Chapter I

Introduction

Urbanism and Literature

Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind.

Lewis Mumford

Imagination and the city are mutually dependent and intertwined with each other in innumerable ways. Cities are the storehouse of myths and fantasies, sometimes assuming a form that is symptomatic of opportunity, excitement, enchantment and fulfilment and sometimes epitomizing fear, alienation, crime, corruption, disease, disorder, claustrophobia and threat to social order. These sites are as much a feature of literary and film texts these days as they have been a subject for social scientists, social reformers, philanthropists and politicians in the past.

Definitions and delineations of urbanism have, until recently, remained the prerogative of social scientists and law makers. From ancient times to modern, one may find a long and complex route by which human beings have attempted to understand their link with their habitat and sought significance through the tools of their specialized knowledge, whether it be in politics, philosophy, sociology, demography, geography and such other disciplines. The humanists, and especially literary scholars, have often used the city as a context for their imaginative constructions. However, within the contemporary systems of knowledge building through interdisciplinary methods, it is fascinating as well as possible to connect the literary texts with social science formulations to derive an argument about individuals and people interacting with the city space and its pulsating momentum.
Offering rich possibilities for exploring and imagining public life, identities, and the nature of social interaction, the urban has appeared in a startling variety of representational forms. Cities have always attracted the attention of artists, writers, designers and academicians. Contemporary Indian English drama has made use of many bold innovations and experiments both in terms of themes and techniques. On one hand it has used myth, folklore, history and philosophies like absurdist and existentialist; on the other hand, it has employed dream sequence, masks, sci-fi, voice over, memory play etc. Its rich lineage not only is the result of Indian theatre traditions but also of such European pioneers as Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Jean Paul Sartre. Since Contemporary Indian drama is very complex and employs the latest techniques and innovative themes, its critical evaluation also needs to be theoretically up to date. Contemporary Indian English drama has been studied from variety of critical positions which use insights from psychoanalysis, cultural studies, gender studies, archetypical criticism, Marxist criticism, formalism, etc. However the field remains relatively unexplored with critical tools provided by recent developments in Urban theory.

This research work attempts to define the City space by referring to the impact of urban materiality and social changes on it. This thesis explores various aspects of the urban city space with reference to the works of two contemporary playwrights Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan. These writers present a realistic vision of the city, highlighting the city as a social force, an organic entity that remains ambivalent towards human relationships. Whenever the characters fail to escape the pulse beat of time and the changing social system, they might explore their predicament which ends in miseries and sufferings. Their resistance to the negative and cruel social forces sometimes baffles them, but they persist with their will to win.
The characters mostly suffer from self-created problems like over-reaching ambition, fantasy, illusion, greed, raving jealousy and such other demeaning emotions.

The Indian English drama in recent years has attracted a good deal of in-depth critical analysis. However, not enough attention has been paid to the impact; city life has on the persona, thinking, behaviour, values and psyche of those who are caught in the mire of ever-increasing pace of the urban life. Literary works do not just offer a reflection of, but importantly are also a reflection on city space.

When we think about the Indian cities, the images of call centres, shopping malls and skyscrapers are conjured up in our imagination, simultaneously overlapping with the images of poverty-stricken slums and the dark recesses of terror of all kinds. These urban issues have been referred in literature as a way of thinking about the city. This study thus revolves around certain aspects of the city—like the position of the individual in city space, characteristic types of space, and the role of the body—but simultaneously also around developing an approach that connects literature with sociology, psychology, and history. It offers suggestive answers to the questions like does the city space have any impact on urban landscape and mindscape? The question “what happens to people?” (Rao 5) in the city; whether the caste gets transformed into class; whether the joint family gets replaced by the nuclear family and how the religious practices change or dilute in the city space. An attempt has been made to answer these questions through the analysis of plays selected for this research work.

This thesis brings together diverse issues of urban materiality and social change that are linked with the idea of city space which becomes the backdrop for all the selected plays of this thesis. For looking at how people work their ways to cope up with the deep disparities every chapter is framed with an interdisciplinary
investigation of a different urban question; or, to put it differently, since these questions are interrelated, every chapter looks at the postmodern city from a different angle, by combining concepts and perspectives. This study, therefore, is a broad investigation of the city life from a postmodernist and interdisciplinary point of view.

The theoretical frames for urbanism come largely from the West. The Indian English drama, to an extent, has the western intellectual orientation. The two playwrights chosen for the study, Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have adopted and explored certain theoretical concepts through their plays. These plays are located in the Indian urban space which is a hybrid created by the forces of globalisation. In a situation like this, it is very difficult to separate the Indian influences from the western.

The present study, therefore, is located in this hybridity where the theoretical framework has been taken from the western sources and the sociological representation from the Indian urban space. It explores the mutual and dynamic relation between urbanism, sociology and literature. From the beginnings its literary documentations, the modern and the postmodern literature has been related to cities and their cultures. However academic and conscious theorization about urbanism is a post modernist enterprise. It has produced a range of knowledge and understanding of the contemporary world. The way urban space is generated in social relationships and the manner in which social relations take distinct spatial forms in the cities are the key processes the thesis seeks to analyse. In urban sociology cities are not merely conceived as sites or arenas of social interaction but as spatial entities. Literary criticism would take another direction by entering the human relationships within this space.
Theories on Urban Space and Cities

Urbanism as a characteristic mode of life may be approached from three interrelated viewpoints: firstly it draws on as a physical structure comprising a population base, a technology, and an ecological order. Secondly it works as a system of social organization involving a characteristic social structure, a series of social institutions and typical pattern of social relationships. Finally it is imminent as set attitudes and ideas, and a constellation of personalities engaging in typical forms of collective behaviour and subject to characteristic mechanisms of social control.

There has been a long tradition of urban sociological imagination with writers and theorists as diverse as Georg Simmel (1903), Louis Wirth (1938), Manuel Castells (1942), Walter Benjamin (1985) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) and many more representing the city in diverse ways. The intellectual discourse of urbanism derives from the above mentioned European thinkers—mostly from the postmodernist period. Their contribution towards creating a poetics of the urban space is immense.

Georg Simmel in his most notable essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” 1903, analysed the effect of big city on the mind of the individual. He writes:

The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. The antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence.

(Simmel 324)
Simmel saw money as a major component of life that helps us understand the totality of life. He highlighted the impact of urban materiality on social change as he writes “For money expresses all qualitative differences of things in terms of ‘how much?’ Money, with all its colourlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values; irreparably it hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability. All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money” (Giddens 80).

Everything is measured in a metropolis is intellectual terms rather than in emotional terms. One can precisely see everything as measurable. Simmel termed it as “blasé”. He discusses that the city space produces new social relations and a new type of person. The continuous nervous stimulation due to crowded noisy and polluted urban space leads city dwellers to develop a defence mechanism where they respond to any shock with their intellect rather than emotions. The indifference stemming from the lack of emotional involvement is what he termed as ‘blasé.’

Prompted by the work of Simmel, and some important members of “Chicago School”, Louis Wirth grasped city as a spatial environment that influences individual behaviour. In his major work “Urbanism as a Way of Life” 1938, he discusses the concept of “an urban way of life” which he terms as a unique behaviour that city produces. Urbanism, according to him is a product of three empiric factors, namely large population size, density and heterogeneity (Simmel 1903).

Wirth insists that the interpersonal relations in city space are solely driven by selfish motives. He says that in contrast to rural dwellers the urban dwellers are more dependent on people for day-to-day interactions, producing “impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental” (1938) contacts and engendering “reserve, indifference and
a blase outlook” that people use to “immunize” themselves against the expectations of others. Wirth describes density as a socially differentiated specialization (Darwin’s theory of nature), which divides activities and complicates social ecology. Further, he refers to “Visual recognition,” by which urban dwellers are identified by their purpose but denied recognition of their personal traits, which provokes a cognitive separation by the observer on the basis of wealth, sophistication and belief. Wirth states that the daily interaction in the urban space is functionally close but socially distant which gives rise to a “relativistic perspective” that leads to tolerance. However, Wirth also mentions that density, as a self-satisfying masses in the urban space competing for scarce resources in a competitive environment, fosters “friction and irritation” and creates “nervous tensions” that add grist to the mill of social interaction (Hurme 50).

While referring to heterogeneity, Wirth proposes that urbanites are apt to have multiple group memberships going beyond social affinity he uses “group” to include political affiliation, neighbourhood, workplace, economic and cultural organizations. The tolerance of the group is directly linked with the size of the group. It blurs the ethnic and cultural barriers and increases anonymity and depersonalisation in the public life. Louis Wirth’s interest in city space, minorities and specially towards Jewish immigrants adjustment to life in urban America resulted in his famous work *The Ghetto* (1928). In this book he demonstrates the social isolation of ghetto life at first self-imposed and finally through a variety of extralegal mechanisms.

