Chapter I: Introduction

Mahesh Dattani – His life and Works

Drama: Meaning and Definition

A literary art attains cosmic value when it reflects human experience and sensibility faithfully, and also corresponding with the universal socio-moral codes. By virtue of its live performance and potential to facilitate direct communication between the artist and the audience, drama has immersed as a potent literary mode of representation of human sensibility that is universal and is beyond the limitations of time and space. It is the oldest, authentic, and the most appealing form of literature. It has also been acknowledged as an instrument to human entertainment and enlightenment for ages. It has close affinity and affiliation with religion since time immemorial. The Indian tradition maintains that roots of all art are laying in the Pranav nada, om. The dance of Lord Shiva is often said to be divine or cosmic play. Our great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata also attempt to define drama and dramaturgy. The Mahabharata defines drama as a mixture of poetry, story, action etc. The great ancient Indian poet and the creator of the Ramayana, Valmiki uses the word ‘Nat’ or ‘Narataka’-meaning an actor or a performer.

The word “drama” has its origin in Greek. It is originated from word “dra” meaning “do”. In this way, ‘doing’ or ‘action’ is column beam of the whole dramatic premise. Aristotle has also acknowledged action as the predominating component of drama. Narrative holds much importance in fiction, but action and dialogue hold paramount significance in drama. Compton- Rickett defines drama ‘as an articulate story presented in action.’ ¹ This lays emphasis on speech and action in drama.

Drama is a representational art, a visible and audible narrative presenting virtual, fictional characters within a virtual, fictional universe. It has come close to the observation of Marjorie Boulton:
A true play is three dimensionals. It is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended that the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions, which occur literally and physically on the stage. Though in fact, plays are often read in silence, if we are to study drama at all intelligently we must always keep this in mind.

It is appropriate to say that the composition of drama is more difficult task than other forms of literature. The playwright has to coordinate various elements like dialogue, music, plot, metaphoric construction, psyches of the characters and audience, paraphernalia and stage craft along with the unity of time. It is observed: “It is a composite art, in which the author, the actor and the stage manager all combines to produce the total effect.”

Theatre represents human life on the stage with its all facets and dimensions as well as colour and complexities. So, drama or theater has direct connection with human life. The great sage, Bharat Muni, in his great treatise Natyashashtra dictates: “Theatre is life. There is no art, no life, no craft, no learning, and no action which cannot be seen in it.” The dramatist attempts to reach audience through the means of stage via performers. Performance, idea, and paraphernalia, make continuity to seek ‘wholeness’. The playwright is bound by economy of characterization and depiction of the events or episodes.

There are different kinds of drama. In a broader classification, drama can be put into two categories: Tragic Drama (Tragedy) and Comic Drama (Comedy). From the structural point of view, both sub-genres of drama pass through five evolutionary phases known as pyramid structure of the drama. They are: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Catastrophe or denouement. Thus, the composition and functions of drama is
quite compact than any other forms of literature. The success of drama involves the participation of the three variables: the playwright, performers and playgoers.

❖ The Origin and Development of English Drama

In England, the church played an important role in the nourishment and flourishing of the drama. It is very pertinent to say here that the drama appeared in England in the post-Norman conquest period. Before 10th century, there was no drama as such. It arrived in England with the Normans. An elementary form which may be called Tableau existed outside England. The origin and development of miracle and morality play also connected with this tradition. In those days, dramas were enacted in the church mainly based on religious and ethical subjects, written by the clergymen. In the course of time, it shifted from clergyman to common man-ultimately reaching on to the streets.

The religious or sacred dramas were known as Miracle or Mystery Plays. These plays were based on the lives of saints or the Christ. The scenes were performed on the mobile stage which was known as pageants. Ludus de Sancta Kathurian was the earliest English Miracle play.

English drama attained artistic maturity during the Renaissance. The credit of writing first regular plays goes to Nicholas Udall, who wrote Ralph Roister Doister in 1541. It is the first regular comic play or comedy, whereas the credit of writing the first English tragedy goes to Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, who jointly composed English tragedy Gorboduc which was written some time during 1562. Hence, the regular English drama conceived under the classical influence even before the Elizabethan age in which drama attained the highest position among all the literary genres. It is to be noted here that the group of dramatist known as “University Wits” namely Christopher Marlow, John Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Nash, Thomas Kyd, and Thomas Lodge. Thomas Kyd contributed significantly in the rapid development of English drama. His Spanish Tragedy was the significant Senecan tragedy that influenced a lot to many dramatists
to apply melodramatic elements. Roman dramatist Seneca swayed greatly upon the tragic writers of England. His use of melodramatic element in the plays tempted to imitate to the English writers. Needless to say, the English drama blossomed fully in the hands of Shakespeare, the uncrowned king of English literature.

The Origin and Development of Indian Drama

Drama is the manifestation of religious instinct of human beings in the most of the countries of the world, whether in India or Egypt, China or Britain, it is deeply rooted in religious instinct of the people. In ancient India, dramas were enacted in the temples. It was a kind of religious activity or offering to God on various occasions, events and celebrations. They were based mainly on religious scriptures, myths, legends etc. The good forces were praised and evil forces were punished in them. Since these plays were staged in the temples, they were known as Temple plays.

As regards the birth of Indian drama, it dates back to pre-Christian era. The great sage and the architect of Indian drama Bharat Muni appeared approximately in the seventh century A.D. He has very dexterously and interestingly propounded the theory of drama in his great work entitled Natyashastra, which is, perhaps, the first complete, concise, and a systematic treatise on drama in India. He said that gods wanted to have a thing of great entertainment with the combine qualities of audio-visual elements, which can be accessed for enjoyment equally to all segments of society. So, they prayed to Lord Brahma who has been regarded as the creator of the universe. Lord Brahma made drama opting nectar of all the four Vedas-the Rigveda, the Sam Veda, the Yajurveda, and the Atharva Veda. He took plot, music, acting and rasas (sentiments) from these four vedas respectively. In this way, he created drama, the fifth Veda, which is characterized by the four different qualities of all the four Vedas.

Thus, the inception or the birth of Indian classical Sanskrit drama traced back to the Vedic period. The journey of Indian drama commences with Sanskrit plays. It is observed: “Indian tradition, preserved in
the ‘Natyashastra’, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama, claims for the drama divine origin, and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves.”^5

The drama had been one of the finest expressions of Indian culture for the ages. The inscriptions at the Sitabenga and Jogimara caves in south Bihar are good indicators of the subsistence of a well developed dramatic tradition in India even in third century B.C.

However, it is to be noted here that the established notion of divine origin of Sanskrit drama is objected by some scholars by propounding unconventional hypotheses regarding the origin of drama—say for example Prof. R. V. Jagirdar of Karnataka college, Dharwar has traced its birth to the ‘Suta tradition of the Puranas’.^6

There are two broad division of all Sanskrit literature. Drishya and Sravya. The word ‘Drishya’ means something which can be seen or perceived with eyes. So, drama comes under this category. The word ‘Sravya’ means something which can be heard or listened to. The poetry in all forms comes under this category.

