CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Drama is the first form of literature born across the world. Though the propagation of spiritual faith was the first motto to give birth by the priests either in the church or temple, it was able to evolve as a powerful literary and aesthetic form in the forthcoming days. During the early periods of literary history almost all countries, the form of drama had enjoyed an edge over the other literary forms. It was so because the form of drama alone could provide audio and visual effects which in turn could reach the literate and illiterate people.

The form drama which reigned the field of literature for so many decades witnessed its deterioration in Europe after the seventeenth century and in other countries at later time. The form of drama suffered set back in India also. The emergence of fiction has been the major factor the down fall of drama. The Indian Drama in English is not an exception in this regard. M.K.Naik notes aptly as follows:

Unlike poetry and fiction, drama has not registered very notable gains during the post-independence period. The important reason for this is that drama – essentially a composite art involving the playwright, the actors and the audience in a shared experience on the stage – has its own problems of which the other literary forms are free.¹

When the English knowing population has started increasing, reading novel could supersede watching and reading dramas. During the post independent times, the Indian drama in English had begun falling apart. Yet the Indian drama in English has survived because of the continuous efforts of some of the playwrights like Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani about whose role in sustaining the Indian English Drama is observed by M.K.Naik and Shyamal A.Narayan thus: The most significant plays of the last two decades have come from two playwrights, who, interestingly enough, represent a generation each: Girish Karnad (b.1938) and Mahesh Dattani (b.1958)²
Girish Karnad has proved that he is the custodian of Indian English Drama by producing as many as eight plays and by associating himself with directing, producing and playing in the plays continuously for more than four decades. Karnad has adopted the episodes of history, epics, and tales for his plays. He has used the history of Tughlaq, Tippe Sultan and Lord Basavanna for making Tughlaq, Dreams of Tippe Sultan and Tale-Danta respectively; the episodes of yaytai and and of Yavakrita for Yayati and The Fire and Rain; Vetala Panchavimsati and Transposed Heads for Hayavadana, Yashodra Charite for Bali the Sacrifice; the folk tales of A.K.Ramanujan for Nagamandala; and the episodes of Rig Veda Samhita concerning Yama and Yami for Anju Mallige.

Karnad has not reproduced those episodes in adhering to their original spirit. On the contrary, he has altered them significantly to address the contemporary socio-regious-political conflicts. By way of basing his plays on those texts which have been surviving for many centuries, his pays appear not only the critique of the socio-regious-political conflicts, but also the poetics of Drama itself.

Karnad has employed innovation in the in the women characters. He has modified those women characters drawn from the myths, history and folklore. He has also created new women characters. He has presented the ill-treatment of women and their protest against the system, convention and traditions which ill-treat them. This is a tendency of feminism. The researcher proposes to examine these aspects in the plays of Karnad.

Structure of the Dissertation: The dissertation is divided into three sections which consist of eight chapters. Chapter I Introduction presents the title of the thesis i.e., Feminism in Girish Karnad’s Plays – An Applied Study. It is followed by the reasons for selecting the said title. Subsequently, the structure of the dissertation i.e., the division of the study into three sections and eight chapters is provided. Since Karnad has been influenced by the Indian regional drama, a detailed note on the evolution of
Indian Drama is presented. This chapter is wound up with a brief note on the Indian English Drama.

In Section One entitled Feminism in Karnad’s Mythical Plays, three mythical plays are studied namely *Yayati; The Fire and the Rain* and *Bali – The Sacrifice*. In Section Two Feminism in Karnad’s Historical Plays, three historical plays are studied namely *Tughlaq, Tale-Danta* and *The Dreams of Tippu Sultan*. In Section Three entitled Feminism in Folk Plays, two folk plays are examined namely *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala*.

**Indian Theatre: Origin and Development:** Theatre is a living art form and therefore, changes continuously. The origin and development of theatre in India may be broadly divided into three phases. The first is marked by the high-quality Sanskrit dramatic literature, imaginative staging styles as wea as a profound theatrical reflection as in Bharata’a *Natyashastra*. The second phase begins after the decline of the classical Sanskrit theatre and the emergence in all the regional languages of India varied forms of popular but innovative theatre, marked by the transformation of the classical theatre in the changed socio-political conditions. The third phase consists in the encounter of Indian theatre with the West in the nineteenth century, causing the growth of a new kind of theatre in urban centres, weakening links with tradition and intensifying the urban-rural divide.

The First Phase: The roots of the theatre in our country are certainly very old and deep. Theatrical expression of some kind has been, since primitive and mythic ages, an integral part of Indian life. At the same time, it has undergone wide-ranging, fundamental changes during the last two to three thousand years. Broadly speaking, we can say that for a few centuries theatre formed part of the life of common people as ritualistic music and dance, story telling and tableaus on special occasions. Subsequently, its different forms crystallized, were adopted by the upper strata of
society and continued as such for more than a thousand years, some of which have come down to us Sanskrit drama and theatre.

Theatrical activity began with primitive magical, religious or social rites, ritualistic dances, festivals etc. Even today, many tribes in different parts of the country perform rituals related to birth, death, puberty, marriage, food gathering, hunting, battles and propitiation of their gods, goddesses and primordial forces, in which the dramatic or theatrical elements are prominent. In order to ward off an imminent danger, to ensure success in some future battle, the tribes mimic and identify with imagined situations and individuals through ritualistic dance movements, accompanied by incantations, suggestive sounds and instrumental music.

In the rites and ritualistic activity related to yajnas of the Vedic age, many situations and actions had pronounced theatrical aspects. There are frequent references in the Vedic literature to song, dance, musical instruments, decorative materials and properties, and to people connected with these activities, like the Gandharva, Suta, Shailush of Rig-Veda, like Yam-Yami, Pruurava-Urvashi, Vishwamitra-Nadi, Agastya-Lopamudra, Indra-Aditi etc. are in the form of dialogue, suggestive of an enactment. Later, with the ballad singing and the musical rendering of the lives of the heroes and other eminent personages of the community, or in just ordinary story-telling, most of the requirement of the early dramatic forms begin to appear. No wonder, there are references to drama, dancers, musicians and actors (Kushilava) etc., in the Mahabharata, to dramatization of the Ramayana in the Harivamsha Purana, and about the actor and dance, drama and music in the Bhagavata Purana, Markandeya Purana, and so on.

Origins of Indian Theatre: By the time we reach the historical period, we find that in the Buddhist and Jain texts monks are prohibited from watching dramatic performances, which would suggest that such performances were tempting or absorbing enough to disturb the monks’ concentration. In the well-known work of Panini, the
Ashtadhyayee, composed about the fourth century BC, there are mentions of dramatic works and performers. A commentary on this work by Patanjali describes the conditions of the families of performances and producers, dances, music, musical instruments, and to people who made their living from theatre.

All these references from texts composed or compiled between the sixth –fifth century BC, or even earlier, to the second-third century AD, indicate that the theatrical tradition in this country goes back to ancient times. This activity seems to have consisted mainly of musical or dance –based enactments, simple or dramatic singing with some acting, miming of heroic sagas, ballads, legends, popular stories or just ordinary narratives. The Patanjali Mahabhashya, however, mentions plays, called Kamsavadha, Balibandhan. Some fragments of the dramatic work of the Buddhist poet-playwright Ashvaghosha of the third century BC, called Sariputta Prakarana, have also been found. The well-known treatise on dramaturgy, the Natyashastra by Bharata Muni, speaks of plays called Devasurasagrrama, Amritamanthana and Trpuradaha in the myth related to the origin of drama.

On the basis of all these references, it can be safely asserted that some kind of theatrical activity with elements of music, dance, acting had been in vogue in this country for al least a thousand years before the Christian era. With the appearance of more favourable socio-cultural conditions, it gradually acquired more regular and complex forms, such as those of Sanskrit drama and theatre. Thus began that fascinating period of the unique flowering and achievement of the Indian dramatic tradition.

In this new phase, plays of different kinds, style and artistic excellence were written in Sanskrit, the language of literary expression at that time. Many innovative and often highly sophisticated styles for the presentation of those plays were also developed. This burst of energy was not confined to creative exploration in a very serious and systematic original thinking about almost all theoretical and practical
aspects of the theoretical art, best exemplified by the illuminative *Natyashatra*, a comprehensive Muni, unparalleled anywhere in the world.

