CHAPTER-II

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INDIAN HISTORICAL DRAMA IN ENGLISH

Indian Drama and Theatre is one of the oldest art forms, as old as the Indian music and dance. The Classical theatre traditions have also influenced modern theatre, particularly the Hindi, Marathi and Bengali theatres. Looking back at history, we can find the beginning of the ancient dramas in the Rig Veda. Bharata is the founder of the Indian dramaturgy and he described Drama as the fifth Veda. Thus, he is often known as the father of Indian theatrical arts. His *Natyasastra* seems to be the first attempt to develop the technique or rather art, of drama in a systematic manner. The *Natyasastra* tells us not only what is to be portrayed in a drama, but how the portrayal is to be done. The *Natyasastra* is incredibly wide in its scope. It consists of minutely detailed precepts for both playwrights and actors. Bharata describes ten types of drama ranging from one to ten acts. In addition, he lays down principles for stage design, makeup, costume, dance, a theory of rasas and bhavas, acting, directing and music, in each individual chapter.

The beginning and the rise of the Modern Indian Dramas were in the 18th century when the British Empire consolidated its stable power in India. In 1765, there were two drama lovers, who had staged two English comedy plays named *Disgaj* and *Love is the Best Doctor*. In 1831 Prasaankumar Thakur had establish the Hindi Rangmanch. In 1843, on the request of the Sangli King, the playwright Vishnudas Bhave had produced *Seeta Swayamwar* in Marathi. In 1880 Annasaheb Kirloskar...
staged *Abhignan Shakuntal* in Marathi. However, in the western part of India, due to the Portuguese domination, drama groups from western countries began to arrive in India to stage English plays.

In 1850, the modern theatre activity originated in Bengal, Karnataka and Kerala also. Then, from 1858 onwards Gujarati and Urdu plays were staged in many cities in Mumbai & Gujarat chiefly in Ahmedabad, Surat, Baroda, Vadnagar. The Parsis started their own drama company and they used words from Hindustani, Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit, while staging their plays. Their successful dramas were quite famous in the theatre halls of Karachi, Calcutta and Mumbai. At about the same time the theatre activity began in Karnataka and Orissa. The Parsi plays besides the language of the play also paid much attention to stage decor and stage specialties. Thus, from the beginning in 1850 up to 1940 there was a resurgence of drama movement in different regions of India and there was significant development of the Indian Theatre. There are hundred years can rightly be called the Golden Age of the Indian Theatre.

The period after 1947 marks a second stage in the development of modern Indian Drama. Prior to 1947 the drama scripts centred around Sanskrit plays, English plays and ancient religious-historical epics. They related themselves to the social problems as well as the ideology of the freedom movement; making it a very powerful medium intended to make an impact on the life of the common man.

The second stage of Modern Indian Drama began after 1947, which divided dramas, into two parts: Professional Theatre and Non-Professional Theatre. The Non
Professional Theatre groups were formed by co-operative theatrical societies, where their subjects were inspired by western plays. The Indian theatre groups, including the theatre craftsmen and artists went to foreign countries to acquire knowledge of stagecraft. The modern Indian drama enriched itself with the modern techniques of stage screens, sets, scenery, lighting and sound effects and the same has been continued, till date.

The modish aspect in Indian drama was first sown during the British Imperialism, as then, Indian drama stood apart as the weapon of protest against the British Raj. It is then; English drama in India made its presence felt quite enormously as a portrayal of the realisms of daily life. The contemporaneousness of the varied facets of the English drama in India for the very first time then aided in illustrating the finer aspects of life teamed with the regular instances of the poverty, sufferings and agony of the common people. English theatres mainly initiated in different European countries and evolved in diverse stages; however in India English drama arrived in the later part of the 17th century with the arrival of the "East India Company". British colonialism then did play the major role in changing the Indian dramaturgy whilst making it lot more chic.

English drama in India gained a dimension with the establishment of the three Presidency Towns by the British. Calcutta, Mumbai and Madras therefore became the three-metropolis in exemplifying the true aura of contemporary art forms through the grace of English drama. These cities then had the typical urban middle class audiences, which again helped in the thriving prosperity of the English theatre. The
success of the English drama in India was then, not based on the sale of the tickets but
grounded on the support and patronage of the affluent class and the theatres were
then an emblematic representation of the European ways of life. The colonial aspects,
British Imperialism coupled with the tuneful harmonization of the Eastern and
Western philosophy then crafted a marked change in the story line and in the dramatic
art whilst making English drama in India a true representation of the British culture,
ways of life and of course a depiction of the British exploitations.

The nature of the English drama in India again changed with the independence
of India. It was then not only a representation of the European lifestyle but a lot more.
English drama then became a typical art form: in epitomizing the socio-political and
economic status of Independent India. The rich chronicle of Indian drama, the
colossal history of Indian Natya then witnessed a marked change with the advent of
the eminent theatre personalities like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and many
others who further carried English drama in India to the further step of maturity.
English drama in India, which was once just the illustration of British mistreatment,
then gained a further up to date projection as the theatre personalities then tried to
highlight Indian tradition, folklore, custom, rituals, conventions, and rites amidst the
innovativeness of English drama. The saga of English drama, which began back in the
long gone era of the British Imperialism further continued and is still an eminent part
of the theatre forms in India. Continuous study, deep understanding and above all the
tuneful blend of the west and East have helped English drama in India as a distinct art
form whilst aiding it to stand apart with pride and dignity.
The first Indian historical drama in English is D.N. Wadia’s *The Indian Heroine; Being Some Incidents of the Sepoy Revolt Of 1857* (1877). The play is dramatization from his own Novel, *The Indian Heroine*. As title of the play suggests it deals with some incidents of the Sepoy Revolt of 1857. Wadia in this play focuses on anti-colonial movement of early India. The main plot of the play deals with the love affair of rebel’s daughter and British soldier. Shakespearean play is the model for this play which is divided in five acts.

