Chapter I
Chapter I

Introduction

Section “A”

Life and Works of Mahesh Dattani

Mahesh Dattani is a leading dramatist in Indian Drama in English. He is in the tradition of those dramatists of India who expressed their visions of life concerning various social, political and cultural ills and maladies in the medium of English language. The contemporary playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Circar – to name only a few have expressed their views about men and manners of society in their respective regional languages; but the credit goes to Mahesh Dattani who, like his British counterparts tried his best to pen down his thoughts and visions in the medium of English. Perhaps this is why his plays are being staged not only in India but in various parts of the world.

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright in English who has been awarded the ‘Sahitya Akademi’ award for his contribution to world drama. Like George Bernard Shaw, his plays deal with the burning social and political problems e.g., religious tension, communal disharmony, child sexual abuse, lesbianism, sexuality and gender discrimination. Alyque Padamsee, the well-known stage director calls him one of the “most serious contemporary playwrights.”
Dattani was born on August 7, 1958 in Bangalore. His parents originally belong to Gujarat but they came to Bangalore for business purposes and settled there. The childhood of Mahesh Dattani was very prosperous. He got his education in English medium school at ‘Baldivin’s High School. It was a Christian institution where he got his early education. Here Vernacular language was strictly prohibited. As Dattani recalls:

“[U]npleasant distinctions were made between the ‘vernies’ and the one who were fluent in English. Snob values were included early on and you generally were made to feel privileged to belong to that school. We were taught English literature with a capital E!”

After completing his Matriculation, he took admission at St. Joseph’s College of Arts and Science, Bangalore. He is a graduate in History, Economics and Political Science. During his studies at College he also took interest in British and American dramas which planted a seed in his mind that later on flourished and blossomed in the form of Indian Drama in English. During studies he joined ‘Little Theatre’, a Bangalore based theatre company and participated in workshop, acting and directing plays. He got his Post graduate Degree in Marketing and Advertising Management. He has worked a copywriter in an advertising form and subsequently with his father in the family business. It is interesting to note here that like Bhabani Bhattacharya and Arundhati Roy, Mahesh Dattani is not a student of English literature.

His educational qualification shows that he has interest in business and he took the courses of Marketing and Advertising Management and also
helped his father’s business. From the very beginning of his life, Dattani has an intrinsic attachment to dance and theatre. He attended the Gujarati plays with his parents and two elder sisters; those were performed at Bangalore. Although Gujarati was his regional language he also watched Kannada plays. This experience of watching Gujarati and Kannada plays gave him the idea of theatre. He realized:

“I don’t know the world at my doorstep. I got involved in theatre and for a long time continued to do European plays in translation. […] Seeing Gujarati theatre in Mumbai, I realized I had to unlearn a lot that I learnt in school. That is when my true education really began.”

Although his education was different from his profession he always took keen interest in theatre from his early college period. The seed of a playwright was already present in him in a dormant stage; but just after finishing his education, Dattani came in contact with the day to day life, and then all his sleeping seeds of dramatic art began to sprout and take a very strong root.

He has a keen interest not only in theatre but also in dancing. He wanted to get the systematic training of dance and for this “he underwent Western Ballet training under Molly Andre at Alliance Francaise de Bangalore (1984-87) and Bharatnatyam training under Chandrabhaga Devi and Krishna Rao, Bangalore (1986-90).” He was very much obliged to these two persons who taught him the real qualities of an artist. He writes:
“The late Chandrabhaga Devi and U.S. Krishna Rao, for teaching me what it means to be an artist.”

He writes his plays to be staged. He knows the problems of stage and influence of Director over a play. Under this influence he founded ‘Playpen’, a theatre company in 1984 to perform the plays. In the Preface of his book he himself writes:

“I know that I am an artist… I write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide a section of the society that my plays speak to and are about.”

Dattani founded this company. The intension behind the work was to perform Indian Plays and not usual Western canonical texts. Although English is an alien language but he speaks of his choice of English as his medium. He was living in Karnataka so it was not possible to write in Gujarati. He could not find himself at ease in Kannada. So he chooses to express himself in his language of education and the language which is understood by many Indians as well as by International Community. He observes:

“Like many urban people in India, you’re in this situation where the language you speak at home is not the language of your environment, especially if you move from your hometown. And you use English to communicate, so you find that you’re more and more comfortable expressing yourself in
English […] but] I wanted to do more Indian plays and that became a challenge, because there weren’t many good translations – or there may have been good translations, but they didn’t do anything for me.”

He wanted more Indian plays in English and so he founded a theatre company. He planted the seed of plays on the barren land of Indian English plays by writing his first play Where There’s a Will in 1988. He is a versatile writer and Sita Raina, the director of the play, remarks about the play:

“Joy is the essence of life… theatre should exude delight. Where There’s a Will is such a play. It is not only thought-provoking and introspective but also provides an evening of pure entertainment.”

Dattani was interested in theatre from the very early age. He started his career as an actor in the drama Surya Shikar in 1985. He played many lead roles in various Indian English plays and British plays. After this, he devoted himself to directing plays. He first directed the play – “God”! in 1986. He directed almost all of his plays. Later on he moved towards writing plays and the result is Where There’s a Will. In this play he also worked as an actor. Thus he started his career as an actor, he moved to directing and then to write plays. Dattani tells Ranu Uniyal:

“I have been interested in theatre right from the beginning, from a very early age. And I began acting in plays and then I moved on to directing … writing plays really happened more out of
necessity because I wanted to do more Indian plays in English … I live devoted entirely to new writing in English.”

The important plays in which he worked as an actor are Surya Shikar, The Witness, A Macbeth, Where There’s s Will, Dance Like a Man, Doongali House, Broadway Bound, Our Town, The Tempest, Henry IV. It shows that he is a versatile genius. He played a lead role in both-his own plays and other English plays. For the works he “has won accolades for his sterling performance in them.” He also plays the role of a father ‘Vineeth’ in Vijay Nair’s play The Gloomy Rabbit.

As a director, he occupies the top position among the contemporary Indian English directors. He is a good actor and so he knows the basic elements of drama. “Many of his plays have been staged to universal acclaim. His best radio plays have been aired on BBC radio.” The important plays, to which he directed, are God (1986), Where There’s a Will, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Final Solutions, Torch Song Trilogy, In Camera. Dattani loves the art of directing a play as he himself accepts : ‘The minute I write a play, the minute it’s ready and finished on my computer, I want to direct it’. He loves the theatre very much and he goes to say that ‘I would choose to direct first before I write’. Again he says :

“I always direct the first production of any play I write. That enables me to put in more stage instructions, which go on to become a kind of blue print for other directors. That way, there is no
conflict’ and the other directors can interpret it, as they will.”

Mahesh Dattani is such a dramatist who has a very profound and comprehensive knowledge of the every bits of drama and the dramatic art. He knows that drama is a composite art and he is involved in every field – acting, directing, writing and workshop. “He does take time off his hectic schedule to conduct workshops for the sake of nurturing new talent and giving a new dimension to theatre.” Now a day he is working in institutions with different status. He is writing Screenplay at Xavier Institute of Communication, Bombay. He is also related to Dramatic Structure and Playwriting at Media Centre, Bangalore and Yoga for the Performer and Indian Cinema at Portland State University, U.S.A. He wants to raise the status of theatre in the country and for this he conducts workshops for playwrights and actors in all the major cities of India. “Mahesh will teach at Portland State University in July-August 2001. He has also been commissioned from BBC Radio 4 to write a radio play. He also has a commission from RAHI, a support group, to write a play on childhood sexual abuse, supported by the Ford Foundation.” When Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta asks him about the purpose of workshop and interest in teaching, he replies:

“I conduct workshop there (a theatre studio in South Bangalore). I like stretching myself. My milieu is theatre.

You can’t operate in isolation, you see. At the risk of sounding naive, I do want a theatre movement to happen. The major block for that is lack of sound training and professionalism. We
have the talent, but theatre is more than that it’s a craft of communicating through the language of action…

… Oh yes very, I couldn’t do it (teaching) full time, of course, but this kind of teaching work, for limited periods at a time, gives me fresh ideas.”

He is a man fully devoted to the theatre. He always works to uplift the theatre and its related components. But he also writes for Modern Moving Theatre (Cinema). Theatre is limited in a Hall and only a hundred or two hundred people can see a show at a time but a film can be seen by a lot of people. Mainly the difference is that for cinema, the narrative runs through pictures:

“It is a sensory medium with a strong emphasis on the visual component. Colours and use of light are significant. Art direction is a special category which as important as cinematography. The director’s job is really in bringing at all together to serve the script.”

Dattani was influenced by Edward Albee’s play and his style. He accepts: “I read Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* when I was in my teens. It unleashed in me an ability to set up my male and female characters against each other.” And that’s why his characters exchange heated verbal duels. Another important thing that is interesting, he changes his genre for writing screen but retains authorial/directorial control over his material. He introduces most of his actors and related materials from theatre.
Behind the work his purpose is that only a committed actor should achieve his mission. As he says:

“I intend to make movies, though selectively, but I intend to make them with artistes who have the commitment and the time for good work. I don’t want the tantrums and hassles of starts and thankfully for me, theatre is full of such talented artists.”

He wrote his first screenplay Chalo Memsahib in 1992 directed by Ayesha Sayani. But his important screenplays are Hum, Tum aur Woh (for Tuter Film, directed by Pankaj Parasher, 1994), Ek Chingari Ki Khoj Mein (for Madhyam, directed by K.P. Sasu, 1988). Ek Alag Mausam (for Actionaid India, directed by K.P. Sasi, 1999) He is also working on a script A Walk With Mr. William (2000). His plays Dance Like a Man and Mango Souffle were also adopted in screen. Mango Souffle, his first directed film is really his play-On a Muggy Night in Mumbai. It is an award winning play. Although he participates in screenplay, his love for play never lessens. As Asha Kuthari Chauduri writes:

“And Dattani would be the first to point out the seeing a play and a film are different experiences and not necessarily hierarchichal. The immediate, living power of theatre can hardly be overlooked. The audiences may be very small in size but it is their immediate feedback to the content of a play that is important.”
Mahesh Dattani is a dynamic writer and he always has his own genuine views on all the forms of art. He thinks that cinema is looking forward and establishing new relationship. As Menon and Prakash say:

“We’ve a lot more to say, whether it’s a direct story telling or a new look at relationships – new icons of gender, gender roles, whole new paradigms on sexuality and feminism. There is a lot more meat than we can chew.”