Technically speaking, Sanskrit play develops depending mainly on three constituents or elements. They are: (i) Vastu (plot) (ii) Neta (hero) and (iii) Rasa (sentiments). It should be mentioned here that while defining tragedy in his great work, Poetics, Aristotle also stresses much importance on plot. He considers the plot as the ‘soul of tragedy’. There can be tragedy without character but no one such without plot.

Kalidas, Asvaghosa, Bhavbhatti, Bhasha, Sudrak among others are the doyen dramatists in the whole range of history of Indian drama. They gave some immortal works of literature. They have been sources of inspiration not only for their successors but also continue to inspire the Indian playwrights even today.
Later on, unfortunately, Sanskrit drama became a court art or royal art as it ceased to be the literary exercise for the experts of Sanskrit. These Sanskrit pandit or scholars of Sanskrit had been obtaining due encouragement and incentives from the kings and the queens. The political changes also affected in development and continuity of Sanskrit drama.

In this way, India offered a fertile soil to the drama. It has a very splendid and richer tradition of dramatic literature than any other country or culture. Even before over 2000 years, it had its own systematic and elaborative dramatic theory.

**Vernacular Form of Drama**

Basically, Indian drama nestled into the cradle of classical Sanskrit dramas. However, Indian drama can be classified into two groups (1) Sanskrit drama (2) Prakrit-drama in vernacular language. After the decline of classical Sanskrit drama, Indian dramas registered substantial development in the regional languages of India. Despite the foreign invasions and political changes, they persisted to exist as the potent tool of entertainment and enlightenment. Even today, people love to watch the regional dramas in almost all the states of India. Every folk theatre has its own identical name, for example, performance of the drama is called “Bhaona” in Assam. In Bengal, it is known as ‘jatra’ which still persists and attracts the people of Bengal. The most interesting thing about jatra theatre is that it doesn’t require any fixed platform or stage properties. The word ‘jatra’ means a religious precession accompanied by dance, song, music etc. It is one of the earliest forms of drama in vernacular language. The vernacular form of drama is known as Ramlila in northern India and ‘Kathakali’ in Kerala. ‘Kathakali’ is the most representative of the life and mind of Keralite. Marathi stage, which centred on various rasas, has no much resemblance with other vernacular dramas in India.

*Bhavai* is the prakrit-vernacular form of folk tradition of Gujarati drama. It is one of the manifestations of Gujarati regional theatrical performance. It is the most popular folk theatrical tradition of Gujarat. The word
‘bhavai’ has wider connotation and variegated meaning. In dramatic world, bhavai means a kind of show or spectacle. The performers of bhavai are called bhavaiya.

- **Indian English Drama: Tradition and Achievement**

India has a prolonged, proud and splendid past of dramatic art. Perhaps, no country can withstand comparison with India in this matter except Greece. Actually, the tradition of Indian English Drama began with the arrival of the Britishers in India. Along with transcription of European models, Sanskrit plays were translated into English.

The development of Indian English Drama had been staggering for over nearly two centuries. It doesn't mean that there were no writers. Right from the beginning of the twentieth century, the plays have been written and staged, but very few of them have met with thumping success on the stage. There were many dramatists who had tried their hands at writing plays. As a matter of fact, most Indian English plays are translated works. Some of them by writers themselves, while some by others. A very few plays are originally written in English. The stunted journey of Indian English play is attributed to many factors. One of them is non-availability of stage-worthy plays. Writing and staging of the plays are two different tasks. In the same way, viewing of the play and reading of the play are quite two different experiences. Reading a play renders more information and less excitement, whereas viewing a play is the most exciting, appealing and memorable thing.

The drama requires great commitment and interest on either side – performers and viewers. Even the dramatist himself also depends on the players who perform his play. Drama, being an audio visual medium of expression, must be staged. And staging drama demands great care and conscious efforts not only on the part of performers but also on the part of viewers. In this connection, M. K. Naik aptly observes:

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic
realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage and through that medium reacts on the mind of that audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience. 

Thus, the text of the play is meant for the stage – performance. When an English play is performed, we see Indian character speaking English in all kinds of situations and circumstances. This poses the problem of their liability before us. They speak English to the vendors, servants or their grandparents or elders. The dramatist must have convincing power for all these. There is a mixed reaction to the normal Indian speaking English with a milkman or a newspaper vendor. Again if they use Indian words or English words with Indian accent, there are some who will react against this also. So, there are some challenges before Indian dramatist for the creation of convincing Indian English theatre. It demands sincere and sustained efforts on the part of author and production authority to keep theatre going. Moreover, the lack of living theatre in India is inhibiting factor for ongoing journey of Indian drama in English.

However, Indian English Drama is growing slowly and steadily for carving its niche in the realm of commonwealth literature. Since the pre-independence era, there have been constant efforts to create the plays with due dramatic qualities. Even after decades together, the attempts were not met with handsome result. The most Indian plays, available in English, are the translated works. We have but very few little original works in English. Drama, being composite art, it should be endowed with both qualities – literary and stage.

The origin of Indian drama in English can be traced back to the pre-independence era. Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote the first Indian English Play entitled *The Persecuted* or *Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*. It appeared in 1831 on the literary horizon.
Thus, the journey of Indian English Drama embarked with the appearance of this play more than a century before the independence era. The play depicts clash and conflict of a sensitive Bengali youth that occurs due to traditionalism and liberal views resulting from the acquisition of foreign education. However, Indian English Drama has never achieved smart success.

It is very essential to mention here that the real journey of Indian Drama in English started with the publication of Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s translated play *Is this called Civilization?* The play came on the dramatic firmament of India in 1871. The play originally was written in Bengali and translated by the playwright himself into English. The play depicts the social life and the issues pertaining to that period of it. Ramkinoo Dutt wrote *Manipura Tragedy* in 1891. The dramas written during this era were not numerous in quantity. Moreover, they lacked in refinement and dramatic qualities.

However, under the influence of British Drama, Indian Drama in English beyond certain odds and obstacles began to blossom in the hands of literary wizards like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chatopadhyay, T. P. Kailasam among others in pre-independence period.

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are the connoisseurs of art and literature. They have been considered as the first Indian Playwrights of repute in Indian English Drama. They have contributed significantly in the field of Indian Drama in English. As regards Tagore’s dramatic output, *The Post office, Chitra, Sanyasi or The Ascetic, Sacrifice, The Cycle of Spring, The King and The Queen, Kacha and Devyani, The mother’s Prayer, Karna and Kunti, Somaka and Ritvika, Ama and Vinayaka, Autumn Festival, The Waterfall or Muktadhara, Red Oleanders, The King of the Dark Chamber* among others are celebrated dramatic works credited to Tagore. All these works originally appeared in Bengali. Later on, they were translated into English. They are deeply rooted in Indian soil in terms of themes and ethos as well as Indian thoughts and philosophy. They bear the imprint of his literary
genius. His plays hold much importance from the point of view of sustenance and enhancement of tradition of Indian Drama in English.

