-: Chapter II:-

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL REALISM
There are different narrative techniques for the narration of literature. Among the narrative techniques, Realism, in literature, is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity. Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. George Eliot introduced realism in England, and William Dean Howells introduced it in the United States. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications in literature, an approach that proceeds from an analysis of reality in terms of natural forces.

2.0. Definitions of Realism, Social Realism and Socialist Realism:

Realism is a style of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life. The term refers, sometimes confusingly, both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description and to a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favour of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life. Modern criticism frequently insists that realism is not a direct or simple reproduction of reality (a ‘slice of life’) but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader. In its
methods and attitudes, realism may be found as an element in many kinds of writing prior to the century ago.

It was also found in theater. Realism established itself as an important tradition in the theatre in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the works of Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and others; and it remains a standard convention of film and television drama. In drama, realism is most closely associated with Ibsen's social plays. Later writers felt that realism laid too much emphasis on external reality. Many, notably Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the mind. Despite the radical attempts of modernism to displace the realist emphasis on external reality, realism survived as a major current within 20th century fiction, sometimes under the label of neo realism.

Realism in literature is the theory or practice of fidelity to nature or to real life and to accurate representation without idealization of everyday life. The 18th-century works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett are among the earliest examples of realism in English literature. It was consciously adopted as an aesthetic programme in France in the mid-19th century, when interest arose in recording previously ignored aspects of contemporary life and society. The realist emphasis on detachment and objectivity, along with lucid but restrained social criticism, became integral to the novel in the late 19th century. The word has also been used critically to denote excessive minuteness of detail or preoccupation with trivial, sordid, or squalid subjects.

The twentieth century prevailing models of literary criticism drew a line between realist and anti-realist literature, placing realist works on one side of the line and fantastic works on the opposite side. Despite this inherent questioning of the boundaries and construction of reality, the international literary scene has been largely uniform in its placement of magical realism in the anti-realist category, thereby opposing it to realist fiction. Furthermore, the current critical climate furthers the division between realism and magical
realism in the premium that it places on magical realism at the expense of the earlier social realist tradition, which is defamed for producing artistically stunted narratives without any enduring aesthetic value.

This hierarchical and oppositional division of social and magical realism into the categories of ‘real’ and ‘anti-real’ literature, respectively, is too simple and that this attitude of dismissal of social realist fiction must be understood within the context of the historical trends of literary criticism, as it goes hand-in-hand with the languishing of Marxist criticism.

The term ‘social realism’ is a term that derives from Russian inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist society. The international production of social realist fiction is characterized by a belief (now regarded as naive) in the power of the word and in the writer’s ability to portray in a satisfying documentary fashion the structure of social reality. Social realism is inspired in various ways by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism, international Marxism, and the need to respond critically and in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanisms of repression and the frustration of personal and collective aspirations. According to Dictionary of Literary terms by Coles;

Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively. In contrast to romance, this is concerned with the bizarre and psychological in its approach to character, presenting the individual rather than the type. Often, fate plays a major role in the action. Realism became prominent in the English novel with such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray. (Coles, 163)

The term ‘Realism’ is widely accepted according to need and time. Realism in literature and the visual arts is used to describe a variety of approaches in which accurate depiction of reality is the aim. Each of these uses
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involves a contrast between human thought or imagination and an external reality independent of mind. The notion that reality has a cognitive or normative authority over the mind is also generally present.

Arnold Kettle remarks as Victorian novel is characterized by realism that the novel by its very definition “is a realistic prose fiction, complete in itself and of a certain length” wherein the word ‘realistic’ is meant to ‘indicate’ relevant to real life as opposed to… ‘Romantic’. (Kettle, 1960)

There is a difference between social realism and socialist realism. According to Galsworthy, the word ‘realist’ characterizes the artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with revelation of the actual spirit of life, character and thought with a view to enlighten him and others. The main difference between social realism and socialist realism is between ‘is’ and ‘should be’. Social realism means the depiction in literature of social reality as it is; there should be a point one to one correspondence between the society depicted in literature and the real actual society.

