processions were many, such as the Dol-jatra or the Holi festival of Srikrishna, the Rath-jatra or the car festival of Jagannath. The Buddhist and Jain religious festivals were also celebrated with processions” (41). In due course of time, *jatra* had undergone through some changes. After these changes, the shows and dances were presented in a fixed arena not in a moving processions and dialogue was added. It can be said that *jatra* and drama had a common origin (in the religious festivals) but they had undergone different lines of development. During Muslim rule in Bengal when drama was losing its identity, *jatra* was the strongest medium of entertainment for the people. Though, *jatra* was a prevalent drama form then, yet it gained popularity in eighteenth century, as indicated by Sen;

Popular *jatra* actors no doubt drew the admiration of the people, but history has no record of their achievements until the eighteenth century when two brothers called Sridam and Subal became famous as great *jatra-walas* or actors and succeeded in finding a lasting place in the people’s memory. (42)

Paramananda, Premchand, Badan Adhikari, Govinda Adhikari, and Lochan Adhikari were the followers of Sridam and Subal who gave a new life and originality to drama and acting. *Kaliya-daman, Chandi-jatra, Chaitanya-jatra* and *Vidya-Sundar jatra*
were the themes of the jatra. Kaliya-daman depicts the repression of the mythological serpent Kaliya by Lord Krishna. Chandi-jatra delineates the story of the Goddess Chandi and Chaitanya-jatra portrays the character of Chaitanyadeva, the great poet-actor of sixteenth century who influenced the people so much that he had become the subject for jatra performances. Later, the love story of Vidya and Sundar became the favorite theme of jatra festivals.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, Bengal came under the occupation of British rule and in the middle of the eighteenth century Western drama appeared in Bengal. Various play-houses were founded in different parts of Bengal on the pattern of Western proscenium theatre and till the middle of the nineteenth century folk theatre and Western drama existed simultaneously without affecting each other. The first English theatre namely ‘The Play House’ was founded in Bengal, some years before the battle of Plassey. A Russian namely Herasim Lebedeff was credited for founding the first Bengali theatre in Calcutta towards the end of the eighteenth century where he produced the Bengali translation of an English play The Disguise with the help of his Bengali instructor Golakhnath Das. But for some reasons, the first Bengali theatre was not a success. In the meanwhile, a fundamental change had been caused to happen in the mind of the enlightened people through English education and they started efforts to set up Bengali theatres on English pattern. The result was the repression of folk drama forms. Hindu Theatre was established in 1831 by Prasanna Kumar Tagore where English plays or English version of Sanskrit plays were performed; “The first two plays put on the boards were Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and Wilson’s English version of Bhavabhuti’s Sanskrit drama, Uttara-Rama-Charitam” (Sen 44). In the following two decades many private theatres came into existence but a noticeable exception was the establishment of a theatre at the house of Nabinchandra in 1833 where four or five plays were produced every year. In this theatre, the female roles were played by the women artists, that is the most favorable and revolutionary change occurred in the theatrical tradition of Indian drama. Krishna Mohan Benerjee wrote a play named The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta in 1831 which deals with the ill practices of Hindu religion:
In this play, he depicts the inconsistencies and blackness of the influential Hindu community. It shows the wiles and tricks of the Brahmins. It also presents the conflict in the mind of the sensitive Bengali youth between the orthodoxy and the new ideas ushered in by the Western education. (Shah 45)