Sri Aurobindo, a man of versatile genius, has greatly enriched and enlightened Indian Drama in English by way of writing plays of good quality. He has, to his credit, five complete blank verse and six incomplete plays. He has made proper use of blank verse in his plays. He wrote his drama on the lines of Elizabethan drama. However, the influence of Sanskrit classical dramatists also can be felt in them.

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 Bhavbhuti,- though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones. 8

Out of the five complete plays, only *The Perseus the Deliverer* appeared during the span of his life. The remaining four *Vasavadutta, Rodogune, The viziers of Bassora* and *Eric* were published posthumously. *The Witch of Ilni, Achab and Esarhaddon, The maid and the Mill, The Birth of Sin, The House of Brut, and The Prince of Edur* are his incomplete works. These plays are diverse in themes and traditions. The Play *Rodogune* depicts the story of Cleopatra and disloyalty of her two sons Antiochus and Timocles. *The Perseus the Deliverer*, steeped in Greek myth of Perseus, dramatizes the conflict between old ethic and the new one emphasizing the prevalence of the new values. *Vasavadutta* is closely related to Sanskrit classical drama *Swapna Vasavadattam*, a comedy written by the great Indian dramatist Bhasa, whereas *The Viziers* and *Eric* are the plays rooted in alien background.

It is very necessary to mention here that despite rich themes and verbal texture, the plays of these two literary wizards failed to impact on the stage.
Another great dramatic figure we encounter is Harindranath Chattopadhyay, who had made notable contribution in the realm of Indian English Drama. He had left behind him good dramatic legacy. He wrote seven plays in verse, which appeared under the title of Poems and Plays in the year 1927. He drew the material from the lives of the great Indian saints for all the seven plays. These plays are also known as hagiological plays. He began his dramatic voyage with Abu Hassan in 1918. He has to his credit prose plays, which arrived on literary scene under the title Five Plays (1929). They are deeply dyed with the colour of socialist views and realism. The play The Window and the Parrots depicts the lives of the poor people. Sidharth: Man of Peace deals with the glory of Buddha’s life. The play The Sentry’s Lantern displays the writer’s deep concern for the unreached and unaccessed. It symbolizes the ensuing hope and aspiration for the unprivileged and unreached. It is to be noted here that his plays lacked the dramatic qualities. Hence, they failed to impact the audience. However, the subject matters of the plays are very rich and dignified. They are remarkable for the philosophical flavour.

The dramatic geniuses of these three outstanding Bengali playwrights- Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Chattopadhyaya find due expression in their great works. All these three literary stalwarts have made substantial help for establishing and enhancing the tradition of Indian English drama and adding new dimension to it.

A. S. P. Ayyar is another great playwright in the realm of Indian drama in English. With his six dramas, he has made significant contribution to the field of Indian drama in English. In the Clutch of Devil (1929) is his first drama and The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity is the last one. What holds prime significance in his plays is the message, while plot and characterization are of the subsidiary significance. He employs drama as the mode for seizing reality of contemporary life. Briefly, his dramatic output helped to continue the journey of Indian Drama in English.
The next great dramatic figure we come across is T. P. Kailasam who wrote both in English and Kannad. It should be noted here that T. P. Kailasam has been considered as the father of modern Kannad drama. However, his dramatic art blossoms fully in English drama. G. S. Amur appreciates his creative caliber in the following terms:

A talented actor who appeared in the amateur as well as the professional stage, he brought to the writing of drama an intimate knowledge of theatre. It is for this reason that his plays whether in Kannad or English have a uniform technical excellence.  

T. P. Kailasam has ardent love for dramatic genre. He has to his credit “The Burden” (1933), “Fulfillment” (1933) “The purpose” (1944) “Karna” (1946) and Keechaka (1949).

In the beginning, there was no woman dramatist worth considering in the realm of Indian English Drama. However, after many decades of its journey, Bharati Sarabhai appeared on the literary scene of Indian drama in English. She is the first female dramatist of pre-independence era. She wrote two plays – The Well of the People (1943) and Two Women (1952). These plays could meet with good success. The most important thing is that her play The Well of the People deals with Gandhian idealism. By that way, it attaches Gandhian flavour to Indian drama in English.

The last great dramatic voice in pre-Independence era is J.M. Lobo Prabhu, who has been credited with about a dozen plays. Among them, only two plays – Mother of New India: A Play of the Indian Village in Three Acts (1944) and Death Abdicatoes (1945) were published during Pre-Independence era. The rest of the plays were published under the title Collected Plays in 1956. Technically speaking, Lobo Prabhu excels in creating live dialogues and situations, but his art of characterization is not so powerful and convincing.
Besides above cited dramatists of Pre-Independence era, there were some other dramatists who also attempted to plough the field of this literary genre, but they couldn’t make notable contribution in the field of Indian drama in English. They were: A.C. Krishnaswami (Two Twice Born -1914), S.M. Michel (Nation Builders) V.V.S. Iyengar (Dramatic Divertissements, a collection of six humourous playlets-1921), Sudhindra Nath Ghose (Colours of a Great City), Niranjan Pal (The Goddess-1924), R.K. Narayan (The Watchman of the Lake), Balwant Gargi (The Vulture and Other Plays-1941, Barrister at Law -1977), Mirnalini Sarabhai (Captive Soul-1945), Nalini Mohan Chatterjee (Krishna- 1937), S.C. Bhatt (Trial Celestial -1940), K.R. Srinivas Iyengar (Sumti and Her Spouse, The Storm in a Tea Cup. Battle of the Optional – 1930), A.S. Raman (Charity Hospital 1944), S. Fyzee Rahamen (Daughter of Ind -1940) Purushottam Tricundas (Sauce for the Goose 1946), S.D. Ghosal (Princess Kalyani 1930) V. Narayanan (Where God is Not and other Playlets 1933), D.M. Borgaonkar (Image Breakers) among others.

\[\textbf{Indian English Drama in the Post-Independence Era}\]

The tradition of Indian English Drama has been enriched and augmented further in post-independence epoch. Gradually, it begins to develop as powerful form for the creative expression. The marked difference between Pre-and Post Independence drama is that most of the dramas were written in verse during pre-independence era, whereas the post colonial dramatists showed much inclination to prosaic drama. All the same, the poetic drama continues to exist in the post colonial period. It is attributed:

\[\text{\textcircled{\textasteriskcentered} Tagore – Aurobindo – Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continues, but with a difference in the hands of Manjeri Isvaran, G.V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy.}\]