**Henri Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad**

During last thirty years there have been major changes in the perception about cities in urban theories. The urban research by the Chicago School in the 1970s centred upon the theory of human ecology. The most significant claim was that the
city is like a living organism that consists of interdependent parts; hence any activity in a single part would affect the whole (Kleniewski 24). But the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre's classic account of the city suggests that urban space is not just a neutral context for people and for structures. Instead, city space functions actively to influence socio-cultural processes, identities and, indeed, the ways in which the city itself is represented. This insight has led to productive conceptualisations of urban spaces as having inherent possibilities of shifting political formations.

Henri Lefebvre challenges the validity of the Gaston Bachelard's theory of urban space known as *Poétique de l'espace*, which is based on the idea of phantasmic inner spaces. Lefebvre uses semiotic approach to discuss the space favoured by modern, urban and architectural studies which opens up the arena of interdisciplinary articulation of anthropology, sociology and philosophy and challenges the traditional opposition between the empirical space and the mental spaces. Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991) gave the theoretical concept of a spatial triad. This triad refers to the physical, mental and social spaces, identified with the three moments, which are—the perceived, the conceived and lived spaces associated respectively with the physical, the mental and the social spaces.

For Lefebvre, space tends to be an instrument as it is “the principal stake of goal-directed actions and struggles” (Lefebvre 410). Space for him is more than a stage or setting of an action, an effect of a past, a history or a society; it is the medium, with its role as an instrument and as a goal. Particularly abstract space is the space of strategies; it is a master's project for a 'dominated' space, transformed and mediated by technology and practice.
Manuel Castells

Manuel Castells in his classic work, *The Urban Question* (1972) attacked the Chicago School of urban ecology of 1920s, Louis Wirth and Henri Lefebvre. The main critique was that the urban studies did not look at the processes of society as a whole and its failure to grasp the historical specificity of the urban form. Castells’ main endeavour in this work was to look at the urban as a theoretical object and the influence of space on social life. As a consequence, he discarded Wirth’s definition of the urban as built on dimension, density and heterogeneity.

In another work *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), Castells documented the power of identity. The book was a pioneering work aimed at understanding the minority organisation, women’s community mobilization and discussion of sexual orientation. According to him the City space has a potential to liberate and accommodate everyone. For people living outside the conventional norms city represents the only space of liberation. Castells describes social exclusion not as a condition but as a process as he writes: “Social exclusion is a process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically barred from access to positions that would enable them to have an autonomous livelihood in keeping with the social standards and values of a given social context” (Kendall 285).

Castells also conceptualised the term the “Fourth World” as he puts it, “The Fourth World is populated by millions of homeless, incarcerated, prostituted, criminalized, brutalized, stigmatized, sick and illiterate persons. They are the majority in some areas, the minority in others and a tiny minority in a few privileged contexts. But everywhere their numbers and visibility are increasing. In the current historical
context, the rise of the Fourth World is inseparable from the rise of informational, global capitalism” (Romero and Margolis 561).

**Walter Benjamin’s Flâneur**

Walter Benjamin a significant theorist in this discipline identifies the modern city as a cumulative reality of fabricated time and space in his famous work *One Way Street* (1928) in which he propounds that the city is both real and imagined. The city is the outcome of a variety of crises and conflicts, including the decline of manufacturing, growth of unemployment, and a polarisation between the socially excluded and the better off middle classes. For him the city and its inmates are intoxicating, fascinating, productive, creative and dreamy. Benjamin saw the *Flâneur’s* role as symptomatic of modernity. In Benjamin’s writings on the city life, the immediacy of what is new was pitted against the remoteness of the old and the meaning of these actualities was driven home through technologies of knowledge. The piling up of catastrophic changes in the name of history brought an understanding of hardened relics and their connection with everyday city life. The modern metropolis for Benjamin provides the primary spaces of the “phantasmagoria” of modernity. Benjamin was clearly influenced by surrealism and in turn, he became influential in creating insights on the modern city. In his own words “no face is as surrealistic in the same degree as the true face of the city” (Crang & Thrift 41).

Charles Baudelaire, the famous French poet, art critic is credited with coining the term ‘modernity’ to designate the ephemeral experience of the urban metropolis but his major contribution to urban sociology is in elaborating the meaning of *flâneur*, as a person who idly strolls about in the city in order to experience it. He says that the *flâneur* moves through the labyrinthine streets sharing the fearful pleasures, yet
remaining somewhat aloof from it. The use of the word *flâneur* by Baudelaire and numerous other theorists has resulted in its significant meaning as a referent for understanding urban phenomena and modernity and extended the whole notion of a stroller to a philosophical way of living and thinking. Baudelaire discussed his concept of *Flâneur* in an essay on *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) which P. E. Charvet translates (1972) as *The Dandy*:

> The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird’s and water that of fish. His passion and his profession are to merge with the crowd. For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer, it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen… The observer is a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes. (Web)

**Edward Soja’s “Thirdspace”**

Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad is further elaborated by the postmodern thinker Edward Soja in his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996) where he updated the concept of the spatial triad with his concept of spatial trialectics which includes Soja’s Third Space (Lefebvre’s social space) which is a combination of both the real (physical space) and the imagined (mental space). It means when the physical landscape is viewed through a conceptual spatial lens and experience, the outcome of that view does not exclude the physical and the mental spaces. This is what Soja termed as the ‘third space’. Soja simply suggests that we cannot study space in segregation. He asserts that only the third
spaces have the potential to be simultaneously an arena of both built that is real physical space and a social hybrid that is imagined space. The third spaces are created by effects of a changing culture, and are spaces of transition; transition between localities and over time. They relate to both poles of binary conceptions of cross-cultural space and yet at the same time entirely transcend them. More than the mental place, the third space, holds the possibility for socio-political transformation.

Since 1945, when the Second World War came to an end and until the early 1970s, the western world experienced a period of post war Depression followed later by economic recovery, sustained growth and rising standard of living. Though the concept of postmodernism was initially connected with the architecture of post war urban development; the practice of mixing a number of dissimilar elements of architectural styles in a single building sustained itself as a method of urban paradigms. The new orientation on spaces influenced the environment and human conduct in the city itself. This evolution of the urban habitat resulted in new thought processes of the inhabitants as well as academic theorists.

The postmodern architects acted consciously against the modernist notion of uniformity and functionality. For instance, David Harvey apart from concentrating on a distinct urban style also paid attention to the emerging and new urban spaces. It was observed that these urban spaces were not only linked with architecture but also determined cultural values. The most important aspect of this theorizing about space is the distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. Through such a perspective, the cities come to be conceived not only as sites and arenas of social interaction but as built up spatial entities which constitute the constraints and opportunities along a wide range (218).
Rather than attempting to analyze the city with an 'objective' approach, the postmodern writers stressed upon the existence of individuals in the cities. They employed the idea of 'pastiche', an array of separate yet co-existent thought processes which might also yield conflicting meta-narratives. Thus postmodern writers often celebrate the concept the holism. Postmodern theorists work on the concept of 'multivalence' over 'univalence', showing thereby the simultaneous functioning of a varied human society. (Savage & Warde 73) Similarly Monica Spiridon in her paper “The City of Texts”, comments:

Contemporary theorists identify symbolic mapping as one of the main arenas of social, cultural, racial, national, and gender identities. A significant side effect of this turn-around in post modern cultural theory is the influx of such categories as lieu, place, landscape, territory, architecture, topography, geography, mapping, region, realm, area, location, dwelling etc (169).

Freud's Concept of the Uncanny

In a similar way in the essay on the "uncanny", Freud’s analyses the concept of uncanny as very closely related to the present city space. Just as there is always a duality in the characteristics of the city, similarly the concept of the uncanny talks about instances where something can be familiar yet foreign at the same time. This concept of the uncanny has been taken up in many analyses of urban space. Freud meticulously constructs a story out of a sequence of images but his experience of "uncanniness" rests in the way in which time and space shift dreadfully. This shift is similar to the ambivalent nature of the city that shifts from conscious desires to unconscious motivation and turns desire into fear. Freud’s repeated return to the same
place indicates the labyrinthine nature of the narrow city street and the unconscious, unfulfilled wishes. Freud calls this mental process ‘dream work’ and identifies within it some key components: condensation, displacement and means of representation.