Annaya’s three-act play, *The Bride of God* (1931) illustrates an experiment in the direction to highlight historical theme from the history of the Mughal period. It is a dramatisation of the episode of the killing Dara by his brother Aurangzeb for the sake of throne and of the escape of his daughter Dilara from the clutches of the tyrant. In order to ensure proper development of the plot, the playwright rightly introduces sequences like the search for Dara by Aurangzeb’s men who threaten the lives of villagers at sword-point and the capturing of both father and daughter who had been given shelter in the ashram of the saint Sarmad. Further, in this play, the characterisation is adequate: the heroine Dilara the innocent bride of God who knows no other love except that towards her father; Ziab-un-nisa who, with a true sisterly heart, risks her life for the sake of Dilara; Dara, the father of Dilara who, unlike his most cruel brother Aurangzeb, is so large-hearted as to think that various religions are all petals of the one flower divine. Sarmad, a true saint highly respected by all for his compassion for the suffering; the good and sympathetic Sulaiman, the foster-brother
of Dara; and Nasir Khan, whose love for Dilara is so selfless that he shows his readiness to help her without any self-interest.

Whether it is the search for Dara and Dilara, or the trial of the former, or the escape of the latter, the theme is handled in such a way that the play has suspense and stirring action throughout. Thus, excepting a few lengthy speeches and the scene where Dara, bound hand and foot, is taken in a procession, the play can be a success on the stage.

Apart from this full-length play dealing with Mughal history, V.V.Srinivasa Aiyangar has also written a playlet, *At any Cost* (1921) which consists of only one scene about good treatment given by Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, to the wife and the sister of Rana Uday Singh after the siege of Chittor. Unable to face Akbar's forces, the cowardly Rana flees to the forest. Then his queen Veera Bai and his sister Padmini go in disguise to Akbar’s tent in order to assassinate him. Akbar’s suspicion is corroborated by the timely information given by one of his soldiers. Then he makes the two women disclose their identity by cleverly pronouncing a death-sentence on the Rajput captain Pratap Singh, caught in his espionage activities. The women demand a death sentence for themselves, but the Emperor admires their bravery and gives them back their kingdom.

Even in this simple dramatisation of a small episode, the playwright bestows some thought on characterisation. While Akbar’s ever-cautious nature and nobility are well realized, the two women show their courage and presence of mind, but their scheming is most uncharacteristic of the bold and straightforward behavior of the
Rajputs. Further, it looks rather ridiculous that the women with melodious feminine voices go disguise as men-singers to the enemy camp. However, the action which is brisk throughout, contributes to the stage ability of the piece.

Mrinalini Sarabhai is a celebrated dancer and choreographer and has achieved an international reputation that is unmatched by any contemporary Indian classical dancer. The syntax of her creativity mediates between a moral commitment to traditional form and the desire to claim one's own experiments as unique, unrepeatable. This interface of technical mastery and creative expressionism achieves a profoundly versatile language of the body - simple, eloquent, visually inspiring. The creative anarchy of her essentially modern style is convincingly disciplined by the taut orthodoxy of her classical technique, learnt from her guru Sri Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai. The result is an exalted visual statement combining almost fanatical purity of vision with modish formal experiments.

Mrinalini has written novels, poetry, plays and stories for children. Amongst these are: Captive Soil (play), This Alone is True (novel), Devadasi (novel), Understanding Bharatanatyam (text book of Bharatanatyam), Bharatiya Nritya (on dance), Bharatiya Nrityakala (on dance), Longing for the Beloved (homage to Lord Shiva), Kan (mystical poem), Sacred Dance of India (on dance), Creations (essays on choreographic experiments), "Vision of Vasavadatta" (co-authored with John D. Mitchell of Institute of Advanced Studies in the Theatre Arts (IASTA), New York - on Bhasa's epic Play"Swapna Vasavadatta"), The Mahabharata (poem), Krishna my Beloved (Poem), Return of Bharata (Play), Urmila (novel), Nala Damayanti, Krishna
- The Prince of Brindavan, Kiratarjunyam, Ramayana, Geeta Govinda, Usha

The Freedom Movement provides the theme of Mrinalini Sarabhai’s *Captive Soil* (1945), a small but powerful verse-play in two acts with a prologue and an epilogue, presenting the action and reactions found among different sections in our country during the movement.

The prologue presents a few policemen as the only substantial figures guarding a cemetery, and the voices of a few ghastly figures giving the details of injuries sustained in police firing; while the Epilogue projects silhouettes of some freedom-fighters who move with renewed zeal and declare with one voice their urge for freedom. Thus, the playwright effectively employs the prologue and the Epilogue, bringing in between a series of sequences starting with the arrested girl-rebels demanding the resignation of the judge and ending with the scene of a newly-wedded young man beaten up by the police and going back to jail.

Mrinalini’s characters are mostly types here: for instance, the girl-convicts who are determined to fight; the police killing the indigent to protect the opulent, the idealistic and romantic girl and her practical-minded husband. But in giving importance to the presentation of tyranny under foreign rule, the playwright does not seem to have given attention to the development of the plot. Without any interaction of characters and without a proper link between the two acts, the whole play seems
conspicuously lacking in organic coherence. It seems the noble theme is lacking the appropriate dramatic structure.

Asif Currimbhoy is India's first authentic voice in the theatre. He is the one modern Indian playwright who has shown great interest in producing drama. Among the very few Indian dramatists writing plays in English, he has made his debut as a dramatist for the stage. His twenty nine plays are first and foremost meant for the stage and he brilliantly succeeds in producing Actable plays. Asif Currimbhoy is one of the first playwrights writing in English and one of the most prolific. With about 30 plays to his credit, he wrote on social issues that bothered him. As his wife has said, he is a karma yogi! He is a Mumbai-born Muslim, from the baronetcy stock of the Khoja sect, the followers of Aga Khan. He gave up a lucrative job and a senior position with Burmah Shell Oil Co. to devote more time to writing. He started writing plays in his early thirties, but not with much success. Ironically, it was the US that gave him his first taste of success when, in 1965, (he wrote his first play in 1959), Goa was staged by the University of Michigan. This was the beginning. It was only in 1969 that his plays began being staged in India – the Little Theatre Group in Delhi staged his play The Doldrummers, which was written in 1960. His was a story of fate cutting short the abundant talent that he had – in 1994 a massive heart attack felled this giant of a man. Currimbhoy's is the first authentic voice in the theatre. He has written that India's first plays of dissent. He presents life as it is, not as something it should be once again, art, that discredited wonder-box of illusions, finds itself telling the truth while politicians lie and people look the other way. Currimbhoy is a prolific...
dramatist. He has taken unusual themes from contemporary Indian society and woven them into plays of artistic excellence. Within a span of fifteen years, Currimbhoy has written as many as thirty plays.