Despite the immense popularity of film and T.V. Serials, English plays were produced on the stage at home and abroad very successfully impacting the audience in an unprecedented manner. G.V. Desani’s best known play Hali (1950) was performed and won rave review. It was
successfully staged in India and also at the Watergate Theatre in London in 1950. It depicts the theme of love and passion. Prof. Iyengar observes:

A short poetic play, Hali is an attempt to project the story of a ‘passion’: in other words, Hali’s confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communication with love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place.¹¹

Lakhan Deb and Gurucharan Das are another two playwrights of some distinction. Their plays were performed on the stage with and without India and got considerable success. Lakhan Deb composed three dramas Tiger’s claw (1967), Murder at the Prayer Meeting (1976) and Vivekanand (1972). These plays are written in verse and they deal with historical events. The play Tiger’s Claw deals with the murder of Biaipur General Afzal Khan by Shivaji, whereas Murder at the Prayer Meeting deals with assassination of the father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi. This play reminds us the famous play Murder in the Cathedral by T.S. Eliot. He has made ample use of dramatic devices especially chorus and prologue in his plays. His plays are marked with the flawless quality of verse. Gurucharan Das also contributed his humble mite to the development of Indian English Drama. His play Larins Sahib is the fine example of decolonization of English language in the post-independence era. His play Mira was staged as a ballet in New York and in Bombay very successfully.

Pratap Sharma is another dramatic voice who has contributed considerably in the field of Indian English Drama. He has produced two stage-worthy plays. They are A Touch of Brightness (1968), and The Professor Has a War Cry (1970). It should be noted here that his plays were great success on stage in abroad, but they could not be performed in India. Sex is the underlying theme of his plays. However, Pratap Sharma ‘displays a keen sense of situation and his dialogues are often effective.’¹²
Nissim Ezekiel, a well known poet, also wrote five plays. However, the fact remains that he is not as much ease with dramatic art as with poetic art. His Three Plays (1969) consisting Nalini, a comedy in three acts, Marriage Poem, a tragic-comedy and The Sleep Walkers, an Indo-American farce, are the good commentary on the vanity and futility of urban middle class. He has employed ironical fantasy, satire etc. to exhibit hollowness of urban middle class.


Asif Currimbhoy touches up diverse issues and events in his plays such as social, political, economical, philosophical, historical psychological, religious, cross-cultural etc. His theatrical art, efficiency and profound knowledge of various human fields has immensely enriched and expanded the tradition of Indian English Drama. He has rightly been considered as “India’s first authentic voice in the theatre”

Gradually, Indian English drama begins to strengthen its position and started carving its own identity and place in Indian Writing in English. It registers the remarkable growth and also earns glory at national and international level in contemporary era. With the thematic and theatrical innovations, Indian English Drama marks the beginning of distinctive tradition in the realm of world drama. The playwrights find myths, legends, history, folklore etc. very useful and attractive for the thematic investment in their plays. In fact, contemporary playwrights reinvestigate this treasure of knowledge with present socio-culture and political scenario. However, it
should be pinpointed here that contemporary drama mainly depends on translation. The plays, written in vernacular languages, are translated into English. So, the translation works boosted up the Indian dramatic scene. In this context, the contributions of some great playwrights like Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar are highly wonderful and therefore, occasions here special elucidation.

Girish Karnad is one of the outstanding playwrights in the modern India. He has considerably enriched and enlightened the tradition of Indian English drama. During his childhood days in country side of Karnataka, he encountered with some *Natak Mandalies* which made indelible impression on his sensitive mind and subsequently found expressions in his dramatic works. Karnad has composed eight plays. All these plays are originally appeared in Kannad and later on, have been translated into English. He began his dramatic career with the publication of his maiden play *Yayati* in 1961. He is retelling the myth of *the Mahabharata* very skillfully in this play. He works out the motivation that facilitates Yayati’s final choice. It is a very unique and original play. Of the eight plays, five plays *Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Madala, Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain* are reincarnated into English. It is very essential to mention here that *Tughlaq* is also converted into some foreign languages especially Hungarian and German.

Girish Karnad has been awarded Bharatiya Natya Sangha for his *Hayavadana*. However, it is his next play *Tughlaq* which earns him name and fame as a major dramatist. He has also received the most prestigious Jnanpith Award for his wonderful contribution in the field of Indian English Drama. Karnad’s plays were staged successfully and got international recognition. He is capable of comprehending requisites of stage production of the play. He is adept at converting any event or any situation into aesthetic experience. Girish Karnad delves deep into myths and legends of India and employs them as vehicle of a new vision and interpretation. He gives fine and fresh food to apologetic existence of Indian English drama.
The next great dramatic voice in contemporary era that needs to be discussed is that of Vijay Tendulkar who provides new force and direction to Marathi theatre as well as Indian English theatre. Tendulkar, prolific dramatist of Marathi, begins his career as a free lance writer and emerges as prominent playwright on the literary scene of India. His dramatic corpus is vast, varied and wonderful. He has written twenty eight full length plays and twenty one act plays. He has also authored some children’s dramas and a novel. He has, originally, written all his plays in Marathi. Most of his plays are translated into English. Some of his well-known plays are; The Silence! The Court is in Session, (1968), Ghasiram Kotwal (1972) Kanyadan (1982) Sukhram Binder (1972), The Vultures, Kamala (1982) etc. Considering his great service to Indian theatre, he has been honoured by Natak Akademi in 1971.

Another brilliant star in the literary firmament of India is that of Badal Sircar who externalizes the existencial attitude of modern life through his dramatic works. He has to his credit, Solution X, Evan Inderjit (1462), That other history (1964), There is not End (1971), Pagla Ghoda, Palap, Pary Konodin, Jadi Aur Ek Baar, stale News, Procession.

Badal Sircar is called ‘barefoot playwright’. Since theatre is the effective and powerful medium of sharing our views and opinions with the people, Sircar employs theatre as a mode of social change and expresses his views and ideas pertaining to socio-economic issues. What makes him endearing dramatist is his successful attempt to relate theatre to people and develops it to suitable people’s theatre which is assisted and developed by people. He aims at delineating ground reality of Indian villages.

He has not only broken the dictionary between the actors and audience but reduced the drama to its barest by dispensing with conventional story, plot, characters and dialogue.  

Sircar involves new technique of live communication with play -goers who also actually participate in performance of the play especially
concerning contemporary social issues. He evolves “third theatre’ deriving the good qualities of both the first and second theatre of Calcutta. Sircar, an avant-garde dramatist, has touched diverse themes in his plays such as social, political, exploitation etc. He started his theatrical career with comic plays like Solution X. His Evan Inderjit has been hailed as a milestone in the modern dramatic world, whereas his play Stale News centers on the concept of Third Theatre. It should be noted here that his concept of Third Theatre was considerably influenced by Grotowski’s “Poor Theatre”.