**The Fifth Veda:** It is a measure of the importance of drama and theatre in Indian life that the *Natyashastra* has been given the status of the Fifth Veda. This glorification of the *Natyashastra* is neither unfounded nor accidental. There is no element of drama and theatre that has not been discussed here extensively, in great depth, and with insight. In fact, the *Natyashastra* is the primary and most important source of fundamental principles and ideas, not only about drama and theatre but also about other performing arts, like music and dance, as well as poetry. That is the reason, why its impact has been so far-reaching that even after about two thousand years it is still relevant and useful. Probably, it is the work not of one but many individuals, though several generations, incorporating their accumulated experience, knowledge and ideas.

The *Natyashastra* also seems to suggest continuous and regular theoretical activity in different parts of the country during the centuries when it was compiled, because without any actual direct experience it would have been impossible even to think of all those ideas or problems so elaborately discussed in the unique work.

**Reflection of their Times:** Apart from this theoretical speculation about drama and theatre, the image of Indian theatre tradition which emerges from the extent dramatic works in Sanskrit is no less amazing. Besides presenting the specific Indian worldview, they reveal in a picturesque manner how a human being with his distinct temperament, capacity and objective, passes through a variety of situations, with all their ups and downs, exultation and disappointments, fulfils his duties, and achieve equilibrium and harmony- a desirable goals which gives meaning to his life.

The Sanskrit dramatic works depict different mental states, emotions and ideas, desire and aspirations, strengths and weakness, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments. They also present a many-layered, fascinating picture of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of those times. Plays like *Madhyma*
Vyayoga, Urubhanga, Swapna-vasavadatta, Pratima, Abhijnan Shakuntala, Vikramarvashiya, Mrichchhakatika, Bhagavdejukya are glorious works that would bring credit to any literature. For their keen insight, delegate aesthetic sense, structural skills and variety, dramatic and theatrical quality of the language, and excellence of their poetry, they have a distinct place in world dramatic literature.

**Bhasa:** Even a cursory glance at the important plays, of Bhasa to Bodhayana, from the pre-Christian era, to the 7th century AD reveals that thought the plots of most of them are from the Puranas or the epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, there is no dearth of plays based on historical events and personages or on imagined situations and characters. Bhasa himself, who is considered to be the earlist playwright, has written plays based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata-Pratima, Abhisheka, Mahdyama Vyqayoga, Urubhanga, Karnabhara-as well as on stories from popular tales or almost imaginary events and episodes- Swapnavasavadatta, Pratijna Yaugandharayana, Avimaraka and others. Similarly, Malavikagimitra of Kalidasa, Mrichchakatika of Shudraka, Malatimadhava of Bhavabhooti, Mudrarkshasa of Vishakhadatta, are plays making extensive use of historical events and characters.

Bhasa’s renderings of episodes from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are different from those of the later playwrights. His choice and presentation of episodes suggests that though the tradition of musical enactment of mythological stories and episodes from the epics was still alive and strong during his time, another theatre tradition had also meanwhile emerged which led him to structure his stories in different dramatic forms and styles which were eventually mentioned as various Roopakas in the Natyashastra. In his plays, even the mythological episodes have a wider moral and human perspective. At the same time, they provide a great scope for emotional conflict, dramatic irony and intensity of dramatic action. Bhasa with his rich imagination has infused them with many motifs that make them more stageworthy and popular. In only two of his plays- Swapnavasavadatta and Pratijna Yaugandharayana, both connected
with the Udayana episode- a love story is in the centre. But even that has been presented in the context of a distinct political and social well-being. This method of linking individual happiness and tragedy, success and failure, with wider social values is in keeping with the basic Indian dramatic approach.

**The Great Poet Kalidasa:** In this respect, the Kalidasa plays are different from the Bhasa plays. All three of them are essentially love stories. In *Vikramorvashi* and *Abhijnan Shakuntala*, there is love between a man and an Apsara (divine nymph) and a man and Apsara born woman respectively. Here must be mentioned that kalidasa has given the available mythical episodes a new form and meaning according to his own creative purposes. In these plays, social and moral contexts are suggested through the irony of the situation, or through the emotional states and deep internal agony of the characters. But the human emotional in their different states are treated with such an imaginative insight and sophistication that a unique blend of poetry and theatricality is achieved. From this point of view, the plays of Kalidasa remind on of Shakespeare’s plays, though in Shakespeare the theatricality of situations is as strong as that of emotions and feelings, while in Kalidasa, the dramatic organization of human emotions and feelings in their variety overshadows the situations.

**Shudraka:** In *Michhakatika* by Shudraka, again, a love story is presented against the backdrop of social and political upheaval. Here the perspective of political anarchy, dissatisfaction and rebellion is so wide and central that often it appears that the playwright has used the Charudatta-Vasantens episodes only to intensify that conflict and to make it more poignant. In this play, through its numerous characters and their personal relations, so many forms and levels of social life are revealed that in many ways it can be considered an important document of the socio-political life of an entire epoch.

**Vishakhadatta:** *Mudrarakshasa* by Vishakhadatta is totally a play of political conflict and power and consequent clash of various power centres and their intrigues,
espionage and counter-espionage, though even these have a relevant moral purpose. The play makes it more than clear that all the political machinations and stratagems of Chanakya are motivated not for any personal aggrandizement or capture of power, but by his desire to establish a more just and competent regime.

**Bhavabhooti:** Bhavabhooti wrote three plays. Two of these—*Mahaviracharita* and *Uttaramacharita*—are based on the Rama story: and a love tale from *Katha Saritasagara* provides the plot of the third, *Malatimadhava*. Specially in *Uttaramacharita*, there is a very moving presentation of the conflict between the pathos created by the irony of Sita’s life and the social and individual morality of the times.

Two satirical comedies (prahasana)—Mahanra Vikrama’s *Mattavilasa* and Bodhayana’s *Bhagavadejjukiya*—must be mentioned for their different kind of dramatic action and treatment of social life. They present a very fascinating picture of the degeneration of the moral values and behaviour among various religious orders of the sixth-seventh centuries. To some extent, this can be also seen in the single-actor short plays called *Bhanas*. In fact, in the Sanskrit dramatic literature, the extraordinarily imaginative rendering of mythological and other popular tales reveals many levels of human experience, social relations and individual responses.

Such a wide and sensitive presentation of life in the Sanskrit plays is not accidental. It is based on a very profound philosophical outlook, a comprehensive that has come down to us as the theory of the Rasa. The Sanskrit plays do not present either a superficial or a realistic reflection of life. They accomplish, with a profound moral and aesthetic discrimination, an artistic, imaginative, ‘imitation’ (*Anukarana*) or picture of actions, feeling and various situations of human life, so that through an experience of a state of bills, a deeper realization of truth may be possible. The Indian view of life does not accept that a human being is a puppet in the hands of inscrutable, mysterious, blind, supernatural forces, condemned to struggle, but destined to face a pre-determined tragedy. That is why in Sanskrit plays, instead of the usual exposition of any gradually
intensifying real or imaginary personal predicament of sense of sin, we have a portrayal of the joys and sufferings, success and failure, ecstasy and pathos, union and separation, laughter and tears of a person in his or her normal behaviour in various personal and social situations.

Sanskrit Drama and Greek Drama:

It is for this reason that Sanskrit plays, Greek drama, defy categorization into tragedy and comedy. Instead, they are categorized according to social and mental status of the protagonists and their consequent actions. The ten kinds of plays, called *Dasha Roopaka* in the *Natyashastra*, are classified on the basis of the nature and character of the hero, the form and type of the action, not by dividing human life into the artificial and externally imposed frames like tragic and comic. The available Sanskrit plays invariably conform to this categorisation.

This freedom has enabled the Sanskrit dramatist to incorporate in his dramatic action, natural and supernatural events, human and super-human characters, animals, birds, and other animals, even trees or inanimate objectives. The inherit possibility of presenting different layers of reality in its totality gives to the craft of the Sanskrit drama an unparalleled power and inclusiveness.

