CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

…the greatest art is that which timelessly transcends its historical conditions. (Eagleton 3)

Art is a medium to transcend human experiences and hence every work of art has an ideology, which is its quintessential aspect. Ideology generally constitutes the writer’s intention. To interpret or analyse a work of art on what basis it functions, one needs to know the principles acting upon the text i.e. the specific ideology and thereby one can determine his position and derive at a meaning, for which, too, one should possess yet another ideology. Ideology is a social production and it is produced either by a group or an individual.

In modern times, texts are examined with an eye for how they reveal the economic and social realities, especially as they generate ideology and represent the power of subversion and power. Ideology may be defined as the relationship between a text and the political, social and economic circumstances in which it takes its form. Through ideology one could control the society. Earlier, people of the business class controlled the working class through their constructs – ideology, and that ideology was unthinkable for the marginalized. Only with the protests and struggles of eminent thinkers that it is possible for the people at the periphery to voice their voice. They use art as a form to propagate, to coin their ideology. The growing versions and points of view result in a great increase in the number of ideologies, which is confusing or at times difficult to find what is real. However, it is clear that ideology is inevitable since it is an object of controlling the society. All works of art are tangible vehicles of ideology, falling within the orbit of a particular genre.
Of the four major genres of English, drama is the oldest and the most effective of all. The word ‘drama’ has its origin in the Greek word *Drain* which means ‘to do’, and the word ‘scene’ comes from the Greek word *Scana* which means ‘to see’. Drama may be performed in a theatre. Theatre involves writing, acting and producing of a play, with the end result being the performance.

Drama assumes the existence of an actor who will lend his body, voice, action and existence for the time needed for the performance of the drama. The theatre is also, along with music, among the most ephemeral of the arts and it is also one of the most powerful in effect. While the audience watches the performance:

> Living human beings perform scenes which interpret man’s experience as thought it were happening at the very instant. By this means the theatre approximates life as is lived and felt moment by moment. Like life, each episode is experienced and then immediately becomes part of the past. (Brockett 5)

Further, the theatre can present both the outer and inner experiences through speech and actions: “As in life, individuals both externally and internally; what we know of their minds, their personalities, their motivations comes to us through what others tells us about them” (7).

Novels may deal at length with unspoken thoughts and feelings about the characters and poetry may express strong feeling alone but the dramatist must indicate these inner stirrings through external signs; gestures, meaningful expressions and sharp dialogues and hence drama may be acclaimed as the best form to express one’s ideology. Though drama owes its origin from Greece and India, the form has been internationally accepted and acclaimed. Since the audience identify themselves along
with the performance dance, music, gestures, costume effect, lights etc. it has been acknowledged as the best medium to propagate ideas.

During fifteenth century, Drama was initially enacted for spreading spiritual values, morals and for purgative purposes. The early morality play like *Dr. Faustus* (1592) in the British context and *Ramlila, The Bhagavad-Gita* in the Indian context are fine examples of these kinds. Over the ages, drama developed as a successful genre, exhibiting high philosophic and intellectual thought. During the nineteenth century, the form ‘drama’ seized a definite position in all the parts of the world, especially in Europe, organising different movements of drama, depending on the dramatist’s ideology like naturalism, realism, symbolism, absurd and expressionism. These movements accelerated the production of ideology, high thinking among the audience pertaining to high philosophic schools of drama and earning for drama a high position among the genre and at the international forum as well.

The naturalist theatre is a French movement which attempts to create a perfect illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies; detailed three-dimensional settings, everyday speech forms, a secular world-view, an exclusive focus on subjects that are contemporary and indigenous, an extension of social range of characters portrayed and a style of acting that attempts to recreate the impression of reality as advocated by Emily Zola in the essay entitled *Naturalism and Theatre* (1881). This theory lost its credibility for it attempts to create a perfect illusion of reality and opened the gate to realism.

The aim of the realists is to put a slice of life on the stage and the first person to do this was Henrik Ibsen, the father of modern drama. The realists avoided poetic language and their characters used the language of everyday life. The realists tried to put on stage what they verified by observing ordinary, real life. This ideology of
drama was widely accepted as it reflected the real world and earned the universal credibility receiving the acceptance of all. Writers of different parts of the world started enacting dramas on real life following the ideology of realism. Dramatists like Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Lorraine Hansberry, Asif Currimbhoy, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahasweta Devi belonged to the realistic theatre. The realism was immediately followed by many ideologies like symbolism, expressionism absurd theatre and so on.

The use of symbols in poetry and fiction are common and there are universal symbols, something concrete standing for something abstract. The French symbolists were the first to employ symbols in poetry. But in drama, it operates at a different level. In case a wall is needed in a particular play, the director has two options - either to do it realistically and have a wall as a stage prop or to do it symbolically and make an actor stand for a wall. But at a deeper level, life could be represented as a dream resulting in a more lyrical and imaginative stage. As in naturalism, the language becomes poetic and the stage sets abstract, with the emphasis on atmosphere and not locale. The actors usually use masks. The use of height and space, vertical and horizontal lines, lighting creating elongated shadows – all these techniques are used to symbolize the mood of actors. Symbolist drama, as such, was practised among others by T.S. Eliot in his *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935).

The next ideological movement is expressionism. It is a German Movement which tries to present the reality of the mind, the internal world, rather than external realities, the external world. In these plays the atmosphere is dream like; the decor has bizarre shapes and loud colours; the plot and structure consist of a sequence of episodes or incidents strung together; the characters, frequently, are not even given names emphasizing their collective nature representing a particular social group; the
dialogue is poetic and the actors and directors have the freedom to experiment.

August Strindberg with his *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) was a major exponent of this kind of drama. So was Eugene O’Neill, in *The Hairy Ape* (1922).

Within the symbolist tradition, there falls yet another theatre, the theatre of the absurd, made famous by Samuel Beckett in his *Waiting for Godot* (1952), which was followed by Harold Pinter, in his later plays like *Old Times* (1971). These plays have no formal plot or characterisation and because of this the characters seem as if they have no purpose in life and emphasise as Camus said in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942):

> In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile …. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (qtd. in Abrams 1)

Brecht identified his plays as *epic theatre*. By this term, he signified his attempt “to emulate on the stage the objectivity of epic narrative; his aim was to prevent the spectators’ emotional involvement with the characters and their actions” (55) and so to encourage them to criticize, rather than passively to accept, the social conditions that the play represents. Mahaweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry have used this kind of technique in their oeuvre.

With the theorists and philosophers like Jean-paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Nietzsche and others, drama took a definite direction. Dramatists, interested in pursuit of higher truth and knowledge, tried to inculcate in their plays the high philosophical ideologies of the modern theorists. Thus, over a century, drama positions itself as a platform for new ideologies and paves way for serious discussions. After exploiting the modern theories, much of the dramatists had turned their attention again to
realism. Since the audience were aware of ‘hyper realities’, realism was reintroduced. Even today, the ideologies of the drama of realism have earned the credibility. Since the art form reflects the real life, it becomes a success. A novel, a painting or a statue may remain relatively unchanged but the theatre exists only in those moments when a performance is seen. Then it disappears only to live in the play script, in the programmes, the pictures, the reviews and the memories of the audience.

The play script forms a bridge between the present day values and those of the past, and may even speculate upon or suggest values for the future. If one is to isolate the theatre arts of the past from the present day drama, it might seem totally disconnected. However, through the great plays of other eras such as, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603), Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* (1890) or Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949), one can come into contact with the thoughts, feelings and life of these earlier periods. Thus one has a bridge of understanding between the past and present, because the best theatre is not isolated in a specific era but is a record of human experience which gives insight into man’s universal condition. Theatre, like history, philosophy and Literature, attempts to discover, formalise and record patterns of human experience. History attempts to record man’s past. Since it is not possible to report everything, man does from minute to minute, events are selected which seem significant. Historians select, arrange and give emphasis to the record of people. Philosophy seeks out truths and principles underlying all existence and tries to relate this to contemporary experience.

The methodology of history and philosophy is directed to intellect. Theatre, however, tries working primarily through the direct involvement not only of the audiences’ intellect but also through the audience’s imagination and emotions. A play therefore can have a dual function: it can illuminate and comment on human
experience while at the same time, it appears to create that experience. Thus, art stimulates the imagination and the emotions through the presentation of recreated life. Even if a play may not demand action or decision, it does require involvement of a definite kind. For “we watch in a kind of suspended animation, a quality, sometime called ‘aesthetic’ distance since we seem to be far enough away from the event to enter a state of detached contemplation, which removes us from the events” (Brocket 8-9). It is also true that this distance should not be so great as to induce indifference. A degree of detachment is necessary, but of equal importance is a feeling of involvement with the characters and their situations:

Thus we watch a play with a double sense of involvement and detachment, of entering into the experience but without any need for action on our part. It is both a removed and intensified reaction of a kind seldom possible outside an aesthetic experience. (9)

Apart from dramas of aesthetic sense, there are also serious types of drama and different kinds of drama are enacted for different kinds of audience in which different ideology and moods are expressed.

Drama theatre is broadly categorized into two types depending on its origin. Eastern dramatic theatre and Western dramatic theatre with its unique features; eastern dramatic theatre is more dance-oriented whereas western dramatic theatre is dialogue oriented. The Eastern dramatic theatre is said to have originated in India.

Drama in India begins its journey with the Sanskrit plays. A.L.Basham, a prominent historian, expresses his views in this manner:

The origin of Indian theatre is still obscure. It is certain, however, that even in the Vedic period dramatic performances of some kind were
given, and passing references in early resources point to the enactment at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and mime. (434 - 435)

Indian traditions are preserved in the Natyasastra, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama. This play claims for the drama, divine origin and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. Origin of Indian English drama can be traced to the ancient rules and seasonal festivities of the Vedic Aryans. The dramatic performances of those times mainly included such events like depiction of events of daily life accompanied by music.