The year 1857 is significant in the history of India, for the first war of freedom was fought in this year. After this, people became aware of the exploitations of the colonists and they had started resisting them. Drama and theatre proved to be very important instruments to arouse the feeling of nationalism and patriotism among the people and plays were written on the themes of suppression and social problems, resulting out of colonial rule. People were so full of anger and fury that the performance of English plays in English style had got a jolt. In the year 1857, four significant dramas in Bengali language were performed on the stage in Bengal. The first was Abhijnana-Sakuntalam by Nandakumar Ray. The second was Kulina-kulasarvasa that was written in 1854 by Ramnarayan Tarkaratna. The play Kulina-kulasarvasa is the first original Bengali drama which deals with an important social problem of the day; that is, the Kulin polygamy. The other two plays, Veni-Samhara (1856) by Ramnarayan and Vikramorvasi (1857) written by Kaliprasanna Sinha, are the translations of Sanskrit plays. Nava Natak, another play which criticizes the polygamy, was performed by ‘Jorsanko Natya-Samaj’ in the year 1866. The native drama that “...fashioned the national mind for centuries could not fail to exercise its influence on the new drama” (Sen 43). This is the reason why after 1870, attempts were made to revive the folk theatre form and Girish Chandra Ghosh founded the ‘Great National Theatre’ where plays were performed in jatra tradition. Dinabandhu Mitra established a public theatre in Calcutta namely the ‘National theatre’ in 1872 which marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Bengali stage and then started the endless production of dramas. Nildarpan by Dinbandhu was the first production of this theatre. Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s Sarmishtha, and Ratnavali, Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s Durgeshnandini, Jyotirindranath Tagore’s Puruvikram and Asrumati are the important productions in this theatre. Madhusudan Dutt’s Is this called Civilization? came out in 1871. These plays were full of revolutionary zeal and
“...inspired the audience with a spirit of patriotism hitherto unknown in the history of Bengal” (Sen 47).

Rabindranath Tagore, a gifted artist, came to the dramatic scene as an actor in 1877 and as a playwright in 1881 with the publication of *Valmiki-Pratibha*. His plays are rich in imagery and symbolism. He wrote such kind of poetic plays which are full of the themes of Bhakti and India’s glorious history. His *Sanyasi, Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice, Red Oleanders, Chandalika, Mukta Dhara* and *Natir Puja* are the plays infused with imagery and symbolism and the influence of Shakespeare, Ibsen and Materlinck is clearly evident in them but the performances of his plays were in folk *jatra* tradition. There are also Tagore’s contemporaries writing in other languages who produced a rich harvest of poetic drama: Samsa and Kuvempu in Kannada, Subrahmanya Bharathi in Tamil, Sreekantan Nair in Malayalam, Harishchandra Harishchandra and Jaishankar Prasad in Hindi. *Perseus the Deliverer, Vasvadutta, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric* are the dramas of Sri Aurobindo written originally in English. All these plays are full-length five-act plays composed in blank verse, imbued with poetry and romance. Srinivasa Iyengar praises him; “Sri Aurobindo was a prophet and a recluse, and he stood apart in unique solitariness, and anyhow his five plays were but a small fraction of his phenomenal literary output” (231). Harindranath Chattopadhyaya’s collected plays namely *Five Plays* contains “The Window”, “The Parrot”, “The Sentry’s Lantern”, “The Coffin” and “The Evening Lamp”. The plays of Chattopadhyaya cope with social consciousness, realism and the contemporary burning issues; such as, struggle for the freedom of the country.

After 1870, urban theatre played an active part in the anti-colonial struggle of the country. Indian drama after that started to act out the exploitative history of colonial rule. The production of *Nildarpan* in the ‘National Theatre’ of Bengal in 1872 and the subsequent performance in Lucknow in 1875 created uproar among the people and therefore the performance was banned by the British soldiers. The play delineates the anti-colonial subject matter in front of the common folk; that is, the oppression of poor peasants by colonial planters. The performances of a persiflage titled *Gajadananda o jubaraj* and *Surendra-Binodini* led to “...the Dramatic Performances Control Act in 1876 and widespread suppression and censorship by the
British colonial government in the following five decades” (Dharwadker 4). In *Surendra-Binodini*, the hero ruthlessly beats up a British magistrate who attempts to rape a Bengali woman. The play satirizes the Calcutta Police Commissioner Hogg and the Superintendent Lamb. Dramatic Performance Act was passed to execute a check on the plays which projected and satirized the despotic rule of the British. Anand Lal observes, “Although prominent citizens and the press protested a proposed bill to prevent provocative theatre, the government passed the DPA on 16 December 1876, empowering it ‘to prohibit Native plays which are scandalous, defamatory, seditious or obscene’” (111). Nevertheless, the productions of dramas did not come to an end. Instead this period had produced innumerable playwrights and their plays were helpful in generating national consciousness and the spirit of protest against the British rule. A. S. Panchpakesa Ayyar writes *In the Clutch of the Devil* (1926), *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1942) and two Play-collections *Sita’s Choice and other Plays* (1935) and *The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays* (1941) which deal with the reformist themes such as; widow remarriage, impact of materialism, infidelity and so on. Some other themes dealt by Ayyar are, “The ungodly and superstitious practices involving witchcraft and ritualistic murder current in contemporary rural South India . . .” (Naik 154). The plays, written during this period, delineate the exploits of colonizers and social evils prevalent in the Indian society and were very important instruments of social protest. *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) by Bharati Sarabhai are plays that show a distinct impact of Gandhian thought. The play *The Well of the People* “. . . is an effective dramatization of how during the Gandhian age a new social awareness fused itself with the age-old religious consciousness, thus leading to a resurgence of the spirit” (157).