*An Experiment with Truth* is an attempt at a dramatisation of certain episodes in the later life of Mahatma Gandhi. In this play of three acts the playwright presents some sequences starting with the first attempt on the life of Mahatma ending with his assassination, with a few important scenes in between: Sardar Patel and a police Officer dealing with Madanlal who made a fruitless attempt to throw a hand-bomb and Gandhiji pitying him; Gandhiji’s dealings with his wife Kasturba and the ‘untouchable’ girl Manu; The Salt March; Kasturba’s death; finally Gandhiji’s assassination before the commencement of a prayer meeting.

The playwright is successful in highlighting Gandhiji’s adherence to truth and non-violence, though he appears to concentrate more on projecting a series of pictures of the Mahatma’s life than on coherently constructing plot. However, these episodes are impressively dramatised. Further, the death of Kasturba is efficiently suggested to the audience by way of her fading voice and Gandhiji’s shading of tears with an intervening chorus of mourners singing the famous Upanishadic lines. The panorama of the mahatma’s experiments with truth would have been more comprehensive, had the playwright covered a few more events from the great man’s boyhood and also his career as a barrister in South Africa.

The Naxalite Movement in Eastern India is the subject of three-act play *Inquilab* which throws light upon the origin and development of the revolutionary
activities of some agrarian Communists who opted for violence. Prof. Datta is in conflict with his students whose emotions are roused by their new notion of revolt against the existing order; the group consists of the Professor’s own son Amar, Suprea, the daughter of a landlord Jain, Shomik, Ahmed and others. In addition to inciting the villagers, their violence ultimately leads to the torture and death of both the Professor and landlord.

Currimbhoy portrays the conflict between the existing order and the new order anticipated, between conservatism and the forces of revolution. For example, while the professor is lecturing about the need for discipline and constitutional methods in a democracy, the entire premises are re-sounding with the slogans. There is suspense created by the intervention of the police and the politician. The tension reaches its climax with the death of the Professor and the landlord at the hands of students. The play is replete with terrorism and acts of violence like exploding bombs, the burning of library books, physical torture and killing. But the playwright evidently makes no attempt to probe the theoretical aspect of the problem.

The play gives evidence of a genuine dramatic talent, but the evidence is uneven. *Inquilab* is full of thrilling and exciting events. The Naxalite peasants, egged on by the compulsions of the movement, murder their good-natured Zamindar, Jain. The students storm into Prof. Datta’s study, ransack it, set fire to books and destroy whatever they can lay their hands on—all under the leadership of the Professor’s son, Amar. And shortly after their exit, Ahmed, a Naxal leader and close friend of Amar’s
stab Prof. Datta to death. The love affair between Amar and Suprea, Jain’s daughter, provides a love motif and serves to further link the two scenarios.

_The Refugee_ is one-act play written against the political upheaval in East Pakistan in 1971. The playwright shows his concern for the burning problem of the refugee of Bangladesh who poured in to India during the 1971 war. The play is about Yassin, a young refugee and his search for conscience in the confusing world of standards. Sen Gupta, who himself come to India as a refugee some twenty-four years ago and become prosperous through his hard work and diligent application, is now, ironically enough, sore about the very influx of the refugee. _The Refugee_ is a neatly structured play with a beginning, middle and end. The arrival of Yassin forms the beginning of the play. His staying in the house of Sen Gupta is the middle of the play. His decision to liberate East Bengal forms the ending of the play. The tempo is slow and almost even till Yassin decides to help the unhappy brethren of his country. The playwright concentrates on a single topic according to the requirements of a one-act play. The whole piece hinges on the conflict in the mind of the hero Yassin, who represents the University intellectuals of his country. Sen Gupta, himself a refugee in the past, sympathizes with Yassin in the latter’s state of helplessness.

In _Sonar Bangla_, the dramatist deals with the conflict between the people of the East Bengal and Pakistani forces. There are four acts dealing with four important phases of the War: I 25th March 1971—The Slaughter; II The Exodus—The Refugees; III Liberation forces – The Mukti Bahini; IV The Final War. The play with its moving dialogue and fast actions presents a realistic picture of some horrible
events of the war; the unity exists among different religious groups in organizing the
fight against Pakistan under the leadership of Mujeeb, direct and guerilla warfare and
the people's final victory won with the help of the Indian forces. The very nature of
the play seems to forbid Currimbhoy from portraying well-developed characters.

Communist China's occupation of Tibet and the consequent flight of the Dalai
Lama to India form the theme of *Om Mane Padme Hum*. The Title is one of the
sacred mantras of the Buddhists, used here probably as a symbol of the origin,
development and death of Lamaism in Tibet.

Here Currimbhoy brings in events like the Dalai Lama’s Flight to India and
the subsequent political developments in Tibet. The playwright portrays the terrorism
and tricks of the Chinese Communists who aim at supplanting Lamaism. In addition
to brain-washing the tradition bound Tiberans, General Chang Chin-wu makes an
imposter Dalai Lama carrying on telepathic and mystical exercises.