The Indian audiences are not much in number to watch the English Cinema. Few English language films have done well in India and abroad like Aparna Sen’s 36 Chowringhee Lane. But these are very few in numbers. But Dattani does not consider about the medium and he remains loyal to his language. As he says:

“English is for me a short of given […] I have no choice in this matter. I could have easily done my film Mango Souffle and Morning Raga in Hindi but the fact is it’s not my language I really think in.”

Dattani started his career as a film director with Mango Souffle. It is the film adopted from his highly successful play-On a Muggy Nights in Mumbai. Many changes have been made and location is also changed from Mumbai to Bangalore. “Mango as you know is the fruit of passion just as the apple is a fruit of temptation in the Christian world.” Although it looks similar to write a script for a play and a cinema but it requires a great effort
to film a drama. Drama can be staged at a place but film needs different locations.

Dattani is a typical writer and does not consider what is right or wrong. But he always considers over what the use is, that is prevalent in our society and while common people always try to cover them. In Mango Souffle he adds a new shade to the relationship. As he says:

“I have found out that sexuality can’t be straitjacketed or compartmentalized. There are varying degrees of love and bonding one feels for another person irrespective of the gender… There are grey areas in people’s relationship with others too and through my film, I have only brought them to notice.”

Mango Souffle is very interesting film and it is awarded at Barcelona film festival. It is filmed at various international film festival and attracted attention of the critic. It is very important for all the Indian artists made a film on ‘homosexuality’ that is very unique for the world.

Dance Like a Man is a film produced by the National Film Development Corporation (India) in association with Rooks AV. The screenplay is written by Dattani himself while directed by Pamela Rooks. Although the medium of the film is English but it has fully Indian flavour. It uses direct sound of the artist.

The screenplay of the film, Ek Chingari Ki Khoj Mein (In search of a spark) is written by Dattani. The film is based on the issues of women e.g;
dowry and the status of girl child in society. He tries the expose to condition of women in their own family and the domestic violence to which they meet everyday.

_Ek Alag Mausam_ (A special Season) is an important film whose script is written by Dattani. He introduces the problem and love story of ‘two HIV positive people.’ ‘The objective was to infuse a sense of belonging, care and hope in the HIV afflicted.’ The two lovers know their problem and ultimately decide to marry. Dattani, interestingly puts the very burning issues of the world before his audience. It seems that he wanted to bring awareness over the problem of HIV positive people.

_Morning Raga_ is an original work by Mahesh Dattani. Raga is a hindi word and related to music and so is its theme that is based on the life of a classical singer. The inspiration for the film came from one of his experiences during the making of _Mango Souffle_.

Although play and cinema seem similar but these two are very different genre. Dattani has skills to handle both the situations and works according to the requirement of their demand. There are not many contradictions related to this in his film and play. He always feeds what is the requirement. He never tries to impose something extra to the audiences or characters. The script of the cinema which Dattani has written has newness of its own. It makes a vary deep influence on the viewers and readers.

Thus this brief life sketch shows that Mahesh Dattani is not an individual but an institution. He is a man of versatile genius. He is not simply a dramatist good or great but a very skilled dancer, teacher,
screenplay writer and a director par excellence. He thinks that a fine combination of all the aforesaid qualities is most needed for the success of a standard drama. In one of his interview with Anita Nair he observes:

“The actor, the playwright and the director are all complimentary to each other in a production. It is like gardening; where a whole is made of many parts. So many conditions determine a garden’s lushness, its beauty.”

The area of Dattani is very broad and it is very difficult to crown him with a single adjective. He works as an actor, director, playwright, teacher, scriptwriter for film, businessman. In all these role, he handles situation according to the demands of the genres. He makes his distinction in every field. He never wants to infuse his own idea in his art but works as an observer. His idea is very close to Thomas Stern Eliot who writes:

“The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passion which are its material.”

Though Dattani has a multifarious business of different activities of art like acting, directing, script-writing, dancing, teaching. Yet he has a very special learning towards playwrighting which made him an immortal man in
the field of English drama. His place is special in the field because he is the only Indian English Playwright who got the Sahitya Akademi Award since its inception. His book *Final Solutions and Other Plays* published by East-West Books, Chennai, got this prestigious award. The citation of the award says: “[Dattani’s work] probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender… a brilliant contribution to Indian drama in English.”

He is a reluctant playwright. As a playwright he may enforce his ideas through his play but he always maintains objectivity in his work. Like G.B. Shaw and John Galsworthy he thinks that the drama is the medium of exposing the realities of the various ills and maladies that afflict the societies the world over. He also believes in the fact that the primary duty of the artist to lay bare the things as they are. He is not bound to give any conclusion or solution. It all depends upon the audience to decide and think over the problem concerns. He observes in the preface of his book:

“I also know that I have a lot to say and am probably not saying it well enough. But my characters have a lot to say too, and they seem to be doing rather well at having their say.”

So it is clear that Dattani does not believe in the fact that a dramatist should infuse his own philosophy in his play but he thinks that only audience should reach at a particulars conclusion. In his plays, characters do their work according to their merit. As a dramatist he shows the mirror of society and not the way to eliminate the maladies of society. As he himself accepts: “Theatre to me is a reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre.” Each
and every play of Dattani raises various maladies of a healthy society but he is never seen didactic and straightforward in his attitude. He expresses his views through powerful image, symbols, stage direction, dialogue, situation, etc. Dattani himself observes that in his plays “everything is geared towards rasa.”

Mahesh Dattani is a keen artist and he knows where the future of art lies. He is an artist who believes in a theory – ‘art for society’s sake’. He excels in mirroring his society. In the preface of his book he himself writes:

“I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background. I am hugely excited and curious to know what the future holds for me and my art in the new millennium in a country that has a myriad challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally.”

One of the important things which merit our attention much is Dattani’s concept of place and situation. He was brought up in urban culture and so his characters are rooted in the urban cosmopolitan setting of modern middle class of India – *Seven Steps Around the Fire* in Bangalore, *On a Muggy Nights in Mumbai* in Mumbai, *Do the Needful* in Bangalore, *Final Solutions* in Amargaon, *Bravely Fought the Queen* in a posh suburb of Bangalore, *Tara* in London and Mumbai, *Dance Like a Man* in the heart of the city (Bangalore), and *Where There’s a Will* in Bangalore. It shows that most of the places in Dattani’s plays are based in Bangalore and Mumbai and he always chooses the medium as English.
It is to be noted here that Mahesh Dattani is very close to Ravindranath Tagore who also wrote several books of literature related to the life of (Calcutta) Kolkata. In Indian Poetry in English we find a similar figure Nissim Ezekiel who has presented a very realistic picture of the tensions and tussles of modern materialistic man living in the big buildings of Mumbai. What Nissim Ezekiel observes in poetry has a very close conformity with the various plays of Dattani in which we get a description of a frustrated and isolated man in this stereotype world of money and matter.

Mahesh Dattani is a celebrated dramatist and in a short span of time he wrote a dozen of plays. Where There’s a Will (1988) is his first play and it is set in a Gujarati family with which he was familiar. In this play he exposes the hollowness of the patriarchal code. But it also raises various social ills that come out after the progress of the play. The same temperament continues in his plays which published in future – Dance Lika a Man (1989), Tara (1990), Bravely Fought the Queen (1997), On a Muggy Night in Mumbai (1998), Seven Steps Around the Fire (1999), Do the Needful (1991), Final Solutions (1992-93), Thirty Days in September (2001). Among these Do the Needful, Seven Steps Around the Fire, The Swami and Winston (2000) and Tale of the Mother Feeding Her Child (2000) are radio plays for BBC. Thus he can be compared with the Nobel Laureate Harold Pinter, who also writes for the radio.

Dattani raises the problem before society and he says its forcefully. There is not the place of complexity in his plays. The characters are given sufficient space to establish their utility in the plays. They never become mouth-piece of the dramatist but look like the voice of common people. That is why Rozario Ignatius writes about Dattani:
“Mahesh Dattani is one of the few leading Indian English dramatists. Other popular names in this genre are Gurucharan Das, Gieve Patel, Shashi Tharoor, Uma Parameswaran and Manujula Padmanabhan. The greatness of Dattani lies in the fact that he expresses himself easily and naturally in a voice loud and clear.”

One basic matter that pulls our attention is the setting of identity. Dattani does not raise a issue related to politics or society that is too much discussed. But he raises the issue that still exists in our society but always thought as an alien and matter of social debate. The matter of homosex is raised in Do the Needful but no common man can say that this should be staged before audiences and considered as the matter of western country although it prevails in India. Hindus and Muslims depict their won statement to prove their superiority and Dattani depicts this in Final Solution. Many massacre happened in India since her independence but still no one thinks upon the real nature of communal riot and for its permanent solution. But a big gap is tried to be created among the societies. Still some Hindus think India as their own country while Muslims as foreigner and as a spy.

Various type of issues are always raised in his plays. Tara demands our attention over the issue of girl child. Boy and girl are conceived in the same womb. So there should be no distinction theoretically. But always such tendency comes out that a girl child suffers when the matter of benefit comes in the way. The life of Tara is changed to make Chandan more able receiver.

In Where There’s a Will he shows the patriarchal code that dominates in society. Ajit is an able member but he is not given the ownership of
property by his father, Hasmukha Mehta, because he does not bear his image of an ideal child. Dattani criticizes indirectly the systems that suppress the full growth of a child/son. In Bravely Fought the Queen women search their identity. They are given the work of home and hearth. About the play Asha Kuthari Choudhary writes:

“The play tries to establish the rapidly shifting values and structuring of the self in a locale where the traditional and the contemporary class, but do not fuse to create new social landscapes.”