Another distinguishing feature of Sanskrit plays in a multi-level organization of communication between the characters. The Sanskrit plays use prose, recitation, verses, and songs, thus giving great flexibility of expression from just narrativeness to many lawyers and shades of human emotion. This is very important for the actor, because the variety in the speech gives him an opportunity to make his verbal communication more interesting and effective. Besides, to make the speech lively, natural and appropriate to the characters, the Sanskrit plays use standard Sanskrit as well as different prakrits or dialects. This makes the characters more creditable, it becomes easier for the spectators to identify with them, apart from making the speech attractive by the varying verbal music of the dialects.
For communicating some abstract, indirect or mental aspects of the dramatic action on the stage, the Sanskrit plays resort to a number of inventive devices. There is of course, the *Swagata* or aside in which a character expresses his reaction or feeling when alone or in the presence of others, which is similar to such devices in the western drama. But the Sanskrit drama has two other devices called *janantika* and *apavarita*, in which two characters exchange ideas or reactions which are not intended for others, or to say something which is heard by the audience. Similarly, the Sanskrit plays have announcements or conversation from the *nepathya* or backstage, besides the *akashavani* through which super-natural characters communicate. All these devices, while maintaining an uninterrupted flow of dramatic action, create a kind of audio-visual attractiveness. They all have a fascinating and imaginative blend of naturalness and stylization, in other words, of theatricality.

In fact, the Sanskrit dramatic structure is finely tuned to either of the two production styles- the codified or stylized or the representational technique, called the *natyadharmi*, as well as the comparatively more flexible, popular method, called the *lokadharmi*. Some of the stories in the plays have a dramatic action in which an external conflict and physical movements are more important, while in others the inner psychological life; some have a predominance of the hard, accentuated or frightening mental states, while others of softer, delicate and pleasant feelings. Some require emphasis on verbal expression, while the others need more of music and dance. The style of Sanskrit drama is determined by these differences, which facilitated the work of the director and the performer.

**Extent Tradition:** However, except for *Kutiyattam* in Kerala, no tradition of staging Sanskrit plays is extant in the country. Even in *Kutiyattam*, there is much greater emphasis on the detailed explanation and comments on Sanskrit speeches or verses in Malayalam by the *Vidushaka* or the jester, rather than on the Sanskrit text itself. Accordingly, elaboration of one act, scene or an episode of a play, or even one line or
verse, continues for hours, sometimes even days together, by various devices of miming and acting. Undoubtedly, Kutiyattam reveals many conventions, devices and methods of the Sanskrit stage presentation. Even so, it is at best one of the styles of the dakshinatya or the Southern approach to performance, and it would not be correct to consider it as the only or main representative style of the Sanskrit theatre.

Unfortunately, no other accounts of actual presentation of the Sanskrit plays are available. Under these circumstances, whatever we know or say about the Sanskrit theatre is based mostly on Bharata’s Natyashastra and some later commentaries on that work, or, to an extent, on the structure of the available plays and the internal evidence of their stage directions. Lastly, there has also been an attempt to determine the staging methods in the Sanskrit theatre from the traditional; theatrical styles in different regions. Many directors have tried to recreate the Sanskrit plays on the stage by various methods. But, on the whole, this entire exercise is still in its stages, and it could not be very proper to come to any definite conclusion on its basis.

In spite of these limitations, a few observations can be made on the subject. The Sanskrit theatre, despite an integral importance of the dramatic script, is acting oriented, in which there is great emphasis on the talent, creative imagination and technical skill of the performer. This is borne out by the structure of the plays as well as the detailed and intricate analysis of various aspects of acting or abhinaya as elaborated in the Natyashstra is as notable as it is different form the western concept of acting.

**Lull in Theatrical Activity:** But this theatre, established on such a strong base of theory and practice, had disintegrated gradually by the 10th century AD. Subsequently, a few Sanskrit plays were certainly written and occasionally also performed in princely courts, but they are mainly literary exercises, with little relation to dramatic performance or genuine theatre. There are many reasons for this decline – social and political instability created by foreign invasion and internal conflicts, loss of creative energy in the Sanskrit language gradually confined to a small elite, fall in the
standard of dramatic writing due to lack of talent, and loss of appeal for common spectators etc., etc.

For the next one thousand years, the theatrical activity took place not in Sanskrit but in different regional languages, which, like Tamil, Kannada and other languages of south, were already vehicles of creative expression; or those which were emerging out of the Prakritas and the Apabhransha and acquiring their own specific character. Not that theatrical work in Sanskrit ended altogether. Theatrical performances entirely in Sanskrit, based on jayadeva’s *Geeta Govinda*, or in mixed Sanskrit and regional language, like the *Kutiyattam*, continued in different parts of the country. But one, their number was from the beginning very small, and secondly, even this gradually stopped, and in every region almost the entire theatrical activity was confined to the regional language only, which continuous even today.

The Second Phase: This phase of the Indian theatre is spread over a period of about one thousand years, and many of its strands and forms have continued up to the present day. The activity in this entire phase is often called ‘folk theatre’ today, because, unlike the town-based classical Sanskrit theatre, it has flourished in the countryside. During this nomenclature is misleading for a number of reasons. During this long and extended phase of our theatrical pursuit, many of the dramatic modes and styles, developed in different regions and languages, have innumerable elements of our classical arts. It is, therefore, improper to call them folk theatre, mainly in imitation and due to the influence of the western historians, sociologists and other academics etc., only because they have been preserved and developed in our rural communities.

Traditional Theatre: A large number of them are not spontaneous or simple like the songs, dances, or pictorial representations of any tribal, agricultural or rural community. The structures and techniques of many of these theatrical expressions are complex, and for any proficiency in them a prolonged training and practice is indispensable, besides some proficiency in music and dance, and knowledge of the
puranas, epics and poetry. The miming and acting in the Kutiyattam or the Kuchipudi, dancing in the Yakshagana, or singing and drumming in Swang or the Nautanki, cannot be acquired without considerable turning. For any excellence in them, it is necessary to learn from a Guru or a teacher almost, if not totally, like other classical arts of the country. That is why many serious scholars and practitioners of these theatrical modes or *natyas*, keeping their special characteristics in mind, have increasingly come to call them ‘traditional’ rather than ‘folk’ theatre. This new description also is a little wide and, therefore, inadequate to some extent. But compared to the ‘folk’, the ‘traditional’ is nearer the distinct characteristics of these theatrical modes, and at the same time separates them from both the classical Sanskrit as well as the modern theatre.

In fact, it can be said with reasonable certainty that even at the time when the Sanskrit theatre was at its zenith, different regions of the country had their own local performance styles and structures, nearer to the life of the common people which were important means of their entertainment. Such a view is not mere guess work. The natyashastra itself speaks of four broad styles or manners of theatre specified according to the regions of north, south, east and west. Many other works on dramaturgy mention the Uparoopakas or minor dramatic modes which are, more or less definitely, indicative of regional theatres. This process continued in different regions from the tenth-eleventh centuries right up to the nineteenth century. Not a single drama emerged in any of the regional languages, whose work could be considered drama according to any definition, or which in its creative quality and level was significant or mentionable like Sanskrit plays. It seems that the theatre of this phase began, for more than one reason, with an overwhelming emphasis on music and dance which not only continued but, with time, became more pronounced. As a result, the written word could not acquire sufficient importance for the dramatic writing to be considered indispensable for theatrical work.

**Bhakti Movement:** This situation persisted for about eight to nine centuries, during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, the Bhakti Movement or the upsurge of
the devotional fervour, produced great poets in many regions and language, but even that did not lead to any plays of creative excellence. However, the growing religiosity was confirmed by the various kinds of performances inspired by Jayadeva’s poem *Geeta Govinda*, in spite of its strong erotic undercurrent.

During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the Bhakti Movements inspired a number of new theatrical modes or renovated the existing ones. These were all not only apart of the general religious movement, but were also organized for a wider dissemination and popularity of the objectives of some specific religion or religious sect. the Ankianat of Assam, Bhagavatamela of Tamil Nadu, Krishnattam of Kerals, Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh, Dashavatar of Maharashtra, Rasleela and Ramleela of Uttar Pradesh, are very clearly like Vaishnava religious rituals, in which frequently the performers are regarded not as ordinary human beings, but ‘Swaroopas’ or incarnation of God and are worshipped as such during the performance.