Socialist realism means the depiction of the social reality not as it is but as it should be: idealized. The second kind of approach is typical Marxist approach to literature. The theory of Socialist Realism was adopted by the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. Approved by Joseph Stalin, Nickolai Bukharin, Maxim Gorky and Andrey Zhdanov, Socialist Realism demanded that all art must depict some aspect of man's struggle toward socialist progress for a better life. It stressed the need for the creative artist to serve the proletariat by being realistic, optimistic and heroic. The doctrine considered all forms of experimentalism as degenerate and pessimistic.

Socialist realism had its roots in neoclassicism and the traditions of realism in Russian literature of the 19th century that described the life of simple people. It was exemplified by the aesthetic philosophy of Maxim Gorki. His novel Mother is usually considered to have been the first work of socialist realism. Gorky was also a major factor in the school's rapid rise, and his pamphlet, On Socialist Realism, essentially lays out the needs of Soviet art.
Other important works of literature include Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement* (1925) and Mikhail Sholokhov's two volume epic, *And Quiet Flows the Don* and *Quiet Flows the Don Summary* (1934) and *The Don Flows Home to the Sea* (1940). It has been noted that the realism in Indian context or in context of post colonial would have been treating literature in better way at present scenario.

Realism in art and literature is an endeavor to portray life as it is. It shows life with reality, omitting nothing that is ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing. To the realists, the writer's most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. Realism began as a recognizable movement in art in the 18th century. By the mid 19th century, it was a principal art form. In past, realism has been an upheaval against classicism and romanticism – artistic movements were characterized by works that idealize life. Classicism shows life as being more rational and orderly than it really is while Romanticism shows life as being more emotionally exciting and satisfying that it normally is. While it was an attempt through realism to present life as it is. This 'life as it is' is what realism is.

In this literary approach of literature, writer keeps in mind the basic reality while narrating a piece of art. It is a unique literary observable fact which never allows believing anything by the force of formulas of art. However, in the process of selecting and presenting their material the realists cannot help being influenced by what they feel and think. Even the most thorough-going realism is the result of observation and personal judgment. Even there is no place for the writer's own belief and thought to present. It means writer without being prejudice of anything narrates what it is.

It is surprising that realism became very popular recently. It has two major factors; the development of modern science with its emphasis on facts and figures and the other is an increasing desire of artists and readers for a realistic understanding of different social problems. Even so realism is not an object, to be identified, pinned down, and appropriated. It is rather a way of
describing certain methods and attitudes, and the descriptions, quite naturally, have varied in the ordinary exchange and development of experience.

The major problem of realism is the satisfactory presentation of the complete human personality. Literature is saturated with social and moral humanistic problems and the expectation for a realistic creation of types is in contrast to the trends in which the biological being of man, the physiological aspects of self-preservation and procreation are dominant. In this case if the writer depicts any other aspect of life with his own creative mind then it may divert it from realism and lead to other type. So the scope for imagination in this style is quite less.

Realism is nothing but an acute observation of life as it is. It is a simple recording process from which any deviation is voluntary. Now we know that we literally create the world we see which is necessarily dynamic and active. Reality is that which human beings make common by work or language. Thus, in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially recognized, known and formed is richly and subtly manifested. Reality is continually established by common efforts and art is one of the highest forms of this process. Yet the tension can be great in the struggle to establish reality, and many kinds of failure and breakdowns are possible. The recording of creative efforts to explore such breakdowns is not always easy to distinguish from the simple exciting exploitation of breakdown. It is a challenge for realist to establish the form without any characteristics of any other style of literature and yet to maintain the charm of realism. There are different obstacles in the path of realist to prove it as per expectations. It is very difficult to achieve this at first attempt. Not only a great deal of hard work but also a serious moral effort is required for this.

