PREFACE

Performing gender identity amidst the oppressive social structure that adheres to the norm of essentialized binary structure, and the consequent conflict that rises between the self/individuality and the hegemonic social structure, is the crux of human existence. The social norm pertaining to a specific socio-cultural milieu demands conformity from the social subjects placed under its jurisdiction. Since a non-conformist individual is often stigmatized and seldom allowed any space within the ‘mainstream’ society, it could often be seen that people are trying to perform their lives in a socially acceptable way even at the cost of sacrificing their individual tastes, desires, needs and wishes. Certain ‘realities’ are often swept under the carpet for the sake of maintaining socially desirable ‘realities’ that can earn social membership for us. Such issues related to gender and the difficulties encountered by individuals while confronting the fixity of the societal norm is very relevant to our contemporary social scenario. Since drama and literature at large is often regarded to be the mirror of society, we can find glimpses of such sensational issues related to gender and the predicaments of contemporary life in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. His plays often endeavour to unravel those ‘realities’ that are concealed by acceptable ‘realities’. Most of his plays expose the complexities confronted by individuals situated within strictly hetero-normative social structures. Dattani makes an attempt to bring to center-stage marginal issues that are often swept under the carpet. With such ideas in my mind and a reading of Dattani’s plays, I approached my supervisor Dr. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri, Associate Professor, Department of English, Gauhati University. I am indebted to her for showing me the right path that has enabled me to travel a long way in the world of academics and thereby gather knowledge about the theoretical ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Freud, Derrida, Lacan Merleau-Ponty and other such thinkers who have prepared the ground for the deconstruction of the taken-for-granted concepts. After a year of studying the theoretical domain; and drama and other cultural texts that could be read in the light of these theoretical ideas, I submitted my synopsis and registered as a research scholar on 12th February 2008. While confronting the binary, one has to perform ‘conforming’ acts, since liminal gender acts are compelled to face stigmatization and social exclusion.
My thesis entitled *Performing Gender, Confronting the Binary: Liminal Gender Acts in Selected Works of Mahesh Dattani And Other Cultural Texts*, attempts to explore issues like representation or performance of oneself before the social world, repression of individuality being placed within the fixity of gender structure, stigmatization of normative behavioural patterns, paradoxes embedded in the essential structure of gender, gender identity as a social construct, subversion of gender stereotypes and other such issues that unravel the hidden contradictions and complexities of the existing gender structure. While confronting the binary, one has to perform 'conforming' acts since liminal gender acts are compelled to face stigmatization and social exclusion. In order to discuss such issues I have made extensive use of the theoretical ideas of Foucault and Butler's theory of gender 'performativity' among others. As a textual illustration of such issues, I read selected plays of Mahesh Dattani: *Tara, Dance Like A Man, Seven Steps Around the Fire, Muggy Night, Bravely Fought the Queen, Do the Needful*. Two film texts—*Tamanna, Sabnam Mousi*, and other cultural texts that are relevant to this project, are also analyzed. The factor that establishes a link between the theoretical framework and the drama and film texts is that all of these works are trying to raise their voice against the fixity of the social structure and the unfair stigmatization of those who transgress the 'normal' tract.