Badal Sircar is one of the prominent playwrights of modern India who have revolutionized the conventional concept of theatre and freed theatre from the saddle of droning stuff. Sircar’s “Third Theatre” facilitates the process of ‘being within and experiencing’ with the persona and the event being performed on the stage. His theatre differs from other theatre by bringing actors and the spectators on the same wavelength mentally and physically as well.

Another doyen dramatist in the arena of contemporary drama is Mohan Rakesh who is best known for his play Halfway House which is a translated work of his Hindi play ‘Adhe Adhure’. The play depicts discord and dichotomy of family life. It also explains how parental discord affects on the lives of the children. One Day in Ashadha (1958) and The Great Swans of the Waves (1902) are also his full length play dealing with the historical past. Nonetheless, the theme of man-woman relationship is also well explored in these plays. Since drama is the most powerful and potent means to explore human experience, Mohan Rakesh has used it for exploring man-woman relationship in a very realistic way. As far as Mohan Rakesh’s dramatic output is concerned, it is not very large one but his contribution to the field of Indian Drama is myriad.

In the present era, the genre of drama has also attracted women dramatists to try their hands in the field of the theatrical art. Among the women dramatists, Manjula Padmanabhan is the great dramatic figure that demands special attention. The other women playwrights who have also
contributed to the development of tradition of Indian English Drama in contemporary era are those of Dina Mehta, P. Sengupta, Mahasweta Devi, Uma Parameswaran and others.

Mahasweta Devi, prolific female playwright, deserves special mention. She has authored a good number of novels and articles. Her writing credentials crosses publication of more than 200 books. She originally wrote in Bengali, but her works have been translated into the major languages of the India and also of the major languages of the world like English, French etc. Her contribution to Indian English Drama is, indeed, great and commendable. In her writings, she delves deep on the problems and issues of the unreached and unjust masses of our society. She registered her protest against the violation of basic human rights to the unprivileged section of the society like women, dalit, children etc.

Mahasweta Devi is the writer with the commitment. Her writings display her social commitment and concern. Mahasweta Devi shows angry look at the societal unjust and inhumane treatment to the underdogs without any rhyme and reason in our hierarchical social construction and structure. Since the drama is the most powerful means to bring change in society, she presents through it the heart rendering problems and constraints of the marginalized Indian masses which, in fact, constitute a large section of our society. In her play ‘Water’, she dramatizes the grave problems like gender and caste discrimination, exploitation and violation of basic human rights to lower caste people. Water is the basic need for human existence on earth. The play ‘Water’ captures the realistic picture of denial of water to the down trodden and tribal in the countryside of West Bengal.

Uma Parmeswaran is also another great name in field of Indian English Drama. She has made a notable contribution to Indian English Drama. She begins her career as a newspaper reporter and today she is considered as a noted poet, short story writer and dramatist. Presently, she has been working as a professor of English with Winnipeg University. She
also serves as a regional representative, National Council of the Writers’ Union of Canada.

Uma Parmeswaran has made sustained and sincere efforts for presenting glorious heritage and culture of India on the global stage. Committed to the task, she has formed a center called Performing Arts & Literatures of India (PALI). She has to her credit plays like Sons Must Die, Meera (1971), Sita’s Promise, Rootless but green are the Boulevard Trees (1998), Dear Did (1989), My Sister (1989).

Manjula Padmanabhan is a playwright of high dramatic caliber. She is one of the most powerful female playwrights of contemporary era. She has received the most prestigious Onassis award for her pioneering play “Harvest”. The problems of alienation and marginalization are the off repeated themes in her plays. She depicts a very dirty decaying world in which mothers are seen bargaining their kids for the ‘price of rice’. The play Harvest, which puts its playwright on international stage, is a gruesome tale of despondent and dilapidated family living in a chawl of metropolitan, Mumbai. Forced by the ill and adverse circumstances, a twenty year young lad namely Om Prakash decides to be an organ donar. Eventually, he is compelled to bargains his own body to a white ‘First World buyer’. This incident reminds us the scene in which Dr. Faustus bargains his soul to Mephistopheles, chieftain of evil power.

Manjula Padmanabhan is the distinguished and doyen woman playwright in field of Indian Drama in English. She is the playwright of competent art and craft. Besides Indian English Drama, her contribution in the field of art and fiction is highly commendable. It is attributed:

Very recently Indian English Drama shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing.
Prior to the above discussed women dramatists, there are some other women dramatists like Usha Ganguly, P.Sengupta among others who have also used theatrical art to depict feminine self and psyche, their anguish and agony. In post-independence era, the women writers have started to register their protest against the domestic violence, suppression and subjugation of women as a second rank citizen, physical and mental exploitation of women through theatrical art. Hence, one can call it ‘Theater of Protest’. The women dramatists have immense theatrical potentiality to delineate feminine self, psyche and sensibility as well as plight of women in patriarchal social setup. The female playwrights document the realistic scenes of social-economic and psycho-cultural condition of women in our society.

Passing through the different stages of imitations and translations, Indian English Drama has ultimately got an independent identity and status in the last quarter of 20th century in the hands of Mahesh Dattani. It is the distinction of the dramatic vision of Dattani that he took the tradition of Indian English Drama as the faint reflection of European traditions. He adopted different forms of drama as a medium to represent the real depth and vitality of human experience. Therefore, it has become mandatory to contextualize the contribution of Mahesh Dattani in the totality of theatrical tradition.

Mahesh Dattani is the most powerful and potent dramatic voice in the present Indian English dramatic world. He has enriched and embellished tradition of Indian Drama with his experiments and innovations. With the arrival of Mahesh Dattani on the literary scene, the scenario begins to change. His plays are, originally, written in English. He has authored a good number of dramas diverse in themes, techniques and devices. Moreover, his plays have been produced on the stage very successfully.

The plays of Mahesh Dattani are characterized by some theatrical and thematic innovations. He is confluence of art and craft. He has not only intellectual power and prowess to produce a play in text but also has
an ability to get it staged successfully. While commenting on his plays; John Mc Rae calls him “the voice of India” and observes as follows:

They are the plays of today, sometimes as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same time they are the plays which embody many of the classic concern for world drama.\(^{16}\)

Dattani has an unconventional approach to theatre. He looks at the theatre as the medium to manifest the cause of the unprivileged segments of our society. His plays externalize the problems and pent up feeling of the subalterns in a very authentic and realistic manner. In his plays, Dattani visits untraversed and unexplored soil of homosexuals, HIV positive, eunuchs, physically challenged people etc. By touching up radical themes like gay themes, child sexual abuse, eunnuch etc., he has greatly expanded new horizons in Indian English drama.

Mahesh Dattani, the most comprehensive dramatic soul, was born on August 7, 1958 in city of Bangalore in Karnataka, though his parents originally belonged to Porbandar of Gujarat. They have migrated to Bombay for business purpose and eventually settled in Bangalore where he found an opportunity of watching Gujarati and Kannad plays in the company of his parents and sisters. Dattani took his education from Baldwin High School and St. Joseph College of Arts and Science, Bangalore. Recalling his days at Baldwin, he avers that the communication was only done through English. Use of vernacular language was strictly prohibited and frowned upon.