It is the desire of the reader to share in the lives of the millions around him. It may be worthwhile to read romantic literature for thrill, relaxation or
amusement, but for a proper appraisal of life the realistic literature alone provides the answer.

The political changes gave rise to social realism in Europe. The political reformation of nineteenth century Europe was fostered by social factors such as the spread of literacy and especially the increasing power of the bourgeoisie as it became enfranchised to vote and as it gained in economic stature as a result of business and manufacturing growth which created greater prosperity for it and greater hardships for the exploited labourers. This change has attracted all the men of letters to focus on them and as a result some of the best work of literature came out during this time. A brilliant picture of working conditions from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards is given in such realist novels as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) and Gola's *Germinal* (1885). Even the modern science discoveries in all the fields have given a great comfort to middle class and labourers. Scientific inventions and specially the discovery of photography technique have provided the exact reproduction of reality. The bourgeois were the primary readers of realist writing whose tone and content were geared to appeal to an audience convinced of its capacity to master the physical world.

The realists place truth-telling at the core of their beliefs, implying thereby certain directness, simplicity and unadorned artlessness well attuned to the mid-nineteenth century preference for facts and figures. The reiterated emphasis on truth is the central motif of all contemporary views and reviews, even though the exposition of its meaning undergoes modification between the early 1830s and the late 1880s. The notion of truthfulness is taken most literally by Balzac who likes to cast himself in the role of recording secretary to the nineteenth century, and by Edmond Duranty, who adopts truth as the dominant slogan of his short-lived journal Realisme (1856-57). He also upholds sincerity, modernity and prose along with truthfulness as the distinguishing features of realism in contrast to the idealization, historical remoteness and verse typical of Romanticism.
The basic theory of art as merely truth-telling came to be qualified in the writings of some of the great realists themselves as they realized its inherent shortcomings. George Eliot, for example, in *Adam Bede*, declares her desire ‘to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind’. (Eliot, 391) Eliot is already conscious of the crucial quandary of literary realism, which has become the fulcrum of present-day examination of its writing. Eliot comments on the ease of describing an imaginary description while the reality which is very difficult to present. According to her, for imaginary writing there is free flow of thought and fantasy while for reality there are obstacles. She extends that it is very difficult to narrate our daily conversation as it is in a way as real and true.

The interest in realism was sparked by a significant book, *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach, subtitled as *Represented Reality* in 1946. He puts forward the assumption that the essence of realism lies in its completeness and truthfulness. Realism denotes above all the serious portrayal of everyday occurrences among the lower social strata at a specific moment in the history of their time. Realism is quite different from the Classicism and Romanticism. Here the presentation of life is what life is while the same situation in the hands of classicists can take place in the style of classicism and it cannot adore the truth and reality alone.

Edmund Duranty says that Realism bans the historical in painting, the novel, and the theater so that no lie may creep in and the artist cannot borrow knowledge from others; Realism demands of artists only the study of their period; in this study of their period it asks them not to distort anything, but to keep everything in its exact proportions; the best way not so err in this study is to think always of the idea of representing the social side of man, which is the most visible, the most comprehensible and the most varied, and to think also of the idea of reproducing the things affecting the lives of the greatest number, which happen often in the realism of instincts, desires, and passions; realism thereby attributes to the artist a philosophical, practical, useful aim, and not that to amusement, and consequently raises him up. That, in demanding of the artist
useful truth, it demands of him particularly the intelligent feeling and observation which sees a lesson, an emotion in a spectacle at any level, low or high, according to convention, spectacle at any level, knowing how to represent it completely, and to embed it in its social cadre. (Duranty, 31) A distinction is drawn between art and reality and an antithesis established between art and reality do not lose sight of the fact that art is a representation of reality – a representation which must be limited by the nature of its medium; the canvas of the painter, the marble of the sculptor, the chords of the musician, and the language of the writer, each bring with them peculiar laws but in all laws, art always aims at the representation of what is true.