This religious orientation is clear also from their performance scripts, like *Rukminiharan, Parijataharan, Kaliadaman, Shriramavijaya* in the Ankianat or Bhaona; *Jagannadhava, Gajendramoksha, Janakiparinaya, parashuramavijiya* in the Bhagavatamela, which are all related to episodes which have a distinct religious flavour. This is very eloquently evident in the theatrical modes, the Rasleela and Ramleela of Uttar Pradesh, which are based on creative work of great poets like Soordas and Tulsidas, deeply submerged in the religious, devotional attitude of the authors. By the end of the seventeenth century, when the Vaishnava Bhakti Movement atarted losing some of its fervour, the Shaiva or Shakta influence also appers in many dramatic forms, specially the Jatra, in stories like *Chadimangal, Mahishasuramardini, Haraparvati*, etc.

In fact, the Bhakti Movement was so inclusive and sweeping, and so widely connected with the deep and fundamental concerns of the Indian social life, that even after its decline, most theatrical modes either continued to present episodes showing
various facets of the incarnation of Rama and Krishna directly, or became vehicles for conveying religious feelings or devotion-inspiring beliefs in some manner or the other.

**Non-Religious Themes:** As the political, social and individual life became more stable and normal, and the urgency, intensity or sharpness of the struggle for religious identity gradually weakened, many of the theatrical expressions began to lose their purely and strictly religious, sectarian character and became more and more cultural. The Jatra of Bengal, Terukuttu of Tamil Nadu, Veethinatakam of Andhra Pradesh, or, to some extent, the Yakshagana of Karnataka are the examples of this process. They started presenting, besides the religious stories, some historical, social and political themes, or the mythological episodes were presented in a manner that their religious aspect was no more predominant.

At the same time, many other dramatic modes also emerged which are basically and mainly non-religious and whose themes and contents are widely social and political, like the tamasha, Bhavai, Mach, Khyal, Sang, Swang, Nautanki, Naqal, Bhand Pathra, Karyala and others. These, while staging stories of Satyawadi Harish Chanra, Nala Damaynti, Prahlad, or other episodes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, also started presenting historical or social events, folk tales or medieval romances. By the nineteenth century, some political themes also became popular. Plays like Mitharni, Patthe Bapurao in the Tamasha, Jasna Odan and Jhenda Jhulan in the Bhavai, Raja Bharthari and Devar-Bhaujai in the mach, Dhola Maru, and Shrin Farhad in the Khyal, Amar Singh Rathor and Sultana Daku in the Nautanki or Swang, Shahi Lakadhara in the Sang, or the satirical presentation of a monk, a money-lender or government official in the Karyala-they all indicate the growing variety of themes in the traditional theatre.

**Parsi Theatre:** The parsi style plays written in the Hindi-speaking region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in spite of their great success and popularity on stage, have failed to become significant as dramatic literature. It is also true of almost all the plays, inspired by the western theatre, written in various other languages of this
country during the last one hundred fifty years and more. By acting in them, many performers have become famous and their performances memorable, but nobody wants to read those plays today. We will come to these aspects from the drama and theatre in the modern period a little later. Here this fact has been mentioned only to indicate that the scripts of the medieval theatre, in spite of their effective and attractive presentation, are not in themselves considerable for any creative excellence.

**The third Phase:** India’s encounter with the west during the nineteenth century had wide-ranging political, economic, social and cultural consequences. In the field of theatre, however, this encounter changed almost everything –its from, direction, pace. Indian theatre had gone through changes on many levels earlier also. But during the previous two or three thousand years, it had taken new forms according to our own worldview, on the basis of one or the other aspect of our culture, and under compulsions of our own social and political conditions. Its direction and pace also were determined by the rhythm of Indian life. Specially, it had no inner dichotomy and its fundamental form and aesthetic basis was almost the same for the entire country in the phase of the Sanskrit theatre, and the entire community in different language regions in the phase of the medieval traditional theatre, though the urban and rural theatre activities even in these period were not always entirely similar in their complexity, refinement or methods.

**The New Theatre:** But the new theatre which emerged in our country under the impact of the western culture was totally different in all these aspects, because it had taken shape in imitation of alien theatre, fundamentally different in its worldview and aesthetic approach. According to the Indian view of life, the purpose of drama and theatre was to create a feeling of pleasure or bliss (*Rasa*) by delineating different situations, mental states and feelings of human beings. The purpose of the Western drama, on the other hand, was to reveal struggles of life in their various forms. In the Western outlook, some kind of conflict between gods and man, man and man, man and
nature, and between various emotions, desires and tendencies within man himself, that is at almost every level, is inevitable. It was, therefore, difficult to conceive of drama without some form of conflict.

The western drama and theatre entered our country as elements of the culture of the conquerors, who, in a well-planned manner, deliberately third to prove that compared to the western the Indian culture was inferior, trivial and undeveloped. The British rulers introduced an educational system which, on the one hand, cleverly devalued Indian history and culture traditions and, on the other, made the most outstanding aspects of the western culture and literature more and more familiar to the Indian elite and the newly emerging middle classes in the urban centres. Since then till today, the Indians receiving this new western education have been learning that the Sanskrit drama is not only inferior to the dramatic works of the Greek, Shakespearean or other European playwrights, but is, in fact, no drama at all, and at best could be considered as ornate and exaggerated dramatic poetry.

Thus, the new theatre which began in our country in the middle of the nineteenth century was, if not a total imposition, almost entirely an imitation of the western theatre. Its patrons and practitioners were those aristocratic Indians who had enthusiastically accepted not only the political domination of the Englishmen, but also their social and cultural domination, and who with their newly acquired English education took a kind of pride in behaving like the rulers. As a result, they started staging, initially, some English plays in English and then their translations and adaptations into their own languages, culminating finally, in plays based on Indian themes written and staged in imitation of the western plays.

In this context, it is also important to note that this theatre started, continued and was accepted only by the newly educated Indians in the cities. In some regions, production of the newly formed traveling professional theatre companies did occasionally reach a few small towns and were also appreciated there. But the new
theatre did not make any contract with the countryside where in different regions the traditional theatre continued to be active and popular.

Moreover, this new theatre began and developed primarily in those cities or settlements, which were founded by the English merchants and the British rulers, or where their commercial, industrial, or administrative centres were located. This is the reason why this theatre got so much more patronage and encouragement in new cities like Calcutta, Bombay, and to some extent in Madras, than in other regions. With the spread and consolidation of the British rule, this theatre reached almost all parts of the country, but it did not start in all regions at the same time, nor did it grow everywhere to the same extent. As a result, its achievements, whatever they are, have different levels in different languages and regions of the country. In Bengali and Marathi, it became most active, prosperous and popular, though the beginning and the subsequent development of the theatres of even two languages have been considerably different.

**Bengali Theatre:** The modern Bengali theatre began at their initiative in their large palaces or sprawling garden houses, then gradually spread to other sections of Bengali society, and has continued to this day is spite of many ups and downs. This theatre grew almost entirely in imitation of the western drama and performance, indeed, of the model of the decadent, ornamental Victorian theatre of the mid-nineteenth century in England. There is hardly any contribution of the Sanskrit or the medieval Indian theatre traditions in its growth, or is confined only to writing and staging plays based on mythological and historical episode, folk tales and legends.

In many other aspects, this new Bengali theatre became the most advanced and powerful theatre of the country. Being totally concentrated in Calcutta, the theatre groups, first amateur and then professional, which sprang up there, continued their precarious existences in keen competition with one another. Many playhouses were also constructed, which witnessed the formation and dissolution of different companies from time to time. Thus only in Calcutta, an urban residential theatre on the model of the
western world, especially of London, came into existence and has survived. As a result, many talented actors emerged, who were often also playwrights, directors and managers of their companies. A large urban audience was also created. By 1940, within a period of about 1000 years, highly gifted actors like Girish Chandra Ghosh, Ardhendu Mustafi, Amrital Basu, Amarendra Nath Dutt, Amritalal Mitra, Surendra Nath Ghosh, Shishir Bhaduri carried the Bengali theatre to the pinnacle of its glory.