‘vernies’ and the ones who were fluent in English. Snob values were inculcated early on and you generally were made to feel privileged to belong to the school. We were taught English Literature with capital E!\(^{17}\)
Dattani has a very strong ‘passion’ for the theatrical art. He longs to present variegated Indian life and sensibility. It is because of these, he sets his eyes on the art of play writing and stage performance. Otherwise, he wanted to spend a normal life, helping run his father’s business. Of course, he helped his father in family business for some time. He has an urge to evolve theatrical tradition competent enough to capture spirit and sensibility of soil. He was motivated to join Bangalore Little Theatre during his college days, in early 1980’s and started participating in workshops, acting and directing plays. He took training of Western ballet under Molly Andre at Alliance Francaise de Bangalore (1984-87), whereas he took training of Bharatanatyam under Chandrabhaga Devi and Krishna Rao, Bangalore (1986-90). He did his graduations in history, economics and political science at St. Joseph College, Bangalore. He did his post-graduation in Marketing and Advertisement Management. So, his academic career has no direct connection with his dramatic voyage.

Mahesh Dattani started his own theatre group named Playpen in 1984. It can be interpreted as the manifestation of his abstract ideas and knowledge of art and dance. This playpen, an important performing art group, is very useful for the artist. His plays are performed at his studio. It also encourages the novice artists to participate in dramatic activities. He attaches his great success to his Playpen. He, in one of his interviews, asserts:

I wouldn’t say the only one, but I would say that I have been the most successful for various reasons: I have my own theatre company (Playpen), and I have a theatre background. I’m not writing because I’m a writer (of literature), I’m writing because I have theatre back-ground. 18

Dattani has also been teaching drama courses at the Summer Programme of Portland state University. He also organizes the workshops on theatre course and a host of other theatrical activities at his Playpen studio time and again.
Being the multifaceted literary and dramatic figure, Mahesh Dattani has given a new height and dimension to Indian English Drama. He has rendered great help in bringing out Indian English drama from apologetic existence. Under the patronage of dramatists like Mahesh Dattani, the withering tree of Indian English Drama has started taking its roots and growing rapidly. Besides being the best known dramatist, Dattani is also reputed and accomplished actor, director, scriptwriter and dance teacher. It has been attributed:

Dattani’s dramatic art is inspired by the mission to communicate profound meaning through his plays and, therefore, he exhibits keen awareness for the direction and stage performance of his own plays. His sensitive dramatic self is a fine synthesis of a dancer, director, actor, playwright, audience and commentator moving collectively towards a single direction. 19

Apart from play writing business, he has been actively engaged in so many activities related to theatre. He has starred successfully in some noted plays winning accolade for his brilliant and sterling performance. While responding to the questions whether there occurs a conflict between the actor Dattani and director Dattani, He explains in following terms:

The actor, the playwright and the director are all complimentary to each other in a production. It is like gardening; where a whole is made of many parts. So many conditions determine a garden’s lushness, its beauty. I write for an actor in the true sense of the word and not to ponder to vanity actors. There is no theatre without an actor or an audience. Everything is geared towards ‘rasa’ which is why I always direct the first production of any play I write. That enables me to put in more
stage instructions which go on to become a kind of blue print for other directors. That way, there is no conflict.  

Dattani has directed and acted in many plays. He first performs his play at his Playpen, a theatre company. The plays of other artists are also first performed there and necessary modifications are made in them. Since, Dattani is not the student of any art or literature, the questions arise in our mind that what makes him write a play. Actually, some theatre group used to perform Gujarati plays in Bangalore. Young Dattani would enjoy the watching of these plays in the company of his family. The sensitive mind of Dattani receives an indelible impression of theatrical performance. It sustained his interest of watching Gujarati and Kannada plays for a longer period. He admits:

I didn’t know the world at my doorstep. I got involved in theatre and for a long time continued to

Gujarati theater in Mumbai, I realized I had to unlearn a lot that I learnt in school. That is when my true education really began.  

Thus, his encounter with Gujarati plays is the most significant phenomenon in shaping his mind for theatre business. It is, therefore, we find Gujarati settings in most of his plays. He acknowledges this in the following way.

The playwright Madhu Rye influenced me a great deal in his portrayal of middle class Gujarati hypocrisies. Vijay Tendulkar’s Silence! The Court is in Session and Sakharam Binder impressed me with their complex portrayal of women characters.
Moreover, the aura of stage and audio-visual devices of a play attracted and appealed a lot to the mind and heart of Dattani. To the question what makes him write plays, Dattani responds in the following words.

I participated in the usual school plays and skits but I always yearned to direct performances. I realized that there must be a script for a performance. That’s why I started writing - not very serious stuff though, initially. I watched a play whenever I could. Every time there was a group from Bombay or Ahmadabad staging a play in Bangalore, it became a community event that we would all attend. I remember a play I saw as a child at Ravindra Kalakshetra that fascinated me. It used the "play within the play" concept that I’d never seen before and a dramatic finale that took place in the auditorium. The teasing tone, the costume and make-up, the lights -- were all bright and loud yet I was utterly captivated. I later learnt that it was Madhu Rye’s Koi Pun Ek Phool Nu Naam Bolo (Tell me the name of a flower). He is a sensational playwright. I got the chance to see his other plays, especially Kumarni Agashe (Kumar’s Terrace), also in Hindi as Neela Kamra, in Bombay. Then the Bangalore Little Theatre was formed and I became seriously involved in acting, directing and writing plays. I learnt much from Vijay Padaki in the early years. I started my own theatre studio after a few years. 23

Besides this, the American playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller have influenced him on the matter of stage craft. Mahesh Dattani has got a very strong urge and affinity for Indianness. He uses Indian dramatic devices, techniques etc. in a very ample measure. He has made
sustained and sincere efforts for making stage befitting to Indian milieu. He uses Indian words very profusely in his English plays. His characters are fond of using Gujarati dialogues. He has used good number of Gujarati, Kannada and Hindi words in his plays.

Dattani is one of few dramatists who write their play originally in English. He doesn’t follow western dramatic canons. He has indianized his English plays. With the globalization and arrival of digital technology, the world has become the small global village and English has become the lingua franca of this new global village. He wants to globalize the Indian stage and theatre through his English plays. Of course, he has succeeded in making its presence felt at global level. Moreover, English is a link language or contact language. At national and international level, it unites larger sections of society or civilization. About the use of English, he explains:

You’ve got to be true to your expressions. English is for me a sort of given. It’s my language as it is to a lot of Indians here and abroad.  