Realism is thus the basis of all art. When our painters represent peasants with regular features and irreproachable linen, when their milkmaids have the air of keep-sake beauties whose costume is picturesque and never old or dirty, an attempt is made to idealize but the result is simple falsification and bad art. To misrepresent the forms of ordinary life is no less an offence than to misrepresent the forms of ideal life. The writers of realism are expected to either give us true pictures, or leave them untouched, either paint no drapery at all or paint it with the utmost fidelity of their class. In the same way, a playwright expresses his mind in his plays, according to his poetic disposition, with the choice and treatment of his subject to be poetically but it must always be real-true. If he selects the incidents and characters of ordinary life, he must be rigidly bound down to accuracy in the presentation. He is at liberty to avoid such subjects, if he thinks them prosaic and uninteresting, but having chosen, he is not at liberty to falsify under pretence of beatifying them; every departure from truth in motive, idiom, or probability is to that extent a defect. His dressmaker must be a young woman who makes dresses, and not a sentimental heroine, evangelical and consumptive; she may be consumptive, she may also be evangelical, for dressmakers are so sometimes, but she must be individually a dressmaker. If the writer’s knowledge or sympathies do not lead him in the direction of ordinary life, if he can neither paint town nor country, let him take
to the wide fields of history of fancy. Even there the demands of truth will pursue him; he must paint what he distinctly sees with his imagination; if he succeeds, he will create characters which are true although ideal. It is a greater achievement for a work of art to represent the ordinary life truly than the extraordinary life incompletely. Echoing a similar note, George Eliot confesses:

I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing indeed but falsity which, in spite of one’s best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. (Eliot, 166)

It is very much true that the depiction of truth requires perfect knowledge of the situation or emotions while for fantasy there is no barrier at all. It just requires lots of vocabulary and imagination and there is no need to care for its bonafide or its relevance with contemporary world.

Realistic literature has been primarily a revolt against the sentimentality and melodrama of romantic idealism. Characters in realistic literature tend to be more complex than those in romantic writing. Settings are more ordinary, plots are less important, and themes are less obvious. A realistic literature deals with probable commonplace events and believable people; it presents unpleasant and even offensive subject-matter. This sordid quality is especially associated with ‘naturalism’ which is but an outgrowth of realism.

Social realism is concerned with dynamic interpretations of life with the purpose of changing the existing reality. In the 19th century England Dickens and George Eliot, Meredith and Thackeray endeavoured in this direction; in India, Sarat Chandra, Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand blazed the trail in Bengali, Hindi and Indian English languages respectively. They faced political persecution, but were ultimately recognized. The concept ‘social realism’ in the strictly scientific and philosophic sense has come to us with the philosophy of Marxism. Indian novelists are not Marxists; the Victorian writers are close to socialist interpretation of the problems of their time while some of the Indian
writers appear deeply influenced by the leftist ideology in the creation of their world of fiction.

Leo Tolstoy also the follower of social realism theory admits that the real world presented for the sake of art is also not up to the purpose. Reality for the sake of art is like fantasy only. The works of Hugo, Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Dostoevsky, George Eliot, Cervantes, Moliere, Gogol, and Pushkin have produced an example of art that seem good to Tolstoy, but he votes for the destruction of 'art for art’s sake’ and admits ‘art for ourselves’.

The contemporary drama has both reflected and illuminated the crisis of our society; only a different society can resolve our literary problems. It is true for literature also that it is a reflection of life and our experience. Realism is nothing but the reaction of Romanticism and Classicism. It is a kind of presentation of life as it is. The difference between Romanticism and Realism is like the difference between painting and photography.

Realism became popular as it presents the emotion of mass and every member of the mass relate the subject matter with himself. Realist writers in fiction always take the most important burning problems of the community for their starting point; their pathos as writers are always stimulated by those sufferings of the people which are the most acute at that time; it is these sufferings that determine the objects and direction of their love and hate and through these emotions also determine what they see in their poetic vision. In the process of creation, their conscious world view comes into conflict with the world seen in their vision and what really emerges is the true conception of the world which is only superficially formulated in the consciously deep ties with the great issues of their time, their sympathy where the sufferings of the people can find adequate expression only in the being and fate of their characters which is the real charm of realism.