There are references to drama in Patanjali’s Vyakarna Mahabhashya, as well as Vatsyayan’s Kamasutra, Kautilya’s Arthasasstra and Panini’s Ashtabhyam. Thus the origin of Sanskrit drama dates back to 1000 BC. All literature in Sanskrit is classified into Drishya (that can be seen or exhibited) and the Sravya (that can be heard or recited). While poetry in all forms can be said to fall under the later, drama falls under the former. Drama in Sanskrit literature is covered under the broad umbrella of rupaka which means depiction of life in its various aspects represented in forms by actors who assume various roles.

A rupaka has ten classifications of which Nataka (Drama), the most important one, has come to mean all dramatic presentations. The Sanskrit drama grows around three primary constituents namely Vastu (Plot), Neta (Hero) and Rasa (Sentiment). The plot could be either principal (Adhikarika) or accessory (Prasangika). The former concerns the primary characters of the theme and pervades the entire play. The latter serves to further and supplement the main topic and relates to subordinate characters other than the chief ones. This is further divided into banner (Pataka) and incident (Parkari). The former is a small episode that presents, describes, improves or even
hinders the primary plot to create added excitement. The latter involves minor characters. The Neta or the hero, according to the definition prescribed by the Natyashastra, is always depicted as modest (Vineeta), sweet tempered (Madhura) sacrificing (Tyagi), capable (Daksha), civil in talks (Priyamvada), belonging to a noble family (Taptaloka), pure (Suchi) articulate (Vagmi), consistent (Sthera), young (yuva), endowed with intellect (buddhi), enthusiasm (utsaha), good memory (Smrthi), aesthetics (Kola), pride (Maana), brave (Shura), strong (Dridha), energetic (Tejaswi), learned (Pandita) and pious (Dharmika). The main category in which the hero of Sanskrit drama normally falls is the Dheerodatta, that is, he who is brave and sublime at the same time.

Bharata’s Natyasatra is the most significant work on Indian poetics and drama. In it there is description in detail about composition, production and enjoyment of ancient drama, a wealth of information of types of drama, stage equipment, production and music. According to the legend, when the world passed from the golden age to the silver age and people became addicted to sensual pleasures and jealousy, anger, desire and greed filled their hearts. The world was then inhabited by gods, demons, yakshas, rakshasas, nagas and gandharvas. The gods along with Lord Indra, approached Brahma and requested him thus: “Please give us something which would not only teach us but be pleasing both to eyes and ears” (Gupta 86).

Bharata ascribed a divine origin to drama and considered it as the fifth Veda. Its origin seems to be from religious dancing. According to Bharata, poetry (Kavya) dance (Nritta), and mime (Nritya) in life is play (Lila) produce emotion (Bhava) but only drama (Natya) produces flavour (Rasa). The drama uses the eight basic emotions of love, joy, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion and wonder attempting to resolve them in the ninth holistic feeling of peace. Thus, when the dramatic art was well
comprehended, the *Natyaveda* was performed on the occasion of the celebration of Lord Indra’s victory over the *Asuras* and *Danavas*. In the *Natyashastra* there is a verse in its sixth chapter which can be quoted as Bharat Muni’s own summary of his dramatic theory: “The combination called natya is a mixture of rasa, bhavas, vrittis, pravrittis, siddhi, svaros, abhinayas, dharmis instruments, song and theatre - house” (86).

The most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwaghosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidas, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Visha-khadatta, Bhattanarayana, Murari and Rajeshkhora, who enriched Indian theatre with their works like Madhya-Mavyaayoda, Urubhangam, Karnabharan, Mrichkatikam, Abhigyana, Shakuntalam, Malankagnimitram, Uttar Ramacharitam, Mudrarak, Shasa, Bhagavadajjukam, Mattavilasa etc., The supreme achievement of Indian Drama, undoubtedly, lies in Kalidasa who is often called the Shakespeare of India. The Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the 12th century in India when the Mohammedan intrusion shifted the Sanskrit stage. But till the 15th century, plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat but thereafter, Indian dramatic activity almost ceased due to foreign invasions on India:

The beginnings of Loknatya (People’s Theatre) are noticed in every state of India from the 17th century onwards. We see in Bengal Yatrakirtaniya, Paol and Gaan, in Madhya Pradesh Mach, in Kashmir bhandya, thar and in Gujarat the forms were Bhavai and Ramlila in Northern India. There were Nautanki, Bhand, Ramlila and Raslila in Maharashtra, Tamasha in Rajasthan, Raas and Jhoomer in Punjab, Bhangra and Song while in Assam. It was Ahiyanat and Ankinatya in
Bihar, it was Videshiya and Chhari in West Bengal and Bihar.

(www.bharathiyadrama.org)

The rise of the modern drama dates back to the eighteenth century when the British Empire strengthened its power in India. With the impact of Western civilization on Indian life, a new renaissance dawned on Indian arts including drama. Furthermore, English education gave an impetus and a momentum to the critical study of not only Western drama, but classical Indian drama too. English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare’s, in cities like Bombay and Madras. The Portuguese brought a form of dance drama to the West coast. A Russian music director, Rebedoff, is said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1765, a Russian drama lover Horasin Lebdef and Bengali drama lover Qulokhnath had staged two English comedies. But the real beginning was in 1831 when Prasanna Kumar Thakur established Hindu Rangmanch at Calcutta and staged Wilson’s English Translation of Bhavabhuti’s Sanskrit drama Uttar Ramacharitam. Social drama of Girish Chanda Ghosh, historical dramas of D.L. Roy and artistic dramas of Rabindranath Tagore continued to reach up to the stage of realistic dramas during the period of the worst-ever famines of Bengal and the Second World War. In 1852 - 1853, the famous Parsi Theatre was launched in Bombay which influenced the whole country in no time. Postagi Pharmji was the pioneer in establishing the Parsi Theatre company in India. Many new theatre experiences were brought up on stage during Parsi Theatre’s evolution in India. On the other hand, the amateur theatre also developed with the works of Bharatendu Harishchandra, acclaimed as the father of Hindi drama.
Indian English drama was started when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote *The Persecuted* (1837). The real journey of Indian English Drama begins with Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Is This Called Civilization* (1871). Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, the two great sage-poets of India, are the first Indian dramatists in English. Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali but almost all his Bengali plays are available to us in English renderings. His prominent plays are *Chitra* (1913), *The Post Office* (1914), *Sacrifice* (1917), *Red Oleanders* (1925), *Chandalika, Muktadhara* (1922), *Natir Puja* (1932), *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1914) and *The Cycle of Spring* (1917). These plays are firmly rooted in the Indian ethos and ethics in their themes, characters and treatment. R.K Ramaswamy finds a depth and gravity of purpose in his dramatic art: “… more than anything else, he has shown the way both in respect of ideas as well of methods, by which the soul of India could be realized and revealed in the realm of dramatic creation and representation” (Shastri 47).

Sri Aurobindo is the prominent dramatist in Indian English Drama. He wrote five complete blank verse plays besides his six incomplete plays. His complete plays are *Perseus the Deliverer, Vasavadutta, Rodoguna, The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric* and each of these plays is written in five acts. His incomplete plays are *The Witch of Ilni, Achab and Esarhaddon, The Maid and the Mill, The House of Brut, The Birth of Sin* and *Prince of Edur*. The length of these incomplete plays varies from one scene of fifty two lines to three acts.

The notable feature of Sri Aurobindo’s plays is that they depict different cultures and countries in different epochs, ringing with a variety of characters, moods and sentiments. *Perseus the Deliverer* is grounded on the ancient Greek myth of Perseus and *Vasavadutta* is a romantic tale of ancient India. *Rodoguna* is a Syrian romance and *The Viziers of Bassora* is a romantic comedy which takes us back to the
days of the great Haroun al Rashid, while *Eric* is a romance of Scandinavia, a story of love and war. In Aurobindo, one can find romance, heroic play, tragedy, comedy and farce. One can find the impact of Sanskrit playwrights like Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti on Aurobindo, as Dr. K. R. S. Iyenger observes:

> But all five plays are stepped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti. Though, of course all have Aurobindonian undertones. (226)

Another playwright who has made significant contribution in the growth of Indian English drama is Harindranath Chattopadhayay. He started his career as playwright with *Abu Hassan* (1918). There are seven verse plays to his credit published under the title *Poems and Plays* (1927) and all the seven plays are based on the lives of Indian saints. His *Five Plays* (1929) is written in prose. *The Window and the Parrot* deals with the lives of the poor whereas the *Sentry’s Lantern* is a symbolic display of the expectation of the advent of a new age for the downtrodden people.

The next great name is A.S.P. Ayyar who wrote six plays. *In the Clutch of the Devil* (1926) is his first play and the last one is *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity*. P. A. Krishnaswamy is also a name in the history of Indian English drama whose fame rests chiefly on his unusual verse play *The Flute of Krishna*.

The next dramatic voice on the Indian literary scene that demands attention is that of T.P. Kailasam. He wrote in both English and Kannada. Though Kailasam is regarded as the father of modern Kannada drama, his genius finds its full expression in his English plays such as *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose*
(1944), *Karna* (1964) and *Keechaka* (1949). He has a real genius and love for the drama. S. Krishna Bhatta holds a very high opinion about T.P. Kailasam:

...his knowledge of ancient Indian Literature and his long stay in England urged him to contribute something concrete to this sparsely cultivated field. In spite of their limitations, his plays breathe, throughout, a deep reverence for our ancient culture with a modern critical approach. We also find in him a blending of genius and intuitive vision, a fertile imagination, ready wit and subtle humour and a serious presentation of the theme. (86-87)

J.M. Lobo Prabhu is the last great name in pre-independent Indian English drama. He has written over a dozen plays but only *Mother of New India: A Play of Indian Village in three Acts* (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945) appear before Independence. His *Collected Plays* was published in 1956. Lobo Prabhu is capable of writing dialogues with felicity, situation – creation is also admirable but his characters do not appear life like, soothing and convincing to the audience.