The dream sequences about the legendary origin of Tibetans and other scenes
in the second act are, no doubt, interesting; but, even with all modern stage directions
and techniques, it is very difficult to present them on the stage. The Title is both
significant and symbolic. It is used here probably as a symbol of the origin,
development and death of Lamaism in Tibet. The film style has been overdone and
hence the play does not seem actable. The opposites—Lamaism and Communism,
Beauty and Beast, the Past and the Future, Violence and Sufferance—have been
juxtaposed nicely.
Harindranath Chattopadhyay was a Bengali Indian English poet. He was the brother of Sarojini Naidu. Born to Aghornath Chattopadhyay, a scientist-philosopher, and Barada Sundari Devi, a poetess, he is famous for poems like *Noon* and *Shaper Shaped*. His other interests were politics, theatre and cinema. He was awarded Padma Bhushan in 1973. He married Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a Socialist and leader of Women...she created the All India Women's Conference, the Indian Cooperative Union and also was the inspiration for the All India Handicraft's Board, a body which revived many Indian handicrafts, decimated by the Industrial Revolution in Britain in the 1800s. He started writing rhymes at the age of eight and when he was 14 years old he had written many plays. His first book *Feast of Youth* was published in 1917 and it won praise from critics both in India and abroad. Chattopadhyaya is a man of versatile genius and varied interests. He is a pioneer in theatre craft and progressive literature. He has staged several of his plays and is himself a talented actor. He has written a good number of poems in Hindi also. His famous song, Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai, became very popular in India as well as in China.

In *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* Chattopadhyaya tries not only to focus on Siddhartha's enlightenments, but also to project an image of the present crisis caused by the nuclear race. This is an experimental play in eight acts, rich in both poetry and drama.

Right from his-childhood, prince Siddhartha of Kapilvastu puzzles all in the palace with his unusual, sanity outlook on life. Altered by the sage Astia Muni's prophecy, The King keeps him in the palace shut from the dark realities of the life like
old age, disease and death to attract him further to the material world, he provides material happiness too for Siddhartha, whose wife Yashodara bears a son. Meanwhile, in spite of all preoccupations, he is made to see the ugly side of life by his villainous cousin Devadatta. Siddhartha’s irresistible urge to bring salvation to the suffering humanity can no longer be suppressed. One night he leaves the capital. After he wanders from place to place to salvation is revealed to him, and he becomes the Buddha, the enlightened one. He is attached by many who finally become his followers.

In addition to the presentation of the catastrophe caused by the present nuclear war, Chattopadhyaya successfully employs the parrot in the cage as a symbol of the Siddhartha’s spiritual hunger; its liberation from the cage coincide with the enlightenment of Siddhartha.

The development of the plot goes hand in hand with the growth of Siddhartha’s personality. The hero of the play shines throughout as a noble and compassionate man who, without caring for the hereditary throne, has come to shatter human bonds, to rid the world of mournfully shadows. The force pulling him in various directions are represented by some minor characters like the materialistic king; Siddhartha’s cousin Devadutta, who is a villain; the unscrupulous Jester; the robber Angulimala who, under Buddha’s influence, eschews violence; Yashodha who sacrifices her comfort in favor of her lord. The elaborate plot and the great detail with which it is developed appear to suggest that the play has been written with a foreign audience in view. The style of prose dialogues could at best be described as
competent, but it seldom glows with passion or intensity. Only a few parts of the play are in verse, and this is generally feeble and insipid except, perhaps, the long rolling lines of the first chorus describing war and its baneful effects.

M. Mujeeb's five-act play *Ordeal 1857* is his own translation of his original play which had been published in *Ajkal*. It deals with some aspects of the political struggle of 1857 at Delhi. As the author says, here is an attempt is made to throw light upon some aspects of the struggle which have been generally ignored by historians. The characters and incidents in the play are not entirely fictitious; for example, there seems to be some evidence regarding the participation in the holocaust, of woman, the Kahars and the Boy's Brigade.

In the first act itself, the playwright introduces some revolutionaries like the Raja of Ballabhgarh, Seth Ram Sahay Mal, Munni and others who discuss in Mirza's court about their plans in transforming this affair, which has begun with a mutiny of soldiers, into a war of Independence. The discussion is followed by different kinds of activities like the soldiers' attack on Hakim Ahsanulla who is saved by the leadership of the liberation forces, some soldiers' futile attempt to escape under disguise for want of food and arms, the extension of their fight outside Delhi with the help of Sidhari Singh and Yusuf. The most dramatic of all is the sequence in the last act where four soldiers of Bakht Khan in the British army uniforms raid the Seth's house to search for the two hiding women, Salma and Ram Kishan Kunwar. But these various scenes do not add up to an organic dramatic plot.
S. Janaki’s three-act play *The Siege of Chitor* (1960), deals with Akbar’s final successful bid to conquer the formidable Chitor fort. In the last phase of the war, Akbar camps outside the fort which is now guarded by the loyal Rajput Generals, Patta and Jaimal. Among the Rajput women who take an active part in the battle, Padmini and Jaya make an unsuccessful attempt to kill Akbar. In the end, as the wall of the fort is demolished by the Mughal army, the Rajput soldiers directly confront the enemy and die a brave death in the battle; and true to their chaste life, their women observe *Johar*.

The playwright tries to ennoble the character of Akbar; for example, here are his instructions to his General before leaving Chitor. But, in giving prominence to the Mughal Emperor, the playwright does not relegate to the background staunch patriots like Patta, Jaimal, Jaya and Padmini. There is suspense, particularly in the scene where Padmini and Jaya attempt to kill Akbar.

The killing of Afzal Khan, the Muslim general of Bijapur, by the Maratha Ruler Shivaji forms the theme of Lakhan Deb’s *Tigerclaw* (1967), a verse-play in three-acts. Afzal Khan has taken an oath to present the head of Shivaji to his king. Shivaji, who too is waiting for a chance to kill Afzal Khan, pretend to surrender. Their envoys arrange their meeting, pretending to embrace Shivaji, Afzal Khan tries to finish him off; but Shivaji himself kills the Khan with his tigerclaw. At the same time Shivaji’s trusted commanders surprise and rout the Muslim army in the end, he is blessed by his guru, Saint Ramdas.
Instead of concentrating on the main theme, the playwright broadens its dimension into a three-act structure. While the second act presents the crucial moment of the killing, the first act prepares the ground for it by presenting the contradictory opinions held by the common citizens about Shivaji’s exploits and his plan to attack. But, as the actual ends in the second act itself, the third act appears to be superfluous on account of the unimportance of the events presented through the subplot.