Literature is a mirror of life and it can be justified through realism only. Only realism reflects the life of an individual or mass with humanistic approach and zest of their betterment. In this way great realism and popular humanism
are merged into an organic unity. If we regard the classics of the social
development that determine the essence of our age, from Goethe and Walter
Scott to Gorky and Thomas Mann, we find the same structure of the basic
problem. Every great realist finds a different solution for the basic problem in
accordance with his time and his own artistic personality. But they all have in
common that they penetrate deeply into the great universal problems of their
time and inexorably depict the true essence of reality as they see it. From the
French Revolution onwards the development of society moves in a direction
which renders inevitable a conflict between such aspirations of men of letters
and the literature and public of their time. In this whole age a writer could
achieve greatness only in the struggle against the current of everyday life.

2.1. Social Realism in Indian English Drama:

The present study examines carefully the real social problems on which
Dattani's existence rests. They are the social issues in India which affected
Dattani's viewpoints and approach. In India, the freedom struggle movement,
reformers and thinkers like Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekanand, and Gandhi made a
vigorous attempt to break the age-old shackles of colonial dominance, social
evils and political orthodoxy. The father of the India, Mahatma Gandhi calls
Tolstoy his Guru. It is no accident that this attempt at regeneration, which does
not at first confines itself to literature but strives to create healthy conditions in
all ideological spheres, is at the same time the period in which Tolstoy grows to
be an influence in India and England along with Dostoevsky and Gorky. It is
interesting to note that the foreign influence in the awakening of Indian
consciousness has provided much more to the Indian society and the socially
affected people. It is India or world at large but the basic interest behind social
development is same as the emotion and feeling of mankind is same across the
globe. This turning point in social development is mirrored in literature and
considered one of the finest elements of realism.

The panoramic intensity and gravity of social experience starting from
Ram Mohan Roy down the ages through which India passed in its struggle for
freedom from the white Racism has made Indo-English writers' approach realistic and down to earth. There was a wave of disgust of blowing against the colonial yoke of foreign rule but a few writers for example, M. R. Anand, Krishan Chandar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Chaman Nahal, Ahmad Ali peeped into the inner recesses of Indian social hierarchy as did Dickens and George Eliot into those of Victorian social systems.

In this respect Dattani and his contemporaries followed the tradition of realism set by 19th century novelists like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy and Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand in fiction and Vijay Tendulkar in plays. They endeavoured to depict life in an entirely honest manner, without prejudice and glamour, so to hold a mirror to society.

The picture of India as painted by these Anglo-Indian novelists leaves much to be desired. Often it barely scratches the surface of Indian reality and means to give altogether an exotic image of this country so much cherished in the west-through touches of romance, mystery, satire, farce, and fantasy-even melodrama. The trio; M.R. Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have by their herculean efforts tried to retrieve the true realistic ‘inside’ view of India and her people. We can hardly deny that there are fundamental differences in their perspectives; yet we have to concede that their ‘common endeavour with its elements of propaganda, art and philosophy, has challenged the current norms of realism as understood and practised in the west.

In India, Munshi Premchand was perhaps the first Urdu author to write European-style short stories. He believed that the standards of beauty needed to be changed, that literature should be an instrument of social reforms, and explored with considerable realism social problems such as rural and urban poverty, the oppression of women, and the caste system.

Hence the social realist movement was at its peak in India at his time, the same time when social realism had achieved a high degree of international prominence in Latin America and elsewhere. With its emphasis on the realistic depiction of such social problems as hunger and poverty, social backwardness,
and political subjugation, Indian social realist literature would hardly seem to contest reality or to allow for the opening up of a third space between reality and fantasy. Social realist literature did not attempt to question the boundaries between reality and fantasy, as it was focused entirely on the accurate portrayal of empirical reality.