Dattani, who although did not uplift the drama at the height at which R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao established but he is the man who infused all. Dance Like a Man is an appropriate example in which he infuses the sense of local colour. Jairaj wants to be a dancer and for this he practices his whole life. His wife also wants to be a dancer. But in life they could not get perfection. Although they compromised on many issues but only after death, are able to dance perfectly. Again here Jairaj pines for his identity but buries that under the influence of tradition.

As the name suggests Seven Steps around the Fire, an Indian audience can understand this very easily and relates it to marriage. It is not easy for an English audience to understand the same thing. In the play two marriages take place – one arranged marriage in which bridegroom shoots himself in other, Kamala is burnt alive by some hired goons. The voice of hijra, a marginalized group, is suppressed in the society. Uma Rao proves through her research that always ‘big shots’ get the benefit of doubt and escape from the bar. Here, the identity problem lies with a group of ‘hijra’ who has no political group to raise his grievances.
The matter of gay issue is discussed in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. John Mcrae writes about the play:

“It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. … the fault is not just the characters’ – it is everyone’s, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity.”

No one in the play is ashamed of being involved in gay relationship. Bunny emphatically accepts that ‘he is a gay man’. Even Kamlesh accepts that he loves him (Sharad). He wanted to live as ‘two men in love’. Kiran is very different character who suggests of gay marriages.

So it is found that Dattani deals with different types of identity in almost all his plays. *Do the Needful* and *On a Muggy Nights in Mumbai* talk of gay issues while *Tara* is of gender problem. *Seven Steps Around the Fire* raises the identity of Hijra while *Where There’s a Will* about the dominance of a will in our society. In *Dance Like a Man*, a man wanted to dance but buried his will due to tradition. *Final Solutions* discusses the matter who is supreme in India–Hindus or Muslims and whose is the land? In all the plays characters try to establish their identity and they say their matter dramatically. They are suppressed by the atmosphere and tradition. As A.K. Chaudhuri writes:
In this process of laying bare, speaking the unspeakable, and taking nothing, at face value, Dattani arrives at the point where the identities have begun to take on specific contours and colours, but are never unequivocally ‘constructed’. The progression remains one where identities make and unmake themselves, adding or shedding newer perceptions, never complete, but always in the process of becoming.”

Dattani is not interested to show an alien matter and costume. But he borrows his experience from Indian culture and depicts them in total Indian environment. He does not believe English as an alien language and Indian tradition as ‘pure’ Indian; but it is a mixture of various cultures. He puts his figure and feels that is understood by others as ‘misfits’ to be exposed. In the matter of Indianess Dattani is very close to Girish Karnad. But the first does not rely on myth and history as the second does. Dattani always raises the social ills of the society through characters and gives new identities to the problems, so that audience could think over the problems and may be familiar with those, which although exist but remain unlooked.

Generally it is called ‘Literature is the mirror of society’, but one thing is clear that in a mirror we can see only the clear face in clear mirror. Dattani enriches literature but he sees the society differently. He feels the pulse, touches the outer layer and observes the society minutely. And that is why he is in a position to raise the issue before the audience that is hidden in the society as gender discrimination, communal riots, gay issue, eunuch problems, patriarchal code etc. Alka Tyagi writes:
“Naturalism is the expression that comes to mind when one reflects on the plays of Mahesh Dattani. The subjects of his plays not only reflect life but they deal with life head on. Gay relations, communal violence, human relations and the ordinary, untouched, untaught conflicts between son and father, husband and wife, lovers etc are tackled with a skilled frankness…”  

Mahesh Dattani is brought up in a middle class family and so his plays also reflect the socio-economic background of the society. In the present time most of the playwrights or other writers are not interested to raise the ‘fringe’ issues but Dattani’s works contain these elements. He writes on the issue that is considered as non-Indian, while he thinks differently. He believes that there are many social ills in our society. Due to these we suffer and no one tries to escape from this. It goes on because the society or social-scientists have not given any alternative to these problems. And in its absence we also live in the society and follows its tradition so that we may save ourselves although it suppresses us. As Asha Kuthari Chaudhari writes:

“Much of ‘mainstream’ society, Dattani believes, lives in a state of ‘forced harmony’ out of a sense of helplessness, or out of a lack of alternatives.”

As Vijay Tendulkar, one of the most prolific Indian playwright, has enriched the Indian drama and theatre by picturizing the various problems of his region, Maharashtra, Dattani’s plays question some of the norms and conventions of society. In the process his plays raise question of gender
discrimination in our society, homosexuality, lesbianism, child sexual abuse, patriarchal code, enunch’s problem, economic gap etc. In an interview when Anita Nair puts a problem that in most of his plays the traditional woman as mother is portrayed with some contempt, be it Sonal of Where There’s a Will, Prema Gowda in Do the Needful, Baa in Bravely Fought the Queen, Aruna in Final Solutions. While the younger woman as trouble shooter; Lata in Do the Needful, Ratna in Dance Like a Man, Bharati in Tara… In contrast, men are not treated with such disdain and are often shown to be as victims suffering from a woman’s machinations–Jairaj and Ratna, Patel and Bharti, Preeti and Hasmukh. About the question Dattani replies:

“It’s to do with my perceptions. I don’t mean to say that this is a definitive view of life. But several of the images that we carry around in our minds are politically generated images and we accept them to be as true. However I don’t think so and my characters are simply a personification of my perceptions.”

Many of Dattani’s plays push forward the issue that is not common but still prevails in society. He never comes directly before the audience to convey his thought. But ‘all the plays end with a question in the audience mind.’ That is why he is a special playwright who even includes the audience in his art. As Mohan Rakesh takes the family unit as the setting of place, so Dattani is ‘Human relationships and family unit have indeed been at the heart of Dattani’s representation.’ John McRae, in his introduction to Dattani’s plays, writes:
“...Very few dramatists are able to give this sense of a whole society touching the participants in the on-stage drama; it recalls Ibsen on his social best.”

*Where There’s a Will* is the first play of Mahesh Dattani and in this play he raises the problem of patriarchal code. He explores the role of male and female in family and the will of a male member of the family. Hasmukh Mehta is the man who imposes his will through his mistress, Kiran on his family and also sees its result. Although he becomes happy in the beginning but like Machiavelli, it does not last for long period. About this play Sita Raina, its director, remarks:

“*Where There’s a Will* has several interesting aspects. Mahesh described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women – be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress – are dependent on men... To be the watcher of one’s self is to make intelligent changes in this life... When he became the watcher of his actions, he perceives that his desire for control has led him to be the victim of his own machinations unlike Kiran who uses power play to essentially improve her relationships.”

His next play is *Dance Like a Man* in which the main protagonist Jairaj wants to dance like a woman and for this he sacrifices many things. He (Dattani) writes the play to show the likes of society and individual. Jairaj does not believe in social norm and becomes a dancer. This enrages his father. Jairaj tries to get perfection in his art but does not get very much
success. He even wonders for the sacrifices, he made in the past, at the last moment. The social bias against the art of dance among men is high–lightened in this play. Jairaj suffers not because he has ill will against any one or any other wants him to suffer, but because of a social norm that dancing may infuse woman traits in him. Amritlal, Jairaj’s father, even get ready to give Ratna, Jairaj’s wife, to make dance as career, if she pulls Jairaj out of his passion to be a dancer. In the play when Amritlal knows that Jairaj will wear the costume of a lady, he criticizes this and says:

“A woman in a man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic.”

The above lines truly reflect that man can not even expect to wear a dress of a woman. Thus Dattani raises the problem of gender discrimination, patriarchal code, dowry and intercaste marriage, that prevail in our society; but not in the term of a reformer but as an observer. The last line of the play is very remarkable, in which Jairaj says:

“We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God.”

_Tara_ is the most performed plays of Dattani. In this he shows that although society claims to be liberal but at the matter of gender we always have bias. Tara, a untwinkling star, whishes to twinkle in the society. Even God favours her. But we the men, never give her opportunity to do so. Her only mistake is that she is a female by birth. Her parents do not favour her and ultimately she reaches to her creator, God. Tara is killed by a social
system that encourages a male child (Chandan) should grow up. In the modern world she is shown as unwanted girl and irrelevant. The play shows that Tara can not twinkle on the Indian sky. It is because the condition is not in her favour. As Subhash Chandra writes:

“The play presents a mirror to the Indian society to see its true face. It tries to shock the society out of its grooved thinking.”

*Bravely Fought the Queen* is related with alternative sexuality. But it also includes the matter of gender differences and the raptures between the world of men and that of women. The division of three acts is more suitable – Act I is called ‘Women’, Act II is ‘Men’ and the last Act is ‘Free for All.’

The whole play is centered around an Indian family, in which two brothers – Jiten and Nitin – who are the owners of an advertising agency, have married two sisters – Dolly and Alka. These women live at home and look after the ageing mother, Baa. The mother suffers under her husband who was a cruel and a dark man and always harassed his wife. Jiten behaves in the same manner as his mother says: ‘Jitu is just like his father. Just like him.’ And its result is the premature delivery of Daksha, a disabled daughter. Alka, in the same respect, is an alcoholic. And their relationship is not well.

But unlike Tara, these two characters, Alka and Dolly arm themselves at the end of the play and fight back. She (Alka) questions the authority of her husband and his disloyalty. She also exposes the homosexual relationship between her husband and her brother. The women in the play have not been presented as sinners but they suffer due to companion of their
male counterparts. They are not depicted as victims or marginalized women but they resist and fight back. It shows the plight of educated Indian women of our times. At the same time it is also conveyed through drama that if they are maltreated in society for long, they can not accept it as their fate like uneducated village women. Thus the dramatist aims not at changing society and status of women and their miseries, but he offers the reflection of society through the play which will give the audience some kinds of insight into their own lives. It presents and the gray realities of the urban families and the conflicts and dilemmas they face.

