Drama has been the most familiar form for mankind since time immemorial. The origin of drama is rooted in the religious rituals and this is true of India, Greece, China or any other region. Drama originated as a source of worship to the gods and entertainment for human beings. Indian drama also originated with the same aim. Brahman, the Creator, took certain aspects from the four Vedas and created the Natyaveda. This Veda was aimed to instruct as well as entertain mankind at the same time. Following this, Sanskrit dramatists have created plays that have become immortal literary pieces throughout the world. There have also been folk forms in the regions of India that influence drama, especially the performance-oriented ones. Thus, Indian drama has its history, basically, in the Sanskrit tradition and the folk forms. Developing from those forms, Indian drama has come a long way in the modern times.

Drama in India did vanish for sometime during the Mughal rule and the period following that. But eventually with playwrights such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sumitranandan Pant, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Kanaiyalal Munshi, Chandravadan Mehta, Asif Currimbhoy, Nissim Ezekiel, K. M. P. Pillai, Gurucharan Das, Kali Charan Patnaik, Gieve Patel etc. drama flourished again. With the advent of the post-independence era, dramatists like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, G. P. Deshpande, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Habib Tanvir, Ratan Thiyam etc. have been writing about issues that began with independence. They took to writing about the human psyche and angst against the backdrop of an emerging post-modern India, which was a confluence of the East-West encounters. Though society was changing in traditions, certain norms such as gender-bias, authority of institutions/community, politics, discrimination of castes and religion did not change much. Post-modern drama soon witnessed the flourishing of plays by playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabham who are concerned with the struggle of modern, urban human beings in a rapidly changing society and culture. They depict the conflict of a human being who is divided not just against society, tradition or nation but even his/her own self.
The earlier playwrights wrote in their mother tongues and so had to be translated into a more commonly used language like Hindi or English in order to have a wider readership/audience. Due to translations it has been possible for these plays to be performed and appreciated abroad too. However, the post-modern playwrights have chosen to write directly in English, making it their first language. Hence, there is no question of translation regarding their plays.

An attempt is made in this thesis to trace the history of Indian English drama in the introductory chapter. The second, third and the fourth chapters are an attempt to study the themes, characters and the dramatic techniques in the selected plays (available in translation) of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani with reference to contemporary times. The fifth chapter draws a conclusion by comparing and contrasting the themes, characters, techniques, language and reviews of the performances of their plays. All the three playwrights have been writing in different decades with different backgrounds and style. Yet their plays strike a chord of similarity when we analyse them in detail; whatever the individual language or style, their concerns for the struggling and suffering human beings remains the same. These plays are a source of creating an awareness about contemporary times.