Following in part the conventions of social realism and proscenium performance that had defined modernity in late colonial theatre, important new plays in the urban-realist mode appeared concurrently with the first major works of mythic-historic retrospection in the 1950s and have coalesced over five decades into an equally, if not more, substantial tradition. Focusing on contemporary life, these plays are more or less realistic in presentational style; their action is invented, not derived from pre-existing narratives; their settings are urban (often metropolitan) or semi urban; and their primary level of signification is literal rather than analogical or allegorical. To a remarkable extent, these works have also settled on the private space of home as the testing ground of not only familial but social and political relations, so that domestic settings, love marriage, parent-child conflicts, generational shifts, and the everyday pressures of urban life appear as the common fictional substrata of plays that are thematically disparate. Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar and Mahesh Dattani are among the major contemporary practitioners who work predominantly in the realist mode and possess a social imagination that expresses itself primarily through the psychodrama of family relationships. Other leading playwrights, such as Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, G.P. Deshpande, Mahasweta Devi, and Satish Alekar have offered stylized variations on realism in specific plays or group of plays, or have assimilated its conventions to their respective forms of historical, environmental, political and absurdist theatre.

In its totality, the contemporary tradition of urban, realist, predominantly domestic drama is large and varied and includes some of the most influential plays of the last five decades: Vijay Tendulkar's *Shantata! court chalu ahe*
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(Silence! The Court is in Session, 1967), Gidhade (Vultures, 1970), Sakharam binder (Saktharam, the Bookbinder, 1972), Kamala (1981), and Kanyadaan (The Gift of a Daughter, 1983), all in Marathi; Mohan Rakesh’s Adhe adhure (The Unfinished, 1969), in Hindi; G. P. Deshpande’s Uddhwasta dharmashala (The Ruined Sanctuary, 1974), Ek vajoon gela ahe (It’s Past One O’Clock, 1983), and Andhar yatra (Journey in Darkness, 1987), also in Marathi; Madhu Rye’s Koipan ek phool nu naam bolo to (Say the Name of Any Flower, 1974) and Kumarni agashi (Kumar’s Terrace, 1974), both in Gujrati; Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Raktapushpa (Petals of Blood, 1972), Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion, 1985), Atmakatha (Autobiography, 1988), and the Yuganta trilogy (1994), in Marathi; and Mahesh Dattani’s Tara (1990), Bravely Fought the Queen (1991) and other plays, in English. Despite formal and thematic differences, Badal Sircar’s Evam Indrajit (And Indrajit, 1962), Baki itihas (1965), Pagla ghoda (Mad Horse, 1967), and Shesh nei (There’s No End, 1969), in Bengali, Mahasweta Devi’s Hajar churashir ma (The Mother of Corpse Number 1084, 1973), in Bengali, and Satish Alekar’s Mahanirvan (The Great Departure, 1974) and Pidhijat (The Dynasts, 2002), in Marathi, also participate in this tradition by virtue of their urban settings and their preoccupation with contemporary middle-class life.

Predictably, there is no single ‘theory’ of realism or naturalism that undergirds this varied drama set mainly in the contemporary middle-class urban home. Rather, in the polyphonic theatrical discourse of the last five decades, the subject of realism has occasioned a range of theoretical, ideological, and polemical positions that place a high value on theatre’s commitment to the historical present and its ability to contend with its own times. In terms of subject matter, the focus on contemporary urban experience sets the realist works apart from plays concerned with a mythic or historical past, as well as from plays immersed in the ostensibly timeless realms of folk narrative and traditional performance. In thematic terms, the persistence of home-as-setting has created a ‘typology of home’ in post-independence Indian

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theatre, within which the practice of each major playwright forges distinctive connections between the private world of the family as an emotional and psychological entity and the public world of social and political action. In performance, these plays have established the proscenium stage and the enclosed auditorium as indispensable components of urban theatre architecture; realistic representation as an important common goal among directors, performers, and theater craftsmen; and the staged space of home as an intrinsic part of the visual, psychological, and emotional experience of spectatorship. The full impact of realistic urban drama as a distinct kind of theatre emerges only when all three of these levels of communication are taken concurrently into account.