*Final Solutions* is a award winning play of Dattani. It is based on the theme of us (Hindus) and them (Muslims) and their conflict. It is a stage play in three acts. The play shows the problem of communal riot that is the burning issue in India. As Rozario Ignatius writes:

> “Final Solution examines the so called liberal attitude to communalism. We can discern, in this play, the repulsive, frenzied, perfidious power of the perpetrators of such crimes. Dattani highlights the deep sense of futility of such bloody acts of violence.”

The play is set under the background of communal riot in which Javed and Bobby participate. Incidentally they are saved by Ramnik and his daughter, Smita. Javed represents the muslim sentiment and his reason to become a communal mercenary. Bobby represents the symbols of a liberal muslim. Ramnik and Smita are libral – minded but they have their own ways to put the matter. Ultimately it is found that only one person/community is not responsible for such type of activity but actively or passively both
communities are involved in such type of act. About the play Reena Mitra writes:

“Dattani, however, does not charge his descriptions of the incidents of brutality and monstrosity with feelings; rather, he offers journalistic reports of the events. He bypasses the emotional aspects of the historical situation because it is not to his purpose. He subordinates the specific events of history to an analysis of the situation as it prevails. His focus is on a ‘failure of understanding’ between man and man.”

_Do the Needful_ is also an important play that deals with a fringe issue – homosexuality. But it is set in background of a love story between Lata and Salim. Lata loves Salim, a Muslim belonging to a separate community. Their marriage seems an impossible event. When Lata and Alpesh are asked to marry, they mock the marriage institution through a hidden pact. Alpesh likes Trilok while Lata, Salim. But under the compulsion of their respective parents they agree to marry. They show as couple but do not want to live as husband wife. It conveys the message of the playwright that we are living under ‘forced harmony’ in the absence of any alternative. We have full faith in the institution but Dattani considers through the play as a trifle. On the issue, Sangeeta Das comments:

“This play stirs the feeling of misgiving for the characters – Lata and Alpesh. Though such characters may be existing in our midst but such blatant disregard for a sanctuous ceremony fills us
with horror. No sooner Lata and Alpesh marry than they decide how to deceive their family and go and meet their respective lovers.”

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is a stage play in three acts. It is the continuation of the theme of Bravely Fought the Queen and Do the Needful. It covers the gay issue of love partnership, trust and betrayal. ‘It is a play about how society creates patterns of behavior and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates.’

Kamlesh, a fashion designer, is in love with Prakash. He organizes a party and Sharad, a gay, participates in the party. Dipali a sensible lesbian, also represents the gay culture. Among them a debate goes on and each cares other. But there is also mystery. Kiran, the sister of Kamlesh, is set to marry Prakash. But at the last moment, a picture is found in which Kamlesh and Prakash can be seen embracing each other. The marriage does not take place and the future of Ed, changed name of Prakash hangs in dilemma. About the play Alka Tyagi writes in an article:

“Dattani deals with a difficult subject with bold pen and lays open the hypocrisies of social life which imposes stereotypical roles to men and women and acknowledges and legitimizes only these roles. Male and female – there are only sexual categories which have secured social existence and society’s approbation. People who do not fit into these two classes either keep trying to fit into the rut and suffer throughout their lives a burden of living the big lie, or if they choose to
live with the truth they have to bear social ostracism and contempt.”

Like *Do the Needful, Seven Steps Around the Fire* is a radio play. The play also raises an unconventional matter, the murder of a ‘Hijra’. The victim Kamla, a beautiful eunuch had been secretly married to Subbu, the son of a wealthy government minister. Although Subbu’s father planned to burn the hijra, he arranges the marriage of his son in which many hijras come to celebrate the function. But at last Subbu kills himself at the place of marriage. Uma, a student of sociology, the wife of Police Superintendent, Suresh Rao, finds out who is responsible for the murder of Kamla. It is the story related to tragedy but Munswamy, a constable, makes laughing the audience.

Thus we find that in all the plays and literary works generally authors deal with the issues related to male and female. But in the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* Dattani deals with third gender eunuch and their position in Indian society. They are called regularly on the occasion of ‘marriage’ and ‘birth’. But it is very strange that society prevents their marriage. Dattani shows that they are also human beings and they should be treated like human beings. They also pine for love and family. Anarkali talks in different terms with Uma who calls her sister but Munswamy does not get the same respect from her. Their condition is very beautifully remarked by Uma who comments:

“Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspaper. Champa was right.
The police made no arrest. Subbu’s suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people…”

The above statement is enough to show that society is not only against the fringe group but also the protector of society. The man who fights for the causes of people, made plan to burn Kamla. The people who shows the mirror – the journalists – to the society, do not care their issue. And the men in uniform, police, who maintain ‘law and order’ give free hand to unsocial elements to neutralize the neutrals.

_Thirty Days in September_ is also an interesting play of Dattani and it deals with the problem of ‘child abuse’. The play moves round a girl child ‘Mala’ who is sexually assaulted by her uncle. Her mother knows all the facts but she chooses the path to keep silence. It is this manner that makes the child more complex and creates great trouble for society and specially children. It also suggests that the problem of child abuse does not prevail in outer world but it begins from our family.

Dattani always includes the matter in his drama that is prevalent in the society. His recent play is written on his experience with eight women who told him about their experience. As he is always called an observer of society and its best example is his play _Thirty Days in September_. It is actually written when he came in the contact with a NGO RAHI (Recovery and Healing of Incest). His story is very close to the story of a film ‘_A Monsoon Wedding_’ in which the uncle sexually assaults his minor niece. At the time its impact is not serious but when the child grows up and becomes adult its impact is very dangerous. Also in the film _A Thousand Acres_, a
father sexually assaults his daughter. Dattani talking to Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta, tells about the play:

“The focus is on an interior kind of story, with a lot happening inside the minds of the characters. Personally I feel it’s a kind of progression in my writing. The style is more subtextual than overt text. It was commissioned by an NGO based in Delhi – RAHI and I went to Delhi to research the play.

I spoke to incest and child sexual abuse survivors for about a week. Those were some very intense interviews. I’m very lucky that they came out with their stories – talking about what had happened to them was also a kind of therapy, you see.

Of course, the material was so intense that I had to put it aside for a while, I couldn’t write the play all at a stretch. So it took me a little longer than usual, a little over a year.”

Thus we find that Mahesh Dattani is not a brand playwright but his plays have varied content and varied appeal. “He deals with issues which are very much a part of the educated urban society but the people do not want to confront them and Dattani provides a platform for these issues, so that the people are aware of the fact that they are a reality and not just the fantasies of a playwright.” In *Thirty Days in September* he deals with child abuse while *Bravely Fought the Queen* about gender discrimination and homosexuality. *Tara* shows the bias against the girl child while *Final*
Solutions tries to give the solution of communal riot. Do the Needful and On a Muggy Nights in Mumbai tell the story of gay relations. The problem of ‘Hijra’, a marginalized section of society, is shown in Seven Steps Around the Fire. The will of elder is more important and it is shown in Where There’s a Will. Dance is the profession of women, and men can not perform this, this is what the matter of Dance Like a Man. Dattani raises such type of ‘fringe issues’ in his plays but he does it to enlarge the horizon of the audience towards the problem. To materialize all the dialogues into action he does meticulous job and uses various elements. Although Dattani has not been able to establish himself as Sri Aurbindo, R.N. Tagore and some other early playwrights of India, he has to his credit a number of interesting and thought provoking plays which are very much alive to the burning issues of our present day world. His encouraging and daring spirit in writing specially plays, will certainly bring fruit in future.

**********
References


3. Ibid.


6. Ibid, P-XI.


11. Ibid, P- 2 of 5.

12. Ibid, P- 3 of 5.

14. Ibid.


16. Ibid.


30. Ibid, P-XI.


33. Mahesh Dattani: Collected Plays, op. cit., P-XV.


40. [www.anitanair.net](http://www.anitanair.net) 2001 (Mahesh Dattani – The Invisible Observer – a profile by Anita Nair.)

41. Ibid.


44. Ibid, P-451.

45. Ibid, P-420.

46. Ibid, P-447.


Introduction

Section “B”

Indian Drama in English: A Bird’s Eye View

Drama is a part of “literature that walks and talks before our eyes,” remarks Marjorie Boulton, an eminent critic of drama. Drama Presents fiction or fact in a form that could be acted before an audience or audiences. Although the play contains a plot, characters, dialogue, an atmosphere, and an outlook on life, same as in novel but later is meant to be read in private while play is performed in public. That is why Arthur Compton-Rickett defines drama “as an articulate story presented in action.” It has both the visual and the oral exercises. Martin Stephen observes:

“In some respects reading a play is similar to being an archaeologist who tries to decide what a dinosaur looked like with only the evidence of its bones in front of him. The words of a play are its bare bones, and the crucial thing about it, but they sorely need to be brought to life by actors, scenery and music if the experience is to be realized.”

A novel can be enjoyed without recourse to any external accessory. Its meaning lies in it. The writer narrates and reports the action in detail. But the dramatist imitates the activities by action and speech. A novel is self-contained but a drama is not self-contained. It is ‘a composite art, in which the author, the actor and the stage manager – all combine to produce the total
effect.”⁴ When a poem is composed it becomes perfect and it can be fully enjoyed but when a play is written only the half work of the playwright is done. It can be fully enjoyed only after its staging with the help of so many other things like light, stage-setting, director, actor, producer, rehearsals etc. As B. Prasad writes:

“The dramatist, however, has to work with a number of collaborators, all of whom have to be taken into account: the audience, the actors, the producer, the scene-painter, the dressmaker, the musician, the electrician and many others. He has to consider costs and mechanical and physical limitations…When a novel is written, it is finished, but when a play has been written, the worst difficulties still lie ahead.”⁵

A poem, and an epic or a novel can be read in a private room. But a play can not be enjoyed in private life. No wonder “what makes the difference between the drama and all other kinds of art is that you crowd a mass of people together, not as you would crowd them in a prison, in such a manner that it is humiliating for anybody present to make any protest,”⁶ says G.K. Chesterton. The point of view of the Indian critic on drama like Dr. Biswanath Bhattacharya is:

“Drama is that form of literature which can be staged by actors, which is divided into acts, that are neither too long nor too short; the action of which has to undergo several stages to reach the climax; which must not show anything unpleasant;
which is free from all comments of the author; the plot of which depicts the nobility of a particular type of character leading to realization, by the spectators.”