Indian People’s Theatre Association, founded in 1943, emerged as a political theatre movement not “. . . from folk theatre forms but from the tradition of Indian adaptations of Western proscenium theatre in urban centres such as Calcutta” (Srampickal 46). IPTA artists belonged to Leftist intelligentsia for whom the major inspiration was Marxist-inspired currents of thought, neither the national independence movement nor the Congress Party. Though the dramatic demonstrations varied from region to region, the IPTA workers all firmly supported theatre as a means for social change. The regions where this movement was strongest were Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The
troupes of IPTA were established in every region, with the objectives of taking “... theatre to the masses and encouraged working class and peasant artists to join the movement and perform important roles” (47).

In Bengal, two strong and resolute personalities appeared on the theatre scene in 1943-44: Utpal Dutt and Shambhu Mitra. The former, a playwright, director, actor and producer made significant contributions to political theatre after the waning of IPTA. Shambhu Mitra joined the IPTA in 1943 and jointly directed *Nabanna* with Bijon Bhattacharya in 1944. After independence he established a theatre group ‘*Bohurupee*’ with Manoranjan Bhattacharya in 1948. His reputation rests on his magnificent productions of Tagore’s major plays which were, “... considered till then unstageable because of their symbolism, new dramatic language, and rejection of established norms of Bengali playwriting and theatre” (Lal 272).

The scenario of dramatic art and performance in India had changed after independence and the regional theatres started growing and developing rapidly. Many of the dramatists had been writing their plays in their mother tongue but these plays got worldwide recognition through translation. Indian theatre was successfully presenting the adverse effects of colonial rule, and delineating the conflict between the present and colonial past; ancient and modern; civilization and materialism, and the meaninglessness of existence and the love for tradition. Though the dramatists had been attempting to revive the folk drama forms, their presentation techniques were infused with proscenium theatre techniques. Theatre groups had been founded by dramatists where translations of English plays were performed. This was the theatre scene after independence till the 1960s when Vijay Tendulkar and Asif Currimbhoy of Marathi theatre, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Girish Karnad of Kannad Theatre, Mohan Rakesh and Dharamvir Bharati of Hindi theatre and Badal Sircar of Bengali Theatre, appeared on the scene. These playwrights have brought to theatre great formal precision and the thematic preoccupation of modernist anxiety. In their plays, “... these playwrights have made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosities. They are using legends, folklores, myths, history with splendid results” (Bajaj and Mehta 151-52). Their plays are a sharp reaction rather than a continuation of colonial theatre practices. All these
playwrights have a common raison d’être to take up play-writing and direction as stated by Karnad,

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries. (1)