Up to post-independent era, drama in English in Indian soil could not flourish as a major current of creative expression. Although the pre-independent Indian English drama is notable for its poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical virtuosity, symbolic significance and its commitment to human and moral values, it was by and large not geared for actual stage production.

The post-independent Indian English drama was benefitted by the increasing interest of the foreign countries in Indian English literature in general and Indian English drama in particular. A good number of plays by Indian playwrights Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Gurucharan Das were successfully staged in England
and U.S.A. But the plight of Indian English drama is that no regular school of Indian English drama was established in the country. This was mainly because the encouragement drama received from several quarters immediately after India got freedom but it was monopolised by the theatre in the Indian regional languages while Indian English drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousins table. The plays have been written in prose but at the same time poetic plays also survive in the post colonial era. M.K. Naik rightly points out that “The Tagore-Aurobindo-Kailsam tradition of poetic drama continues, but with a difference in the hands of Manjeri Isvaran, G.V. Desani, Lakhan Dev and Pretish Nandy” (256). Manjeri Isvaran’s Yama and Yami (1948) is a dialogue in poetic prose, with a prologue and an epilogue, dealing with the incestuous love of Yami for her brother. G.V.Desani’s Hali (1950), an entirely different kind of play, received high praise for its originality, symbolism and rich imagery.

Lakhan Dev’s Tiger Claw (1976) is a historical play in three acts on the controversial murder of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. His two plays are Vivekananda (1972) and Murder at the Prayer Meeting (1976). The use of blank verse is flawless and the last play reminds one of T.S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral (1935).

The number of prose playwrights is larger in comparison to verse playwrights. The most prolific playwright of the post-independent period is Asif Currimbhoy, who has written and published more than thirty plays. Some important plays are The Tourist Mecca (1959), The Restaurant (1960) The Doldrumness (1960) The Captives (1963) Goa (1964), Monsoon (1965), An Experiment With Truth (1969), Inquilab (1970), The Refugee (1971), Sonar Bangla (1972), Angkor (1973) and The Dessident M L A (1974). In spite of comprehensiveness, Currimbhoy’s dramatic art has been a subject of criticism for the lack of structured plot, embellished language and balanced
characterization. His dialogue reflects the extreme poverty of invention and his language is not suitable to capture the internal drama of the clash of motives:

His symbols are often crude, conventional and mechanic but the greatest limitation of his technique is revealed especially in his later plays, in which Currimbhoy appears to confuse dramatic technique with theatrical trickery and stage gimmicks with dramatic experience.

(260)

In the realm of Indian Drama, Nissim Ezekiel is acknowledged for his exceptional poetic creed and rare dramatic sensibility. Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) including *Nalini*, a comedy, *Marriage Poem*, a tragic-comedy and *The Sleep Walkers*, an Indo-American farce are considered to be “a welcome addition to the dramaturgy of Indian English drama” (Chetan 125). *Songs of Deprivation* (1969) is also a short play by Ezekiel. Gurcharan’s *Larins Sahib* (1970), a historical play, deals with Henry Lawrence of Paunjab. The play *Marriage Poem*, presents the conflict of a middle class husband caught in the conflict of commitments of married life and the desire of love. *The Sleep Walkers* is a diverting take off on national preconceptions and prejudices. In spite of strong sense of dramatic concept, Ezekiel could not transform his poetic talent into appropriate dramatic talent. His plays can be appreciated for symmetrical construction with abundance of irony. They unveil his sharp observation of the oddities of human life and behaviour. Ezekiel’s poetic self swayed his dramatic creed but his plays make a “pleasant reading”. It is attributed in his satire of current fashion, in his exposure of prose and presence, Ezekiel comes very close to the spirit of some English social satirist in theatre” (126).

Contemporary Indian drama, deviating from classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It is not an
offspring of any specific tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk love with context to contemporary socio-political issues. A cumulative theatrical tradition evolved by Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahasweta Devi ushered in the background for contemporary Indian English theatre.

Girish Karnad, in the capacity of writer, director and actor substantially contributed to enrich the tradition of Indian English theatre. His dramatic sensibility was moulded under the influence of touring Natak Companies and especially Yakshagana, which was in those days not accepted as the purified art form. His well known plays are Yayati (1961), Tughlaq (1962), Hayvadana (1970), and Nagmandala (1972). He borrowed his plots from history, mythology and old legends but with intricate symbolism, he tried to establish their relevance in contemporary socio-political conditions. The play Yayati (1961) reinterprets an ancient myth from Mahabharata in modern concept. The plot of the play Hayvadana (1970) is adopted from Katha Saritsagar, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. Tughlaq (1962) is Karnad’s best historical play where he mingles fact with fiction. Karnad projects the curious contradictions in the complex personality of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. In the play Tale Dande (1989), he discovers the vital relationship between contemporary society and literature. The collective efforts of Karnad and Karalam Narayana Pannikar are significant in their binding of the traditional forms of Indian theatre with the modern. Karnad’s success lies in his technical experiment with an indigenous dramatic form rather than social concern.

Vijay Tendulkar is a prominent dramatist of modern English drama who began his career as a journalist but from the very first play Grihasth (1955) to Safar (1992),
his plays have given Indian theatre a rich and challenging repertoire. Leading the vanguard of the avant-garde Marathi Theatre, Vijay Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the century to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing on the middle class society. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Influenced by Artaud, Tendulkar relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or disgusting in as much as it is in note in human nature.

While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy, trapping so as to make it palatable but rather keep it raw and natural. The plays *Chimanicha Ghor Hote Menache* (1960), *Kalojanchi Shalai* (1968), *Ek Holti Mugli* (1967) reflect Tendulkar’s concern with authority and the idea of exploitation of individual. In the plays *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1968) and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), the theme of oppression dominates. *Sakharam Binder* (1972) is a study in human violence amounting to a powerful dramatic statement. *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadaan* (1982) are written on the lines of naturalistic tradition. *Kamala* is a study of marital status as well as study in the theme of exploitation. *Kanyadaan* is a complex play about the cultural and emotional upheavals of a family. Tendulkar was associated with the New Theatrical Movement in Maharashtra. He presents a fictional reality in which the reality of life acquires a sharp focused character having rare dramatic power.

In Indian English drama, the influence of Mohan Rakesh can not be ignored. He wrote in Hindi but for exceptional dramatic relevance, his plays have been translated in English and other regional languages. He published his first major play
*Ashadh Ka Ek Din* in 1958, *Leharon Ke Rajhansa* appeared in 1963 and *Adhe Adheere* was first staged in 1969. The play *Pair Tale Ki Zamin* was completed by Kamleshwar after his death and published in 1974.

Mohan Rakesh made extensive experiments in theatre. He used words and languages not as dialogues or direct statements but as the tools of suggestion to convey the meaning beyond the verbal connotation. In *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, he highlights the dangers of sycophancy of his age and the desire of dignified official position. In *Leharon Ke Rajhansa* (1963), he reflects on the problem of relations between man and woman, ego clashes, divided self and ongoing illusion and nothingness. *Adhe Adhure* (1969) deals with the clash of ego between husband and wife, disintegration of family relationship, the prominence of individual interest against the commitments of the family.

Badal Sircar is a prestigious name in the realm of contemporary Bengali theatre. Bengali Theatre, initially developed as a protest against the administration of British Empire, became a major form of art among the people of Bengal. Theatre in India under the British rule sowed the seeds of contemporaneousness which gained a rather articulate contour in the hands of the famous theatre personalities in West Bengal.

With the establishment of India’s People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), the history of Bengali theatre took a new turn. Theatre in Bengal then became even closer to the people. The famous stages of Bengali theatre like the Girish Mancha and Star Theatre then witnessed a huge changes in order to befit the requirement where the aura of the classical dance drama was no more and, on the contrary, emerged a whole new concept of theatre.
Theatre continued to flourish in Bengal; Dwijendra Lal Roy, Girish Gosh, Bijion Bhattacharya, Utpal Dutt, Shombu Mitra, Balraj Shani, Habib Tanvir and several others contributed to its maturity.

Badal Sircar represents New Theatrical Movement in India. His *Evam Indrajit* (1962) and *Baki Ithihas* (1965) deal with political, social, psychological and existential problems. His later plays *Procession*, *Bhoma* and *Stale News* are based on the concept of Third Theatre. The play *Procession* is about the search for a ‘real home’ in new society based on equality. It suggests a ‘real way’ to new way in which man does not have to live exploiting man but should work according to his own needs. In *Bhoma*, Sircar deals with the life in the rural Bengal and the hypocrisies of the urban world are realistically portrayed. The analysis of these three plays suggests remarkable changes in Sircar’s concept of a ‘real home’ a new society based on equality and free from the horrors of exploitation. Tendulkar in 1967 established his theatre group called ‘Satabdi’. Similarly, Sircar’s first contact with Grotowski’s ‘Poor Theatre’ influenced him greatly in formulating his Third Theatre. Badal Sircar, “the dramatist of real promise in the post-sixties literary scene of Bengal” (Sathyanarayana 7) is to some extent in line with Mahasweta Devi.

Besides male dramatists, women dramatists also tried to enrich the soil of Indian drama. But only a few writers addressed with utmost social concern by projecting the ‘real’ world in the theatre. Women’s theatre coalesces with Street Theatre movement and using the same technique in performance and production they tried to bring into light the exploitation of the privileged. It can be attributed as a ‘Theatre of Protest’. They also revived the traditional myths of Sita and Savitri and tried to reinterpret the epics from women’s point of view. The dramatic work of Usha Ganguli and Mahasweta Devi can be placed in this category. But the theatre of the
marginalised; women, caste, race etc., are neglected over generations. Yet, Mahasweta Devi’s writing stands out as an iconic and iconoclastic tool that subverts the authority of women’s writings being censored. She steers clear of the state and street censors.