As K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, "Lakhan Deb has presented a credible enough Shivaji whose heroic stature and essential nobility are hardly affected by the grim necessity that drives him to deal with his adversary in the way he does."

(Iyengar: 246)

Drawing his theme from recent history, Lakhan Deb gives a picture of the last days of Gandhiji’s life in his two-act verse-play, *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976). About the title Lakhan Deb says “The source of my inspiration, as the title itself suggests, is T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* which has served me as a model” (Deb: 5). The plot covers the Mahatma’s dominant role in politics just before partition, the events that followed it, the two-way exodus of refugees and the consequent communal clashes and bloodshed. Written in the manner of a Greek tragedy, the play observes the unities and contains a prologue and employs the chorus, while the interlude successfully used to link the two acts reminds us of the Pravesaka technique of the classical Sanskrit drama though it has clear affinities with Eliot’s play’ the playwright has used the expressionist method in characterisation, making
almost all the characters universal. He makes combined use of blank verse, rhymed verse and metered prose but the audience may find this style difficult to follow.

Gurcharan Das is an author, management consultant and public intellectual. He is the author of the international bestseller, *India Unbound*, which has been published in 17 languages and filmed by the BBC. He writes a regular column on Sundays for the Times of India and periodic guest columns for the Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Foreign Affairs, Time and Newsweek magazines. He is a regular speaker to the top managements of the world's largest corporations. Gurcharan Das graduated with honors from Harvard University in Philosophy and Politics. He later attended Harvard Business School (AMP), where he is featured in three case studies.

Penguin has published his novel, *A Fine Family*, which is being made into a film. Oxford University Press has published his anthology, *Three English Plays*, consisting of *Larins Sahib*, a prize-winning play about the British in India, which was presented at the Edinburgh Festival and other cities. *Mira*, another play, was produced off-Broadway to critical acclaim from New York critics. *9 Jakhoo Hill* has had a successful run in major Indian cities. Penguin has recently published his book of essays called *The Elephant Paradigm*.

Gurcharan Das' *Larins Sahib* (1970) is a historical play in which the playwright succeeds admirably in evoking the nineteenth century colonial Indian background. The action of the play is based on events in the Punjab in 1846-47, and
was reconstructed from documents and letters exchanged by the principle characters. After the death of Ranjit Singh, Henry Lawrence is appointed the Resident of the East India Company in the court of Ranjit Singh's twelve year old son Dalip Singh. In Act I, Lawrence emerges as a strong advocate of the principle of natural justice, a lover of the natives and just and efficient administrator. He identifies himself with his Indian subjects: “His face is burdened almost black as a native's and but for his uniform, he might be easily mistaken for north Indian” (Das: 29). He even advises the Governor General to reconsider the harsh term of the treaty and to ensure the dignity of the land. In the first Act, Lawrence stands in contrast to the Hardinge, the Governor General and Frederik Currie, the Foreign Secretary, harsh, inhuman and inconsiderate to Indians. He even arrests Lal Singh and Tej Singh, the friends of the British, for their political intrigues. He is fair to Rani Jindan and to the people of the State, and keeps the traitors at a distant. Rani entrusts the fabulous Koh-I-Noor diamond, the dearest possession of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to his safe keeping. In Act II Lawrence changes and he deems himself the Lion of the Punjab. He even passionately kisses the Rani. Lawrence in this Act plays duel role-the benign and humane Lawrence of pre-Koh-I-Noor days and the power-intoxicated Lawrence of the post-Koh-I-Noor days. Lawrence exults when the people call him The Angrez Badshah.

In the beginning of Act III, Lawrence returns to his former self and he boldly rebuts the charges levelled against him. He appears as the liberal Englishman pitted against the imperialists. But soon he assumes the role of the lion of the Punjab. He proves to be a cog in the wheels of the huge East Indian Company machine. He even
refuses to give Koh-I-Noor to the Rani. Finally, Lawrence is dismissed from his post. This is the inevitable nemesis of his misdeeds.

Dilip Hiro was born in the Indian subcontinent, and educated in India, Britain and the United States, where he received a Master's degree. He then settled in Britain in the mid-1960s, and became a full-time writer, journalist and broadcaster. He has published 30 books and contributed to 16 more.

He has written extensively for stage, television and cinema. *To Anchor a Cloud*, his three-act stage play about the struggle for power by Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, and the concept of the Taj Mahal, was produced in London in 1970, starring Saeed Jaffrey, Jamila Massey and Mrac Zuber. It was published in 1987 as part of *Three Plays*. The other plays in the collection were *Apply, Apply, No Reply*, written originally for BBC TV and broadcast in 1976, and *A Clean Break*, a one-act play performed in 1978. He scripted 10 of the 21 episodes on the BBC TV's drama serial *Parosi*, centered round the lives of South Asian immigrants in Britain, broadcast in 1978-79 and repeated a year later. He is the co-script writer of *A Private Enterprise*, a story of a young Indian immigrant in Britain trying to become a successful businessman, which was judged the best British film of 1974, and won prize at the Chicago Film Festival. In 1985 he wrote *The Video Wicked*, a stage play for the Royal Court Theatre, London, for young audience. The Asian Cooperative Theatre, London, presented a staged reading of his three-act play, *In Search of Lord Clive's Corpse* in 1993.
As the play, *To Anchor a Cloud*, (1972) is set in the seventeenth century India, a brief description of the Mughal dynasty, which then ruled the country, should help understand and appreciate it better. Jahangir was the Emperor of India from 1605 to 1627. He had four sons - Khusru, Parwez, Khurram and Shahriyar - in that order. Shah Jahan is the name that Prince Khurram acquired when he finally won the imperial throne. However, for the sake of simplicity, the author has used the name Shah Jahan throughout the script. Since the Mughal dynasty lacked the tradition of the eldest son automatically succeeding the father, rivalry for the throne broke out during the ruling emperor’s lifetime. This happened in the case of Jahangir and his sons. In 1618, when the play opens, the fight for the imperial throne was already on.