Generally drama is divided into two parts – tragedy and comedy. In tragedy the theme is dark and serious, in comedy it is light and gay, promising a happy ending. In ancient Greek play tragedy deals the fate of the person of high origin as king, princes and related matters which comedy with the person of lower level. As B. Prasad writes:

“Tragedy… deals with the fate of character of high birth and station, kings, princes, and their households; comedy with people of much less importance. In ancient Greece the tragic actor put on a thick-soled and high-heeled boot… to make him appear tall and majestic; the comic actor wore a light shoe… to show his lower degree.”

But this trend does not live for long period. In later period there are many tragedies of lower life and many comedies of high birth. In this category the novel of Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is more appropriate, which was successfully dramatized and its heroine is a dairymaid. In Shakespearean comedy, the characters of high birth – Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch – occupy an important place. Later on Domestic Tragedy came in use that try to use of character and incidents of an ordinary life as a subject-matter of serious drama. But these plays are not written in verse but in prose.
In the Sanskrit Literature we generally see that a drama has five or seven acts. Similarly in the early plays of English Literature, particularly in the age of Queen Elizabeth a drama has generally five acts. Almost all the plays of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Ben Jonson are based on the division. But in modern time most of the playwrights divide their plays into three acts. The play of George Bernard Shaw is a glaring example. ‘The surviving Sanskrit dramas are numerous and varied, ranging from short one-act playlets to very long plays in ten Acts. The chief dramatists were Asvaghosa, Bhasa, Kalidas, Bhavabhuti and Sudrak.’

All plays moves round a problem or a conflict. In tragedy the problem is serious while in comedy it is light and gay and move towards happy ending. But the structure of the play remains same in both-tragedy and comedy. In long plays the five stages are – “Exposition (to explain the circumstances from which the action is to take its course; Complication (or Rising Action); a Climax (or Crisis); a Denouement (or Falling Action); and a Solution (in a comedy) or Catastrophe – that decide the fate of its character (in tragedy).” In a five-act play, generally, the first act contains ‘Exposition’. The ‘complication’ comes in the next two acts or so. The third act of a play is involved in ‘climax’ while the forth act or the first part of the fifth act shows ‘Denouement’. The rest of the play contains the element of ‘solution’ in comedy or catastrophe in tragedy.

All the above classification and explanation bring a conclusion that drama is a fusion of the arts of music, dancing and poetry. It is not a finished article, printed on a page. It is as incomplete as human being is. About the content Dattani says: “I also know that I have a lot to say and am probably not saying it well enough. But my characters have a lot to say too, and they seem to be doing rather well at having their say.” It requires great effort to
materialize them on the state. Its objective is greater than other branches of art. Mostly the classical dramas are in verse while the prose in play is recent use. But it is very popular in modern age. Sri Aurobindo, one of the most dominating literary doyens writes about dramatic form:

“Dramatic poetry can not live by the mere presentation of life and action and the passions, however truly they may be portrayed or however vigorously and abundantly pushed across the scene. Its object is something greater and its conditions of success much more onerous. It must have, to begin with, as the fount of its creation or in its heart an interpretative vision and in that vision an explicit or implicit seeing idea of life and the human being; and the vital presentation which is its outward instrument, must arise out of that deeper sight harmoniously, whether by a spontaneous creation, as in Shakespeare, or by the compulsion of an intuitive artistic will, as with the Greeks.”"12
The Origin of Drama

“The origins of the drama have always been deeply rooted in the religious instincts of mankind. This is true of the Greek, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian and also of modern Christian drama.”\(^{13}\)

Drama did not come into existence for the entertainment of common people but its origin is deeply rooted in religious instincts of mankind. In England drama started during the reign of the Romans in England. But *Mystery* and *Miracle* brought drama before the common people. The clergy used the medium to present the message of Christ before common people. But with the progress of time and its influence over the common people, it attracted the attention of common people. It “grew finer in course of time, and was observed and sublimated in the works of the great Elizabethans.”\(^{14}\)

The tradition of drama in India is very rich and glorious. Its origin dates back to Christian era. In ancient India Sanskrit was the language of learned men and so the play also started its journey in the language. A.B. Keith, a prominent scholar observes: “Indian tradition, preserved in the ‘Natyashastra’ the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama, claims for the drama divine origin, and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves.”\(^{15}\) A great historian on ancient India, A.L. Basham confirms this: “The origin of the 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 sources point to the enactment at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and mime.”\(^{16}\)

The above facts show that the origin of the drama is not clear, and which is the first play? Obviously, the Sanskrit drama came into existence
out of religious conventions. And this is confirmed by every Indian and foreign scholars. Dr. Amar Nath Prasad also quotes a myth related to the origin of plays in India:

“The great sage, Bharat says that once all gods prayed to Brahma, the creator of the Universe, to produce a thing of great entertainment possessed with the qualities of the visual and the auditory senses, which can be enjoyed alike by all sections of society. Lord Brahma, then took the nectar of all the four Vedas – plot from the Rigveda, music from the Samveda, acting from the Yajurveda, and rasas (human emotions) from the Atharvaveda and thus made drama the fifth Veda.”

The description and discussion about drama and dramatic art can be found in the great Hindu epics – *The Ramayan*, written by great sage Balmiki and *The Mahabharat*, written by Maharshi Veda Vyasa. In the first epic, Valmiki mentions the word ‘nat’ or ‘Narataka’ which means actor or player. In *The Mahabharat* drama is defined as ‘a blending of many things – story, poetry and action. Even Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian who wrote the famous book *Ashtadhyai*, about four hundred years before the Christian era, deals with several relevant details regarding drama.

As Greek and Elizabethan playwrights often borrowed their plots from earlier sources and so did the Indian dramatists. Legends of gods and goddesses and the life of great ancient heroes form the basic dramatic material. The life of historical kings was also the base of the plays. The range of Indian Sanskrit drama varies from short one-act playlets to very
long length plays. “The earliest known dramas to have survived are fragments of plays by Asvaghosa preserved in manuscripts found in the desert sands of Central Asia. The oldest complete plays are probably those attributed to Bhasa, which seem to be earlier than those of Kalidas, though there is no complete unanimity of experts on this point.”18 The important dramatists of Sanskrit were Bhasha, Asvaghosa, Kalidas, Bhavabhuti and Sudrak. Tragedies like Urubhanga, romances like Abhigyanakuntalam and historical plays like Murda Rakshasa, or an imperishable part of our literary heritage. These are great works not only of India but also of the whole world. They are such works about which Keats’ famous line “nor hungry generation treads thee down” may well be applied.

In course of time Sanskrit drama started to decline after Bhavabhuti who is second only to Kalidas in Sanskrit literature. Although it never ceased to exist in the coming years but its quality declined. The works of coming dramatists – Bhatta Narayan, Murari, Rajasekhara and Krisnamisra – grew more and more literary and not suitable for staging. “We have records of the occasional production of Sanskrit plays after the Muslim invasion, but the Sanskrit theatrical tradition, though not forgotten, had by now become a thing of the past.”19 It is also important to note that “Sanskrit drama never offers tragedy unlike many of the Shakespearean plays.”20 It does not mean that human emotions like grief, terror and disgust are not depicted. But Sanskrit drama does not allow a tragic catastrophe to cause a painful impression in the minds of the audiences. Tragic drama does not get success in India. Sri Aurobindo explains the true spirit of Indian Drama:

“An atmosphere of romantic beauty, a high urbanity and a gracious equipoise of the feelings, a perpetual confidence, is the sunshine and the
flowers are the essential spirit of Hindu play, pity and terror are used to awaken the feelings, but not to lacerate them, and the drama must close on the note of joy and peace, the clouds are only admitted to make more beautiful the glad sunlight from which all came and into which all must tell away.”

“In 1852-53, the famous Parsi Theatre was launched in Bombay which influenced the whole country in no time. Postaji Pharmji was the pioneer in establishing the Parsi theatre company in India. Many new theater experiences were brought up on stage during Parsi theater’s evolution in India. On the other hand, the amateur theatre also developed with the works of Bhartendu Harishchandra, acclaimed as the Father of Hindi Drama.”

The real history of Hindi plays is not very old and its existence can be traced from Bhartendu Harishchandra (1850-1885). “And if there were a few plays they lacked originality and most of them were merely the imitation of the Sanskrit drama.” These plays were written not regularly but in different time. Vidyapati wrote Rukamani Marriage and Parijat Marriage in the 15th century. Hirdyaram’s Hanumanatak, Maharaja Yasvant Singh’s Anand Rughunandan and Brajvasi’s Prabodh Chandrody were written in the 17th century.

All the above mentioned works have their individual significance in the field of Hindi Drama; but it got maturity in the works of Bhartendu Harishchandra in 19th century. “Bhartendu wrote plays as reaction to the Parsi theatres and companies of plays. The dramatic output of Harishchandra is substantial in quality, varied in content, universal in appeal and compelling in tone.” He did not follow the traditional path and wrote his
plays in prose style instead of verse. His characters were from society and not great mythological heroes like Ram and Krishna. He had knowledge of Sanskrit, Bangla and English plays. His important plays are *Bharat Durdasha, Nildevi, Andher Nagari, Premyogin, Chandravali, Vaidiki Hinsa- Hinsa Na Bhavati* and *Bishasya Bishmaushadham*. He also translated Sanskrit plays – *Mudra Rakshasha, Dhananjaya Vijay* and *Ratnavali* into Hindi. He translated *Karpur Manjri Vidya Sunder* and *Bharat Janani* from Bangala and *Venice Nagar ka Mahajan* from William Shakespeare’s *The Marchant of Venice*. His deep knowledge of these plays and quality of a good actor made the plays more successful on the stage.