The force of her writing dents the patriarchal, English language publication monopoly with a major publishing house undertaking to translate and publish most of her writings. Her activist art and its unique aesthetics further dismantle the discursive determinism of the mainstream male socio-literary and rabid feminist canons. Her texts break thematic taboos and expand the conformist/ rigidly confrontationist gender concerns of female critical/literary praxis to put forward a holistic perspective where the issue of gender co-extends with the larger ideo-political issues of postcoloniality, nationality, and history. Her radical aesthetics displaces the mainstream’s stereotypical critical stance to invent an idiom and technique that forces the current theoretical assumptions and critical perceptions to undergo a revision and re-definition. Mahasweta Devi’s unique aesthetics require alternative reading paradigms for a comprehensive and cohesive appreciation of her works.

Mahasweta Devi is one of the foremost literary personalities in Bengali drama, short fiction and novels; a deeply political, social activist who has been working with and for tribal and marginalized communities like the landless labourers of eastern India for years; the editor of a quarterly, “Bortika”, in which the tribal and marginalized people themselves document grass root level issues and trends; and a socio-political commentator whose articles have appeared regularly in the Economic and Political Weekly, Frontier and other journals.

Mahasweta Devi has made important contributions to literary and cultural studies in this country. Her empirical research into oral history as it lives in the
cultures and memories of tribal communities was a first of its kind. Her powerful, haunting tales of exploitation and struggle have been seen as rich sites of feminist discourse by leading scholars. Her innovative use of language has expanded the conventional borders of Bengali literary expression. Standing as she does at the intersection of vital contemporary questions of politics, gender and class, she is a significant figure in the field of socially committed literature. She herself answers the question that, if she would agree that tribal should be left insular to a certain context:

These are theoretical questions. What I think or you think does not matter, but it is true that the minimum human rights...having roads, livable huts, drinking water; if they have land then irrigation; health, literacy...they should get it. They are not only getting it, increasingly tribals all over India are getting evicted from their land like anything. For any industrial projects or dams that come up, tribal land is taken. When they take land, it is never land for land or money for land, so in this condition they become a nomadic migrant mass of people in search of work. Then they cannot retain anything of their own culture because all they are concerned with is ekwaqt ki roti.

(www.rediff.com)

To a further question that whether she sees the tribals getting fully integrated with the national mainstream at some point of time and whether it is possible, she gives a challenging answer:

Who tried to integrate them into Indian society? It is said they are cut off from mainstream society. Who tried to integrate them? And what is there so beautiful in mainstream Indian society that they should get integrated and lose their tribal entity?...In west Bengal, We have had a
Santhal tribal world mountaineer. So given training, chance, opportunity, they can do anything. They have never been given any chance, so this question of keeping them apart does not come because mainstream society never wanted to give them anything.

(www.reddiff.com)

Human lives are thrown to wind and the marginalized become bonded labourers. Marginalization of women, tribal community, class struggle and bonded labour occupies the central position of her novels and short fictions. Outcaste, Imaginary Maps (1995), “Douloti the Bountiful” and Of Women and Outcaste (1990), adequately discuss the problem of tribals, women who are forced to become prostitutes, labourers and as a result class conflict. The entire community is struggling under the yoke of the ‘mainstream’.

Mahasweta Devi has not written plots for material benefits, but out of commitment. This is obvious if one looks at her life history. She started writing for the uplift of the downtrodden and her growth is steady. She has never hesitated to criticize the governments, both the central and the state. Devi never plays a role of a ‘typical politician’ except as a committed social writer. Being a non-tribal, she portrays the state of downtrodden especially, the tribal in its entirety, with such honesty and in such a conspicuous tone.

Devi’s “Douloti the Bountiful”, set in post independent India in a small village of Seora in Palamu (Bihar), focuses on the plight of Ganori of the Nagesia tribe and his daughter Douloti. Ganori, a bonded labourer, has been nick named Crook Nagesia following an accident where he becomes crippled after having been forced by his master to carry an ox yoke on his shoulders. The cruel and dangerous punishment Worsens Ganori’s condition to a slave. From the moment he borrows three hundred
rupees from the landlord Munabar Chandela, he becomes his slave for an interest and recurrent social and economic needs. And finally her daughter is forced to indulge in prostitution for his debts and she dies of veneral disease. Thus, her life ends in a pathetic manner.

Devi’s *Outcaste* (2002), *Of Women and Outcaste* (1990) and *Imaginary Maps* (1995) deal with the agony of the bonded labourers. It focuses on the pathetic conditions of women’s body. All these tragedies or injustices happen out of violence and hatred towards the marginalized and the wishful act of the upper class men to remain ‘upper classes’.

*Breast Stories* (1997) by Mahasweta Devi, deals with multi faceted themes. Her *Draupadi* picturises the state of tribals, how they ‘rebel’ against the mainstream and the government machinery and the cruel treatment meted out in the hands of the mainstream. Her *Breast-Giver* records how a poor Brahmin lady is subjugated to a level of dying alone in agony without anybody to care for, though she milked fifty two. Devi’s *Behind the Bodice* narrates how in India a woman labourer is exploited under the yoke of the society. In these three short stories, breast serves as more than a symbol; moreover, it becomes a sign, a sign of exploitation. It speaks more of conflict within the society and within the class than many other works of Devi’s. In all these three stories the theme of class struggle is common. Dopdhi, Jashoda, Gargor, all the three women belong to the ‘lower classes’. All the three are struggling to survive in this mother earth; class and caste play a major role in these stories. So is Devi in her dramatic field struggles through her ideological texts. She knows the concept of mirroring the unedited realities of life. Within a short span of time she brought a whole new conception of realistic theatre in Bengali.
A social realist she is, she deliberately criticizes the hypocrisies and follies of the mainstream and moves a step forward making reverberating political discourses in her *Five Plays* (1986). Her *Mother of 1084* reflects the then pathetic socio-economic condition of West Bengal. It witnesses the failure of the government machinery crushing the oppressed to a level of under dogs supporting the main stream. Devi employs time: past and present, to present the bare conditions of the subaltern.

The play takes us to 17th January 1970. Even after Independence, a large number of people in India did not experience the fruit of it. Using the concept of ‘Varnashrama’ and sankritisation, the mainstream discriminated a large number of people. They have been deprived of basic rights and the mainstream maintained its superiority over the oppressed. So many youths had to turn into rebels, forsaking their home, family hoping for the future generation tasting the fruit of Independence. Once they protest, they are termed as ‘criminals’ and the official machinery pounces upon them drinking their blood to the least. It turned a large number of mothers mad to see their children’s mutilated body, some mothers turned furious and rebellious, and some others in helpless situation. Apart from the tortures meted out by the official machinery, they also had to undergo tortures at home from their husbands and children and some suffered of nervous breakdown. *Mother of 1084* presents such a case.

In *Aajir*, Devi deals with an age-old social evil which has reduced the humanity to a sub-human level. *Aajir* is essentially a social play in which Devi attempts to give an artistic expression to the sufferings of the under privileged in their confrontation with the powerful, exploitative mechanism. It presents a realistic picture of the rural India where the barbaric system of bonded labour has been at work. The bonded labour system, in fact, has its origin in the Varna system. Indian society had
been stratified into four Varnas (Castes): Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Shudra were denied the right to property, education and choice of occupation. They were made to depend on others for their survival. Their total dependence on other caste Hindus reduced their status to that of slaves. Even today, most of the bonded labourers belong to this section of the people. Devi is aware of the innocent people still experiencing the trauma of inhuman subjugation by the landlords who reign supreme in the villages. So she raises their voice through her work *Aajir*.

The play further exposes powerfully man’s inhumanity to man. Mahasweta Devi is aware that the persecution of the innocent folk continues unabated in the rural areas with an implicit acquiescence of the ruling class. The dramatic world of Mahasweta Devi is solely concerned with subaltern heroes who become martyrs.

*Water*, a social drama is set in the rural Bengal. Water is essential to human life. Mahai Dome, the protagonist in the play, is a traditional water-diviner. He is an untouchable. The untouchables of the village are not allowed to draw water from the public wells, even though they are dug with Mahai’s help. Santhosh Pujari, a powerful land owner is an exploiter. He makes the innocent folk suffer for no fault of theirs. He denies what is due to them. He uses the official machinery against the poor. Even he swindles the ration and relief funds of the lower caste, given by the government. He exploits the under privileged by creating an artificial famine, not allowing the poor folks to dig or draw water. Even though they build a dam with their effort, Santhosh plots his villainy. With the support of the official machinery, he breaks the dam and plots the doom of Mahai and his tribe. Thus, Devi brings into light the crude treatment meted out by the underprivileged. A common brotherhood is her clarion call.

Mahasweta Devi is a writer who is conscious of the under privileged. Even in presenting their case, she is interested in nuance descriptions. A social propagandist
might deal with the life of the oppressed, but Devi moves a step forward. In presenting the oppression meted out to the downtrodden, Devi also traces the problems that arise within the social group. Thus she proves herself a staunch historian.

The play *Urvashi and Johnny* has been written during the emergency period. Johnny an orphan is an artist. He practices Ventriloquism to delight his audience and to earn his living. In course of time, Johnny identifies himself with Urvashi, the doll. He is crazy towards Urvashi. Both Johnny and Urvashi have promised great entertainment to the audience. Johnny is an ideal artist; his end is to delight his audience with pleasure and art is his passion. During the course of time, Johnny is affected with cancer. Though he undergoes treatment from the hakims, the ayurvedics, the homeopaths, his position worsens. The severe practice and performance has affected him a lot and now he experiences sore throat. The doctor advises him to leave ventriloquism and to continue treatment at the cancer institute. Urvashi speaks in different languages. The public torture her with a bundle of questions. Johnny could not continue his show. He has a cracked voice because of cancer. People demand Urvashi to speak loud. Like Franz Kafka’s *The Hunger Artist*, Johnny dies in a pathetic manner. He becomes a martyr for art. His passion for Urvashi has killed him. The world has not understood his passion but looks at him only as an entertainer. The art of Urvashi comes to an end with Johnny. For Devi, art meant ‘commitment’ and that is best expressed in her *Urvashi O Johnny*.