The playwright presents the weakness of old Emperor Jahangir, who, looks upon Shah Jahan as his successor to the throne, and also the circumstances that lead to the unsuccessful bid of Shahriya and Parweez to capture power. But in his attempt to transform Mumtaz Mahal into an active politician, the playwright seems to distort history altogether. Mumtaz is shown to be a woman who is shrewd and crafty. Further, though the playwright shows his ability to create lively situations, he has not ensured harmonious development of the plot. Thus, *To Anchor a Cloud* may not fully impress the audience on account of the playwright’s immaturity in handling a historical theme and loose plot construction.

Born on May 19, 1938, in Matheran, Maharashtra, Girish Karnad has become one of India’s brightest shining stars, earning international praise as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, and translator. As a young man studying at Karnataka
University, Dharwar, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics and Statistics in 1958, Karnad dreamed of earning international literary fame, but he thought that he would do so by writing in English. Upon graduation, he went to England and studied at Oxford where he earned a Rhodes Scholarship and went on to receive a Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. He would eventually achieve the international fame he had dreamed of, but not for his English poetry. Instead, Karnad would earn his reputation through decades of consistent literary output on his native soil.

His first play, *Yayati* (1961), was written neither in English nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead, it was composed in his adopted language Kannada. The play, which chronicled the adventures of mythical characters from the *Mahabharata*, was an instant success and was immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages. His best loved play, however, would come three years later. By the time *Tughlaq*, a compelling allegory on the Nehruvian era, was performed by the National School of Drama, Karnad had established himself as one of the most promising playwrights in the country. He soon quit his post at the Oxford University Press, deciding to focus all of his energies on his writing.

For four decades, Karnad has continued to compose top-notch plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary themes. He has also forayed into the jungle of cinema, working alternately as an actor, director, and screenwriter, and earning numerous awards along the way. At the age of sixty, however, Karnad is
vowing to give up cinema for the stage. "I've had a good life," he says. "I have managed to do all I could wish for—even be a government servant! Now I feel whatever time I have left should be spent doing what I like best—writing plays."

Karnad's awards include the Mysore State Award for Yayathi (1962), the Government of Mysore Rajyotsava Award (1970), President's Gold Medal for the Best Indian film for Samskara (1970), the Homi Bhabha Fellowship for creative work in folk theatre (1970-72), the Sangeet Natak Academy (National Academy of the Performing Arts) Award for playwriting (1972), the Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the Best Indian play of the year for Hayavadana (1972), the National Award for Excellence in Direction for Vamsha Vriksha, the Mysore State Award for the Best Kannada film and the Best Direction for Vamsha Vriksha (1972), the President's Silver Medal for the Second Best Indian film for Kaadu (1974), the Padma Shri Award (1974), the National Award for the Best Kannada film for Ondanondu Kaaladalli (1978), the National Award for the Best Script for Bhumika, the Film Fare Award for the Best Script for Godhuli, the Best Bengal Film Journalists Association Award for the Best Actor in Swami (1978), the Karnataka Nataka Academy Award (1984), the Nandikar, Calcutta, Award for Playwriting (1989), the Golden Lotus for the Best Non-Feature Film for Kancka Purandara (1989), the National Award for the Best Non-Feature Film on Social Issues for The Lamp in the Niche (1990), "Writer of the Year" Award from Granthaloka Journal of the Book Trade for Tale-Danda (1990), Karnataka State Award for the Best Supporting Actor in Santa Shishunala Shareef (1991), the Karnataka Sahitya

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Academy Award for the Most Creative Work for *Nagamandala* (1992), the B.H. Sridhar Award for *Tale-Danda* (1992), the Padma Bhushan Award (1992), the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for Best Play for *Tale-Danda* (1992), the Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India Award (1992), the National Award for the Best Film on Environmental Conservation for *Cheluvi* (1993), a Special Honour Award from the Karnataka Sahitya Academy (1994), the Sahitya Academy Award for *Tale-Danda* (1994), and the Gubbi Veeranna Award (1996-97), and the Jnanpith Award (1999). He also served as Director of the Film and Television Institute of India (1974-75), President of the Karnataka Nataka Academy (1976-78), Indian Co-Chairman for the Joint Media Committee of the Indo-U.S. sub-Commission on Education and Culture (1984-93), Visiting Professor and Fulbright Scholar in Residence at the University of Chicago (1987-88), and Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy of Performing Arts (1988-93).

Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq* (1972) is a variable link between received history and its relevance in the contemporary frame of reference. In the text of the play Karnad writes history by judging the past and instructing the contemporary world in its social milieu. In the very opening of the play, an old man and a young man discusses the political situation in the country. *Tughlaq* explores the paradox of Muhammad Tughlaq, the idealistic sultan of Delhi whose reign is considered to be one of the most spectacular failures in Indian history. How it formed the theme of his play is explained by Karnad himself: “What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq’s history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most
intelligent King ever to come on the throne of Delhi....and one of the greatest failures also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had only the correct answer...." (Karnad: Intro.)

In the play of thirteen scenes, the playwright presents the following sequences to throw light upon the complex personality of the Sultan. The affair of the two thieves, Aziz and Azam; Tughlaq’s attitude in imposing heavy taxes on the poor farmers; his orders to change the capital from Delhi with its entire people to Daulatabad; the futile conspiracy of the disgruntled Amirs to kill the sultan while at prayer; his cruel punishment to his stepmother for her crime of getting the Vizir Najib killed; Aziz’s impersonation of the invitee-Caliph and its consequences; and finally the Sultan’s death.

Karnad portrays Tughlaq as the first secular of India even before Akbar. For him politics and religion are complementary to each other. He expects religion to guide politics but not the vice versa as the oldest trick of the world and is very rigid to the amalgamation of the two. As a benevolent socialist he does not believe in politics as a means to achieving the ends of religion when Sheikh Imam-ud-din accuses him for pitting religious men. The shifting of his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is a historic feat in his idealistic vision. It is a step to mediate between the two communities for a peaceful co-existence. The introduction of copper currency in place of silver dinars is a failure of his idealistic vision due to lack of precaution. He knows
that his subjects are afraid of him and would not dare to mistrust him but he fails to suspect the nature and instinct of men who get involved in counterfeiting the token copper coins. Exploration of prayer for murder is an outcome of Muhammad's state policy to liquidate his opponents. He holds prayer very dear to his heart but he gets fouled when the prayer halls are polluted by the discussion of politics.