Sri Nivas Das wrote five plays – *Randhir, Prem Mohini, Prahalad Charitra, Sapatsavaran* and *Sanyogita Swambar*. He was the contemporary of Bhartendu. These plays are staged successfully. The plays *Grioved Maid, Padmavati Dharampal* and *Maharana Pratap* were written by Roy Krishna Das. Bal Krishna Bhatta, who carried the bacon of patriotism in the series of Bhartendu, wrote three plays – *Dayamanti Swayambar, Veni Sanhar* and *As the Work So the Result*.

The next playwright in the series in Seth Govinda Das who wrote a number of plays. His plays cover the area of human life, historical and mythological events and political activities. These are remarkable for characterization and stage-performance. His most important plays are – *Harsha, Prakash, Sevapath, Shashigupta* and *Bara Papi Kaun*. He had a deep sense of human life and presents live picture of political and social life through his plays.

Most of the plays in 19th and 20th century were written on the miserable condition of India in Hindi. Upendra Nath Ushak satirized the
social maladies in his plays. “He is a realist and deals with social problems very intelligently and artistically.”

His famous plays are *Jai Parajaya, Paiitre, Kaid and Urake, The Young Son, Swarag Ki Jhalak* and *Dark Lane*. All these plays raise the social problem and are staged successful also. Vrindavan Lal Verma’s *Purva Ki Aor* is a very successful historical play. Other important playwrights are Jagdish Chandra Mathur, Prithavinath Sharma, Ram Kumar Verma, Amirt Lal Nagar, Vishnu Prabhakar, Ram Briksh Benipuri and Mohan Rakesh. All these gave the hindi plays a new height on which the Hindi plays can move forward.

**Indian English Drama**

The East India Company expanded its influence after the later half of the 18th century. As a result they also introduced English as a medium of education in the 19th century. With this Indians got familiar with western civilization, and renaissance in the field of art and literature made their impact. The Portuguese also established their own art-tradition to the west coast. All these influences awakened “the dormant, critical impulse in the country to bring Indians face to face with new forms of life and literature, and to open the way for a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and forms of expression.”

All the fresh efforts were but in the form of translation. Most of these plays came from Sanskrit and English. The plays in English also adopted from vernacular languages. The rise of ‘Hindi’ drama was also due to these circumstances. The artists touched most of the forms of theatre. So the modern drama is a very complex thing and it is the combination of many models and forces. It is a mingling of two rich traditions classical Sanskrit Drama and the culture of Shakespeare.
Indian Drama in English is not a new thing, but a link in the continuation of its rich heritage. During ancient period Sanskrit drama flourished and many dramatists carved a niche for themselves in the field of drama. Due to Muslim invasion Sanskrit drama was lost. During medieval period Hindi drama, in verse, flourished. After Renaissance in India Hindi prose drama came into force. With the impact of western culture and English education, in 19th and 20th century Indian English drama came into existence. But these works were not different in taste and the works of Tagore and Aurobindo give the same flavour of Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti. These writers adopted only medium but spirit was the same – Indian.

The Journey of Indian English drama started with the publication of *The Persecuted* by Krishna Mohan Banerji in 1831. The British Company got the right to collect revenue in Bengal and so they made it the centre of administration work. As a result, English as a medium of education spread here. So the English play began from the period. Banerji’s play did not bring the new wave in the field of Indian English drama but most of the works were the result of translation. The man who brought real break through in the field is Michael Madhusudan Dutt. He himself translated his three Bengali plays into English *Ratnavali* (1857), *Sermistha* (1859) and *Is This Called Civilization* (1871). Although it was a popular genre but in India English drama always lags behind. “Only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya are the writers who have made substantial contribution to Indian English Drama.”

Aurobindo (1872-1950) and Tagore (1861-1941) are the great dramatists of high calibre who cover the stage of Indo-Anglian drama. They are also sage poets. Like Madhusudan Dutt, all the plays of Tagore were
written in Bengali but are available to us in English rendering. He himself, like Dutt, translated most of the works while some by C.F. Andrews, Nishikant Sen and K.C. Sen. “In translating from his original Bengali, Tagore made extensive changes in the text and in a true sense they have been transcreated. In the original the plays have great musical qualities, but these qualities have been lost in their English trancreations.”

His plays can be divided into two classes – symbolic and non-symbolic. The non-symbolic plays include – *Sacrifice* and *The King and the Queen, Karna and Kunti, Kacha and Devayani*. His symbolic plays are *The Post-Office, The Cycle of Spring* and *Red Oleanders*. *Malini* and *The Sanyasi* are considered as a sort of hyphen between his symbolic and non-symbolic drama. Tagore’s non-symbolic plays are very short and they may be called dramatic scenes rather than plays.

In *Kacha and Devayani*, young Kacha visits the earth from paradise with a mission to learn the secret of immortality form the sage who taught the Titans. After completing his mission he returns paradise to teach the knowledge to Gods. Davayani, the sage’s daughter, awakens love in him. But she could not persuade Kacha to live on the earth. At last she curses – “for lack of love may it ever remain as cold stars are to the unespoused darkness of virgin Night.”

*Karna and Kunti* is also a mythological play in which Kunti tries to persuade her son Karna. But he replies a ‘note of utter dejection’: “On the night of my birth you left me naked and unnamed to disgrace; leave me once again without pity to the calm expectation of defeat and death.” So like Devayani, she also could not persuade her son. Life is very important and it should be lived-is the central theme of *The Sanyasi*. It is the simplest of
Tagore’s play. Tagore discusses the same theme in *The Cycle of Spring*. A middle aged king is afraid of the approaching of old age. He is convinced by the poet that “change being the law of life; the secret of happiness is pleasant acceptance.”

*Malini* portrays an unresolved conflict without pointing to any conclusion. Prof. Mahal Anobis states:

> “Malini is torn between two impulses or perhaps an ideal and an impulse, the life preached by Gautama and the other life of love and friendship.”

*Chitra* is also important play of Tagore. It is about the great warrior of Mahabharat war ‘Arjun’ and ‘Chitra’, the princess of Manipur and their love story. The play conveys the message that life is incomplete without the share of man and woman. “It also shows Tagore’s great mastery over music and metaphor. It is a human drama of love from the physical to the spiritual, from transient to permanence, from romance to realism.”

*The King and The Queen* is a tragedy and a complex drama. *Sacrifice* is one the best plays of Tagore. In this an orthodox priest, Raghupati, opposes the plan of the king to stop the practice of sacrifice before goddess Kali. But he realizes his mistake when his own son, Jai Singh immolates himself on the altar. *Red Oleanders* is a symbolic play that present the victory of human value over soul-killing Mammonism. “Nandini, the spirit of pleasure, love and beauty, destroys the tyrannical elements in Yaksha Town, which reduces the citizens to gold-digging servants, though she herself passes away in the process.”

*The Post Office* is Tagore’s classic work. It is about Amal, an innocence and unexperience boy. “The main theme of *The Post Office* seems to be the liberation of the child, Amal, from the bondage of various kinds -
social, psychological, emotional and spiritual.”35 *The King of the Dark Chamber* is a remarkable achievement of Tagore. The unseen king is God and a woman – Sudarshana – wants to reach Him. About the last two plays K.R.S. Iyengar comments:

“In two of Tagore’s drama, the theme is man in relation to God. *The King of the Dark Chamber*… was the first of these attempts to invade the invisible. It was followed by *The Post Office*. These are symbolic plays, no doubt, but even as human stories they produce, on our first contact with them an overpowering effect on us.”36

Although Tagore is a lyric poet his plays are good enough. His plays did not get very success on the stage. It can be said that Tagore’s plays are poetic rather than dramatic and their value lies in poetic passages and songs. In technique and style the plays are metaphoric, alliterative and musical. These are fine example of the appropriate blending of both feeling and form, fact and fantasy. His plays are firmly rooted in the Indian ethos in its themes and characters. A play requires a plot, characters, dialogue, sentiments but in Tagore’s plays many dialogues and sentiments are presented through symbols. About his plays K.R.S. Iyengar holds the view:

“The meaning of the poetic play is no rocky substance. And we know that even a rock is but hard in appearance. Break the rock into atoms and the atoms into the hundred or more sub-atomic particles that are gyrating wildly – and where are we? We have to grope towards a meaning, and
even if we have only a tenuous something to hold on to, the adventure itself will not have been in vain. So, it is with Tagore’s plays.”

“Sri Aurobindo is one of the most dominating, influential and energetic literary doyens of the first half of the 20th century. He has captivated, enthralled and embellished the literary world with his prolific and vibrant writing… Sri Aurbindo has played a pivotal role in the growth and maturity of Indian English Literature.” He wrote five complete blank verse plays besides six incomplete plays. His complete plays are Perseus the Deliverer, Vasavadutta, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassora and Eric. The six incomplete plays are The Witch of Ilni, Achab and Esarhaddon, The Maid and the Mill, The House of Brut, The Brith of Sin and Prince of Edur. His complete plays are in five acts which the length of incomplete plays varies from one scene to three acts. About the complete plays K.R.S. Iyengar writes:

“…all five plays are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti – though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones.”

Most of the plays of Aurobindo were written between 1891 and 1916. His plays has diversity of time, place and theme. They cover the material from ancient Greak to Medieval India and the country of Iran, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. He tries to establish the fact ‘Love is divine’. Another feature of his dramas is that they are not meant to be staged. He uses blank verse flawlessly in his plays. In all his plays he creates a
wonderful human characters by evolving the psychological element which makes them extremely interesting and appealing to mankind. He is an excellent playwright in plot-construction, situation-creation, characterization and language of his dramas.

The next luminous star in this series is Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. His famous play is *Abu Hassan* (1918), a light play in prose and verse. In 1927 his book *Poems and Plays* was published. It contains seven plays in the plays section, “based on the lives of great Indian saints. He is today best known as a playwright of fecundity and versatility. His plays mostly contain a realistic picture of men and manners. They show flare for realism, social consciousness and a harsh and bitter treatment of the matter.” He was inclined toward socialist idea and it can be traced in his play, and *The Window*, a symbolic plays. *The Parrot* deals with the lives of the poor. *The Sentry’s Lantern* is also a symbolic play that gives new hope for the poor. *The Coffine* is a play that satires the bourgeois artist. His another play *Sidharatha: Man of Peace* is related to the great personality of Budha. It is not the only religious play but he wrote plays on many great saints. This kind of play are *Pundalik, Sakku Bai, Meera Bai, Jayadeva, Choka Mela, Eknath, Tukaram, Raidas, Kannappan* etc. About these plays Saryug Yadav writes:

“A minute study of his plays reveals that they hardly contain dramatic qualities which make the plays stage-worthy. So, his plays are mainly remembered for rich romantic verse.”