Devi is keen in presenting the ‘real world’ of poor artists who become victims of society. The concept of hierarchy and stratification is associated with one’s profession described in Manu.
In 1970’s, even after Independence, the rich landlords and Brahmins, constructed myths and imaginary stories in order to have a high handedness. They termed a set of people as ‘low’ and associated them with a low profession’. They are forced to do the work generation after generation, refused other jobs and are kept under control. If one chooses to go against the mainstream, they are betrayed and are put to death. Some branch ‘a colour’ and are inhumanly treated. In Bayen, Devi presents the picture of India of 1970’s unveiling the follies of the social hierarchy and how the poor becomes victims (or) martyrs because of tyranny. Bayen deals with the psychological turmoil of a mother, who had been doomed by the mainstream.

The Bayen is once Chandidasi Gangadasi, the great descendant of the Kalu Dome. When Chandi decides to quit her ancestor’s profession for the love she has for her child, to celebrate her motherhood, the mainstream traps her as a Bayen. For no fault of hers, she has been ex-communicated.

Though she has served for the cause of the public, she is deprived of her basic needs. There is only half a kilo of rice, a fistful of lintel, fifty grams of oil and a pinch of salt. She has been suffering for three days to quench her hunger and drinks water in order to prevent death. Though the mainstream has promised her relief, they fail to do it, for she is of least importance. When her heart longs for passionate love, the husband pelts stone at her. Both her body and mind ache. In the Indian context, a woman always depends on the husband, father or son. But she is neglected by her husband and her son does not know her as his mother. These heart rending issues are taken by Devi and are challenged.

The origins of western drama can be traced back to the celebratory music of sixth century BC Attica, the Greek region centered on Athens. Although accounts of this period are inadequate, it appears that the poet Thespis developed a new musical
form in which he impersonated a single character and engaged a chorus of singer-dancers in dialogue. As the first composer and soloist in this new form, which came to be known as tragedy, Thespis can be considered both the first dramatist and the first actor. The western drama emerged as part of festivities celebrating the god, Dionysus. Later, dramatists like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and a host of others. Enriched the art form, drama and thus drama emerged as a classical art form and travelled beyond borders to Europe and America.

During fifteenth century, England witnessed renaissance in all the fields, especially in Literature. The Classical ideas and forms (including drama) of Greek and Italy were imitated and acclaimed as superior. Drama developed as a successful art form in England as a result of morality plays in churches, which echoed the Aristotelian principle of teach and delight. Thus, the art form drama entered into America from England and other parts as a colonial brought up.

Aspects of the dramatic performing arts can be found in culture around the world. Globally speaking, American theatre is a relatively new tradition. In its early years, American theatre reflected the lives of its proponents, namely white, property owning Christian men. Ironically even as America established itself as a sovereign nation, the drama of the day came largely from Europe, which boasted a unique canon of work.

The beginnings of American drama date back to April 30, 1598, near EL Paso, Texas, when a comedy about soldiers on a march, written by a Captain Marcos Farfan de Los Godos, was performed. Spanish-speaking areas for the most part, were more congenial to theatrical entertainments than were those colonised by English and Dutch. Among other firsts on the American theatre scene was a play by Virginia
landowner William Darby his *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb* (1665), “the first record of a play in English” (Magill 2915).

The “first play written by a native American to be performed by a professional company” (2915-16) reports the historian of drama, Arthur Hobson Quinn, was performed on the stage of the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia in 1767. The play was *The Prince of Parthia* (1767), a heroic tragedy by Thomas Godfrys. Many a drama from England was staged in America: plays such as Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, William Congreve’s *Love for Love*, (1695) Dryden’s *The Spanish Faire: or, The Double Discovery* (1681) Joseph Addison’s *Cato* (1712), John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), George Lillo’s *The London Merchant: or, The History of George Barnwell* (1731), Thomas Otway’s *The Orphan: or, The Unhappy Marriage* (1680) and George Farquhar’s *The Beaux Stratagen* (1707), *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), and *The Twin-Rivals* (1702) all were brought to America by an English actor-manager named Lewis Hallam. With his company, which included members of his family, Hallam began American theatrical history in pre-revolutionary Williamsburg, New York and Philadelphia. Contending with opposition from religious groups, he finally left for Jamaica.

Civil war broke out and pursuits such as theatre, already strongly opposed on moral and economic grounds, were outlawed by an unenforceable resolution passed by the Continental Congress in 1774, which reads as follows:

> We will in our several stations encourage frugality, economy and industry, and promote agriculture, arts, and the manufactures of this country, especially that of wool; and will discountenance and discharge every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing and all kinds of gaming, cockfighting, exhibitions of shews,
plays and other expensive diversions and entertainments. (Magill 2917)

But the stern prohibitions of the Continental Congress in 1774 did not entirely prevent theatrical entertainments and patriotic plays thrived; characters, frequently military and political figures of the time, taken from real life were enacted. Thus drama, begun as a theatre of movement in America, passed through the initial stage, hereby paving way for the middle phase.

Dunlap, a man of varied interests, was called “the Samuel Johnson of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American Stage” (2918). His first chronicle of the American stage stands out as A History of American Theatre (1832). Drama criticism had begun and Dunlap records the formation of groups that gathered to support and stimulate interest in the theatre by reviews in the magazines. Especially important during the Dunlap era was his long standing association with August Von Kotzebue, a German dramatist whose domestic melodramas were very popular on the American Stage. Americans during the early nineteenth century were enjoying the same kind of melodramatic fare that was popular on the English stage.

Two other major figures in nineteenth century stage history were James Nelson Barker, who wrote the first surviving drama about Pocahontas, The Indian Princess: or, La Belle Sauvage (1808). Taken from John Smith’s The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles (1624), which employed native history. Although remembered primarily for his romantic dramatisations of native subjects, Baker also wrote plays that featured exotic foreign settings. The next, John Howard Payne, author of more than sixty plays, was known for his adaptations of foreign plays. Payne’s exotic, Gothic melodramas, such as Ali Pacha; or, The Signet Ring (1823), entertained American audience, as did his domestic melodramas.
Hastily and cleverly written for performances, melodramas - domestic and exotic, drawn from sources as varied as Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Kotzebue, and Rene-Charles Guilbert de Pixerecourt - fulfilled the expectations of early nineteenth century audiences. Major authors such as Dickens were popularised for audiences who demanded sheer spectacles, heroines saved from villains, and strong musical reinforcement of emotions.

It was in this period that the Scribean well made play, featuring a formulaic plot fleshed out with much action and stage business, reached its peak. Victorian Sardou, Alexandre Dumas, Pere and their countryman Eugene Scribe were the major figures grinding out such formula plays, to which the European dramatists of the latter half of the nineteenth century reactions in their realistic and psychological plays. Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw and Chekhov began the modern period of drama with plays in which ideas and complex characterisations replaced the melodrama that dominated the stages in the earlier part of the nineteenth century pertaining to an intellectual growth at the international level in the field of drama with great philosophical thoughts.

During the civil war period, George H. Boker wrote a tragedy in blank verse distinguished by its literary quality. His Francesca da Rimini (1855) was the first play in English to be based on the story of Dante’s famous pair of lovers, Francesca and Paolo. Iris-born Dion Boucicault, who had spent some time in France before immigrating to the United States, found American culture a rich source of dramatic material. His, The Octoroon: Or, Life in Louisianna (1859), is about interracial romance. Boucicault wrote sympathetically about the poor. He was also important for his efforts to bring about the passage of the first copyright law in 1856. The legislation, however, came too late to give Harriet Beecher Stowe the right to have a
voice in the stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Her novel was adapted with little success by Charles Western Taylor and with much success by George L.Aiken, both stage versions having been produced in 1852, the same year that the novel was published.

The later nineteenth century dramatists provide important links in the historical development of American drama. Their interest in the realism of character and events was part of a reaction against the superficiality and predictability of the prevailing melodrama. In contrast to the outsized passions of melodrama, Quinn observes, James Herne’s *Margaret Fleming* (1880) and *The Revered Griffith Davenport* (1899) deal with “less obvious material and the finer subtlety of motive” (Magill 2919). William Gillette’s *Secret Service* (1895) moved the drama a step further in the realism of action.

Theatre continued to depend on foreign influences in both style and subject matter, despite efforts to create serious native drama, at the turn of the century: “The much-needed catalyst for change was provided in 1913, with the beginning of a workshop 47” (2920), the famous play writing course at Harward taught by George Pierce Backer. Eugene O’Neill became Backer’s most distinguished student among others Robert E. Sherwood, S.N. Behrman, George Abbott, Philip Barry, and Sidney Howard. Other important playwrights who worked hard for change in drama of the era were William Vaughan Moody and Percy Mackaye.

After the First World War, America drama witnessed development in every decade. O’Neill has been compared to virtually every literary figure in the Western world and is considered the first great American modern playwright. Before O’Neill, most American dramas were farce or melodrama. Though the influence of Ibsen, Strindberg and Hauptmann had been felt in England by the end of the nineteenth
century itself, it had reached the shores of America only after the First World War.

O’Neill embraced the theatre as a venue to work out serious social issues and ideas. He transformed the American Theatre into a serious and important cultural institution. His plays deal specifically with the American tragedy, rooted in American history and social movements. His dramas are marked by expressionistic theatrical techniques and symbolic devices that function to express religious and philosophical ideas. O’Neill even used the Ancient Greek Chorus as a device to comment on the action of many of his plays. By bringing psychological depth, poetic symbolism and expressionistic technique to the American theatre, O’Neill raised the standards of American theatre. Though he belonged to the black race, he was held along with the mainstream writers i.e., his writings were less militant.