Another theorist Steve Pile in his work *The Body and The City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (1996) compares the city with the dream that is an active constituent of the story. Indeed the street activates the story. The book reflects on reinterpreting the ways in which geography has explored people’s mental maps and their deepest feelings about places. Pile depicts a different understanding of urban space produced out of psychoanalytic and geographical imaginations. Like Anthony Vidler, 1992, Graeme Gilloch 1996, he explores a wide range of critical thinking, particularly the work of Lefebvre, Freud and Lacan to present a path breaking psychoanalysis of space to re-imagine the city in less material ways.

Another theorist Katia Pizzi, in her paper “Self and the Modernist City: Stelio Mattioni and Trieste” presents the concept that perception of the city is closely intertwined with modernist literature. According to her the modernist mentality values the existential approach most. The idea and the representation of the real city are always mediated by the symbolic practices of self identification of the individual who is trapped within the vicious convulsions of the urban space.

The key characteristic of the city is the uneven development often characterised as “urban sprawl” (*London Times* 1955) Such conditions have often led to physical restructuring and consequent social and cultural relations. Cities have always been the repository of all sorts of myths and fantasies, some of which tend to see the cities as utopian sites of desire. On the other hand, the spaces could also turn into dystopian cities as sites of fear. It is no longer possible to study any one aspect of
the city. Instead cities need to be comprehended from a variety of perspectives; social, cultural, political, economical, historical and so on. A reading of the cities contours lead to a realization that the cities are not just confined to the planning of cultural discourse but also influence our ways of thinking, our identity as well as the public and the private opinions. Cities are represented and recreated in literature, films and other arts. The constructions of the city as an imaginary further have an effect on those who live in them. As Bridge and Watson put it: “Cities are not simply material or lived spaces—they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation” (7).

The city has a lasting effect on the imagination of the individual—like James Joyce’s ‘epiphanies’ or moments of realization and revelation which may appear in the everyday spaces of a city. Sometimes city and urban spaces tend to separate the self from the realms of imagination and creativity. As Bridge and Watson puts it, “Alienation is estrangement” (25). In this situation the city dwellers become a part of the material process that is an outcome of the social relations of production in capitalism. This viewpoint eventually leads to recognition of the fragmentation of the self as also the realization that the ‘real’ self is probably non-existent.

The city might, in a sense, be the site of sin. It connotes desires, fears and anxiety or, to use Freud’s phrase, the ‘uncanny’. For those, who exist outside the hetero-normative rules of the city such as gays, single women, eunuchs or for those who want to reject stereotypical images, the city represents a space of freedom. The city also works as a site of fantasy or even self realization. Drawing on memory and learning from the past in one’s relationship with the city is a part of self actualization. In Virginia Woolf’s The Years, the idea of self realization is suggested by Rose’s experience as she stands by the Thames alone, reflecting on the past events:
As she stood there, looking down at the water, some buried feeling began to arrange the stream into a pattern. The pattern was painful. She remembered how she had stood there on that night of certain engagement, crying....then she had turned... and she had seen the churches, the masts and roofs of the city. There's that, she had said to herself. Indeed it was a splendid view...she looked, and then again she turned. There were the Houses of Parliament. A queer expression, half frown, half smile, formed on her face and she threw herself slightly backwards. As if she were leading an army. (161)

Thus there is a clear suggestion of the juxtaposition of the material world with the subjective world. The city remains fixed but the identity of a person attached to it remains fluid. Rose visibly occupies a public space but mentally she inhabits the private space of her own. So the city is not just about physical space it is as much about the symbolic attachment and meaning that it provides to its inmates. Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani in their works have mapped this symbolic attachment and multiple meaning that city gives to its inmates not overtly but covertly resulting in a mindscape that constructs as well as asserts new identities.

**Concept of the Dual city**

The theme of the 'dual city', first popularised by the Victorian urban explorer has been recurrent in terms of references even in the present century. It has been a classic theme of urban sociology. The bipolar essence of a dual city is reflected in the spatializing of the social difference between the rich and the poor, the bourgeois and the proletariat, the indigenous population and the immigrants. The fresh binaries of
day and night, youth and age, insiders and outsiders have also been added to it. The chief characteristic of a dual city is an increased level of inequality (Catterall 204).

Scott Bukatman’s *Terminal Identity* is another example of cultural theory and philosophy. Bukatman redefines the nature of human identity in the information age. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary theories of the postmodern—including Fredric Jameson, Donna Haraway, and Jean Baudrillard—Bukatman begins with the proposition that the Western culture is suffering a crisis brought on by advanced electronic technologies. These technologies assist to make city life comfortable but ironically make humans slave with so much dependence on these that one feels incomplete without their presence.

**City Across Ages**

Archaeological research shows that the first settled urban areas were densely populated; appeared at the end of the Neolithic age, where the social and natural conditions of labour enabled the cultivators to produce more than they needed to subsist. At that time the city was the habitat adopted by those members of society whose direct presence at agricultural production was not necessary. The diffusion of the system of values, attitudes and behaviour came to be called the “Urban Culture”.

Thus, the above sense of demarcated spaces applies aptly to most of the spaces represented in the dramatic texts discussed in this study. The theatricality of an action is directly connected with the idea of a de-familiarising space. Here, the spectator has to look through an imaginary space in order to conceive the real in a performance. The constant redefining of the spaces of action and its perception and reception enable the audience to re-look at the familiar, everyday spaces and their significance.
In India’s context a vast majority of the urban population of the big metropolises live in slums, the “illegal” colonies without any basic civic rights or amenities. They are considered as the ‘other’ of the city, while being the index of the volatility of any communal riot or conflict. Tracking the growth of cities is a complex matter. Researchers have suggested that with time the city becomes more materialistic and as the city develops, it becomes more complex and the people in the city become more and more alienated. As the theorists tried to explain the city through conceptual systems, literary writers relied on imaginative systems.

The present study takes into account the factors that ascribe social and cultural values to the city space and the urban environment. This thesis is about the difference the city makes to the lives of people and assessment of the spaces they occupy in an urban settlement. The knowledge about the metropolis is a compartment of the knowledge people gain from their lived experience and socialization. In many important ways, city dwellers share certain values regardless of the particular city they inhabit or the history that has shaped their particular culture. City dwellers share this knowledge because they live within the densest and most specialized concentrations of people, information, built form and economic activity in an urban region.

Defining City Space in Theatre

In day to day life, all spaces are well defined in terms of their function and utility. For instance, at home, every nook and corner of the physical entity of the structure is marked by a sense of intimacy, privacy and safety. Theatre redefines this use of space. In case of urban usage of space, the theatrical representation of spaces is doubly significant in a traditional society like India, which is still in the process of
experiencing postmodernist ethos through the concept of the city. As Henri Lefebvre has pointed out in his work, *The Production of Space* that everyday life in the city is a constant movement through a typology of spaces. Lefebvre notes, “Any determinate and hence demarcated space necessarily embraces some things and excludes others; what it rejects may be relegated to nostalgia or it may be simply forbidden. Such a space asserts, negates and denies. It has some characteristics of a ‘subject’, and some of an object” (188).

Thus, the above sense of demarcated spaces applies aptly to most of the spaces represented in the dramatic texts discussed in this study. Interestingly, urban conflict, communal riots, among many other reasons, point to the ‘theatrical’ and ‘spectatorial’ aspects of violence in the cities, both small and large. These characteristics appear in theatrical representation and performance. Iyengar, defining the scope of Indian drama, said that it was supposed to “comprehend the whole arc of life, ranging from material to the spiritual, the phenomenal to the transcendental and provides at once, relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination” (244). His observation obviously refers to the fact that the city-space cannot be left outside the scope of drama if it has to reflect reality of contemporary life.

The prevalence of crime is also an important aspect of city life. Gill Valentine’s article “London’s Streets of Fear” (1992) refers to the concept of use of constrained space by women. The essay also highlights the concept of geography and projected crime as a social problem in the context of fear women experience in the city-space. The population density, residential segregation and social deprivation within a city have close bearing on the geography of crime against women in cities. Social problems in the cities have clear spatial expressions (90-102).
The rapidly developing urban spaces inspire artists, thinkers and critics because of their constant variability and diversity, as well as limitless possibilities. As Malcolm Bradbury puts it, "[t]here has always been a close association between literature and cities. There are the essential literary institutions [...] There, too, are the intensities of cultural friction and influences and the frontiers of experience" (Bradbury 96). The city arouses ambivalent attitudes and feelings in its inhabitants. It provides thrill because it offers opportunities for self realization; it arouses fear because of its vices and abhorrence because of the crudity of its life.