Dattani intends to develop theatre which can be understood and enjoyed by multi lingual community of India and abroad. Therefore, he resorts English as a medium of communication of his theatre. English is a ‘hybrid language’ and spoken unobtrusively in India. Nevertheless, Dattani puts first transmission of message through performance and secondly transmission of message or ideas through language the second. Thus, performance holds more significance than language in theatrical world of Dattani. He makes an honest confession:

My milieu is theatre, you can’t operate in isolation. I do want a theatre movement to happen. The major block for that is lack of sound training and professionalism. We have the talent, but theater is more than that, it’s a craft of communicating through the language of action.
Alyque Padmasee played very important role in paving and sharpening his theatrical track and career respectively. He rendered substantial help in presenting his plays in the leading theatres of India and abroad. With his sincere and sustained efforts, Dattani’s plays have been performed to public and critical acclaim in the cities like, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and London. Critics have appreciated Dattani’s theatrical talent and provide the motivation by way of enabling stage production of his plays. Alyque attributes: “At least we have playwright who gives sixty million English speaking Indians an identity.” 26

Little Dubey is also a great help to Dattani. Dubey has done painstaking efforts for staging Dattani’s plays such as Dance Like a Man, Muggy Night in Mumbai, Thirty Days in September. The stage performance of Dattani’s plays is done either by Dattani himself or by Dubey.

Briefly, Alyque Padamsee and Dubey are facilitator, manager and motivator of Dattani’s theatrical creed. Mahesh Dattani is the vanguard of distinctive and vibrant tradition of Indian English Theatre. He possesses a fine faculty of artistic perception. He has his own specific aims and objectives about theatre. He writes his plays keeping stage production in his mind.

In dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani, there is a synthesis of director and writer. Most of his plays are directed by himself. As a director he is par excellence. His plays have been performed successfully to public and critical acclaim. Most of his radio plays have been aired on BBC radio. Dattani is very prompt and passionate for the stage production of his plays. He performs the play as soon as the writing of the script of the play is over. He puts:

I always direct the first production of any play I write. That enables me to put in more stage instructions, which go on to become a kind of blue print for other directors. That way, there is no conflict, and the other directors can interpret it, as they will. 27
As a playwright, he has an extraordinary ability to transform his plays into living performance. He has been endowed with power of perceiving the chemistry of stage. He knows well how to relate his plays to the audience. The function of audience has got much significance in drama. The success of playwright doesn’t depend only on writing drama text, but entirely depends on its stage ability. Dattani admits:

Audience need to make the effort. Unlike TV or cinema where the viewer doesn’t have to contribute, theatre is collective experience. In fact, at a moment of truth, you will find how people who don’t know each other join in from all corners of the darkened hall to applaud and declare their appreciation of that important moment. And that’s when you know a play works. 28

Thus, theatre offers collective experience. It admits the active participation of audience also. The job of the playwright is quite difficult. The playwright ought to have time, patience and passion for theatre. It is analyzed:

Dealing with compelling issues rooted in his milieu, he has dispelled the perception about English theatre being just gratuitous fizz. His audiences have been large and responsive, both to the spectacle and the language. 29

A close look at his plays will reveal to the fact that most of his plays are rooted in urban milieu of India. He has dramatized the problems and issues of the modernized rather urban India in his plays. He justifies his devotion of depicting urban milieu in his dramatic universe in the following way.

I think the old cliché about writing what you know best holds good for any work or for any art (drama or literature). I think one has to be true to one’s
own environment. Even if I attempted writing a play about the angst of rural Indian society, it wouldn’t ring true, it would be an outsider’s view—I could only hope to evoke sympathy, but never to really be a part of that unless I spend a lot of time there. I think there are enough issues and challenges in urban Indian society (the milieu I am a part of) and these automatically from the content of my work. 30

His plays are dramatic reflections on the concerns and constraints of the commoners. He dramatizes common man’s efforts to have space and respect in society. What matters much in his plays is matrix of space. He writes about the society and surroundings in which he lives. In this way, his dramatic art is the faithful and authentic expression of his first hand experience and knowledge of socio-cultural environment in which he breathes and lives. He responds, to the question whether he is distressed to see the problems that he is dealing in his plays, in the following words:

They invariably do. Social issues move me and I like to examine an idea from different angles. The plays where the content came first are On a Muggy Night and Final Solutions. As for the latter, I was asked to write a play about communal tension, and I said ‘what can one write about that other than platitudes? But out of that churning emerged’ ‘Final Solutions’ Sometimes the characters spoke to me first, as in Tara and On a Muggy Night. In Dance Like a Man, the plot emerged out of a flashback structure where the same actors play different generations. Sometimes images make the first impact; then, the set. 31
Dattani is a forefront playwright in contemporary Indian Drama in English. He has authored more than one and a half dozen plays differing in themes, tone and treatments. The entire dramatic corpus of Mahesh Dattani can be classified into three categories namely Stage Plays, Radio Plays, and Screen Plays.

So far the themes of his plays are concerned; they are, by and large, quite contemporary and modern, radical and unconventional. He has dramatized problems and issues of the modern urban Indian society ranging from communal tension, homosexuality, child sexual abuse, gender discrimination, marriage and career, conflict between tradition and modernity, patriarchal social system, constraints of hijjaras (eunuch), women, children labourer, interpersonal relationship, workings of personal and moral choices, identity crisis, revelation of past, the problems faced by HIV positives.

‘Family’ is the most important theatrical space in his plays as most of the plays have family as their locale. They are dealing with the stories or tales of various families. Where There’s a Will, Bravely Fought the Queen, Dance Like a Man, Tara are some of his plays in which the painful tales of various families have gone into the fabric and texture of the plays. The dramatist depicts the battles being fought among the members of same family at home. ‘Home is the oft repeated arena of battle in his dramatic universe. The unrest eats up the happy and joyous atmosphere of the family curbing the personal development in them. It is observed:

necessarily embedded within the mechanisms of the middle class Indian family, and this is the context from which he operates. 32

Dattani is the spokesperson of the unprivileged section of our society. He has examined and analyzed the problems of women, children, eunuchs and minorities in his plays. His works offers a fine study from socio-psychological dimensions. He presents socio-political realities of our time. He
has redefined the tradition of Indian English theatre with his innovative art and craft. He avers:

thread. I’m not sure even that I want to go back to
on’t need to revisit it. I’m more
interested in pushing it forward. I am pushing, and
I’m pushing the audience. 33

Thus, he considers himself as the ‘change element’ in the contemporary framework of Indian English Theatre. So it is improper to call him sequel to anybody or consider him component of a continuum – the ongoing journey of Indian Theatre. It doesn’t mean that he is something different, but he is doing thing differently for creating effective and ever lasting appeal. He is a true artist who holds mirror to make reality more visible to audience. It has been assumed:

He prepared the stage for a specific realism on the lines of Ibsen and Shaw. For him, man is an integral part of society and consciously or unconsciously the creeping influences of societal set up, determine the fabric of relationship around him. 34