The theme of *The Hairy Ape* (1918) is the effect of industrialization and technological progress on the worker. Industrialization has reduced the human worker into a machine. The men are programmed to do one task, turned on and off by whistles, and are not required to think independently. This is made clear by O’Neill’s stage direction. It reveals how deeply and rigidly class is inscribed into American Culture and the cultural and financial boundaries it erects. His *The Emperor Jones* (1920) is a play about the Negroes.

With the initiative steps of O’Neill, drama became a success in America employing modern western theories and ideologies of various movements. If the playwrights of the 1920’s were bold in their treatment of subject matter and dramatic form, those of the 1930’s were more self confident in their social and political commitment. Their leading voice was Clifford Odets together with Maxwell Anderson and Lillian Hellman who occupied the 1930’s of America. Lillian Hellman is an important writer of the era and of social protest, who wrote steadily until her
death in 1984 and is one of America’s major female dramatists. Through her plays of 1930’s, *The Children’s Hour* (1934), *The Little Foxes* (1939), her play about World War II, *Watch on the Rhine* (1941), Hellman assumed a clear anticapitalist and antifascist stance, yet she also made individual morality a strong issue. Throughout her career, Helman fought against the evil, which for her, became symbolized in the activities of the House committee on UnAmerican Activities investigation of the 1950’s.

If the 1930’s represent at least in retrospect, some cohesion in the use of drama as a vehicle for social protest, the 1940’s seem far removed from any such unity. The Second World War period really seems to be a crisis for drama and no good works were produced except a few like Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of our Teeth* (1942) and William Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life* (1939).

With the close of Second World War, American theatre entered a period of extraordinary achievement. Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947) and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949) stand out among many fine plays of the era.

Arthur Miller is an artistic descendant of Ibsen. He is concerned with truth and man’s unrelenting yet doomed search for recognition as a human being. Although his success as a writer of tragic drama is seriously questioned, Miller has written a body of criticism presenting his views on tragedy and modern drama and has created a handful of plays which, with varying effect, illustrate his ideas. Walter J. Meserve observes:

His concern for dramatic theory, his effective combination of the realistic and expressionistic in his plays, and his basic interest in the
dignity of man link Miller with the best traditions of the past and combine to make him America’s outstanding dramatist at mid century.

(332)

Miller’s *All My Sons* (1947) presents the tragic end of a father who is driven to suicide. His *Death of a Salesman* (1949) portrays a man with “the wrong dreams” (333), who is never able to see the truth or accept the world as it is. Frustrated by his own weaknesses, desperately disappointed in his sons, victimised by a twisted view of social and personal values, Willy is a misplaced man, without “a thing in the ground” (335), who will give up his life before giving up his false ideas. Victim and hero, his suicide is an ironic comment on man’s concern for personal dignity. His *The Crucible* (1953) also earned him name for its allegoric portrayal.

The next successful dramatist of the age is Tennessee Williams, who presents before us the dark world of one-dimensional society of the modern civilisation that survives in the midst of exploitation, violation of moral code of conduct, corruption and dehumanised passion for power and intimate relationships. He makes us realize that such worldly circumstances of the tainted world drives the misfits, the rebels, the artist figures or the fugitive kinds to lead lives of depression, alienation and unhappy madness i.e. a sort of severe schizophrenia. It happens due to their failure of adjustment with the worldly norms and they construct make believe worlds around them through fabricated illusions in order to feel a sense of untrammelled freedom. Through his impulsive creative acitivity, the playwright provides us with a basic premise to understand with tenderness and fortitude, such individuals trapped in their own predicament.

*The Glass Menagerie* (1945) takes us to the America of the 40’s. The play portrays the life condition of a middle class American family, which has been
abandoned by the father, the irresponsible son Tom, who revolts from his routine job in a shoe factory; Laura, a crippled and excessively shy girl, a shouting mother and their life situation pathetically portrayed in the memory play. His *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947) is about the inescapable loneliness of man: “…the word lonely is repeated as a prelude to death” (336). Tennessee Williams is extremely successful in dramatising emotion and writing about people – bizarre though most of them may be – who are trying to live.

Elmer Rice, George Kelly, S.N. Behrman, George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart, Philip Barry and Robert Sherwood are some of the dramatists who contributed to the development of drama but were not acclaimed as international playwrights.

The European philosophical movements dominated the American stage during the 1960’s. Edward Albee, whose pessimism about American cultural values seemed an exorcism of general malaise of the time. He dramatises a hatred for social and personal complacency, false values, and the “American Dream”: “Although he takes his cue from Ionesco and enjoys a cynically intellectual approach to life, he lacks the compassion and concern for man’s dignity, which distinguishes the works of major playwrights” (358).

The Theatre of the Absurd is a post-war phenomenon in which the dramatists, in despair and anxiety, show their sense of the senselessness of the human condition in a world in which man is deprived of certainties, expressing their conditions concerning the impossibility of communication among men and the inadequacy of a rational approach to life. Absurd dramatists discuss in their distinctive fashion the nothingness, which is their approach to reality.
Albee’s *The Zoo Story* (1959) dramatises the meeting of two strangers, one of whom tells the other his life problems, goads him to anger and finally forces him to be the means of his suicide. *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1960) uses the auto accident of blue singer Bessie Smith, and the refusal of two white hospitals to admit her, to illustrate hate and violence as seen in America. Both *The Sandbox* (1960) and *The American Dream* (1961) show the emptiness of the American dream. His *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) is a Strindbergian battle of the sexes, presents a fascinating study in which long repressed conflicts and guilt are exorcised, leaving both the major characters a history professor and his wife, exhausted at the end. Thus Albee’s works reflect the absurdist nature of the American life. Jack Gleber, and Jack Richardson were the two other absurdist dramatists of the era.

During the 1970’s there emerged in America a number of promising playwrights. In this new wave, two interesting phenomena developed: one involving a popular playwright who wrote steadily for Broadway and for film, Neil Simon, and the other involving a quartet of dramatists who started their careers in small theatres and who have continued to develop steadily: David Rabe, Lanford Wilson, David Mamet and Sam Shepard. The last two have demonstrated a uniqueness of style that sets them apart as writers with these potential to join the ranks of O’Neill, Miller, Williams and Albee. Thus American drama attained a peak after the eminent playwrights such as Williams, Miller and Albee, came up to the mainstream dramatists. Apart from the mainstream dramatists, there were serious dramas, containing the tales of the marginalised; black, women, gay and so on. The problems of the Negro were problematized, articulating their own ideologies, resisting the oppression of the mainstream.
With the efforts of W.E.B. Du Bois, the voices of the blacks attained a platform. His *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) served as the propaganda, bringing the black narratives. With much criticism, he also served as the first editorial director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For him, “All Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing pursuits” (Gordon 10). The black liberation movement or the Harlem renaissance made a shift in the dramatic world of America and themes of blacks; Slavery, rights, liberation were staged and after the First World War dramatic world of America.

During the 1960s, a new type of drama evolved from the experience of blacks within American society. It has been designated *Black Arts Drama* and it includes variations such as *Black Evolutionary Drama, Drama of Black Experience*, and *Ritual Drama*. It has co-existed beside the more traditional writing, which continued the practice of mimicking styles of Euro-American drama rather than seeking those uniquely identifiable with back culture.

Black Arts drama is said to be written about black people and intended to educate a black audience to its need for liberation and should derive its style and technique from black culture. On the other hand, the traditional type of drama, though it may be written about black people, does not propose the education of a black audience as its major purpose. It aspires merely to entertain in a broad sense which includes any creative effort to evoke aesthetic pleasure in an audience. Traditional drama is written for an audience which is presumed to be race less (or predominantly white) – as opposed to the Black Arts drama which focuses on the needs of black people. These two types of drama are often seen as considerably different and with little connection between each other than skin colour. Writers are categorized according to seemingly obvious rules and following clear-cut boundaries.
Nevertheless, there would be no Black Arts dramatists without traditional and more
conventional predecessors. Were it not for the authors producing plays between the
World Wars, there could hardly be any prominent black playwrights during post
Second World War.

Seeking to extricate the power of African-American music and dance from the
stereotypes and trivializations of minstrelsy in its various forms, African-American
dramatists have struggled throughout the twentieth century to locate or create an
audience receptive to the full range of their thematic and theatrical concerns. The
attempt to develop an autonomous style without sacrificing all access to production
confronts African-American playwrights, collectively and individually, with a
paradoxical situation in which they must first demonstrate their mastery of
traditionally European American themes and techniques to dispel stereotypes
concerning African-American ability and character.

Faced with tensions between their African and European-American audiences,
and with class tensions within the black audience, African-American dramatists have
followed distinct paths. Serious African-American dramatists have sought to address
directly African-American audiences, frequently but, given the cultural and economic
realities of the United States, by no means exclusively in theatres located in the black
communities.

Many, including Zora Neale Hurston’s *Great Day* (1937), Wallace Thurman’s
*Harlem* (1929), Countee Cullen and Arna Bontemps’ *God Sends Sunday* (1931),
Georgia Douglas Johnson’s *Plumes* (1927) have contributed much. Jean Toomer, and
Langston Hughes, had previously worked and remain best known as poets and
novelists. Others, including Frank Wilson’s *Walk Together Chillun* (1936), Hall
Johnson’s *Run Little Chillun* (1933), and especially Willis Richardson, established
their reputations primarily as dramatists. However, the playwrights of the Harlem Renaissance responded to the call sounded by James Weldon Johnson in the preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) for a new type of artist who would do for African Americans.

The African-American plays can be broadly categorised into two types; the problem play which extends the political tradition of Grimke and William Wells Brown, and the folk-life play, which to some extent attempted to reconstruct the materials that had been trivialised in the minstrel tradition. Among the most successful playwrights to work with both approaches was Richardson, who wrote half a dozen plays of lasting interest, including *The Broken Banjo* (1925), and *The Chip Woman’s Fortune* (1923), the first play by an African American produced on Broadway.