Although the commentary on realism and urbanism by contemporary playwrights is largely a form of workshop criticism—making theoretical positions a matter of deduction and inference rather than explicit formulations—some arguments have appeared frequently enough to emerge as general principles that are relevant to practice. First, proponents of realism regard this mode as a powerful manifestation of theatrical modernity that was admittedly inherited from colonial times but that has a vital role to fulfill in the postcolonial present: instead of being rejected because of its colonial origins, it must be modified to suit present needs. Shanta Gokhale notes that in the first experimental phase of Marathi playwriting after independence, “the preferred mode of writing and presentation was realism, for it was felt that it was through this mode that the ‘modern’ sensibility could best express itself” (Gokhale, 102). By expunging melodrama, spectacle, and sentimentality from the forms of realism inherited from the pre-independence period, a playwright like Vijay Tendulkar fashioned serious new vehicles for the stage that determined the direction of his own work and also exerted a profound influence on other theatre in Marathi and in various other Indian languages during the formative decades (1950-1970). Significantly, unlike the ‘raw realism’ of John Osborne and Joan Littlewood, which gave expression to marginal voices in England at
this time, in Bombay "realism . . . carried, not voices from the neglected margins of society, but from the mainstream, the educated middle-class, the upholders of norms, and also those who carefully defied them, in whom was invested the responsibility for creating a modern society in their newly independent country" (Gokhale, 116). The new Marathi playwrights were not angry young men reviling the establishment, but socially conscious authors who wanted to understand their circumstances in order to effect change. Tendulkar's generation in Marathi theatre therefore epitomizes the position that realism is the indispensable modern mode for understanding, coping with, and representing the post-independence present.

Second, for authors committed to realism, the method is a dependable measure of what is most worth representing in literature and theatre. "I write about the life around me," Tendulkar comments, adding that he cannot proceed with a play unless he sees his characters "as real-life people. . . . A play basically requires living characters who speak their own language in their separate personal style" (Tendulkar, 15, 26). Even when dramatic characters are modelled on actual people, the play must demonstrate the self-sufficiency of its fictional world through the characters' "own separate existence and expression" while retaining its nearness to "reality" (Tendulkar, 5). Mohan Rakesh reiterates the importance of the mundane when he argues that "works portraying an unfamiliar and extraordinary existence are never as popular as those which portray ordinary, everyday life. I live an ordinary life, and from every angle I'm a very ordinary person. That is why I find it completely natural to write stories, to mould this atmosphere of ordinariness into stories" (Rakesh, 42). Consequently, Rakesh is impatient with Indian authors who resort to a breathless 'experimentalism' borrowed from other nations and cultures in order to convince themselves that they belong in the literary vanguard: "(Their) vision is concerned with giving the stage a 'new' and 'modern' look from the outside, and not with searching for a theatre within our personal lives and circumstances. For that quest we need a deep understanding of our life and
environment—a clear recognition of the theatrical possibilities of the assaults and counter-assaults on our sensibilities. Only this quest can lead us in the direction of really new experiments, and give shape to that theatrecraft with which even we have not yet become acquainted" (Rakesh, 45). Clearly, Rakesh regards the ordinary Indian subject as a materially different being from his or her Western counterpart and seeks a theatre capable of recognizing and expressing this difference. He therefore has reservations about the living-room ambience of Western realist theatre, which restricts the Indian playwright mainly to an urban setting and middle-class life and narrows the possible range of subjects. Girish Karnad's objections to European/Shavian models of realism are more specific: "from Ibsen to Albee, the living room has symbolized all that is valuable to the Western bourgeoisie. . . . But nothing of consequence ever happens or is supposed to happen in an Indian living room! It is the no-man's land, the empty, almost defensive front the family presents to the world outside" (Karnad, 10). In sharp contrast to these reservations, however, Mahesh Elkunchwar maintains that "theatre everywhere is rooted in the middle class," and he accepts that the tradition he inherited in the 1960s was one of "Ibsenite realism," and actively resists any critique of literary drama that attempts "to throw out Shakespeare and Lorca and Chekov and Strindberg and Ibsen and O'Neill" (Elkunchwar, 165, 178).