Probably, because of its residential character, the Bengali theatre was the first to attract women performers. In the theatres of all other languages of the country, women came to the stage very much later—by the middle of the twentieth century. In most other places, women started acting on stage only after Independence. Even in Maharashtra, where in the traditional natya, the Tamasha, women had been performing for a long time, on the modern Marathi stage the female roles were always performed by men. The only exemption to this, probably, is the Surabhi Natak Mandali of Andhra Pradesh, in whose plays women of one single family, generation after generation, have been acting with the men folk of the same family. There is no doubt that the new theatre presented for both men and women in the city a form of expression which had, for centuries, never been available to them.

Another important feature of this theatre deserves to be noted. On account of its special nature, and partly because of the influence of the English dramatic literature, particularly of Shakespeare, through English education, the written text and playwright got central importance in this new theatrical activity. From the very beginning, the Bengali poets and prose writers were drawn towards playwriting. From the middle of the nineteenth century till the end of the fourth decade of the twentieth century, dramatist like Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt, Deenbandhu Mitra, Girish Chandra Ghosh, D.L. Roy, Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod, Rabindranath Tagore, Manmath Ray, Sachin Sengupta and many others wrote hundreds of plays for this new stage, after the models of Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Bernad Shaw and others.
The stories of these plays are drawn from Indian mythological episodes, folk tales, historical events as well as contemporary social situations, though sometimes the stories or echoes of some popular Muslims or the western legends or tales are also here. But the structure of these plays is akin to Shakespeare’s plays or, later, to the naturalistic plays. They attempt to present the conflict of an individual with his environment, social conditions, with other individuals or within his own mind and the characters are conceived or developed as in the western plays. On the whole, with very few exceptions, the creative achievements of these plays are negligible, and they are generally little more than stageable melodramas. They have neither any deeper or perceptive exploration of the inner contradictions of human character nor an explosive irony of situations. Not only do they lack creative insight, but innovations in the dramatic form or an imaginative original structure are quite rare.

**Marathi Theatre:** The other big centres of trade and industry of the Englishmen were in the western coastal regions of the country. In the languages of that region also, therefore, the new theatre on the western model had begun in the middle of the nineteenth century, as in Bengali, the new theatrical activity in Marathi and Gujarati also became very popular, though in many ways the theatres of both these languages were different from the Bengali theatre as also of each other.

The initial source of inspiration of the Marathi theatre, unlike the Bengali theatre, was more or less in our traditional theatrical performances with strong elements of the music and dance. Some idea of this can be had from the first Marathi plays *Seeta Swayamvara* written by Vishudas Bhave, a court poet of the Sangil ruler, which was inspired by the Dashavatara of Maharashtra and the Yakshagana of Karnataka, probably, on account of this different beginning, the place of music in some form or the other persisted in the later development of the Marathi theatre, in spite of its in imitation of the western model not only in dramatic writing but in many other ways. There was a phase in which the excess of the classical Indian singing made acting and other dramatic
aspects secondary in Marathi theatrical performance. Many top ranking classical musicians began to act in the plays of the professional dramatic companies, to which the audiences flocked more to hear music than to see a play.

After Vishudas Bhave, the next important actor-playwright in Marathi was Vasant Panduranga alias Anna Sahib Kirloskar. He too is famous for his musical plays like *Shakuntala* and *Saubhadra* which he staged with his own independent theatre company. But, in spite of the productions of these plays and occasional performances of Sanskrit plays in Marathi, the western dramatic and theatrical model was taking over even in Marathi. This is evident from the original plays like *Sharada* and adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays by Kirloskar’s contemporary, Govind Ballal Deval, and then by plays of Krishnaji Prabhakar alias Kaka Saheb Khadilkar, like *Keechakavadha, Bhaubandaki, Manapamana*. All these plays have, more or less, a Shakespearan structure. It is an interesting irony that though Khadikar had accepted the English model in his play, he was otherwise an important leader of the national freedom movement and as such was strongly opposed to the British rule or domination much so that his plays were considered anti-government and the performance of his play, *Keechakavadha*, was banned by the colonial rulers.

With the plays of Khadikar’s successor, the famous Ram Ganesh Gadakari, *Ekach Pyala* and *Bhava Bhandhana*, and later with the realistic prose plays of Mama Warerkar and others, the western dramatic model was totally and firmly established in the Marathi theatre though the demand and linking for the musical plays also continued among some sections of the spectators.

As in other languages, the greatest contribution in making and then keeping the new theatre popular among the people was made by the actors. The Marathi theatre also was the theatre of the actor-playwright. Some of these playwright-actors have been mentioned earlier. Besides them, there is almost a regular procession of names like Bhaurao Kolhatkar, Ganpatrao Joshi, Ganpatrao Bhahavat, Keshavrao Bhonesle,
Narayananarao Rajhans alias Bal Gandharva and others, whose role in bringing wide acceptance and responsibility to the Marathi theatre is tremendous. Many of these actors became legends in their life time and are still remembered for their unique performances in female roles.

The Marathi theatre is different from the Bengali in yet another way. While the Bengali theatre was mostly residential and Calcutta based, the Marathi theatre was itinerant. One reason for this variation is that though, like Cain Calcutta, Bombay was a prominent industrial and commercial centre of the western region, it was dominated but by the Marathi-speaking people but by the Parsis and Gujaratis because of its itinerant character. The Marathi theatre had a much greater sweep and very soon it won the allegiance of the newly educated middle classes more than even the aristocrats, perhaps, for this reason, it was more directly related to the movement for social reform and political independence.

**Gujarati Theatre:** In another language of the western region, the Gujarati, the impact of the western theatre was greater and more pervasive from the very beginning, because of the enthusiasm and initiative of the very influential, prosperous and enterprising community of the region, the Parsis, who had readily accepted the western education and culture. The Parsis not only set up many industries and trades in collaboration with the English traders, they also formed professional theatre companies of the western type which staged their plays in Gujarati. The main area of their activity was Bombay, but the impact of their work was on the entire Gujarati-speaking region, because Bombay was the main centre of the newly emerging industrialist, traders and other western educated Gujaratis.

On account of direct or indirect commercial bias, the parsi as well as the general Gujarati theatre was, from the beginning, dominated by melodrama, spectacle and exaggeration. But even here many talented performers came to the fore, which with their skill succeeded in enchanting audiences. The plays written for this theatre were
generally imitating the Shakespearean model and their stories were mostly drawn from the Muslim or Indian romantic tales and later, plays exposing social evils were also written. But in most of them, the dramatic structure was marked by melodrama or sensation generated by a clash of situations and characters, as in Shakespeare’s plays, but they did not have the master’s deep insight quality. These plays, therefore, though attracting the spectators when staged, were insignificant in a creative or artistic sense.

Theatre in the South: In south India, the English education certainly had an extensive sweep, but the performing arts there had a very strong and deeply entrenched tradition with almost a fanatic adherence which considerably delayed the impact of the western style theatre. Later in the nineteenth century, plays based on the new western model were written in the cities of the Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam language areas, and companies performing them were also established. In the theatres of all these languages, the actor- manner dominated, amongst whom P.Samband Mudaliar in Tamil, Tiger Vardhachari and Gubbi Veeranna in Kannada, and Dharamavaram Krishnamachari and T.Raghavachari in Telugu can be mentioned. The play written or performed by these theatre men were all, more or less, like the plays of the parsi theatre. Their stories were drawn from the mythological, historical or social events, but their form and structure were based on superficial imitation of the plays of Shakespeare and other English writers, or Moliere. On the whole, their content had no insight or depth and their form and technique no originality.

Theatre in the North: The situation in the Hindi speaking areas of the north was totally different. This region, which was far away from the coastal industrial centres and foreign settlements, and which had been an old centre of political power, was dominated by very sharp and widespread anti-British sentiment and movement. Hence the British rulers were suspicious about this region and therefore, reluctant or slow to introduce economic or educational reforms here. This in turn led to further impoverishment and slowed down the formation of a new educated middle class. A small sprinkling of the
English-educated intelligentsia, basically feudal in outlook, was more preoccupied with politics, either for selfish, opportunist purpose or for nationalist objectives. They had little time or inclination for art and culture.