For the success of drama, Dattani admits the importance of performance. He derives more pleasure and also a sense of completeness not from playwriting but from directing it on the stage. His theatre personality is the fine synthesis of writer and director. It is because of this, his plays have gained immense popularity at home and abroad. To the question, “What makes you happy?” Dattani replies:

When I’m directing a play, I feel like I’m a complete human being. That makes me happy. And also when I meet people with a passion. It reaffirms all
that I do. I’m enjoying what I’m doing and don’t want to do anything else. \(^{35}\)

Dattani, with his innovative bent, artistic perception and originality of vision, has altered conventional concept of Indian English Theatre. He has an ability to synchronize the traditional issues with that of post-modernist issues. His plays are very remarkable not only from socio-political but also emotional and psychological point of views. His contribution to the tradition of Indian English Drama is unprecedented and incomparable. Considering this, he has been conferred the most prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. It acknowledges Dattani’s contribution to the genre of drama in the following terms:

[Dattani’s work], probes, tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal contribution to Indian drama in English. \(^{36}\)

Dattani is faithful to his experience and environment. He is one of the most powerful playwrights of contemporary era. His *Where There’s a Will* (1988) marks the beginning of his literary career as serious dramatist. It is, first, full length play dealing with mechanics of middle class Gujarati family. The play is a drawing room comedy in which patriarchal male head of the family tries to control his family even after his death through his will. His *Final Solutions*, which bags him Sahitya Academy Award, is a gripping and sensitive play, dealing with communal tension. In *Bravely Fought the Queen, Do the Needful* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani visits virgin soil of homosexuals. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is also adapted as film entitled *Mango Soufflé*. Both the play and the film describe the issue of the same sex love. Though, there are different locales of both the play and the film, the theme, the characters, the events etc. are same in both the works. The film *Mango Souffle* is a daring attempt to unmask the gay-relationship veiled under the domination of heterosexuals’ relationship of society that considers it as a disgusting, unnatural, and undesirable.
Tara is the most touching three-act stage play by Dattani. The play revolves around the theme of favoring the boy and frowning upon the girl with exceptional originality of conception. The playwright presents arguments against the parents' preference for the male child at the cost of girl child. The play holds much significance in the present time especially when the government and other NGO’s are holding programmes and rallies for creating awareness among people against female foeticide.

Dance Like a Man is also another celebrated play by Dattani. The play depicts conflict between tradition and modernity. Thirty Days in September is based on child’s sexual abuse and its impact. The Seven Steps Around the Fire probes into the lives of eunuch community. It deals with murder mystery. Kamla, the eunuch, is killed and police is investigating the case preoccupying with the idea that Kamla is slain by Anarkali, the chief of eunuch community. At the end, Uma, a researcher of Sociology and the wife of police officer, unveils the mystery of murder exposing our brutal attitudes towards eunuch community.

The play Thirty Days in September dramatizes theme of child sexual abuse within the range of familial relationship, whereas The Swami and Winston also deals with the mystery of murder of English lady. Here Uma Rao, again, unveils the curtain from the murder mystery of English lady. The dramatist exposes psuedo and scheming scholars in this play. Like afore said two plays, Uma and Fairy Queen is also a detective in nature.

The play A Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child is a very interesting and enchanting radio play. The first broadcasting of the play was done on October 29, 2000 on BBC Radio. Mahesh Dattani was commissioned to write plays for BBC Radio on the occasion of six hundredth anniversary of Geoffrey Chaucer. This play was written for this purpose. The play dramatizes the journey of English lady Anna Gosweb to an Indian village after twenty years to meet and help her drought stricken boy friend Jaman. Unfortunately, her friend Jaman dies before she reaches his village. The play Clearing the
*Rubble* is a very brief but touching radio play. It depicts the misery and malady of earthquake affected people of Kutch region in Gujarat.

*Morning Raga* is his famous screen play. It is based on life of Swarnlatha, a carnatic singer. The play is greatly appreciated for its music as motif. The play presents dexterously emotional turmoil in the lives of the various characters of the play. Dattani observes:

> It is about a meeting of two worlds. A story that brings together the modern and the traditional unites the past with the present, Carnatic music with Western music, fate and coincidence with individual choices.  

The play *Ek Alag Mausam* is dramatic achievement of Mahesh Dattani. It deals with the serious issue of human life. The dramatist tries to articulate the voice of the marginalized being HIV positives through this play. Like post-colonial writers, Dattani attempts to seek the space for the HIV positives in the society. He reflects the ethos of the subaltern section of our society. The play depicts post modernistic theme-love story of two HIV positives. The play lays bare their love for life. The play has two layers of ideas; need for the creation of social awareness against HIV and love and understanding for the HIV afflicted.

In this way, Mahesh Dattani makes daring efforts to depict quite unconventional and radical themes in his plays. The complexities of human relationship and predicament of the modern men find due expression in his dramatic works. His dramatic techniques and stagecraft are superb. There are rapid shifts in terms of time and space. He has made use of different images, symbols, devices, techniques etc. to communicate his ideas in a very effective and concrete manner. Dattani’s theatrical genius is characterized by diversity, dynamism, and innovative urge. He is an unconventional voice in the theatrical firmament of India. He seeks to present volcanic dimensions of rage and resentment as well as distrust and discontent shrouded inside the psychological domain of human consciousness. Dattani’s theatrical creed
asserts that human nature has its own autonomous space. Any act of encroachment to this space, either through conventional ideology or by any other means, will result into agitation and uprising causing chaos and destruction.

There are sixteen plays extant in the two Penguin volumes entitled *Collected Play* and *Collected Plays*-Volume II. All these plays are taken up for the critical exploration and inquiry. They are as follows:

- **The Stage Plays**
  - Where There's a Will - 1988
  - Dance Like a Man - 1989
  - Tara - 1990
  - Bravely Fought the Queen - 1991
  - Final Solutions - 1992-93
  - On a Muggy Night in Mumbai - 1998
  - Thirty Days in September - 2001

- **The Radio Plays**
  - Do the Needful - 1997
  - Seven Steps Around the Fire - 1998
  - The Swami and Winston - 2000
  - A Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child – 2000
  - Clearing the Rubble – 2000
  - Uma and the Fairy Queen - 2003

- **The Screen Plays**
  - Mango Soufflé - 2002
  - Morning Raga - 2004
  - Ek Alag Mausam - 2005
References:

6. Deshpande, G. T., in the article entitled “Sanskrit Drama” in *Indian Drama* published by The Director, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India Delhi-8. p. 15
7. Naik, M. K., quoted in article entitled “Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama” by R. N. Rai, in *Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama* edited by Neeru Tandon, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors(P) LTD, New-Delhi, 2006 p. 11-12


15. Dhawan, R. K., *50 Years of Indian Writing*, IAES, New Delhi, 1999 p.19