The Harlem Renaissance started in the 1920’s marked the beginning of the political Afro-American theatre. The anthology *Plays of Negro life* (1927) which included both the works of blacks and whites, supported by programmes such as The Federal Theatre Project and playwrights such as Hughes and Theodor Ward, whose *Big White Fog* (1938) is widely considered the most powerful African-American play of the decade. Hughes who began writing plays in the 1920’s and had the first Boardway hit by an African-American playwright in Mulatto, which ran from 1935 to 1937 supported leftist political causes.

The transition from a drama addressed to an anticipated white audience to Bullins’ black dialectics accelerated after World War II, proceeding in two major phases. The first phase, involving recognition of serious African-American drama from a mainstream white audience, centered on the commercial and artistic success of a sequence of plays reinforcing the premises of the nonviolent civil rights movement.
of the 1950’s and early 1960’s. The second, heralded by Le Roi Jones/Amiri Baraka’s stunning *Dutchman* (1964) and culminating in the community theatre movement frequently associated with Black Nationalist politics, redirected attention to the internal concerns of the African-American community. By no means devoid of assertive political commitment, the plays of the first phase typically endorsed an integrationist philosophy, partially in deference to the anticipated white audience and partially as a result of the early successes and promise of Martin Luther King’s interracial strategies. The first major success of the period, Louis Peterson’s *Take a Giant Step* (1953), was followed rapidly by William Branch’s *In Splendid Error* (1954) and Ossie Davis’ *Purlie Victorious* (1961).

Apart from black men there emerged a few promising women writers resisting the oppression of the whites as well as the black men; Alice Childress, Shange, Mitchell and Hansberry. Their black characters are assertive: “caustic and unyielding to the demands of the whites” (Y.S. Sharadha 25).

Alice Childress joined the American Negro Theatre (ANT) in Harlem. Childress’s plays would allude to themes of race, but her main rationale was to combine her gender with her art. She shocked her audience and critics with her skilled characterization of African Americans. Childress lived in a society where blacks were not allowed to share white space. They were not allowed to enter through the same door as white people, drink from the same fountains, even ride on the same bus. This type of inhuman treatment fuelled her writings.

Childress in her first published play *Florence* (1950) used the one-act form. In the waiting room of a rail-road station in the South, her principal character, a Black woman of low economic circumstances, undergoes a change of mind through a chance encounter with a white woman. Instead of going to New York city to bring
Florence, her fledgling actress daughter, home, the Black woman sends her travel money to the young woman so that she can remain in the city, continue to pursue her career, and perhaps succeed. Her next play, *Trouble in Mind*, was produced Off-Broadway, directed by Childress, at Greenwich Mews Theatre on November 3, 1955. In this play, Childress creates a play within a play. She continues her theme of sexism and racism. When this play was produced, Childress used a drastically diverse cast, for the 1950’s, to demonstrate an anti-lynching drama. The *Wedding Band* (1966) was about inter racial relationship that takes place in South Carolina during World War I, which conveys the differential treatments between the lower socio economic groups within the same racial identity.

Ntozake Shange’s theatre pieces deal with complex notions of identity. They present a range of experiences of blacks in general and black females and black female artists in particular. Transferring her own private experiences and political voice into a dramatic form that reaches across to a public audience, Shange demands that: “...a poem should fill up with something/ could make you swoon, stop in your tracks, change yr mind, or make it up/ a poem should happen to you like cold water or a kiss” (Sharadha 25). While her choreo-poems celebrate black female identity, Shange at no point encourages women to eschew all social or intimate contact with men as the solution to male exploitation. She works toward a level of communication in male-female relationship that is built upon mutual respect, trust, and individual self-worth.

As an African-American woman feminist, an artist, Shange has shown on the American stage that black females are worthy of heroic stature and literary exploration. Showing that black women possess vast creative potential in their dramatization of their self-worth and self-realization in a sexist, racist and capitalist
society, Shange creates an effective poetic drama, the form of which has been examined from formalist, biographical, historical and feminist standpoint.

Although the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s seemed to burst on the American theatrical scene with no warning, the plays of Le Roi Jones (now Amiri Baraka), Ed Bullins, and others appeared, it seemed, from nowhere, called forth from hidden reserves of anger deep within the black community. Few had recognized the strains of militancy in the earlier voices of Lorraine Hansberry. Only in hindsight does one now realise that Hansberry heralded the new movement and, in fact, became one of its major literary catalysts. The commercial success and popularity of her first play blinded some to her vision of light; suppression of her other works robbed the public of her insights and her warnings of the cataclysmic civic revolts to come. Only now, in retrospect, does one begin to comprehend her significance as an American and a black writer.

Lorraine Hansberry was born in 1930 and died of cancer in 1965. Yet during her scant thirty-four years of life, she made an indelible mark on American theatre. She was the first black playwright and the youngest of any colour to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the best Play of the year, earning it for her first play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. The drama, which opened on Broadway in 1959, was a landmark success and was subsequently translated into over thirty languages on all continents, including the language of East Germany’s Sorbische minority, and produced in such diverse countries as Czechoslovakia, England, France, and the Soviet Union. The play became a popular film in 1961 and a Tony Award-winning musical in 1973.

Hansberry’s brief life yielded five plays (one of which was completed by her former husband and literary executor, Robert Nemiroff) and more than sixty magazine
and newspaper articles, plays, poems, and speeches. She also wrote the text for *The Movement*, a photographic essay on the Civil Rights Movement. *To be Young, Gifted and Black* (1970), her autobiographical play, toured the country after her death, playing to thousands on campuses and in communities, and adding a new and vital phrase to the American idiom. An activist artist, she spoke at Civil Rights rallies and writers’ conferences. Her significance, however, does not rest solely on these activities or even on her record of productivity. Hansberry is important because of her incisive, articulate, and sensitive exposure of the dynamic, troubled American culture. That she, a black artist, could tell painful truths to a society unaccustomed to rigorous self-criticism and still receive its praise is testimony to her artistry.

There has been much mention of the fact that Lorraine Hansberry was born into material comfort on the South Side of Chicago, that she grew up as part of the middle class and was therefore privy to opportunities denied others. While that may be true, there is another side to her background which must be acknowledged. In order for her family to purchase a home in a previously all-white neighbourhood, her father had to wage a legal battle all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. When the family finally moved in, the home was attacked by a racist mob; a brick hurled through the window narrowly missed the eight-year-old Lorraine. Earlier she had lived in a *ghetto*, the product of rigid housing segregation which kept all blacks, regardless of income, confined to the same neighbourhood. She went to school and made friends with other black children whose families were not so well off as hers, and she never forgot the lessons she learned from them. There are no easy generalizations about her early life, except those intended to justify simplistic views. The comfort to which she was born is only relative when one looks at the whole of American life; it did not isolate her from the struggles and the anger of poor people.
Although her plays are not autobiographical (except To Be Young, Gifted and Black), the origins of their themes can be found in several important facts from her childhood and youth. According to Hansberry, the truth of her life and essence begins in the Chicago ghetto where she was born:

I think you could find the tempo of my people on their back porches. The honesty of their living is there in the shabbiness. Scrubbed porches that sag and look their danger. Dirty gray wood steps. And always a line of white and pink clothes scrubbed so well, waving in the dirty wind of the city.

My people are poor. And they are tired. And they are determined to live. Our South Side is a place apart: each piece of our living is a protest. (TYGB 45)

From her parents, she learned to have pride in the family and never to betray the race. But she also learned that freedom and equality for her people were not likely to come through the American democratic way. She had seen her father spend a small fortune fighting the restrictive covenants of Chicago, then die a permanently embittered exile in a foreign country, having seen few results from his efforts. She had little desire for the materialism, characteristic of her class since her kindergarten days when she was beaten up by her classmates: “Her mother had dressed her in white fur … in the middle of the Depression” (Wilkerson 9). She came to respect the pugnacity of her peers, children from the ghetto who were not afraid to fight and to defend themselves. From these and other early experiences she developed a deep empathy for the desires and frustrations of her people, and a respect for their beauty and vigor.
She attended the University of Wisconsin, but left shortly to find an education of a different kind. Moving to New York City, she took a job as a journalist on the black paper FREEDOM. Here she began to refine her writing skills and came to know some of the greatest black literary and political figures of her time, among them were W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Langston Hughes.

As a black writer, Hansberry was caught in a paradox of expectations. She was expected to write about that which she “knew best” (9), the black experience, and yet that expression was doomed to be called parochial and narrow. Hansberry, however, challenged these facile categories and forced a redefinition of the term “universality” (9), one which would include the dissonant voice of an oppressed American minority. As a young college student, she had wandered into a rehearsal of Sean O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock (1924). Hearing in the wails and moans of the Irish characters a universal cry of human misery, she determined to capture that sound in the idiom of her own people - so that it could be heard by all:

One of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific. Universality, I think, emerges from truthful identity of what is....In other words, I think people, to the extent we accept them and believe them as who they’re supposed to be, to that extent they can become everybody. (TYGB 128)

Such a choice by a black writer posed an unusual challenge to the literary establishment and a divided society, ill-prepared to comprehend its meaning.

Lorraine Hansberry took much effort in improving the life conditions of the blacks by presenting a realistic portrayal of their sufferings and testimony amidst the
racial prejudices thereby making a shift in the world of American theatre i.e. a definite magnitude in the black theatre movement by enriching, nurturing and heralding the resistance movement of 1960’s, which proves her commitment towards the voiceless.

Lorraine Hansberry knew about disappointment, false hope, and despair. For many of her African-American ancestors who had come north for a better life only to find exploitation and frustration, the dream had become a nightmare. In contemporary terms, she chronicles their nightmare in A Raisin in the Sun (1959), an epic story of the Younger family struggling to realize the dream by escaping ghetto life. Hansberry’s screenplay not only tells the story of the Youngers’ but reveals the plight of all who have failed dreams. The play espouses the black man’s eagerness to define his identity and his determination to seek his identity.