_Tughlaq_ is by no means a straight realistic play, despite close parallels with its historical antecedents, it cannot be deemed to be a photographic imitation of history. Since truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through creative and imaginative transformation. Karnad has presents Tughlaq as a bundle of contradictions and a queer mixture of the opposites. The complex personality of Sultan at once makes him a dreamer and also a man of action, a benevolent ruler and malevolent politician, a god like and godless figure. Most of his plans are Utopian, fantastic and visionary. They end in debacle and bring about much human suffering on a large scale. However, they always appear to be the product of his original and fertile brain. Karnad sticks to history in presenting Tughlaq as a just and generous king.

_Tughlaq_ is not an ordinary chronicle play but it is an imaginative reconstruction of history in the modern context. In the play history is mixed with politics and the dramatist seems to show that politics is used to promote the self-interest of the leaders and not the welfare of the people. The dramatist also portrays through the scenes of the play that the politics is mixed with religion and religion is made use of by the politicians for their selfish motives.
In *Tale-Danda* Karnad re-examines the need and structure of the caste system of India that was once, in the past, hailed as ideal one. Picking up historical background for his plot, he modules the theme of *Tale-Danda* to serve his present needs. He writes, “I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the ‘Mandir’ and the ‘Mandal’ movements were beginning to show again how relevant the question posed by these thinkers were for our age the horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered” (Karnad: Intro). These thinkers are those who condemned idol worship and temple worship. Indeed, they reflect anything ‘static’ in favour of the principle of movement and progress in human enterprise. They believed in the equality of sexes and celebrated hard, dedicated work. They opposed the caste system not just in theory but in practice.

The play centers round the never-ending efforts of Basavanna for the creation of casteless society through non-violent reforms and his ultimate reactionary forces in society. In the preceding two decades ending in A.D. 1168, the city of Kalyan had become the centre of the congregation of poets, philosophers, mystics and social revolutionaries who were opposed to the traditional Brahananical order and believed in radical social transformation. Basavanna and Bijjala as such are the two central characters of the play and both of them have their antagonists. Basavanna, a poet and social reformer, is a King Bijjala’s confidant friend. He is an idealistic man. He gathers around him a number of followers who like him believe in class-less society. His followers include Brahmins too, like Jayadeva and Madhuvarsa. This movement
exhorts people to believe in the idea of 'work is worship'. Basavanna is supported by
the King of Kalyan, Bijjala who is himself a 'Kakachurya'—a barber by birth. The
story tells us that five generations back Bijjala’s ancestors had served as messengers,
later through marriages into royal families. Bijjala himself had married a Kshatriya
princess from the Royal family of Hoysalas.

Bijjala was a feudal lord in Mangalwad with the Chalukya rulers, till he met
Basavanna, who was at that time just about twelve years old. It was Basavanna’s
teaching that arouses him and he achieved what was meant for him, or he would have
spent his life entrapped in his caste constraints and never attained great things. Bijjala
finds himself at the mercy of his vagrant and dictatorial son Sovideva while
Basavanna is let down by his close disciple Jaganna who after killing the King, stabs
himself. Both Sovideva and Jaganna are representative of power hungry politics. The
sub-plot which focuses on the inter-cast marriage between a lower-caste boy,
Sheelavanta and a Brahmin girl, Kalavati add fuel to Sovideva’s plotting which
ultimately leads to the final damnation of the Sharana movement.

It is imperative to note that Basavanna despite his noble goal of caste and class
eradication is also portrayed as a character who is first and foremost sensitive to
everyday practicalities. He does not want to force the marriage between Sheelavanta
and Kalavati for he perhaps realises that the girl’s mother has a point to make about
the girl’s Bhramanical upbringing which is directly in conflict with the day to day life
of a cobbler’s. But more importantly as a leader cares for the welfare the people he
feels that the time is not yet right for such revolutionary act. He is naturally wary
about bloodbath that may take place at the expense of such a step. He further exhibits his wisdom and respect for the individual by telling his Sharanas that marriage after all is a private affair in which the people who are directly involved must arrive at a decision without it being forced upon by the community. Such rationality and insight prevents the romanticization of the task at hand and is exemplary of the spirit and objectivity. *Tale-Danda* is a serious work of art; it projects Karnad’s socio-religious perspective. He chooses history and myth to present a contemporary problem mirroring the social scenario of India today.

Karnad’s latest play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004) takes the readers to the 18th century events in Karnataka that changed the course of history of the country. These three plays studied together stand out for their treatment of history and their contemporary relevance. Play offers an insight into the minds of Tipu and reveals his personality in the light of his dreams. Quite objectively, Karnad probes into the success of the English army and failure of Tipu. A remarkable feature of his handling of historical figures is that he is able to breathe life into them.

To the average Indian, Tipu is merely a historical figure from Karnataka who single handedly fought the British and met heroic death on the battlefield. The character of Tipu is revealed to the British and to the readers, through the accounts of Hussain Ali Kirmani – the confidant and historian in Tipu’s court. Tipu’s tempestuous life and his tragic end have been a source of endless stories, ballads and novels in India. Karnad’s play gives an insight into the life of this warrior and political
visionary he presents Tipu as “one of the most politically perceptive and tragic figures in modern Indian history” (Karnad: i).

Karnad has highlighted the hidden aspects of Tipu that apart from being a warrior, he was also a great dreamer and an idealist, and he shared with the historian Kirmani. Karnad presents Tipu as a multi-faceted ruler who possessed all the qualities of a European imperialist. He has a trader's logic. Perhaps no other Indian ruler of his time had such a vision to strengthen the state economy. While the Peshwa of Pune and Nizam of Hyderabad were giving excessive importance to religious activities and were building temples and mosques, Tipu, realizing the need of the time let the religion and temple “idols enjoy the undisturbed occupation and thoughts of God” (Karnad: 19).