As a result, new theatre could not take any shape there, nor could it acquire any independent existence. The needs for entertainment or theatrical experience of the cities and towns of this region had been met by the Parsi or other theatre companies of Bombay and Calcutta, since the sixth decade of the nineteenth century. The main objectives of these companies were to make money by providing cheap entertainment through melodramas presented in a spectacular manner. The repercussions of this situation on the theatre of the Hindi-speaking areas are noticeable even today.

Bhartendu Harishchandra, in the middle of the nineteenth century, did make a memorable effect of provide this region with its own distinct theatre, with a sort of synthesis of the new West-inspired and Indian traditional theatrical visions. Bhartendu was a poet, a playwright, an actor and manager of theatre group all rolled into one. If his efforts had succeeded, the history of the theatre in the Hindi region would have been very different. Unfortunately, he died at a very young age of 35 leaving the filed open for the Parsi commercial theatrical companies which completely dominated the scene. A cheap, or titillating and therefore, money-minting theatre overwhelmed the region to such an extent that later in the twentieth century even the talent of a playwright like Jaishankar Prasad could not make a dent into it.

It is true even in the Parsi theatre there were outstanding and popular actors like Cowasji Khatau, Khurshedji Baliwala, Master Madan, Fida Hussain Narasi and others. Also, the playwrights like Agha Hashra, Narain Prasad Betab and Radhey Shyam Kathavachak deserve to be mentioned for the immense theatrical quality and occasionally, the grafting of their plays, but artistic merit of their work is very little. The Parsi theatre could not acquire any significant or important position in the cultural life of the Hindi-speaking people. This situation continued till long after World War II.
**IPTA and Prithvi Theatre:*** Thus, not only in Hindi but in every language and region of the country, the theatre had come almost to a standstill around 1940. The companies closed down and the actors were jobless. It appeared that the theatre had no future in India. In the country-side, certainly, the traditional theatre was generally alive and active, but it had no contact with the new urban theatre.

During 1943-44, the rise of the Indian people’s theatre Association of the country and gave it some strength and direction. This movement made a significant effort to bring drama and theatre closer to common people and make them socially relevant in terms of their content. But in its approach to form and technique, and in the general outlook, the IPTA was basically West-oriented, and it had no clear perspective for relating itself to the rich theatre traditions of the country. It did, however, inspire a number of talented theatre workers in many regions and languages, who later became pioneers of very significant and creative theatre work. But IPTA, because of its inner contradictions, landed itself very soon in the morass of a narrow, sectarian attitude and was marginalized. Another similar attempt in Hindi-the Prithvi Theatre started by the noted film actor Prithviraj Kapoor, in 1944 in Bombay, with a nationalistic and socially-oriented selection of plays-but modeled more or less after the Parsi Theatre-also collapsed around 1960.

**Resurgence Period:** Actually, it was only about 1953-54 that the urban theatre evinced some life again when the activity began, to some extent, at a new level. In the fifth decade of the twentieth century, a few years after independence, the character and objectives of the Indian theatre and theatre workers began changes, which led to many-sided change in their relations with the western theatre. Authentic and complete relations, or very carefully made adaptations, of the works of the most outstanding western playwrights began to be staged. Besides Shakespeare and Moliere, playwrights like Sophocles, Euripides, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekov, Tolstoy, Gorky, Sartre, Camus, Bertolt Brecht and many others were thus made available to theatres in Indian
languages. Second, many individuals now attracted towards the theatre considered it a means of creative expression and not primarily a source of profit. They drew inspiration not only from the best of the western drama but also the most significant artistic features and ideas of the western theatre. The theatre, for them, was not a mere pastime or a means of entertainment, but a way of life, a vehicle for exploring reality and the meaning of existence.

In this phase, directors like Sombhu Mitra, Tanvir, Ebrahim Alkazi, Shyamanand Jalan, Utpal Dutt, Satyadev Dubey and later on Arvind Deshpande, Vijaya Mehta, Jabbar patel, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, Rajinder Nath, B.V.Karanth came to the fore. They completely changed the shape and level of the Indian theatre. In fact, productions like Raktakarabi (Rabindra Nath Tagore); Chhenrs Tar (Tulsi Lahiri), Dashachakra, and Putul Khela (Ibsen) all by Sombhu Mitra; Agra Bazar by Habib Tanvir; Ashadh Ka Ek Din(Mohan Rakesh), Andha Yug (Dharmavir Bharati), King Lear(Shakespeare), King Oedipus(Sophocles) all by Ebrahim Alkaze; Shantata Court Chalu Ahe (Vijay Tendulkar) by Arvind Despande, Angar by Utpal Dutt are theatrical creations of unprecedented artistic achievement in the Indian theatre.

To an extent, one of the result of this changed awareness and attitude towards the theatre was that, during the sixth and seventh decades, almost simultaneously in many languages, a number of creatively significant and original plays were written, Evam Indrajit, Baki Itihas, Pagla Ghora by Badal Sircar in Bengali; Shantata Court Chalu Ahe, Ashi Pakhare Yeti by Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi; Kelu Janamejaya by Adya Rangacharya, Tughlaq by Girish Karnad in Kannada; Andha Yug by Dharmavir Bharati and Ashadh Ka Ek Din and Adhe Adhure by Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, brought to Indian dramatic literature, once again after centuries, the status of creative work. In these plays, almost for the first time in Indian theatre after the period of the Sanskrit drama, there is an attempt to understand and articulate the basic philosophical and moral questions, dilemmas or contradictions of life today, the relationship between different
layers of society, between individual and society, and between man and woman. These new plays tried to explore these areas of human concern in some depth and complexity never attempted before.

In dramatic form and technique, these plays generally show, at a sensitive and subtle level, the influence of modern and experimental western styles. In some plays, there are elements of the Indian traditional styles also. Altogether a kind of restlessness to forge a creative and aesthetic as also an original Indian dramatic style is evident in almost all the theatre workers of this phase, including the playwrights, directors, actors, stage technicians, critics and others.

These theatre men started questioning the nature and development of the modern theatre derived from the West, as well as its relevance and usefulness in the Indian context. Indeed the dramatic style, which emerged in different Indian languages as a result of the country-wide efforts to write and stage plays in imitation of the western drama and stage, was gradually losing its novelty and fascination. The model had, during a period of more than a hundred years, produced very few plays which had any significant or distinct creative achievement. Disillusionment, sooner or later, was almost inevitable. At the time, it was only natural in this process that the desire to come out of this desert of imitation and to seek their own fertile region, should surface and become strong.

**Habib Tanvir’s Contribution:** Since the beginning of the sixth decade itself, the young director Habib Tanvir had started attempts to forge a new indigenous idiom of theatre for which he went to the Sanskrit and the traditional theatre styles. Gradually, other theatre workers were also attracted towards this possibility and all aspects of theatrical activity were affected—dramatic writing, staging, acting, stagecraft, actor-audience relationship, theatre criticism, etc. an effort to forge a new relationship with the ancient Sanskrit and medieval regional theatre was underway in the theatre of this country, and thus a new stage of the community of the Indian theatre tradition gradually
started taking shape. By the end of the seventies, this became a major trend of the contemporary Indian theatre, and throughout the country, in every region and language, many playwrights, directors, actors, technicians, theatre groups got involved in some manner or the other in this exploration.

There are many reasons for this new development. For instance, in almost every sphere of life in our country today, there is a widespread search for Indian identity and our arts are not an exception. Particularly, in the theatre world, the growing awareness of the imitative nature of the work in the past century and its consequences has produced a great dissatisfaction, generating an increasing pressure to go to the roots of our life, culture and arts. After independence, for many reasons, our theatre people have had many more opportunities than before of an exposure to the traditional theatre of different languages and regions. As a result they have gradually they become aware of and also impressed by its astonishing vitality, spontaneity, aesthetic freshness and popularity among the common people.