By focusing on the sufferings of the blacks in America and Africa, Hansberry shapes Asagai as the symbol of humanity’s interconnectedness. Further, Hansberry uses Linder, the only white character in the play to reveal the politics of the class whites. Though he declares that he has come to welcome the black family for their new house at Clybourne Park, he could not hide his political agenda. His central point is that people are happier when they live in a community in which the residents share a “common background” (136). Through Walter, Hansberry brings her thesis that they are to occupy the new house at Clybourne Park and rejects the offer of Linder, thereby protesting the whites, who are against the birth right of the blacks.

The Drinking Gourd (1960) is an American television show about slavery written by Hansberry for NBC. The human failure which is evidenced in the hardening of prejudice in racial matters becomes for her indicative of a more fundamental failure. Hansberry’s involvement with the plight of the Negro is subsumed here with utmost concern. She is responsible for bringing a renaissance
among the black people and the whole American Whites considered the play too violent and divisive.

*The Drinking Gourd* of the title is the Big Dipper. For a slave in the South it pointed the way North, the way to freedom. The play takes place at the backdrop of the American Civil war. Hansberry employs the use of a narrator, a certain American soldier who marks the beginning of the play plotting its theme. The Soldier’s walk suggests a trouble. He briefly outlines the history of the trouble, the problem of slavery and of slaves.

The Southern states were rich in soil and cotton seeds. Slaves were callously treated by their masters to attain to heights. Even they torture slaves to death by assigning heavy work and buy the next in order to fulfil their ambitions. The owners consider it cheaper rather than treating them humanely. It was pointed out that a slave could be maintained on under “seven dollars and fifty cents – a year” (*DG* 227). The slaves were refused basic rights by the class Whites enacting severe laws. The penalties are maiming and mutilation to death. In addition to these a slave could be worked for periods as long as the overseer deemed it necessary. He was not paid for his labour and had no right to protest treatment.

*The Drinking Gourd* is an incisive analysis and indictment of American slavery as a self-perpetuating system based on the exploitation of cheap labour. More than an historical piece, this provocative work identifies the slave system as the basis for the country’s economic philosophy and later capitalistic development; it dramatizes the devastating psychological and physical impact of the slave institution on both master and slave.
Three distinct classes of people are a part of this world of slavery: the master, the slave, and the poor white. During the course of the play, set at the beginning of the Civil War, the impact of the slave system on each class is starkly portrayed, with the blacks becoming victims of economic realities.

A hallmark of Hansberry’s work is the mixing of disparate elements on other levels as well, the combining of political and universal themes; individual and social drama, raw emotion and intellect. She also mingled realism with fantasy, tragedy with comedy, and drama with dance and music. *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* (1964) is a play of ideas and includes all three combinations.

As the play opens, Sidney Brustein, a Jewish white man and Alton Scales, a black, the friend of the former are carrying metal racks of restaurant glasses into the Brustein’s village, Brownstone. Sidney, a once politically active middle class intellectual, dissatisfied with his life, goes from one business venture to another. He has just closed the Silver Dagger, his failed night club, and has purchased a newspaper.

Being the editor of the weekly, Sidney discusses the point of view of the paper, with Alton. The former tells Alton to avoid causes and commitments and wants to run the paper as a paper of art and leisure rather than politics. Thus, the play augurs that Sidney was earlier a committed political idealist. But such a political idealist is oscillating between idealism and an undefined sexual problem.

Hansberry traces the universal as well as social and family problems and nuance intrigues.

By the time *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* opened on Broadway in 1964, Hansberry’s cancer had already been diagnosed, and she was in and out of
hospitals, often needing a wheelchair to get to and from rehearsals. Opening to mixed critical reviews, *Sign* played for 101 performances and closed the night of her death, January 12, 1965. It was destined to go down in theatrical history books as a triumph, however, because a loving public fought to keep it open, raising money and donating time to help it to survive.

A play of ideas, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* angered and confused critics for two basic reasons. First, it was not about the black experience; in fact, it had only one black character in it. Lorraine Hansberry, hailed by the establishment as a new black voice, had written about white artists and intellectuals who lived in Greenwich Village. Second, the play firmly opposed the vogue of urbane, sophisticated and the glorification of intellectual impotence so typical of the period. It dared to challenge the apathy of the American intellectual and his indifference to the serious problems overtaking the world.

In this play, plot is secondary to character and serves only as a vehicle for Sidney Brustein’s personal odyssey towards self-discovery. Sidney has agreed to work on the campaign of the local politician who has promised to bring social reform to his New York neighbourhood. Through a series of confrontations with family and friends, Sidney is given an intimate look at the human frailties which lie behind the mask of each character.

Finally, Sidney understands the meaning of life from the death of Gloria. He tells Wally that he will fight him and the machine, because he believes in survival. The play ends with Sidney’s oath, with all hope against hypocrites and he is to work against all evils through his editorials. Thus Sidney proves to be committed to fight against class white men.
Lorraine Hansberry was the first African American playwright to explore the African quest for freedom from European colonialists. Hansberry studied African history and read about uprisings in Kenya and other African nations before beginning *Les Blancs* (1972), to create a work that is obviously a well informed examination of events in Africa. The play can be viewed both as a condemnation of colonialism in Africa and, on another level as a commentary on race relations of America in early 1960s. The play unveils Hansberry’s determination to use her work as an agent of social change. Speaking at a conference in 1959 Hansberry proclaimed that “African – American writers must address (them) selves to (any) dispute” (Abell 470) about the fundamental questions of society and the individual. Hansberry entered such a dispute when she wrote and titled *Les Blancs*.

The play opens in the grey green glow of African twilight with the sound of crickets, frogs and bush babies. A woman appears in a dance pose, her cheeks painted for war and a spear is planted in the earth. She stands for the Mother Africa itself. Much of the play is set in the African mission compound which was founded forty years before by Reverend Nielson and his blind wife Madame Nielson. The mission compound is a symbol and a brought up of colonialists. In the process of civilizing the barbaric Africans, the white masters have used religion as a tool to subvert the constructs of the natives.

Hansberry is keen in exposing the ‘double faced’ colonialist attitude through the military and she builds the tension and unveiling the hypocrisies step by step. The military arrests Dr. Amos Kumalo for plotting insurrection, though he has been called on to have talks with them. This moves Tshembe and he becomes furious. Furthermore, it is revealed by Dr. Dekoven that Major Rice, the colonial military
officer is the father of Eric and Aqua the wife of the Old Abioseh had been seduced by him.

The colonial masters’ nature and attitude are very well traced by Hansberry. Their aim is not only to rape the country but also the people. Even Reverend Nielson has warned Madame, his wife not to save the life of Aqua, for the child is the symbol of the two races and it would bring them trouble. Such is the state of Africans. The so-called religious philanthropists as well as the crude military officer corrupt through their joint venture and hegemonise the mother Africa.

Tshembe involves himself in the war for freedom, because he does not want another African like Abioseh to betray his own race and for the massacre of his own race. The development of the character of Tshembe is also the development of drama, because Hansberry speaks through his eyes.

Hansberry is not only concerned with the theme of the blacks but also she takes up the problems of the universe and she is always optimistic in her approach, condemning absurdity in its entirety. In What Use Are Flowers?, she takes up the issues of absurdity, nurtured by Samuel Becket in his Waiting For Godot, which portrayed life on earth as meaningless and absurd. Using nine pre-lingual children and an English teacher in a vast, rocky Island, Hansberry brings out her answer to Becket in her thesis that “…the uses of the flowers are infinite…” (WUAF 370).

Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry are thus concerned about the poor and the neglected. Both create characters and situations to meet their ends i.e., a resistance movement through their ideologies and political stand points. Both these writers are highly committed towards uplifting the underprivileged. From their oeuvre it is clear that both are the vanguards of their society. In spite of the complexities of
their age, they are committed and self-assured. The questions posed by them are still relevant in this postmodern world. So a keen and sensible study of their oeuvre is inevitable.

**Chapter One** titled, Introduction talks about the greatness of a work of art, how ideology forms the centre of a text, acts as a basic structure, controlling force and how different ideologies can be best expressed in drama through serious actions of various characters acted upon the stage in which the audience identify themselves in the process and how it has been internationally acclaimed as the best form to express ideology. Further, it traces the origin and development of the two broad categories of the dramatic theatres; Eastern dramatic theatre, starting from the *Natyaasastra* of Vedic period to the contemporary dramatists up to Mahasweta Devi and their works of the Indian dramatic theatre and Bengali dramatic theatre, discussing the prominence of Mahasweta Devi and Western dramatic theatre starting from Thespis of Greek who lived during Sixth century B.C, how it travelled to Britain and later to the mainstream American drama, and traces the black arts movement up to Lorraine Hansberry and their contributions, projecting Hansberry heralding the black arts movement.

Moreover, it analyses how a study on both these writers are still relevant.

**Chapter Two** titled, Themes of Confrontation and Commitment presents the world as a place of conflict between the opposites: privileged and under privileged by caste, class, race and gender in the works of Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry. It further analyses the themes of confrontations of the privileged against the under privileged in their oeuvre, how Devi and Hansberry express their self-assurance and commitment in uplifting the underprivileged, constructing ideologies and taking political sides with the marginalised.
Chapter Three titled, Redefining – Myth – Prototypes – Metanarratives analyses the techniques employed: Songs, Myth, Time, Dance etc. by Devi and Hansberry in ensuring their promise for the marginalised and how they use technique as a means to meet their ends.

Chapter Four titled, Technique as Discovery focuses on redefining the roles of each characters and situations. Both Devi and Hansberry being revisionist of history have revisited history and have problematized the mainstream versions, taking stand points with the oppressed. Both have exploited myth, prototypes and metanarratives of the majority for bringing into light their thesis. They have challenged the axioms established by ‘the society in hierarchy’.

Chapter Five titled Conclusion, discusses the importance of Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry, gives a brief account of the earlier chapters and how the problems raised by them are still relevant. Further it concludes that more questions posed by them are still unanswered and one can find in them inexorable commitment pertaining to further research.