Tipu in the play has a commercial bent of mind for which he was seen as a staunch enemy by the British. He picked up British habits and economics very quickly. He says “How John Company came to this country, poor, cringing and what they have become in a mere fifty years. It’s all because of their passion for trade” (Karnad: 26). He started turning his government into a trading agency like the East India Company. He is a man with open eyes and open arms to learn and accept new things from all possible directions. He is eager to know from China how to capture and train elephants. He is very much conscious of his status in world history. He knows that he is the only warrior in the world next to Alexander the Great to receive white elephants, a horse and slave woman from China.
Tipu is very popular about the particular about the foreign trips of his men. He reminds them this is not a picnic, and warns them to be unmoved by the charms of Paris. He knows what that he has to pay a heavy amount for glass, guns and canons. He also knows that he cannot afford to keep buying from abroad. He is aware that his state is teeming with ivory and sandalwood. He has come to know from his men that “Imam of Muscal has fallen in love with sandalwood and spices of his land” (Karnad: 24). He plans to set up factory there for his products. He informs his men “the delegation we sent to Istambul last year to his Holiness the Caliph of All Islamic Nations proved a sensational success. Turkey, Arabia, Iran- they are all clamouring for our products.” (Karnad: 24).

He is very careful about the imports from abroad. He wants not only ten thousand French soldiers but also French craftsmen who could make guns, canons and pistol. He wants his men to bring “a doctor, a surgeon, a carpenter, a weaver, a blacksmith, a locksmith, a cutter, a watch maker, even the gardeners from France who will work in Lal Bagh.” (Karnad: 25). Not content with these, he instructs his men to bring new varieties of trees, flowers and bushes. He struggles to keep pace with the world and asks his men to bring a thermometer. Tipu, in his time, was the only ruler in India who tried to check the expansion of the British by inviting the French to sign a treaty with him. Karnad gives different reading of history in this play. He brings Tipu alive and rescues him from colonial perceptions, and refracts history through the perspective of independent India. He tries to revive Tipu as a modernistic monarch, an astute statesman and courageous warrior who, a century or so earlier, would have led
the Indian anti-colonial struggle. Through this play, Karnad attempts a mind shift by destabilizing the mindset of the twentieth century Indians, who have been, for years together, prejudiced against Tipu and his significant role in the history of India.

Manohar Malgonkar was born in a royal family, and educated at Bombay University. He was an officer in the Maratha Light Infantry, a big game hunter, a civil servant, a mine owner and a farmer, and he also stood for parliament. Most of that activity was during momentous times of Indian history -- the build up to independence and its aftermath -- often the settings for his works. The socio-historical milieu of those times forms the backdrop of his novels, which are usually of action and adventure, probably reflecting, in some way, his own life. He has also written non-fiction including biography and history.

Manohar Malgonkar, though essentially a writer of fiction, has also written a two-act period play, *Line of Mars* (1978) the theme of which is drawn from the period prior to and during the 1857 revolt. Against the bizarre historical background of the decadent morality of impotent princes, palace intrigues and Dalhousie's cunning Doctrine of Lapse, the playwright creates some tragic-comic situations showing the unethical efforts of a royal family to maintain their family tree. The characters are one-dimensional and most of the situations conventional though the dialogue is crisp. Malgonkar himself makes it clear in the preface of the play "Even in today's India, instances of a childless wife going to a temple to receive supposedly divine insemination, often with her husband's connivance, are not unknown. The princely
Tarlochan Singh Gill is a highly educated, imaginative and sensitive Panjabi from India who has made a name for himself both in the land of his domicile and origin. For his zeal, enthusiasm and liberal outlook, his views and activities are often the subject of healthy and favourable comment in the popular newspapers and journals of the province of Ontario, Canada. He specialises in education, the study of languages and believes intensively in the basic oneness of mankind. He is a volunteer in local community projects and takes an active interest in various social and cultural activities.

Tarlochan Singh Gill's three act-play *Ashoka: A Historical Play* (1983), deals with Ashoka, the king of Mauryam Empire from C 274-237 B.C. His ambition in attaining the throne of Magadh, the capital, involved ruthlessness and treachery; but his repentance over the Kalinga War and its toll on human lives led to his radical metamorphosis into a man of deep compassion. This event forms one of the most touching episodes of Indian history. For, Ashoka, it was the turning point in his life. He turned to Buddhism, and its tenets influenced the administration of his empire. His compassion for life-forms was so intense that he banned the slaughter of animals. He is one of the few kings to have set up hospitals for sick animals. The play portrays an inevitable revolution—a revolution of events, in the disposition of the people, and
revolution in Nature and countries, because these changes are inevitable. Ashoka considers his people to be his children. The prime consideration of his rule is to give alms, help and encouragement to the poor. Play is set in Pataliputra, Capital of Magadh (present day Patna), Inderpur, capital of Kalinga (in Orissa), and some other historical places. Gill is very much keen in dealing with historical personalities he does not seem to take much freedom from history. Almost all the characters are from history and Gill majorly focuses on the development of Ashoka's life.

This brief survey helps to judge the development of the Indian Historical Drama in English. Though genre started in 1877 with D.N. Wadia's *The Indian Heroine* pre-independence period has just four historical plays. But in post-independence period it seems flourishing after 1970s Asif Currimbhoy is the major contributor to the genre. His political and historical plays are significant and crucial; he handled contemporary problems taking background from history of modern India. Minor playwrights like D.N. Wadia, V.V. Srinivasa Annaya, M. Mujeeb, S. Janaki, Manohar Malgonkar, Dilip Hiro and Tarlochan Singh Gill have contributed to the genre of Indian Historical Drama in English. However, Major playwrights like Mrinalini Sarabhai, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Lakhan Deb, Asif Currimbhoy, Gurucharan Das and Girish Karnad, in real sense moulded Historical Drama. In the promise shown by number of Indian Historical Dramatists in English, one can predict a bright enough future. They have something distinct to offer to the audience, something which neither a native English Writer besides Shakespeare nor an Indian Writer in the vernacular language can possibly offer. The East-West dialogue as well
as confrontation that characterize our contemporary life and reality can be articulated in Indian English plays more vividly and more completely than perhaps in any other medium.
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