The vision of life expressed by T.P. Kailasam, another great dramatist, but through the Puranic characters like Bharat, Krishna, Eklavya, Karna,
Draupudi, Kunti etc. So he is close to Harindranath Chattopadhyaya who borrowed his characters from the great Indian saints. It shows that both are very much influenced by Indian myth and tradition. Kailasam’s play *The Burden* is about Bharat’ Ram’s brother. *Fulfillment* is about Eklavya and Guru Drona. In *Karna: The Brahmin’s Curse* he shows the life of Karna. In both the plays the matter of caste discrimination is discussed. Eklavya suffers because he is from low caste while Karna suffers because his guru knows that he belongs to upper caste. Both innocent are cursed by their guru who belongs to upper caste. Amur rightly remarks on the plays of Kailasam:

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

The next great name is A.S.P. Ayyar who wrote six plays. His important plays are *In the Clutch of the Devil* (1926) and *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity*. His “plot and characterization are subordinated to the message and he uses the drama as a mode of apprehension of reality pertaining to contemporary life.” P.A. Krishnaswamy is a name in this field whose fame rests on his only play *The Flute of Krishna*, a religious play.

The first important woman playwright in Indian English drama is Bharati Sarabhai who wrote during dependent India. Her remarkable works are *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women*. As it is well-known that Gandhian philosophy dominates on Indian Literature during the period and same thing can be traced in his play *The Well of the People*. A widow
Brahmin, unable to go to Benaras, decides to give her money for digging well for the untouchable. Prema Nandakumar writes:

“The Well of the People is not, of course, a drama in the conventional sense. There are no formal changes of scene, and the stage witnesses continuous action.”44

Bharati’s another play Two Women deals the story of two women-Anuradha, the wife of Kanaka Raya and a devotional singer, Urbashi. It is a beautiful play and its charm lies in the fact is that the play does not remain the story of two women but of all. As K.R.S. Iyengar comments:

“It reaches some sort of conclusion, we are left with the impression that the real conclusion is yet to come – not in the life of Anuradha and Urbashi alone, but in our own lives, in Bharat’s life, as well.”45

The last important name in Indian English drama before Independence is J.M. Lobo. Although he has written a number of plays but his plays Mother of New India: A Play of the Indian Village in Three Acts (1944) and Death Abdicates (1945) are more remarkable. In 1956 his collection of plays Collected Plays was published. In his plays dialogue and situation are remarkable but characterizations are not up to the mark.

There were also some other playwrights who made substantial contribution in the field before Independence but they are great names in English literature. The most important names in this genre were Sudhindra

After Independence Poetry and fiction flourished but any sea-change did not take place in drama. All efforts were made in direction but the result was not very fruitful. The introduction of film in the form of alternative gave a big jolt. But there were also other reason. Drama is “essentially a composite art involving the playwright, the actors and the audience in a shared experience on the stage – has its own problems of which the other literary forms are free.”46 But free India established her relationship with various countries and it increased mutual relationship and so Indian English literature got benefit in general and drama in particular. A large number of playwrights wrote plays and those were performed in India and abroad. But it never got the popularity like novel and poetry. Indian English drama never became the common people’s choice – first due to the second language’ and second, due to ‘monopoly of regional drama.’

Manjeri Isvaram’s *Yama and Yami* (1948), G.V. Desani’s *Hali*, Lakhan Deb’s *Tiger-Claw* (1967) are some of the important plays. But these plays did not leave permanent impression. Other important playwrights who wrote significant plays after independence are M. Krishnamurti (*The Cloth of Gold* – 1951), S.D. Rawoot’ (*Immortal Song, Karn and The Killers*), Satya Dev Jaggi (*The Point of Light*), Pritish Nandy (*Rites for a Plebeian Statue*), Hushmat Sozerokashme (*Vikramjeet*), Sree Devi Singh (*The Purple Braided People*), P.S. Vasudev (*The Sunflower*) and S. Raman (*Karna*). All the above mentioned plays are verse plays. These writers are very few in number but were most prolific writers.
In comparison to verse plays the prose plays were written in large number. The most important name in the field after Independence is Asif Currimbhoy who is very remarkable for his situation and atmosphere. His important plays are The Doldrummers, The Dumb Dancer, The Tourist Mecca, The Clock, The Captives, Om, Monsoon, An Experiment with Truth, Goa and The Dissident MLA. K.R.S. Iyengar appreciates Currimbhoy in his own terms:

“Farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy, history, fantasy; Currimbhoy handles them all with commendable ease.”

After Currimbhoy, the next important name is Pratap Sharma who wrote two plays – A Touch of Brightness (1968) and The Professor Has a Warcry (1970). They are very important plays. He is a dramatist of international reputation and his plays are staged in many countries. In his plays the situation is very sensitive and dialogue is more effective. Nissim Ezekiel is the next name and his plays- Nalini: A Comedy, Marriage Poem: A Tragi – Comedy and The Sleepwalkers: An Indo – American Farce are considered as good edition in the field of Indo-Anglian play. These plays are important for their appropriate use of ironical fantasy. Gurucharan Das wrote a historical play, Larins Sahib (1970), that deals with Henry Lawrence of the Punjab. His next play is Mira. He is a promising playwright and has also proved his talent in abroad.

Mohan Rakesh wrote in Hindi but his play Adhe-Adhure translated into English as Half Way House. The play describes the very sad and gloomy picture of family life. All the characters of the play are misplaced, nobody is in order. Savitri is not happy with her husband, Mahendra, her son
Ashoke and her two daughters Kinni and Binni. His other plays that demand our attention are One Day in Ashadha, The Great Swans of the Waves. He is a marxist writer and always thinks to bring something new in Hindi drama. He tries to bring innovation in theme and technique. About him Nirad Chaudhuri observes:

“With Mohan Rakesh, Hindi drama makes a departure from pseudo-modernism and traditional symbolism to the drama of ‘non – communication’ – the modern man’s failure to understand himself or to understand the other person and their mutual failure to understand each other which is the real tragedy of modern life.”

The most imminent playwright in the series is Girish Karnard, a living legend in the field of Indian English Drama. He is originally a Kannad writer and got Jyanpith Award. His wonderful creations are Naga- Mandala, Yayati, Hayavadana, The Fire and the Rain, Tale- Danda and Tughlaq. The first four plays are myth – play while the later two are historical play. He employed history to present the pathetic and corroded state of Indian politics and creates myth-structure to synchronize the past and the present, to mingle the appearance and reality.

Karnad uses caste-myth in The Fire and the Rain in which myths created for ensuring the supremacy of Brahmins in general become obstructions in their own path and pursuit of happiness. The myth of Agni – Pariksha is used in Naga – Mandala. In this he explores Indian themes and experiments with Indian mythological heritage. In Hayavadana, Karnad uses several myths. He does so because he feels that Indian drama should be
rooted in the Indian soil. In both *Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala*, there are references of shape – shifting.

*Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda* are historical plays. He employs history to comment on the pathetic and corroded Indian state of modern day politics, and through which he engages in an intellectual debate of our times. *Tale-Danda* literary means death of beheading, offering one’s head. It is a social play with intelligent use of the spoken word. Indian society is held together by an oppressive hierarchy and at the heart of the problems is the Varna-system which has led to irrevocable handicaps.

*Tughlaq* is a historical play based on the story of the idealist king Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq whose reign in India is known for several things, particularly for idiosyncratic behaviour of the king. The play presents a psycho-analytical treatment of the political activities of the protagonist, his hypocrisy, vision, motives and his continuous struggle to change his vision of life into reality. No ruler in medieval history has aroused so much interest and controversy as that of Muhammad – bin – Tughlaq. He ruled over a vast kingdom from North India to South India. But his achievements were shown in negative terms. When he died the Sultanate of Delhi was reduced in size. The southern parts were lost and Sindh slipped away. Modern historians say that Muhammad was not responsible for his failure as a ruler, he failed because circumstances were not in his favour and he lacked practical knowledge and common sense. Like Shakesperean tragedy he meets his downfall due to his own characteristic flaw. Girish Karnad himself writes:

“My subject was the life of Muhammad Tughlaq, a 14\(^{th}\) century sultan of Delhi, certainly the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of
Delhi and also one of the biggest failures. After a reign distinguished for policies that today seem far-sighted to the point of genius, but which in their day earned him the title “Muhammad the Mad”, the Sultan ended his career in bloodshed and political chaos. In a sense, the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence and the coming to terms with cynicism and realpolitik.”

Thus all the plays of Karnad have a mythical and historical background. The beauty of his plays lies in the fact that he treats history and myth in respect of the contemporary social, historical and political situation. His mythical treatment can be compared by the myths of T.S. Eliot in his poems and plays.

Badal Circar is a writer of new theatrical movement in India. While Rakesh uses historical characters to portray the social and moral issues of society, Circar uses contemporary situations to present the reality of modern life. He has created a ‘Third Theatre’, a theatre which is supported and created by the people. It shows “a composite of a four ways flow of influences-actor to actor, audience to actor, actor to audience and audience to audience.”

Sircar’s best known plays are Procession, Bhoma, Stale News. These are based on the concept of ‘Third Theatre’, Procession deals with the theme of a real way of living in this world of various sorts of deviations and
corruptions. *Bhoma* is based on the miserable plight of an average Indian peasant who is generally seen socially and economically exploited. *State News* is equally very beautiful in both matter and manner.