What urban literatures have in common is that they reflect the Bakhtinian heteroglossia that resonates in the texture of each city, at the centre of which lies an ultimate Otherness on the personal, social, cultural and political level that permeates and determines the modern city dweller’s everyday experience. By appropriating, juxtaposing and eventually reconciling distinct tendencies and phenomena the city urges such conflicts and controversies that find their vent in various literary forms. The city expresses itself in tendencies and phenomena which are controversial and dissonant. John Clement Ball in support of his argument that the best postcolonial narratives exploit the city as a natural milieu for resistant and oppositional voices says, "Cities, that is, may concentrate and exemplify forces to be resisted [...] but by gathering people and prompting spontaneous interaction, they also provide the space to resist those forces" (Ball 2.1).

The present thesis seeks to examine the way the city-space dominates the contemporary drama in India. City space has always been an integral part of modern literary texts. Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan are two most prominent authors of contemporary times who have written plays with an emphasis on great spatial sense. Their plays have city as the most influential factor in the course of their
action. The subject of city is too complex to be reduced to the idea of space. As discussed earlier Edward Soja’s Third Space refers to the fact that city space is not just a physical space but it also incorporates the mental space, which means that the characters in various plays written by Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan are in a way mentally conditioned due to the space in which they live in.

**Growth of the Indian English Drama**

Tracing the origin of Indian drama in English illuminates new perspectives related to the changes in themes that have taken a complete shift from being traditional to being modern. Since time immemorial drama has been a powerful medium of expression. Indian drama has been in existence since the Vedic era, mainly through rituals and ethnic practices. Since the ancient times, when larger-than-life aspects of experience formed the essence of Sanskrit drama, to the present times of new theatrical tradition of presentation of reality, when the other languages have begun to be accepted as part of our way of life, drama has evolved in a very significant way.

Among the Indian manuscripts, the *Natyasastra* is the oldest and the most authentic text on Indian *natya*. *Natya* is considered as the “fifth Veda” and is supposed to have been created by the god Brahma who asked the sage Bharata to put it into actual production and performance. *Natya* was created by gathering information about significant details from each of the four Vedas: ‘Pathya’ or recitative text from the *Rig Veda*, ‘geet’ or song and melody from the *Sam Veda*, ‘Abhinaya’ or histrionic representation from the *Yajur Veda* and ‘Rasa’ or sentiments from the *Atharva Veda* (Bhat vii). In the modern era, the popular mode of presentation has been that of an “unedited realism” of Indian social life. The introduction of
English drama in India added a contemporary dimension to the Indian *Natya*.

Bharata’s *Natyashastra* discuss the minutiae of ancient stagecraft and displays consciousness of all aspects of drama, namely, stage setting, dialogue, characterisation, plot construction, music, acting.

The most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwaghosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidas, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Visha-Khadatta, Bhattanarayana, Murari and Rajeshkhora, who enriched the Indian theatre with their works like *Madhya-Mavyaayoda,* *Urubhangam, Karnabharan, Mrichkatikam, Abhigyana Shakuntalam,* *Malankagnimitram, Uttar Ramcharitam, Mudrarak, Shasa, Bhagavadajjukam,* *Mattavilasa* etc. The supreme achievement of Indian Drama undoubtedly blossomed in the works of Kalidasa. Sanskrit drama flourished under the patronage of the court till the twelfth century but gradually ceased to be performed on the stage and entered a period of decadence. The “Jatras” of Bengal, “Satharam” of Tamil Nadu, “Yakshaganas” of Andra and Karnataka, the “Kathakali” of Kerala, the “Kirtaniya” of Mithila, the “Bhavai” of Gujarat and Ramlila of north India—all these forms of entertainment represent the gradual transition of the Indian theatre from the classical form to the modern.

The English drama in India dates back to the early nineteenth century coinciding with the advent of English education which resulted in the Indian renaissance by interacting with the native forces. Though English education was formally introduced to meet the dire need for desk clerks, translators and lower official administration in the colonial government, it was also useful in spreading the colonizers’ language among the native people. The gradual spread of English education and western thought brought forth a category of earnest Indians who drank deep at the fountain of European learning. The social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy
strongly favoured western education. In 1816, he established an association to promote European learning and science. This was the first step towards the founding of Hindu college. He established a school in Suripara to teach English to the boys at his own expense. He also founded Anglo Hindu School in Calcutta. Macaulay’s famous Minute on Education, announced on 2 Feb. 1835, permanently stamped English education in India. However, one must remember that two decades prior to Macaulay’s Minute of 1835, Indians had started writing in English. As M.K. Naik puts it, “Cavelley Venkata Boriah’s Account of Jains published in Asiatic Research or Transaction of the Society Instituted in Bengal for Inquiry into the History and Antiquities, the Art, Science and Literature of Asia, Vol. IX (London, 1809, written in c.1803) is perhaps the first published composition in English of some length by an Indian” (Naik 13).

The influence of the western regime marked the dawn of a new renaissance of the Indian arts including drama. As Krishna Kriplani points out, the modern Indian drama “...owed its first flowering to the foreign grafting” (40). The introduction of the English language in India gave an impetus and a momentum to the critical study of not only Western drama, but also the classical Indian drama. During this period various English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare’s, in cities like Bombay and Madras. The Portuguese brought a form of Dance Drama to the West coast. The Russian music director, Rebedoff is said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta towards the end of the 18th century. Thus, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his introduction to Drama in Modern India, observes that the western impact was “to awaken the dormant, critical impulse in the country to bring Indians face to face with new forms of life and literature, and to open the way for a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and
forms of expression" (4). In 1765, a Russian drama lover Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev founded the first European-style proscenium drama theatre in India. This theatre opened in Calcutta in 1795. Lebedev translated two plays into Bengali; they were *Love is the Best Doctor* and *The Disguise*. These were the first English performances in the theatre, with music composed by Lebedev himself and lyrics borrowed from the Bengali poet Bharatchandra Ray. But the real beginning was in 1831 when Prasanna Kumar Thakur established “Hindu Rangmanch” at Calcutta and staged Wilson’s English Translation of Bhavabhuti’s Sanskrit drama *Uttar Ramacharitam*. The social drama of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the historical drama of D.L. Roy and the artistic drama of Rabindranath Tagore (*Muktadhara, Chandalika*) continued to be staged during the period of the worst-ever famines of Bengal and the Second World War. In 1852-1853, the famous Parsi Theatre was launched in Bombay which influenced the drama movements across the country in no time. Postagi Pharmji was the pioneer in establishing the Parsi Theatre company in India. Many new theatre experiences were brought up on stage during Parsi Theatre evolution in India. On the other hand, the amateur theatre also developed with the works of Bharatendu Harishchandra, acclaimed as the father of the early Indian drama in Hindi.

Indian English drama actually began to be noticed as an important genre when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes: Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta* in 1831. Another playwright Ramkinoo Dutt wrote *Manipur Tragedy* in the year 1833. During this period the plays took a hybrid form because they were mainly translations from the vernacular. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, known primarily as a poet, translated three of his own Bengali plays into English—*Ratnavali* (1858) *Shermishtha* (1859) and *Is This Called*
Following this period of efflorescence, English drama in India underwent a considerable decline.

The form revived in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when the great maestros such as Shri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyay created their inspiring works. Plays written at that time were based on popular Hindu myths or historical events and sometimes they took position as weapons of protest against the British Raj. Shri Aurobindo’s plays bear the testimony to his profound knowledge of the eastern and the western thoughts. He has written eleven verse plays and all of these are poetic dramas. Aurobindo’s plays are mostly constructed on the Elizabethan model with the added flavour of Sanskrit drama. For his mastery of languages such as Sanskrit, Bengali and English, he is designated as the lord of language. Out of his five complete plays in English, Rodogune is a modified version of Cornille’s French play. Shri Aurobindo’s major plays are The Witch of Ilni, Viziers of Bassora, Rodogune and Persius the Deliverer.

The interesting feature of Aurobindo’s drama is that it encompasses a variety of locales such as Syria, India, Spain, Britain, and Norway and periods ranging from the Elizabethan era in England to the troubles of Medieval India. The use of the English blank verse is flawless in Aurobindo and in tune with the characters and situations. We also find the strong impact of Sanskrit playwrights like Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti on him, as Dr. K. R. S. Iyenger observes: “But all five plays are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti. Though, of course all have Aurobindonian undertones” (Iyengar 226).

Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s experience in theatre began at the age of sixteen when he played the lead role in his brother Jyotirindranath’s adaptation of Civilization? (1871).
Moliere’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Well read in classical Sanskrit literature, Vedas, Upanishads and Indian epics, his works were mainly inspired by these scriptures. He wrote his first play *Valmiki Pratibha (The Genius of Valmiki)* at the age of twenty. As he was both a mystic and a philosopher, his language is lyrical and transcendental. Tagore’s other notable plays include *Visarjan (Sacrifice), Chitrangada, Raktakarabhi (Red Oleander) Natir Puja, Raja (King of Dark Chamber)* and *Mayar Khela (The Play of Illusions)*.

Another playwright who has made significant contribution to the growth of Indian English drama is Harindranath Chattopadhay. He started his career as playwright with *Abu Hassan* (1918). There are seven verse plays to his credit published under the title *Poems and Plays* (1927) and all the seven plays are based on the lives of the Indian saints. His anthology *Five Plays* (1929) is written in prose. Two out of these—*The Window* and *The Parrot* deal with the lives of the poor, whereas *The Sentry’s Lantern* symbolizes the expectation of the advent of a new age for the downtrodden people. *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* is a unique effort to dramatise Gautam Buddha’s life.

A. S. P. Ayyar, T. P. Kailasam and Bharati Sarabhai also contributed to the growth of Indian English drama. Ayyar wrote about six reformist plays. Two collections of his plays are *Sita’s Choice and Other Plays* (1935) and *The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays* (1941). Another significant name in the history of Indian English Drama is P. A. Krishnaswamy whose fame rests chiefly on his unusual verse play *The Flute of Krishna*. This play was widely read due to mythological and religious background but failed to achieve any success on stage.
T.P. Kailasam wrote both in English and Kannada but his fame resides on his Kannad-Anglo plays which are rich in humour. Though Kailasam is regarded as the father of modern Kannada drama, his genius finds its full expression in his English plays as well. Some of his well known works are The Brahmin’s Curse and Purpose. G. S. Amur rightly remarks “A talented actor who appeared on the amateur as well as the professional stage, he brought to the writing of drama an intimate knowledge of the theatre. It is for this reason that his plays whether in Kannada or English, have a uniform technical excellence” (Amur 186). Bharati Sarabhai shows a trenchant influence of Gandhian views. Sarabhai’s The Well of the People (1943) is a highly regarded play in Indian English.

After India’s Independence in 1947, English drama typically epitomized the socio-political and economic status of the free nation. But there came a lean phase in the growth of Indian English drama. The first five year plan of the Government of India encouraged the performing arts by establishing the National School of Drama in New Delhi. Many institutions for dramatics training came up in big cities; Departments of Drama were set up in various universities. The National Drama Festival staged by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1954 gave an impetus to the development of drama in India.

During this period a few Indian playwrights marked their presence in the history of Indian English drama. The first major Indian English playwright in the post independence era is Asif Currimboy who wrote more than thirty plays. Currimboy’s work is characterized by variety and versatility, dealing with contemporary political events and social issues. Some of his important plays are The Tourist Mecca (1959), The Doldrumness (1960) Goa (1964), An Experiment With Truth (1969) and The Dissident M L A (1974). The historical and the political themes of the Indian take-
over of Goa are used in the play *Goa*. Another play *An Experiment with Truth*, as the title indicates, is a dramatization of the later life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Other playwrights of significance are Girish Karnad, G. V. Desani, Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel and Gurcharan Das. G. V. Desani the author of one play *Hali* (1950) to his credit needs a mention due to its huge success here and abroad. Described as a “Poem Play” (Naik, 256) it was about every person’s quest. Another author who deserves mention is Gurcharan Das, who has written three plays *Larin Sahib, Meera* and *9 Jakhoo Hill*. While *Larin Sahib* is a historical play set in the turbulent period after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when the British first arrived in Punjab, *9 Jakkho Hill* is set in the autumn of 1962 in Shimla. The play is about the changing social order with the rise of a new middle class, the incestuous obsessions of an ageing uncle, the hold of Indian mothers on their sons and the betrayal of sexual love.

Another name of significance in the History of Indian English Drama is Pratap Sharma who wrote two prose plays *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has a War Cry* (1970). His plays were staged successfully abroad but they failed to make any mark in the country. One of the biggest reasons for this was sex as the prime theme of his plays. However, Sharma shows a keen sense of situation and effective dialogues that make him worthy of being a predecessor of contemporary drama. Though the fame of Nissim Ezekiel rests on his exceptional poetic creed but he also has rare dramatic sensibility. Nissim Ezekiel’s *Three Plays* (1969) including *Nalini: A Comedy, Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy and The Sleep Walkers: An Indo-American farce* are considered to be welcome addition to the dramaturgy of Indian English drama. *Songs of Deprivation* (1969) is also a short play by Ezekiel.
Indian drama in English and Indian drama in English translation has made various successful experiments on the basis of thematic concerns. It has been increasing dependent on history, legend, myth and folklore. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sirkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad are the main proponents of Indian Drama and prepared the background of contemporary Indian English theatre. They have dramatized universal aspects of modern human life in India.

Girish Karnad, basically a Kannad playwright is versatile personality. Karnad substantially contributed to the Indian English Theatre and made his mark as a playwright, actor, and director. He has translated his own plays such as Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana and The Fire and the Rain among others. By incorporating myths in the contemporary social system he set a unique trend of depicting the absurdity of modern life by taking ideas from various myths and legends. He borrowed his plots from history, mythology and old legends but combined these with intricate symbolism. He tried to establish their relevance in contemporary socio-political conditions. The play Yayati reinterprets an ancient myth from Mahabharata in the modern context. The plot of the play Hayavadana is adapted from Katha Saritsagar, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit.

**Tughlaq** is Karnad’s best historical play where he mingles facts with fiction. Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. In the play Tale Dande, he discovers the vital relationship between contemporary society and literature. His use of myth as a structure and metaphor in his plays gives new meaning to the past from the present point of view. In the play Nagmandala, the conflict is between patriarchal and matriarchal values. It is about the life of Rani, a typical Indian woman in male dominated society. She is married to Appanna, a wealthy village youth. The focus in the play is on sexual
liberty of sexes: male and female. In order to counter male dominance, Karnad adopts a strange device in which King Cobra gets sexually involved with Rani and ultimately she has to pass through chastity ordeal.

Another important playwright of this era is Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar began his career as a journalist but from the very first play *Grihasth* in 1955 to *Safar* in 1992, his plays have given Indian theatre a rich and challenging repertoire. Vijay Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of the Indian dramatists of the century to depict the agony of being part of a suffocating middle class society. All his plays focus upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Tendulkar was greatly influenced by Antonin Artaud, due to which he usually relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or disgusting in human nature as he believes that human being is born with the spirit of aggression without which man might turned into vegetable.

While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy trapping rather he keeps it raw and natural. The plays *Chimanicha Ghor Hote Menache* (1960) *Kalojanchi Shalai* (1968), *Ek Holti Mugli* (1967) reflect Tendulkar’s concern with an oppressive authority and the idea of exploitation of individual. In the plays *Silence! The Court Is In Session* (1968) and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), the theme of oppression dominates. *Sakharam Binder* (1972) is a study in human violence. The play is a powerful dramatic statement. *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadaan* (1982) are written in the naturalistic tradition. *Kamala* deals with the theme of women’s exploitation. *Kanyadaan* is a complex play about the cultural and emotional upheavals, a family goes through. Tendulkar was associated with New Theatrical
Movement in Maharashtra. He presents a fictional reality in which the reality of life acquires a sharp focused character having rare dramatic power.

Another important contemporary playwright Badal Sarcar, representing New Theatrical Movement created an appropriate ‘people’s theatre’ a theatre supported and created by people. His dramatic career began with a humorous play Solution X. All these plays are based on political, social, psychological and existential problems. His earlier plays are Evan Inderjit (1962), That Other History (1964) and There Is No End (1971). Evan Inderjit, is the story of a playwright who struggles in vain to write a play. In There’s No Need Sarcar develops the thesis that “We are all accused” and hence share the burden of guilt. Afterwards, he wrote Pary Konodin, Jadi Aur Ek Baar, Palap and Pagla Ghoda. His later plays Procession, Bhoma and Stale News are based on the concept of “Third Theatre”. The play Procession is about the search for a ‘real home’ in the new society based on equality. Sarcar’s first contact with Jerzy Grotowski’s ‘Poor Theatre’ influenced him greatly in formulating his Third Theatre.

Another playwright of genius is Mohan Rakesh, basically a Hindi playwright irrespective of language needs a special mention in the thesis for the exceptional dramatic relevance to contemporary reality. His plays have been translated in English and other regional languages. He published his first major play Ashadh Ka Ek Din in 1958, Leharon Ke Rajhansa appeared in 1963 and Adhe Adhure was first staged in 1969. The play Pair Tale Ki Zamin was completed by Kamleshwar after his death and published in 1974. As a playwright, his main concern was to portray the crisis of contemporary man caught in the web of uncongenial surroundings which are a persistent threat to human relationships. Mohan Rakesh perceived drama as a complex art involving an equal contribution of actors, scenic effects, light and music and effective stage direction. He used words and languages not as dialogues or direct
Statements but as the tools of suggestion to convey the meaning beyond the verbal
connotation. In Ashadh Ka Ek Din, he highlights the dangers of sycophancy. In
Leharon Ka Rajhans, he reflects on the problem of relations between man and
woman, ego clashes, divided self and ongoing illusion and nothingness. Adhe Adhure
deals with the clash of ego between a husband and his wife, disintegration of family
relationships, the importance of individual interest against the commitments of the
family. His work usually highlights the realism of the Indian metropolis. Rakesh’s last
full length play Adhe Adhure (1969) (Halfway House) as a drama about urban
dysfunction.

Among some other playwrights to have won accolades are Vijay Paduki, Poile
Sengupta and Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani. Vijay Paduki writes with a
minimalist approach using plot and dialogue in a way that leaves space for the actors
to improvise. Poile Sengupta is a committed playwright with strong feminist view-
points. Poile’s works Mangalam, Alipha, Thus Spake Shoroopnakha and So Said
Shakuni have made a strong impact on the Indian English drama.

In context of India it is worth acknowledging that a vast majority of the urban
population of the big metropolises live in slums, “illegal” colonies without any basic
civic rights or amenities. They are considered as the ‘other’ of the city and also the
index of the volatility of any communal riot or conflict. Tracking the growth of cities
is a complex matter. Researchers have suggested that with time the city becomes more
materialistic. As it develops it become more complex and the people become more
and more alienated. As the theorists tried to explain the city through conceptual
systems, writers of literature relied on imaginative systems.
The present thesis deals with the way social and cultural values to the city space and the urban environment are ascribed to the city space. It explores the difference it makes to people and their valuation of space they live and act in an urban settlement. Metropolitan knowledge is a subset of the knowledge people gain from their lived experience and value socialization. In many important ways, city dwellers share their space regardless of the particular city they inhabit or the history that has shaped their particular culture. City dwellers share this knowledge because they live within the densest and most specialized concentrations of people, information, built form and economic activity in an urban region.

Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have given a new direction to Indian English Drama with their works that challenge the traditional connotation of the word Indian. Both the playwrights have written city centric plays that discuss an array of themes that are topical as well as controversial.

Often equated with luminaries like Henrik Ibsen and Tennessee Williams in stagecraft, Mahesh Dattani is, perhaps, amongst the most important contemporary playwrights. He has demonstrated that Indian drama in English can function as a major genre of social critique. His plays combine the intimate with the social, and the personal with the public, often exploring the boundaries between the two realms. In 1998, Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of plays Final Solution and Other Plays. He became the first playwright writing in English to receive this award since its inception in 1955.

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7 August 1958, in a Gujarati family settled in Bangalore. The fascination for theatre was inculcated in the young Dattani through his parents who often visited theatres in Bangalore to watch Gujarati plays with their
children so as to keep them in touch with their roots. Dattani, therefore, developed fondness for theatre in his childhood and became deeply involved in it in his school days only. Later on he acted in plays and then directed plays and started his theatre company. In the beginning his interest was in translation and direction of plays. The drama of Vijay Tendulkar had a profound impact on Dattani. Tennessee Williams’ drama also inspired Dattani. In an interview with Sachidananda Mohanty, he observes:

Well, I was particularly impressed by the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. Actually, that was one of the reasons why I decided to write myself, because when I saw plays in Hindi or Gujarati and I managed to acquire the translation, they just didn’t have the same impact. *Silence, the Court is in Session* was such a brilliant play, but I felt that the translation in English threw away most of the effect. Later on, it was Tennessee Williams. I relate to Tennessee Williams because he writes about vulnerable women in a very violent society. I think I tend to do that as well, although I don’t see my women as vulnerable, in the sense that they do fight their battles. They are not on the winning side of the battle, and I think I have learnt a lot about dramatic structure. (qtd. in B K Das 5)

Mahesh Dattani was educated in Baldwin’s High School and St. Joseph’s College of Arts and Science, Bangalore, where he studied History, Political Science and Economics for his graduation course. During this time Dattani joined Bangalore’s Little Theatre and participated in acting workshops and directing plays. At Alliance Francaise de Bangalore (1984-87) he took training in western ballet. Dattani also learned Bharatnatyam under Chandrabhaga Devi and Krishna Rao in Bangalore
during 1986-90. He took his post-graduation degree in marketing and advertising management. Dattani began his professional life as an advertising copywriter and subsequently worked with his father in the family business. In 1984, he formed his theatre group Playpen, and directed several plays ranging from classical Greek to contemporary works. Dattani’s first full length play came in 1986, *Where There’s A Will*. From 1995 he has been dedicating his full time to theatre. In 1998, he set up his own theatre studio for the budding talents in acting, directing and stage writing. Dattani’s training programme was the first in the country to focus specifically on contemporary drama.

A man of multifaceted capabilities, Mahesh Dattani is not only a dedicated playwright but he is also a talented director, actor, filmmaker, teacher and screenplay writer. Many of his plays are adopted into films like *Dance Like a Man, Morning Raga* and *Mango Soufflé*. His films have been screened in India and abroad to critical and public acclaim. The film adaptation of *Dance Like a Man* has won recognition for the best picture in English awarded by the National Panorama. Apart from this, Mahesh Dattani writes plays for BBC Radio 4. He also teaches courses at the summer session programme of Portland State University, Oregon, USA and conducts theatre workshops in India and abroad. It was mentioned in the Sahitya Akademi Award citation (1998) that "[Dattani’s work] probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal difference, consumerism and gender… a brilliant contribution to Indian drama in English" (*Collected Plays* Blurb).

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most successful playwrights in the current scenario and his plays have proved to be commercially viable. One of the reasons for his success is his use of lucid and lively language but another reason is the contemporary themes that he focuses upon. He has sometimes been labelled as an
“elitist writer” due to his use of English, because, in India, English as a medium of expression is often attached to concepts of power and privilege. Some critics appear critical about the themes of his plays which according to them are “not Indian”. For instance, *Bravely Fought the Queen* (2000), with its depiction of homosexuality, was perceived as “not Indian” and Dattani was attacked by his critics for being unmindful of the rudimentary problems of existence for most Indians. In a strange reversal of this comment, his play *Final Solutions* had been banned from The Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in 1992 because it showed “what is happening out there on the streets” (Ramaswamy 35). As an Indian playwright in English, Mahesh Dattani is trapped between being “unaware of the reality” and at the same time being “too real.” Just by presenting the stark conditions of the cosmopolitan Indian cities, which no one wants to accept as being a part of the Indian lifestyle, he has been accused of not writing or depicting “true India”.

The introduction of English education in India brought status to the English language. As known from Macaulay’s Minutes, the intention was to create a cadre of people, who would think and speak like the British and could be used as the primary instruments of control over the Indians. We know from history that the English created, maintained and strengthened a kind of distance between the English educated Indians and their countrymen. The residue of this linguistic stratification is visible in Dattani’s plays; which speak of contemporary and independent India where the abovementioned distinction persists. The differences among the classes are established with subtleness. In his plays the constable, auto rickshaw driver, or even the poor people of some Gujarati village speak English but the difference between the language spoken by a common man and by any educated high class character is very clearly demarcated through the choice of vocabulary.
Raja Rao’s views about the English language can very well be applied to the use of English by Dattani:

.... We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it. (vii)

Dattani’s pen innovatively portrays the life in metros of the twenty first century India. The language that he uses is authentically Indian, as the speech pattern and vocabulary contains the cadence of bilingual speakers. Though all his characters speak English, the accent and vocabulary illustrate the class identity. This strategy had never been attempted by any other Indian English dramatist.

Another technique used by Dattani is “staging the audience” (Multani, 22). The conversation between the characters becomes almost a part of audience’s consciousness and the audience feels connected with the people on the stage. For example, in the play Dance Like a Man the conversation of Viswas with Lata and her parents easily establishes the gap between the them, making Viswas somewhat of a comic figure and Lata and her parents “the other” as they belong to different social and economic segments. There is hardly any meeting ground that one can see in respect of both the parties speaking in English. The audience, however, Dattani seems to believe, has the capacity to transact a relationship with both the worlds.

Apart from the theme, the characterization makes Dattani’s plays highly enjoyable. Dattani is an astute observer and effectively captures the nuances of the
world he is talking about. Without giving his personal comments or judgments he just portrays the emotions of the dramatic personae as they are—their hypocrisy, their prejudices, their dilemmas—nothing is left untouched; these elemental issues are dealt with powerfully in his drama. Dattani does not provide a conclusive ending but allows his audiences and readers an opportunity to engage with the issues on the stage and come up with their own perspectives. His is a theatre of engagement. For him as he said in an interview to Anita Nair, “The theatre is a collective experience and the audiences have to finish in their own heads what the playwright began” (Nair web).

The canvass of Dattani’s drama is vast. His plays focus on the family, alternate sexuality, morality, gender issues, identity and marginality in society. The family setting used by Dattani gradually heads towards fragmentation as the relationships disintegrate and so does the visual setting. Almost all his major plays including Dance Like a Man, Tara, Seven Steps Around the Fire and Bravely Fought the Queen present this fragmentation resulting in the portrayal of individual suffering. Dattani writes on the burning topics that may be of social import like communalism in Final Solutions or marital issues as in Do the Needful. But whatever he writes, touches the hearts of his readers and audience. There is no didacticism or preaching in his plays. There is, however, a touch of humour and irony. For example, his play Dance Like a Man focuses on the Bharatnatyam dancers; Jairaj, Ratna, their daughter Lata and her boyfriend Viswas. The play reflects upon the construction of maleness and masculinity as Jairaj being a man, chooses to be a dancer, a profession which is associated with feminine qualities. Not only does the play question the male construct but it also talks about “femaleness”. Ratna, wife of Jairaj is portrayed as a highly ambitious woman who dominates the play by presenting so-called anti-feminine qualities of dominance and control. Judith Butler says.
If gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way... Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of men or that “women” will interpret only female bodies. (6)

According to Butler, gender itself is performative. There is no original male or masculine and female or feminine. Dattani in his plays poses questions asks about gender identity and the social constructs that separate male/ female attributes. Mahesh Dattani also gives a special place to the construct of marginalized in his plays by articulating the pain of the silenced entities and by giving voice to the voiceless. In almost all his plays, core-periphery model is presented.

Dattani strongly and objectively presents his marginalized characters. The marginality is not only confined to the issue of gender, but Dattani gives voice to all human beings—such as the people who do not fall under any obvious category such as eunuchs. He also presents homosexuals who cannot fit into a conventional Indian society. Dattani gives them the position that many playwrights have ignored. He also foregrounds the prejudices associated with man as the ultimate oppressor. According to Dattani, even men could be marginalized, trapped in the “cultural construct” for being strong and “masculine”. Men too suffer due to cultural expectations. This theme is explored in Dance Like a Man. Through his works Dattani gives voice to the sexually abused and the HIV positive patients as in Thirty Days in September and in the screenplay Ek Alag Mausam.

Mahesh Dattani also speaks for the disabled. His play Tara deals with the issue of disability in great depth by presenting social, personal as well as
psychological aspects. “If we look at the social attitude towards the disabled in India” says Shilpa Das “…there is a negative and exclusionary social construct of disability” (Das 10) in the Indian society. Particularly women suffer more due to gender and disability. This also results in the overreaction of the parents who assume their daughter to be “doubly vulnerable” (Das 17) because of being both female and disabled. Moreover, Dattani’s concern takes him to the dark world of sexually abused children. His play Thirty Days in September deals with two women sufferers of incest. Though he writes about the marginalized, he brings them centre stage to articulate their silent screams.

Another issue that Mahesh Dattani deals with is motherhood and gender bias in the Indian patriarchal system. A woman is considered “complete” only when she achieves motherhood. Indian epics and mythology endorse images of motherhood in terms of male children. Mother-daughter images are never a part of the assumption of a fulfilled motherhood. Not only in India but almost everywhere in the world, the image of mother-son predominates. Even in Christianity Mary Madonna is always seen with Jesus Christ, a male Child. These images perpetuate the impression that a woman’s experience of motherhood is not complete unless she gives birth to a male child (Singh159-160).

It is well known that Indian society is culturally biased towards the male child due to its patriarchal set up. A son is wanted for various social, religious, economic and cultural reasons such as continuity of family name, old age security, economic support and for performing the last rites. This aspect of the Indian society is presented by Dattani in Tara and Seven Steps Around the Fire. In Tara we see the battle of choice between a male and a female child. The play refers to Siamese twins joined at birth having three legs who are to be physically separated by pediatric surgery.
Though the possibility of accepting the third common leg is greater in Tara’s body, the mother opts to take this leg from the daughter in the expectation of granting physical perfection and strength of her son. This play is a perfect example of the neglect of a girl child and the preference for the boy. The patriarchal beliefs are so entrenched that the mother does not realize that she is harming her daughter through neglect of many kinds. Through Tara’s mother Bharati, an agent of patriarchy, Dattani exposes the willing instruments of this vicious cycle in which women are largely complicit. The play also raises queries about parenting responsibilities towards the disabled.

Another issue, communalism is handled by Dattani in the play Final Solutions. It presents the prevalent attitudes of Hindus and Muslims towards each other. No solution is given in the play but it raises questions on secularism and pseudo secularism. The story revolves around a Hindu family that gives refuge to two Muslim boys during communal riots. Dattani uses this family as a microcosm of India and traces the Hindu Muslim conflict through three generations.

Apart from social issues, Dattani also discusses some unspoken and muted subjects in his plays. He often writes about alternate sexuality. Alternate sexuality comprises any form of sexuality that does not conform to the norms of society. It includes homosexuals, heterosexuals and transsexuals. Plays like On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Bravely Fought the Queen, Do the Needful and Seven Steps Around the Fire address these issues. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is about gay couples and about social circumstances and compulsions that force them to become heterosexuals. Kamlesh, the protagonist confesses to his friends that he is still in love with Ed (now Prakash) but it comes as a surprise and shock when Kamlesh’s sister Kiran comes to reveal that she is going to marry Prakash (Kamlesh’s former lover Ed). Later, an
intimate photograph of Kamlesh and Ed reveals their relationship. The play poses the question of identity and real life problems of gay people. *Do the Needful* is a radio play that questions the Indian arranged marriage system. It establishes a mutual understanding between a couple who have their own love interest as Alpesh is gay and his wife Lata is in love with a Kashmiri terrorist. They make their own separate niche in this patriarchal system that does not allow any space for these relations.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen* the issue of alternate sexuality is an important concern. One of the brothers in the play is a homosexual but more specifically the play interrogates patriarchy. Similarly, the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* deals with the issue of the transgender community, also known as the “third gender” or “hijra” in India. The play revolves round the murder mystery of a eunuch. Dattani exposes the dehumanized conditions in which they live and the rough treatment that is meted out to them by society. Through this play, Dattani also articulates their wish for self respect, identity and understanding in society.

Dattani gives his characters powerful words to express themselves. The plays try to dissolve the boundary between the core and periphery in social patterns. All radio plays, written by him for BBC Radio 4 have foregrounded the underprivileged by letting them speak. *Clearing the Rubble* and *The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* describes the intense pain and helplessness of the poor people affected by natural disasters such as earthquake and drought, portraying the true picture of rescue work done by government. *Clearing the Rubble* was written in response to the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat. *The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* is a powerful monologue of an English woman who revisits India to save the family of her long lost lover. The play very beautifully brings to the fore the affinities of two different worlds bound with the thread of understanding. In his detective plays *The Swami and the*
Winston and Uma and the Fairy Queen, Dattani presents the “successful sleuth” (Mortimer, viii) Uma Rao. Through these plays the audience and readers “are led to face up to the questions of sexual identity, religious faith, family ties and the feeling for their children” (Mortimer viii).

The most notable aspect of Dattani’s work is the use of stage. For him it is not just a space but a multidimensional area in which vital incidents placed in time may be viewed and assessed. Dattani challenges the traditional denotative and connotative meanings of India and Indians and usually explores the “Invisible Issues” of the Indian society that are usually considered taboo like child sexual abuse, exploitation on the basis of gender and religion, exploitation of eunuchs, homosexuals, disabled. He gives voice to every marginalized section through their depiction in his plays.

It is true that the modern life in the urban space has been responsible for many existential problems for man. This is a result of social, economic and moral dilemma emanating urban materiality. Dattani and Padmanabhan brings into being the realistic vision of the city and its sensibility almost in all their plays. City as a social force works for an organic entity and presents an ambivalent vision of human relationship. Whenever characters created by these two playwrights fail in realising the pulse beat of time and the changing social system, they meet their predicament that ends in miseries and sufferings. Their resistance to the negative and cruel social forces sometimes baffles them, but they don’t lose the will to win.

The city always baffles and nullifies the pleasure-loving and nerve-soothing instincts of the protagonist due to its overbearing presence. Nobody is happy here. Even death mocks at those who apparently seem happy. In the disenchantment and disillusionment, usually the character undergoes the metamorphosis that results in
experiencing a vision. He searches constantly for human and moral values. The characters mostly suffer from the self-created problems like over-reaching ambitions, fantasy, illusiveness, greed, raving jealousy and sometimes demeaning human emotions. Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have also portrayed the similar city-centric themes in their plays.

Born in Delhi in 1953, Manjula Padmanabhan had a fairly itinerant childhood, followed by several years in boarding school as a teenager as her father was a diplomat. She grew up in Sweden, Pakistan, Thailand and now lives in Delhi. After attending college, she was associated with the fields of publishing and media. She was also associated with creation of comic strips as an artist and also wrote the newspaper columns and devised scripts for television. Her early knowledge of theatre was shaped by exposure to Shakespeare’s work and Broadway musicals but, after returning to India in her teens, she became aware of such notable dramatists as Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, whose *Tughlaq* was the first modern Indian play she had ever seen performed.

Her writings reflect little about her personal life. Her versatile genius is reflected in her oeuvre that has enriched the Indian English Drama. As already pointed out, her pioneering play *Harvest* bagged Onassis Award and got tremendous popularity throughout the world. She portrays a mean and moribund world where mothers sell their children for ‘the price of rice’. *Harvest* deals with a miserable family dwelling in a single room in a *chawl* in Mumbai. Population explosion is responsible for the increasing pauperization and dehumanisation of the city people. Om a young man of twenty, driven by hunger and unemployment, makes up his mind to become an organ donor and ultimately mortgages his body to a white first world
buyer. Another important earlier work, *Lights Out!* examines communal apathy in relation to a gang rape.

Many playwrights of modern India including Padmanabhan feel that their dramatic endeavours are occasionally frustrated as a result of the generally weak infrastructure of India's English language theatre, which is not so well resourced and inclined to stage well known foreign plays catering to a westernized elite. With these constraints in mind, she says that she wrote *Harvest* knowing it would surely languish in a filing cabinet unless it won something in the Onassis competition (Gilbert 214). Fortunately, the prestigious award has ensured a very different fate for the play: it was given a much-lauded production in Greece as part of the prize benefit and has since been broadcast by BBC Radio, as well as translated into German, and adapted for a film version in Hindi that is soon to be released under the title of *Deham*.

She has also written such plays as *Lights Out!* (1984), *Hidden Fires*. She has written two much talked plays that have not been yet published—the one is *The Artist's Model* (1995) and the other is *Sextet* (1996). Both these plays have been mentioned by playwright time and again in her interviews but the publication of these is still awaited. While referring to these two plays, she wrote in one of her emails to me “It is very possible that my plays will never become available, because I am disheartened about the prospects for theatre in India. Unless that situation changes, I am unlikely to invest my time in completing work in progress.” Yet she is one of those serious playwrights who have given sustenance to the Indian English Drama particularly the drama about the cityscape. As pointed out by Sumana Mukherjee “She revels in the macabre, pushes the envelope on the extreme....Her stories and plays work so masterfully on so many levels—as twist-in-the-tale page-turners, as on-the-edge adventures, as miniature theatres of the absurd—that the reader’s
imagination plays almost as singular a part in them as the writer’s” (Mukherjee Blurb).

A perfectionist to the core all her published works speak enormously about her sense of creating something very creative yet very subtle as she sensitises the audience and the readers about such common issues that are ignored in day to day life. Manjula Padmanabhan’s Hidden Fires addresses the February 2002 Gujarat massacres in India perpetrated by the Hindu extremists and resulting in the killing of approximately 2,000 Muslims, the burning of thousands of Muslim homes, the public rape of hundreds of women, and the displacement of more than 200,000 Muslims, many of whom are still living in refugee camps. The five monologues which comprise the play vary in aesthetics in addressing the pathology of hatred between Hindu and Muslim populations. In one monologue a Hindu man describes extinguishing the lives, or “hidden fires,” of Muslims who are faceless, sub-human “threats”. Another illustrates a young anchorwoman’s smiling refusal to challenge the government’s insistence that the situation is not serious.

The monologue, Points, refers indirectly to the riots in describing the denial of all sectors of a municipality to acknowledge rampant brutality it thus extends the play’s reach into a universal challenge to all audiences to examine their culpability in the aftermath of violent acts. As already pointed out Lights Out, by Manjula Padmanabhan, represents a real-life and shocking incident of gang rape, torture, and brutal violence inflicted on a helpless woman victim in an apartment which went unnoticed for several weeks, in a middle-class urban neighbourhood in Mumbai. Based on a real-life incident in Mumbai, Lights Out! is not only a play about the ‘near schizophrenic’ life in a metro or any big city, it is also a text, which unfolds before its viewers and readers in its final denouement the startling revelation that s/he is also
implicated in this play. The play reveals to us through theatricality the schisms that exist in our psyche, which we exhibit in our responses to our life in cities.

One of the important features of modern urban life is that the notion of the ‘outside’ is also connected to, and paradoxical with, a peculiar sense of anonymity, which it creates and sustains. This is also the case of many marginalized groups in the modern cities, who as discussed in the introduction, are denied any “civic attention” and therefore deemed as second-class citizens.

This thesis, thus, explores in depth the impact of city life and urban materiality on individuals inhabiting the city space. Divided into seven chapters, it takes into account the major plays of Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan in relation to the above theme.

The first and introductory chapter focuses on urban theory and its links with literature. It would focus on representations of the city in literature. The complex relationship between urban conditions, society and literature has neem explained in detail. Dattani’s and Padmanabhan’s contribution to these aspects of modern Indian drama has been studied in detail. The chapter also focuses on their contribution towards theatre. Emphasis has been laid on the way urban life is effectively portrayed through theatre. The chapter entails an in-depth analysis of urban theory in the Indian context. These have been related to developments in the genre of theatre.

The second chapter entitled “Poverty and The Body” offers a critical appraisal of the play Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan. Though it a couched as a futuristic play, it highlights the heinous self-inflicted suffering of people today who require money to survive in the demanding environment of a modern city. It projects the compulsive need for which the marginalized sell their organs to survive in a harsh
world. While speaking of marginality and its adverse conditions, one can also reflect on Mahesh Dattani’s play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* about eunuchs since this category of people have been physically brutalized by others or have induced self harm.

The **third chapter** “Alternative Sexuality” an attempt would be made to explore the theme of alternate sexuality by analyzing Mahesh Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and Manjula Padmanabhan’s short story *Morning Glory in the East* *Kailash* included in the anthology *Kleptomania*. Both these works look at the concept of Alternate Sexuality from a different perspective that is too urbane and considerate.

The **fourth chapter** entitled “Breaking Gender Stereotypes” offers a critique of fixed notions of gender roles in the urban space as depicted in some plays. This chapter will take into account Mahesh Dattani’s *Dance Like a Man* and *Tara*. The chapter will take into account the women and the men who are typified by their gender identity and their struggle to express their more authentic selves. Freedom and choice become significant counters in their search for happiness but they stand under the scrutiny of society’s cultural assumptions.

The **fifth chapter** entitled “Crime, Abuse and Politics of Silence in Urban Space” offers a critique of crime and unspoken issues of sexuality in cities through assessing Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out* and Mahesh Dattani’s *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Thirty days in September*. The study sees rapid urbanization, industrialization and migration as major factors that contribute to higher crime rates and loneliness. It also underscores the observable rural-urban disparities in urban growth resulting in tensions within different parts of a city, and the special problems
of crowded areas. Apart from this the chapter also highlights the adverse effects of single parenting in urban scenario leading to flagitious crimes at home.

The **sixth chapter** entitled “The Violence Within” an attempt would be made to analyze the violent offshoot of urbanization in the form of communalism and how it is depicted by Dattani in his play *Final Solutions* and Padmanabhan in her monologue *Hidden Fires*. The chapter closely examines the deep rooted prejudice of people who are unable to accept differences of religion or social belief.

The **concluding chapter** will discuss the link between urbanization and the emergence of a socially conscious drama. The major strands of Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan’s plays, and their comparative structure has been presented, not just in terms of their thematic, but also in terms of impact that their plays have had on the audience. The playwrights invite the audience to assess the existential trauma and disenchantment of the city dwellers. In literature and in society this is meant to be an important intervention.