Third, the preference for realism also translates into a preference for, and often a paradoxical defence of, the city. Historically, the city is deeply embedded in Indian political and literary experience because the successive Hindu, Muslim, and European empires on the subcontinent, and also the modern nation-state have fostered urban culture and 'metropolitan' cultural forms from 'classical' times to the present. However, because of the ideological counter-emphasis on village culture and on folk and traditional forms as the necessary bases of an authentic and egalitarian Indian aesthetic, numerous authors have felt compelled to affirm the importance of the city as the site and subject of representation. What is striking about the opposing
arguments is their radical incompatibility. While Habib Tanvir insists that “the true pattern of Indian culture in all its facets can best be witnessed in the countryside” and that villages have preserved “the dramatic tradition of India in all its pristine glory and vitality...even to this day” (Tanvir, 112)

The post-independence playwrights’ commitment to realism, domestic life, urban experience, and proscenium performance is strengthened by a corresponding commitment to these forms of theatre among all of the collaborators in the production process: directors, actors, and the theatre craftsmen who make the stage ‘stand for’ other spaces. The major directors whose careers in relation to new Indian drama have been largely devoted to the mode of urban realism and/or proscenium staging include Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Arvind Deshpande, Shreeram Lagoo, Dinesh Thakur, and Amol Palekar in Bombay; Shyamanand Jalan in Calcutta; Ebrahim Alkazi, Rajinder Nath, and Om Shivpuri in Delhi; and Mahesh Dattani in Bangalore. Like the playwrights whose work they bring to the stage, since the early 1960s these professionals have fostered and sustained the movement for a serious, ‘conventional’ urban theatre aimed largely at a middle-class audience, even as a host of other major practitioners, notably Habib Tanvir, Badal Sircar, K.N. Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam, B.V. Karanth, and Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry, have abandoned proscenium realism. (Sircar, a committed antirealist, acknowledges the strength of the proscenium tradition when he describes realism as the “natural” mode in theatre and the “illusion of reality” as the “unwritten law of theatre”. (Sircar, 17) A director like Lagoo, who mounted the first production of Mahesh Elkunchear’s Atmakatha in 1988, echoes the playwright when he describes himself as “a very old-fashioned director. I am content-oriented, not form-oriented. I have never felt the need, for instance, to do Ekach Pyala in the Kabuki form!...In the case of plays which are cast in a non-naturalist form, I do not think I am equipped to handle them. A play like Ghashiram Kotwal, for instance, which Jabbar [Patel] has handled so beautifully, is quite beyond me” (Lagoo, 122). Om Shivpuri similarly echoes
Mohan Rakesh’s preoccupation with the “reality of life” when he observes that “from the point of view of a director, I consider Adhe adhure the first meaningful Hindi play about contemporary life. It outlines some dense convergences in the ironic map of present-day existence. Its characters, situations, and psychological states are realistic and believable....It has the capability of grasping the tension of contemporary life” (Rakesh, SN, 331). Shivpuri notes that at first he found only the ‘box set’ appropriate to the play’s atmosphere of tension but later resorted to locally obtainable, inexpensive props so that Rakesh’s drama of the imploding middle-class urban family could be performed anywhere (Rakesh, SN, 336). The other major director of Adhe adhure shares Shivpuri’s assessment of the play as a theatrical breakthrough. For Satyadev Dubey, the play “exploded the myth that the Hindi playwright cannot produce a work dealing with contemporary situations and characters connected with our life” (Rakesh, SN, 337).
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