Manjula Padmanabhan is a great voice in the recent Indian English drama. Her pioneer work is *Harvest* that got international acclaim in the literary world. It deals with a miserable family dwelling in a single room in a chawl of Mumbai. It shows the problem faces by due to population explosion and dehumanization of the city people. Om Prakash, a young man of twenty, driven by hunger and unemployment, makes up his mind to become an organ donor and ultimately mortgages his body to a White First World buyer.

Vijay Tendulkar, a great Marathi Playwright who started his career as a freelancer and from 1977 to 1981 was the chairman of Sangeent Natak Academy. He has written a number of Marathi plays that are, later on translated into English. His well-known plays are *Silence! The Court is in Session, Ghasiram Kotwal, The Vultures, Sukharam Binder, Safar, Kamala, Encounter in Umbagland*. His play *Ghasiram Kotwal* made him a writer of international fame in the mid seventies. The beauty of his plays, “lies in his art of dramaturgy, his connotative and metaphoric structure suffused with the colour of some suggestive images and symbols, words and phrases, his extraordinary portrayal of some bitter, and harsh truth of life through music and metaphor.”

*Silence! The Court is in Session* is a satire on middle class society. The playwright exposes “their characters, dialogues, gestures and even mannerisms reflect their petty, circumscribed existences fraught with frustrations and repressed desires that find expression in their malicious and
spiteful attitudes towards their fellow being.\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Encounter in Umbugland} is a political allegory which presents a true picture of the late sixtees and early seventies of India. It deals with the various evils of politics e.g.; intrigues and scandals, corruption and lust of both men and women. \textit{The Vultures} portrays a very realistic description of sex and violence, avarice and selfishness. The central theme of the play is money and this money makes some of the characters-vultures. In it the playwright dramatized the proverb “As you sow so shall you reap.” \textit{Sukharam Binder} is the most controversial play of Tendulkal. The theme of the play revolves around Sukharam, a book binder who has a hunger for woman. To fulfill the hunger he gives shelter to helpless women and exploites them. So like \textit{Gidhade} he has lust but it is the lust of body.

Tendulkar’s play \textit{Ghashiram Kotwal} is a landmark in the history of Indian drama in English. It is a revenge tragedy that deals with power politics, ambition and sexual hunger. It is the story of the power politics between Nana Phadnavis and Ghasiram Kotwal the former is hungry for sex and the later, for power. Ghashiram, a poor brahmin from Kannauj, becomes the Kotwal of Poona and takes revenge of his insult which he got in the beginning. \textit{Kamala} is another play of Tendulkar and it is based on a true incident. The central character, Jaisingh Jadhav, a selfish man, purchased women from the flesh market and treated them as an object. Kamala is also bought by him and leads the life of slavery. He sells ‘the woman’ before press and their amusement and at last discards her to wash off his hands for his safety. Thus Jadhav represents the male – domination over female and a bourgeoisie mentality in society that treats woman as an object.

So Tendulkar’s plays make the anatomy of society in a very realistic way. For this he uses some hard and concrete images and symbols. The
beauty of the plays “lies in his art of well-knit plot and characterization, his exposure of the sham and hypocrisy of the evil world, his apt use of irony and humour and above all the portrayal of the past in the context of the present.”

In this connection the most promising young writer is Mahesh Dattani who writes only in English. Most of his plays are staged not only in India but also in foreign countries. He is commissioned by BBC to write radio play. His well known plays are *Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Dance Like a Man, Final Solutions, Do the Needful, Where There is a Will* etc. He is given the *Sahitya Akademi Award* for his contribution for English drama. He puts drama on a very high pedestal and he accepts in an interview with Sachidananda Mohanty:

“Well, I think this is a wrong perception prevailing among the academies, especially the view that writing for the stage is inferior to writing a novel or writing poetry. I think it is important to keep in mind that the playwright is actually a craftsman. He is a ‘wright’ and not ‘write’.”

Dattani does not write on conventional subject like Padmanabhan. He exposes the mean, ugly and unhappy things of human life. He always raises ‘fringe issue’ in his plays. *Final Solutions* deals with communalism, religious fanaticism and the Hindu-Muslim riot mostly engendered by the self-centred politician. Such issues prevail not only in India but also in world in different shape. *Tara* deals with a siamese twins who are separated and the girl child does not get her share and the second god, a doctor, under the influence of money, does a heinous crime. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire* he deals the problem of a marginalized section of society, eunuch, who are
expected to present on the occasion of marriage and birth but society does not allow them to marry. _Do the Needful_ and _On a Muggy Night in Mumbai_ deal with the issue of gay relationship. _Where There’s a Will_ is about patriarchy domination in society where ‘will’ prevails and younger generation is expected to follow dictation. _Dance Like a Man_ is an interesting play that shows a man should not dance because it is the profession of woman. _Thirty Days in September_ is about child abuse.

So Dattani, a young and promising playwright, always writes on the issues that society thinks meaningless although it exists in our society. Through his plays he exposes the evils of society. Like Shaw he raises social problem but he never gives his opinion or solution of the problem. He always compels the audience to think over the issue. He excels in mirroring his society. He has a lot of issue – homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism and the child abuse etc – in his plays. His plays are stage-oriented and the true manifestoes of realism. Alyque Padamsee say: “At last we have a playwright who gives sixty million English-speaking Indians an identity.”

Basavaraj Naikar is a blooming playwright in Indian writing in English. His play _Sangya – Balya : Betrayal_ (2004) is a folk play in which dance happens to be an indispensable component. It is a folk drama which “deals with the elemental passion of love and betrayal as they interweave with the destinies of ordinary mortals.” The action of the play is set in North Karnataka as it is very popular there. The central thematic concerns of the play are love, immoral sex, poverty, betrayal and revenge. Though the playwright has taken the theme of the play from a real event which took place during his life-time he has made it a memorable one by providing “an artistic image of his vision about human relationship and values.”

66
author’s fine blending of fact and fiction is quite remarkable in the play. *Sangya – Balya: Betrayal* is a folk tragedy. The tragedy in the play occurs due to the serious violation of long–cherished social and moral norms relating to chastity, trustworthiness and loyalty. Like a typical Elizabethan tragedy this folk drama depicts common human weakness and the play excellently shows how these vulnerable tendencies such as love, lust and revenge finally end in a cruel tragedy and the loss of precious lives. The protagonist of this play Sangya is murdered ruthlessly and the lives of Ganga and Virabhadra get ruined irretrievably. The point of ruination starts when Sangappa (fondly called Sangya), a handsome and rich young man, is enthralled by the bewitching beauty of Ganga, the young wife of a rich landlord cum businessman name Virabhadra (fondly called Iranna or Irya). Knowing that her husband is on a long business tour Sangya persuades his friend, Balya, a poor man in the same village “to brainwash Ganga so that he can have her in his bed”. (*Sangya – Balya: Betrayal, 53*).

It is interesting to note here that with his incisive and thought-provoking dialogues in English Naikar is able to communicate the central vision of the play. His effective use of the spoken language of the folk people and images show his proficiency in dramatizing a situation suitably. He does not introduce rhetoric juggleries and grandiosity. His words and images are natural, genuine and without any artificiality. He seems to write the play with ease and confidence, he paints pictures quite vividly and effectively. His perception of thought and the scope of imagination are reflected in his style. His felicity of expression reflects his mature style which shows his mastery over the English language. Naikar’s ability to create convincing dramatic dialogues in English shows the genuine dramatic capability and the theatrical craftsmanship of the translator. As a writer who understands the fundamental tenets of translation as a branch of literature he
does not fail to provide a detailed glossary to enable the English speaking readers to understand the meaning of certain technical terms found in the Kannada language and used by the people of the North Karnataka region. As a writer with true insight into language skills and translation techniques Naikar makes the play a real tour-de-force. Obviously one reads or watches the play not only for the poetic beauty and excellence but also for the moral truth and the practical guidance to be practised in one’s day-to-day life. Unlike the classical and the ‘Closet’ drama of certain other writers Naikar’s *Sangya-Balya: Betrayal*, a folk play in translation with its eternally appealing themes and powerful dramatic dialogues, melodious music and enrapuring dance can be effectively staged. No doubt, the play with its universal themes dealing with the universality of life becomes relevant to all times and all countries. On the whole, Basavaraj Naikar’s *Sangya – Balya: Betrayal* is certainly a welcome addition to the corpus Indian Drama in English Translation.

Thus this critical evaluation of Indian drama in English clearly shows that in comparison with novel and poetry Indian English drama is still in its nursery stage. Today we see that a large number of writers have expressed their ideas in the form of novel as well as poetry. But very few writers show their works in the field of drama. The contemporary Indian English dramatists like G.V. Desani, Assif Currimbhoy, Lakhan Deb, Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurucharn Das, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Circar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnard, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan and Basavaraj Naikar etc have presented a very truthful vision of Indian myths and legends, its various ills and maladies and above all its spiritual quest of truth. Mahesh Dattani has touched upon some various topics which inflict the society the world over. He has raised such issues which are not confined to only our land but it has assumed a universal character. The other
contemporary writers have made some bold innovations and positive responses in both theme and style.

************
References


18 Yadav, Saryug: *New Perspectives on Sri Aurobindo’s Plays*, op. cit., P-55.

19 Basham, A. L.: *The Wonder That was India*, op. cit., P-444.


24 Ibid, P-53.


26 Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa: *Drama in Modern India*, P-4.

27 Yadav, S: *New Perspectives on Sri Aurobindo’s Plays*, op. cit., P-59.

28 Ibid, P-61.


30 Ibid, P-39

31 Yadav, S: *New Perspectives on Sri Aurobindo’s Plays*, op. cit., P-61.


34 Yadav, S: *New Perspectives On Sri Aurobindo’s Plays*, op. cit., P-62.


38 Yadav, S: *New Perspectives on Sri Aurobindo’s Plays*, op. cit., P-11.


52 *Silence! The Court is in Session*, translated by Priya Adarkar, *Five Plays*, Oxford University Press, 1974, P-VIII.


54 Mohanty, Sachidanand: “Theatre: Reaching Out to People”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 14, 1999, P-V.


57 Naikar, Basavaraj: *Sangya - Balaya : Betrayal*, New Delhi, Minerva, 2004, P-X.

**********