Meanwhile theatre, the world over, was becoming more and more disillusioned with the naturalistic or realistic style and methods. Many creative people in the West, in their search for a more imaginative, intimate and socially relevant theatre, were led to the theatres in Asia, including the traditional modes in India. During the last two decades, internationally known theatre directors, like Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Richard Schechner, Petre Brook, have been exploring our traditional theatre performances and practices for their own artistic objectives and have repeatedly come to India in this connection. This also has led our theatre people to give a second look to our traditional theatre once again. In addition, the phenomenal popularity of the German, playwright, Bertolt Brecht, in this country during the last two decades, specially the unprecedented success of the productions of his plays with some of the methods of our traditional performances, has also sharply underlined the theatrically, imaginativeness and inherent power of the latter.
Trends in Dramatic Writing: In dramatic writing, two trends are evident. One, a new play in the specific structure of a regional *natya* or mode; and second an original play not in the form of any particular *natya*, but generally drawing upon the structure and theatrical methods of one or more regional modes. Some significant work has been done in both these trends, though the level of creative achievement of the plays so written is not uniform.

In the first category, for instance, Rasik Lal Parekh’s *Mena Gurjari*, Chandravevadan Mehta’s *Hoholika* and Shantha Gandhi’s *Jasma Odan* in Gujarati in the Bhavai mode; Vijay Thedulkar’s *Ga Sari* and Vasant Sabni’s *Gadhavachi Lagna* in Marathi in the Tamasha form; *Daku* by Mudrarakshas in Hindi in Nautanki style; or the recent *Siri Sampige* by Chandra Shekhar Kambar in Kannada on the pattern of the Yakshagana

INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA : The Indian English Drama has got its root in pre Independent times. It has traveled along the hard road to reach its present destination. Indeed the road has been very hard ever since the beginning of its journey. In order to have a clear perspective of the drama at present, a brief note on its birth and evolution is prerequisite. Hence an attempt is made to render the same in following parts. Indian English Drama can be divided into Indian English Drama during the pre-independent era and that during the post-independent era.

Pre-independence Indian English Drama of the Bengal Region:

The beginning of Indian English Drama is traced as far back as in 1831 with Krishna Mohan Banerji’s *The Persecuted* or *Dramatic Scenes*. This play is woven ground the present state of Hindu society in Calcutta reflecting the encounter between the East and the West.

Krishna Mohan Banerji’s play was followed by the three plays of Michael Madhusudan Dutt entitled Ratnavali in 1858, *Is this called civilization ?* In 1871 and Nation Builders published posthumously in 1922 respectively. Indeed these plays have
been translated from his Bengali version into English by himself. The Last in Bengal in the 19th century is Ramkinoo Dutt’s Manipura Tragedy. The position of Indian English Drama is during this period is described by M.K.Naik in the following as:

In fact even in Bengal- the foundation-head of most forms Indian English literature-drama in English failed to secure a local theatrical habitation, in sharp contrast to plays in the mother tongue (both original and in the form of adaptations from the foreign language ages); and the appetite for plays in English could more conveniently be fed on performances of established dramatic successes in English by foreign authors. ….Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English drama in Bengal, , as elsewhere in India, grew sporadically as mostly closet drama;¹ (98)

Sri Aurobindo is the successor of Ramkinoo Dutt by writing five complete and six incomplete verse plays between 1891 and 1916. It is very interesting to note that Sir Aurobindo’s plays contain a variety of time and places. It includes the period from the ancient Greek times to medieval India and such diverging lands as Iraq; Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. The major themes of his plays are classified into two as:

1) The idea of human evolution.

2) Love as a benevolent force. It is also important to observe that his plays have been modeled on late Victorian pastiches of Shakespearian drama.

Rabindranath Tagore is yet another major playwright in India English literature. Other than the two plays in Bengali, he has written about a dozen plays. Some of the most popular among them are Chitra (1913), The Cycle of Spring (1917), Sacrifice and other plays (1917), Red Oleanders (1924), Natir Puja (1927) and Majorie Sykes (1950). With regard to the theme, his plays are divided into two groups namely thesis plays and psychological dramas. The plays like Sanyasi, The Cycle of Spring, Chitra, Malini, Sacrifice, Natir Puja and Red- Oleanders belong to the category of thesis play. The
plays like _The King and the Queen, Kacha and Devayani, Karna and Kunti, and The Mother’s prayer_.

The next prominent playwright is Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. His career in playwriting began with _Abu Hassan_ (1918). He published poems and plays in 1927. It consists of seven verse plays the subject of which is woven around the lives of such Indian saints as Pundalik, Saku Bai, Jayadeva, Chokha Mela, Ekanath, Raidas and Tukaram. His next endeavour is a collection of plays entitled _Five Plays_ published in 1929. These plays are in prose and exhibit the author’s socialist sympathies.

After Chattopadhyaya, there are only a few writers whose works are not so significant as the works of the predecessors. The works of this group of writers are as follow: The Prince of destiny by Sharath Kumar Ghose (1910), Calif for a Day by Kedarnath Das Gupta in 1916 and Layla Majnu by Dhan Gopal Mukherji in 1916.

In Bombay region, the growth of drama in English has been slower during this period, though an theatre called The Bombay Amateur Theatre was established there in 1776 itself. Only performances of the visiting European touring companies were conducted there. There were only a few artists like C.S.Nazir, D.M.Wedia and P.P.Meherjee who wrote plays in English. Their works are as follows: C.S.Nazir’s _The First Parsi Baronet_ (1866), D.M.Waia’s _The Indian Heroine_ (1877), and P.P.Meherjee’s _Dolly Parsen_ (1918).

**Indian English Drama in Madras Region:** Though Madras began later than Bombay, it surpassed the latter in playwriting. In 1875 The Madras Dramatic Society was established and it gave a boost to the amateur European theatricals. Subsequently two more drama forums were founded namely _The Oriental Drama Club_ in 1882 and The Sarasa Vinodini Sabha in 1890.

V.V.Srinivasa Iyangar is the most productive of the Madras dramatists. He has authored _Blessed in a Wife_ (1911), _The Point of View_ (1915), _Wait for the Stroke_ (1915), _The Bricks Between_ (1918), _Rama Rajya_ (1952) _Any Cost, Vitchu’s Wife, The Surgeon-
General’s Prescription. Among theme, The Bricks Between is a thesis play while At Any Cost is a historical play. The last two are comedies. Though there were a few playwrights like P.V. R.Raju, Krishnammacharys, J. Krishna Ayer, A.C. Krishnaswamy and others during this period, their works are regarded as minor only.

Post-independence Indian English Drama: Drama has not improved so much as Fiction during the post independent era as well. There are some reasons for it. Firstly it is a composite art in which the playwright, the actors and the audience are involved and the defect in any one is bound to affect the whole process of its creation. Secondly, the drama has been monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages. It has caused an adverse effect on the English Drama. Though the National School Drama was established in Delhi and National Drama Festivals were organized, the Indian English Drama could not gain much of its benefits because they had encouraged the dramas in the regional languages. Though there were opportunities to perform the plays abroad only a few artists like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma and Gurcharan Das, there was an utter failure to establish a regular school of Indian English drama in India.

Yet some writers like Manjeri Isvaran, G.V.Desani, Lakhan Den and Pritish have sustained Indian English drama. While Isvaran has written Yama and Yami G.V.Desani has written Hali (1950) both of which are poetic drama. Lakhan Deb has also written three verse dramas, which are Tiger Claw (1967), Vivekanand (1972) and Murder At the Prayer meeting. The Tiger Claw is a historical play dealing the Bijapur general Afzal Khan as the theme. Murder at the Meeting is woven around the murder of Mahatma Gandhi as the theme.

It is followed by the dramas dealing with recent political events like the partition and its aftermath, the Sino-Indian conflict the liberation of Portuguese Goa, Malaysian freedom, Indian freedom struggle, the assignation of Gandhi, the Naxalite movement, and others.
These plays are said to have a strong documentary element about. It is noted that there is no attempt to understand and project in dramatic terms the ideological implications of the political conflicts dealt with.