These dramatists have drawn upon historical, folk and mythological themes to tackle contemporary issues. Vijay Tendulkar’s plays deal with; “Man’s fight for survival, the varied moralities by which people live, the social position of women, the covert or overt violence in human beings . . .” (Gokhale 31-32). One of the main concerns of Tendulkar’s plays is the marginalization of and violence against women. He brought about some changes in the form and pattern of plays “. . . by demolishing the three-act play and creating new models. By developing the flexible as well as carefully crafted forms, modes of recitation and story telling specific to his region, he has managed to bridge the gulf between traditional and modern theatre. . .” (Reddy and Dhawan 23). Karnad, Bharati, Kambar and Rakesh have derived their sources from myths and legends of Ramayana and Mahabharata as well to deal with contemporary themes. These playwrights have tried to uphold the rich cultural heritage of India by using folk and traditional stories in their plays. They attempted to return to the tradition with the purpose of recovering the suppressed performative methods. Utpal Dutta has separated himself from IPTA and returned to his Little Theatre Group (LTG), a proscenium group which performed the translations of European classics. Some other playwrights such as, Lakhan Deb and Gurucharan Das contributed to the development
of historical plays. There plays were modeled on the techniques of Greek tragedy and employed the “... dramatic unities of time, place and action as well as the classical devices of prologue and chorus” (Reddy and Dhawan 18). Nissim Ezekiel who was a well-established Indian English poet also wrote dramas. His plays are well-constructed, abound in irony, wit and humour but they do not fulfill the requirements of the stage and they are therefore pleasant only in reading. K. M. Panikkar and Ratan Thiyyam are deeply influenced by the traditional acting techniques. Panikkar “... uses parable form, incorporates the acting techniques and practices advocated in the Natyasastra, and borrows heavily from Kathakali and Koodiyattam” (35). Thiyyam, in the same manner, is also influenced by his native theatre, Greek tragedy as well as the techniques mentioned in The Natyasastra. All the contemporaries of Sircar have conveyed their message through stories and there are the division of plays into acts and scenes on Aristotelian pattern. In short, it is correct to say that though these playwrights reacted against colonial rule and tried to reclaim their past glory, their presentation techniques are more or less influenced by the proscenium stage. This is the point where Badal Sircar differs from his contemporaries.

Badal Sircar also started his career with the proscenium theatre but soon he became frustrated with it because this theatre form was unable to fulfill his aim. He is the champion of the down-trodden and subaltern groups of society and his main concern is to make them aware of their suppressed condition. He comprehended the strength of theatre and chose it to convey his message but proscenium theatre disappointed him and he decided to invent his own theatre technique. In one of his interviews, he talks to Samik Bandhopadhyay about the causes of leaving the proscenium theatre,

When I came to the proscenium stage, I hadn’t realized the strength of the theatre. I wasn’t aware of what theatre can do. In other words, there was already deep down an awareness of the limitations of this theatre. It was from that awareness itself that there eventually came the question of communication, utilization of space, redefining the spectator performer relationship, and the gradual realization that the
distinctive feature of theatre is that it is a live show and it offers scope for direct communication, man to man communication, and therefore the barriers between the two parties to the process, viz. spectators and performers, should be minimized, and if possible, eliminated. With that realization, I left the proscenium theatre. (Sircar 8-9)

Sircar was so depressed with the colonial rule and its evil effects on Indian people that he decided to adopt neither their theatre form nor their language. So, he founded his own theatre form ‘The Third Theatre’ and wrote in his mother-tongue Bengali. He started his career by writing comedies and came to the limelight with the production of his famous *Evam Indrajit* in 1965. The play’s unique structure and “. . . the social utility of its theme drew an immediate attention of all concerned” (Haldar 58). It led to the translation of his play into several languages including English. Badal Sircar also introduces the philosophy of Existentialism into Bengali theatre. He chooses the educated middle-class Bengali as the character of his plays “. . . who tries to declass himself, refuses to accept the existing unjust socio-political system and urges others (the audience) to take an active part in bringing about a radical change in the society” (Sarkar). His dissatisfaction with the prevailing order leads him to write plays. The significant themes of Badal Sircar’s plays are the problems of poverty, class-conflict, and urban-rural dichotomy as well as ethnic and religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims instilled by the British.

In his view, more than seventy-five percent populations of our country belong to lower-middle classes which do not have the capacity to pay for tickets. So he removes the ticket-system and performs in open air for open view. This is the reason why his theatre is also called the ‘Free theatre’. To convey his messages, instead of following any story-line he puts the situations before his spectators in the form of a collage. He does several experiments through his theatre form and minimizes the distance between spectator and performer. Direct communication and the maximum utilization of body language are his other contributions to contemporary theatre. Thus, his theatre form has given a new direction to Indian theatre.
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