There are some plays dealing with social problems. They are Doldrummers (1960), and The Miracle Seed (1973). While the first deals with the life of the young Christian drop-outs who live in a shack on a Bombay beach, the second deals with the famine situation in Maharashtra.

The next category of plays includes those that deal with the East-West encounter themes. The following plays come under this category: The Tourist Mecca (1959), The Hungry Ones (1965 -77) and Darjeeling Tea ? (1971) and they offer a series of stereotypes like the Americans and Russians.

There are some psychological plays too. They are: The Cock (1959), The Dumb Dancer (1961) and This Alien…. Native Land (1975).

The other themes with which the plays of this period deal include the evolution of Hindu religion, and sex. While OM (1961) deals with the former theme The Professor Has a Warcry (1970) deals with the latter theme.

Nissim Ezekiel is a distinct playwright during this period. He has written Nalini: A Comedy, Marriage Poem : A Tragi comedy, and The Sleepwalker. An Indo-American Face. They were published as an anthology in 1969. Gurcharan is yet another playwright. He has published only one play entitled Larins Sahib (1970). It is a historical play which deals with Henry Lawrence of the Punjab. It evokes the 19th century colonial Indian background. His Mira has not been published.

Mahesh Dattani enjoys the distinction of the first Indian English playwright to win a Sahitya Akademi award. He is a versatile stage personality, a drama teacher, stage–director, actor and Bharatanatyam dancer. His works are Final Solutions and other plays in 1994, and collected plays in Final Solutions, and other plays. They are Where there’s a will; Dance Like a Man; Bravely Fought the Queen and Final Solutions. His
collected plays consists six plays and two radio-plays. The technical virtuosity is a noteworthy feature of Dattani’s plays. His dialogues are crisp and entirely functional.

**A Note on Feminism:** Feminism is simply described as a tendency of revolt against the gender discrimination and of fighting for gender equality. These very terms ‘gender discrimination and gender equality’ denote that such acts were and are in practice in the society across the world. The study of history of mankind provides a lot of evidences that man has been bestowed with an edge over woman from the time immemorial everywhere in the world. Woman was an object of discrimination in social, economic and political spheres. It is so because man was at helm of making and implementing norms and rules regarding the status man and woman in the society and he has always given priority to his sex over the opposite sex. The religion, laws and customs were made to uphold this discrimination as being natural.

The womankind also internalized this gender bias and accepted as natural and lived under the domination of man for tens and thousands of years without questioning such a practice. The patriarchy caused disability to woman by way of denying equal opportunities in education, employment, spiritualism, and politics. At the same time, women had also reacted to this gender injustice in one way or the other. The tradition of women thinking for women and sexual politics in the European society is said to be four hundred years old before French Revolution.

However, the notion of feminism as a movement was in vogue in the 19th and 20th century. It is observed that the English and French Revolutions and a thinker like Anne Hutchinson were the thriving force and influence for the Feminist Movement. In France, Christine de Pisan is considered to be the foremost woman with modernist feminist views. It must be at the same time noted that the term feminism was not used by the early feminists. Instead the terms like defenders or advocates of women were in practice.
Such a gender injustice was questioned by the intellectuals like Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill and a series women intellectuals followed suit. Mary Wollstonecraft is regarded as the earliest crusader for the independence of woman. She is described as “Self educated writer and social theorist. She worked as a governess and a school teacher and spent much time in France. She produced an early manifesto on human rights and the French Revolution and then the strikingly original and influential *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In this book she argued against ideas of the natural inequality of the sexes and held that women were just as capable of the exercise of reason as were men. Her book became a leading text in feminist thought. She lived with radical William Godwin from 1796, marrying him when she became pregnant. She died shortly after childbirth. [ODS, 806]. She had devoted her life and works for the protest against the institutional oppression of women and their identity. Her monumental work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792 gave rise to wide and violent response among the people. This book faced objections and attacked by various male chauvinists. He had demanded education, legal representation, the right to vote, the right to property and admission to professions.

John Stuart Mill is described as “An English philosopher, proponent of liberalism and utilitarianism, and social reformer. Mill publicized the works of Auguste Comte in Britain, critically developed the utilitarian works of his own father James Mill (1773-1836) and his god father Jeremy Bentham, and attempted to provide ‘a general science of man in society’ in his *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Detective* (1843). who is regarded as one of the most extraordinary men of his century had contributed to the creation of feminine consciousness. His *The Subjection of Women* published in 1869 is another book of revolution in the area of feminism. It was also badly criticised and attacked by the male chauvinists. Mill had argued that the women also possess abilities equivalent to men and advocated their right to enter any trade or profession. He also emphasised that the liberty of individual – male or female – is an absolute necessity for
the development of society. He had evinced that the position of woman in the society is not natural. On the contrary, it is the result of political oppression by men. He condemned the family system and culture which is founded on masculine domination. Its influence causes corruption by making boys selfish and girls abject.

Feminism took a turn at the beginning of the twentieth century referring to suffragettes and other campaigners for votes for women and women’s access to education and employment. When the right for women to vote became accomplished, the movement of feminism also become slow in the West. But the second wave of feminism was initiated by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* which is described as” a foundational text which remains a crucial influence on contemporary feminist thought. Her recognition that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ became the basis for the distinction between sex and gender. Her argument that women were defined in relation to men, but unequally, so that ‘woman’ was the negation or ‘Other’ of ‘man’ resonated in later feminist theories, as did her understanding that femininity and masculinity are both discursive and material” [ODS, 251].

Then a series of writers and thinkers like Kate Millett, Betty Friedan, Valerie Solanas, Shulamith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell emerged and the echo of The Women’s Liberation Movement was observed. The attention was drawn to different forms and sites of female subordination and male authority including the ways in which marriages and motherhood caused confinement women to the private sphere. It was argued that these factors prevented women from realising their potentials and caused interiorization of inferiority. The nature and function of Women’s Liberation Movement are explained thus:

The WLM was a grass-root movement, composed of many locally based groups which came together in campaigns and national conferences. At the first British national conference in 1970, four demands were formulated, for equal pay, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries, and free contraception and abortion on demand. The
last was altered to women’s right to control their bodies. ... and the fifth added, demanding financial independence. Campaigns ranged from rape crisis and women’s aid to support for night cleaners and machinists at Fords, and solidarity campaigns with women’s struggle in Chile, Argentina, South Africa, and Mozambique. Publications took the form of pamphlets, newsletters, and magazines, the best known in Britain being *shrew, Spare Rib,* and *Red Rag* dominantly. Members were predominantly young and well-educated. [*ODS, 251*]

The differences were noticed between the theory and politics of feminism. The foremost and greatest division is seen between those who aim for emancipation and equal rights within the present system and those whose goal was liberation and transformation of the prevailing sex/gender system. Besides, there were debates about equality and differences like whether women and men were the same or different and they should be given similar or different treatment. There was also a debate whether the patriarchy or the capitalism was responsible for gender subordination. A section of feminists called radical feminists held that men were the main enemy and rejected to combine with the male. Another section of feminists called sociologist feminists who defied the compulsory heterosexuality and advocated lesbianism. In addition, these feminists condemned anti-social family and romantic love as oppressive institution.

Indian has been a land of patriarchy from the time immemorial. Women are marginal and peripheral in the Indian society. The Indian women were excluded from religious, social, political and economic mainstreams. They are denied the basic rights and freedom. The factors like marriage, motherhood, fidelity and devotion have been the tools of subjugating and oppressing women in India. There were oppositions to *sati* system but most of the major gender discriminations were treated with indifference. Jyothibha Phule, Dr.B.R.Amberdkar and Periyar were the foremost reformers who raised the voice against gender discrimination and women’s emancipation. Though there are feminists like Indian Gayatri Spiwak and Susi Tharu, Feminism has failed to
establish a strong root in India. The aspects of feminism in the creative writing in India are not concrete.

Girish Karnad, a Rhodes Scholar and well-versed with various movements in the West, has provided a scope for the discussion of several literary theories and social conventions in his plays. His adoption of various old mythical, historical and folk sources and creation new characters in his plays exhibit the many tendencies of feminism. He exposes the ill-treatment of women and incorporates a protest against it in a very masterly manner.

Notes: