CHAPTER 1
INDIAN DRAMA: The Contemporary and History

... evoking... the living experience of a play... [as]... a river of feeling within us.

— Eric Bentley

In the twentieth century, Indian Writing in English has developed well and been appreciated widely. There has been an ample of output in all kinds of literary genres. Earlier, amongst all the genres, drama had lagged behind in the literary output, but at present it has not remained restricted to performances on the stage but has also gained a wide readership because of the works of the new emerging playwrights and through the translations of the already existing regional plays. In this connection R. K. Dhawan observes: “Very recently Indian English drama shot into prominence. Younger writers... have infused new life into this branch of writing” (19). There have been experiments in techniques, forms and styles of playwriting. The themes in these plays do not only depict the middle class and the lower class strata of society, but also expose the problems and frustrations faced by the higher class. Playwrights have been experimenting with forms also, like intermingling the traditional and the modern, the classical and the contemporary modes etc. But whatever the experiments, drama is not a new form for Indian readers or audience.

The tradition of dramatic activity in India is very ancient and dates back to the Vedic period when Bharata, in his Natyashastra, described drama as: “Natako Panchamo Veda”, meaning ‘drama is the fifth Veda’. Bharata explains that Brahma, the Creator of the Universe, in order to instruct the life of ethics and to provide some entertainment to the gods and the humans created the art of Drama. He took the text from the Rigveda, the art of performance from the Yajurveda, the song from the Samaveda and rasa (aesthetic experience) from the Atharvaveda. In this way, He created a fifth Veda called the Natyaveda. This Natya or drama has always been (in some or the other form) an imitation of real life. Bharat’s explanation regarding ‘what’ is imitated is: “Trilokyasyasy Sarvya Natyam Bhavanukirtanam”, meaning, “(but) in this drama there is ‘imitation’ of the Three Worlds” – the imitation being that of the actual life, the joys and sorrows experienced by human beings. Hence, the function of drama is to provide instruction, entertainment, enlightenment, happiness,
peace and moral upliftment to people. In this context one is reminded of Martin Esslin’s analysis of drama:

The ‘scene’, the ‘play’, the whole gamut of staged events that fall under the description of ‘drama’ can, indeed, not only help us to pass the time agreeably but provide us with strong emotional experiences, ‘strike us to our soul’ and produce powerful effects upon our lives, our thinking, our behaviour.

(22)

Though Esslin belongs to the twentieth century, his observation is similar to that of Bharata regarding the function of drama, thus proving that drama all over the world and at all times, basically, has the same purpose.

Similarly, human beings, too, everywhere in the world and in all times have always been interested in mime and plays. India is not the only country where theatre activity has been going on for centuries. In the West it was Greek drama that had become an important part of the theatre-world. Fifth century B.C. saw a notable development in ancient Greek drama. Its source can be linked to the history of religious rituals like the worship of Dionysus, the god of a divine and mystic passion. Gradually the dialogues began to dominate Greek drama as more characters spoke and enacted episodes from traditional stories. Thus, Greek tragedy and comedy became an integral part of mankind and literature. Ancient Indian drama, however, became a reflection of actual life, which was seen from the language it employed. Most of the Sanskrit dramatists followed the rules of the Natyashastra, and the earliest specimens of ancient drama can be found in some of the Buddhist plays ascribed to Asvaghosh in the first – second century A.D. Before Kalidasa, there were other dramatists like Bhasa and Shudraka, the author of Mrichchhakatika or the ‘Little Clay-Cart’ depicting the Indian society of the time. Kalidasa wrote around four hundred A.D. His plays such as Abhijnansakuntalam, Kumarsambhavam and Raghuvansham have been admired all over the world by lovers of literature.

Greek tragedy and comedy are quite different in spirit from Sanskrit drama. They present a different world altogether, and hence early Sanskrit drama can be said to be moderately free from the influence of Greek drama. But as the Indians from the fourth century B.C. might have had an opportunity to see Greek performances by Greek settlers in India, we cannot deny a slight influence (of some kind) of Greek drama on Indian drama, as pointed out by Suniti Kumar Chatterji:
It was assumed by some scholars that since the ancient Greeks and the ancient Indians came into such intimate contact with each other from 4th century B.C. onwards, and particularly after the invasion of India and the conquest of part of the country by Alexander the Great, it was but natural to expect that Greek drama should influence Indian drama. (7)

But in their own dramatic expression and style, Sanskrit dramatists were not affected by the Greeks. Gradually Sanskrit drama became a literary pastime for learned scholars, and later remained essentially a court art. With the advent of the Mughal rule, the way of Indian life and culture were modified. However, after twelve hundred A.D. scholars, all over India, continued the tradition of dramatic activity in other languages. Nevertheless, they were mainly translations or adaptations in regional languages of the great religious classics of ancient India. These plays were written in various Aryan languages such as Kosali, Maithili and Awadhi. It was the popularity of Indar Sabha, a song play written around 1853 during the reign of King Wazid Ali Shah, which was responsible for the growth of drama in Hindi during the later times.

Drama in any Indian language has always made liberal use of music and dance. From the time of its inception, these two have been an integral part of Indian drama; Bengal’s Jatra, Gujarat’s Bhavai, Lavani from Maharashtra, or Kathakali from Kerala are a few examples of dance-drama. These are not pure forms of drama as they lay emphasis on dance and music rather than drama. The masques and the intricate face paintings in the style of grotesque masks found in Kathakali are similar to the Japanese Kabuki and Noh plays and the Chinese opera. There is no direct association between the Indian art of drama and that of these other Oriental (drama) forms except for the use of masks. The Indonesian (Javanese) dance-drama can be said to be on the same lines as the Indian, in the sense that the former also takes episodes from the ancient classics like Ramayana and Mahabharata for drama.

Just as India, the West was also flourishing in its dramatic output. Plays of Jacobean dramatists like Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson and Thomas Kyd, and the Elizabethan plays of William Shakespeare were taking shape for literary history. After a brief disappearance during Oliver Cromwell’s rule, drama was revived as ‘Comedy of Manners’ and ‘Heroic Tragedy’ in the Restoration Age. In the eighteenth century, drama went through a minor change in the form of ‘Sentimental Comedy’ and passed the nineteenth century without any major change or output. But the
coming of the twentieth century saw significant playwrights like George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen on the literary scenario, and with them the whole idea of realism in drama and the problem-plays came into existence. T.S. Eliot’s and W.B. Yeats’s poetic plays were also noteworthy contributions in this period of playwriting. In the first half of the twentieth century, there was a rapid change all over Europe. The after-effect of the two World Wars was shocking for people, the rate of urbanization was high, scientific inventions led to enquiries into reasoning of every issue and unemployment was taking over industrialization. People seemed to be alienated from their own selves and at a loss within society. Such situations gave rise to playwrights like John Osborne and Arnold Wesker whose plays came to be known as ‘kitchen-sink drama’. Playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionesco and others, whose dramatic activity came to be known as the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’, were writing plays that depicted the meaninglessness and absurdity in human life, which made human beings helpless.

All these phases affected Indian playwriting activity in some degree (as discussed further) and shades of each can be seen in the plays of those times. But with the increase in the literary activity in India, playwrights here developed a style of their own, which explored the issues of India, its culture and psyche. Modern drama in India is a combined art, resulting from various literary influences. India is a conglomeration of different languages, cultures and religions. These influenced Indian literature and style of writing in various ways. Every region produced a literature in its own regional language. But with the influence of the British, and with the increase in readership of such literature even outside one’s region, its translation into a common language, mainly in English, became necessary. Thus emerged the genre of Indian Writing in English, which is a creation of the East-West encounter in the age of colonization, when a vibrant and dynamic Britain came in contact with a stagnant India. This ‘Indo-English’ literature can be defined as literature written by authors who are Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. Initially, the Sanskrit literary canons of Bhasa and Kalidasa had a strong influence on the thought-process of these writers. At the same time, folk traditions also had a profound influence on an individual. Hence, any writer (from a particular culture) in India was seen working at three different levels – the classical Sanskrit, the folk tradition and the English tradition; drama, being an interactive medium, was a crucial part of this process. This process can be summed up in Dr. Saryug Yadav’s words:
Indian drama in English... emerges against the backdrop of a rich heritage of classical Sanskrit drama and about two centuries' culture of Shakespeare, for a people who have always been interested in the dramatics of a Ramleela, a Nautanki or a Yatra even in the mild half light of a taper in villages miles away from the city and the electricity, from amenity and modernity. (2)

Indian English drama dates back to somewhere around 1831 when Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote *The Prosecuted*, illustrative of the state of Hindu society in Kolkata of those times, and Michael Madhusudan Dutt translated three of his Bengali plays into English. The early Indo-English drama consisted of poetic plays, primarily written in verse. The main exponents of this kind of drama were Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. Sri Aurobindo’s plays such as *Rodgune, Perseus, the Deliverer, Eric, The Viziers of Bassora* and *Vasavdutta* are poetic plays in blank verse. The influence of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, both in verse and drama, are clearly visible in his plays. Love as a benevolent force in life and the idea of human evolution are two major themes found in Aurobindo’s plays. Tagore wrote his plays at the time when the impact of the West had led to disintegration of the old values. His plays such as *Chitra, The Post-Office, The King of the Dark Chamber, Chandalika, Muktaadhara, Karna and Kunti, Natir-Puja* etc. give a new significance and symbolism to Indian drama in English. His plays are an exploration of man-woman relationship, the question about the idea of freedom and the psychological elements and an insight into the feminine mind. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya wrote a few poetic plays, a few prose plays and a few comprising of both prose and verse. *The Proclamation* is a poetic play, while *Abu Hassan* and *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* are plays in prose and verse. *The Window, The Parrot, The Coffin, The Evening Lamp* and *The Sentry’s Lantern* are his five prose plays. Various historical and social themes have been dealt with in his plays.

In later years, though drama lagged behind compared to other forms of Indo-English literature, there were plays written by a few playwrights of the age. They are mostly prose plays pioneered by A.S.P. Ayyar. His plays like *The Slave of Ideas, In the Clutch of the Devil, The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity, Sita's Choice* etc. portray modern Indian life caught between tradition and transition when old ideas are being slowly displaced by new ones. He makes his characters discuss
problems regarding life in India, enforced widowhood, vegetarianism, total abstention from alcohol, orthodoxy and modernity. T.P. Kailasam, another playwright of the time, is known for his play *The Brahman's Curse*. Kailasam chooses his subjects from the ancient epics, but does not merely copy them. He develops the characters in his own way, challenging the original myth. Bharati Sarabhai's plays clearly depict the influence of the Gandhian ideology, which can be seen in her two plays *The Well of the People* and *Two Women*. These plays deal with the subject of harijans and the social setting of those times. Other playwrights like J.M. Lobo-Prabhu, S. N. Ghose, Fyzee Rahamin etc. also wrote plays dealing with social issues of that time.

After independence, drama did benefit due to the growing interest in Indo-English literature abroad. Though not as popular as English fiction in India, drama has surely now got a strong foothold in the literary scene of India. A number of plays by playwrights like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, G.V. Desani, Gurucharan Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Gieve Patel etc. have been widely read and performed (even outside India). G.V. Desani has been very well praised for the poetic quality of his play *Hali*, which is a complex work. It is an allegorical play, a presentation of everyman's quest for fulfilment. Asif Currimbhoy's plays have amazing variety and range of subject matter. *The Tourist Mecca, The Hungry Ones* and *Darjeeling Tea* have the East-West encounters as the chief theme. *The Restaurant, The Captives, Goa, Monsoon, An Experiment with Truth, Inquilab, The Refugee, Sonar Bangla, Om Mane Padme Hum, Angkor, The Dissident M.L.A.* deal with themes of Partition and its aftermath, history, politics, social and economic problems. *The Clock, The Dumb Dancer* and *The Doldrummers* deal with the psychological conflicts and the frustrations of human life. Religion, philosophy and art are also some of the themes that Currimbhoy deals with in his plays. Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness* presents a picture of the red light area in Mumbai, while *The Professor has a Warcry* is the story of a young man who discovers that he is an illegitimate child. Both these plays are examples of good craftsmanship and effective dialogue. Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays* include *Nalini: A Comedy* where the contrast between the real and the illusory exposes the philistinism of the two business executives, *Marriage Poem: A Tragi-Comedy* presents a middle class husband caught between marital duty and love, and *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce*, which is an attack on national prejudices. Ezekiel uses ironical fantasy in all the three plays. Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib* is a historical play that
deals with Henry Lawrence of Punjab, and brings to life nineteenth century colonial India; *Mira* is a play about Mirabai, the sixteenth century Rajput poetess-saint and her transformation into sainthood and *9 Jakhoo Hill* is the story of a once-wealthy family that keeps on brooding over better days. This play also deals with social, political and psychological issues. Gieve Patel exposes the life of Parsis in Gujarat, which is a realistic portrayal. His use of Parsi themes, ‘Indianized’ English and an honest, unassuming attitude in plays like *Princes* and *Mr. Behram* have won him critical acclaim. Patel has given a typical Parsi touch to the English language in his plays, which makes them special.

Till the nineties, people were not very comfortable with English as a regular, conversational language in India. But this problem has been resolved gradually, and now English is becoming an intrinsic and integral part of people’s everyday lives. English drama in India has acquired a pan-Indian stature. Along with the rise of fiction, the late twentieth century also saw the establishment of English drama in India with playwrights like Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabham, Poile Sengupta etc. who write about the newly emerging, modern, educated class, their problems in the social sphere and the struggle to establish their identity. Padmanabham is widely acclaimed for her play *Harvest*, an intensely gripping play that deals with a miserable family dwelling in a single room of a *chawl* in Mumbai. The play focuses on the issue of increasing population — a reason for the rise in poverty and dehumanisation among the urban people. She depicts a mean and gloomy world where mothers sell their children to buy their staple food of rice or young men, driven by hunger and unemployment, become organ donors to a White First-World buyer. With Westernisation and the acceptance of English as an international language, playwrights from India, too, are being widely accepted all over the world.

The themes of the plays of the modern and the post-modern playwrights are usually based on inspiration from real-life situations around them or from their real-life experiences. A quick glance at the socio-politico-religious upheavals and currents helps in a better understanding of this. Since 1948, when India stepped into its post-independence period and freedom was no longer a mere dream, the modernists and the post-modernists have been highly influenced by the social, cultural and political changes taking place in the country. It saw a new form of government known as liberal democracy inherited from its colonial past. And from Jawaharlal Nehru to Dr. Manmohan Singh, it has been going through lots of political changes. There has
always been an inadequacy of liberal ideology in its multicultural society and this inadequacy does not remain limited to its political order, but also creeps into the social order. The early liberals had not spoken of the separation of religion from politics, and now the country suffers from it. Minorities are differentiated on the basis of religion and the reservation policy works on the basis of castes. Religion thus becomes an alternative source of authority, which is then misused. As Gurpreet Mahajan says: “... mobilization of religious identities has been a source of communal violence and tensions” (70). The caste-system has been another aspect of violence and ruthlessness and many problems have arisen from this. Though it is primarily a social problem its use in politics has led to many tensions in the country; the caste-system has been one of the most cruel and repressive systems in human history. In India, this system does prevail even today to some degree in the case of lower classes or the untouchables. Thus, the country has gradually moved towards evils such as corruption and bribery.

Society is based on the patriarchal family system. Although women did come out to fight for independence, later on they were kept inside the house on various pretexts. Complete loyalty and heartfelt devotion were the only two things expected of them. Woman was neither allowed to voice herself nor to show her abilities. According to Iravati Karve:

The women who became part of such a family were brought from outside. They were to cultivate the virtues of devotion to their husband and take pride in his family. A woman’s loyalty to her father’s family lasted until her marriage. After that her duties were to safeguard the name of her husband’s family, to care for all his children as their mother, to go where he would and to serve the parents-in-law. (190)

Society was definitely male-dominated and class-oriented. It was not that people were not aware of the moral or social values related to humanity on the whole. But those values were such as to support the social order. The ideal virtues for men were devotion to one’s fathers and brothers and they were bound by such values. Hence, every individual, irrespective of class, caste or gender, was a part of the whole fabric of society. The value of an individual disintegrated into many values created by society. Such values and policies have several consequences, as Mahajan aptly puts: “This autonomy hindered the formulation of a shared normative-legal frame-work
which ensued equal rights of citizenship for all categories of people” (109). In such socio-political situations, arose a gamut of playwrights from all regions of India who tried to bring about awareness among their fellowmen regarding the concerns of society and country through their writings. Though they wrote in their own regional languages, most of their plays have been translated into other regional languages as well as into Hindi and English so as to give them a wide readership. Among them some of the eminent playwrights are Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Chandreshkehar Kambar, Dharamvir Bharati, Utpal Dutt, G.P. Despande, Ratan Thiyam, Habib Tanvir, Mahesh Elkunchwar etc.

In Hindi dramatic activity, Dharamvir Bharti’s Andha Yug is considered his best play. The play is about the age of Mahabharata and about the consequences of war, the physical and moral devastation it brings, both, to the victor and the victim. The play exposes the dehumanising effect of war on the individual and society. It shows feuds between brothers and the deliberate ‘blindness’ of the elders towards their children. It is a play of every age in which the elders refuse to look at the follies of their children, and being blinded by their love, do injustice to others. Mohan Rakesh’s Ashadh ka Ek Din, Lehron ke Rajhans and Aadhe-Adhure are plays dealing with themes of hopelessness, lovelessness and despair in life. Rakesh’s plays are basically about man-woman relationship and the hopelessness and helplessness in the relationship. In Marathi, there was a Vijay Tendulkar writing about individuals struggling in a family/society. G. P. Deshpande’s Chanakya is a play about political intrigues set in the Maurya period. It revolves around the characters of Chankya Vishnugupta and Chandragupta Maurya. The play exposes the various political strategies employed by Chanakya to make his disciple and a mere rebel, Chandragupta, the Emperor of Magadh and to create an all-powerful empire. And to do this, the state had to be saved from the Greek invader Alexander. But in doing so, Chandragupta has to sacrifice his individual desires and his beloved, while Chanakya is not concerned with such ‘petty’ things of life. Deshpande’s other plays are Ek Vajoon Gela Ahe, Andhar Yatra and Uddhwasta Dharmashala, a political trilogy that explores the threats to ideology. His plays are about the relationship between human beings and ideas. Mahesh Elkunchwar’s plays occupy a noteworthy place in the history of Indian drama and are more on the existential level. Aatmakatha is a play about an old writer who is dictating his autobiography to a young scholar. But this autobiography remains unrecorded as he faces a lack of understanding about it,
especially about the women in his life, a rival writer and an illegitimate son. *Wada Chirebandi* makes a close observation of those old families struggling against time in small towns or villages, trying dreadfully to hold on to the old links that kept a family together, even as the big city tempts it and pulls the individual members of the family apart. *Party* is a play where the absence of a character becomes his presence through the constant discussions of him by other people in the party, until the news of his death breaks up the party and exposes the cold-bloodedness of the games the ‘creative’ set plays. Elkunchwar’s *Two Plays: Reflection and Flower of Blood* borders on the Absurd, bearing traces of the characters’ origin in the life of the middle class in India today. Other Marathi playwrights like Satish Alekar and Shanta Gokhale have also written plays about the existential crisis of an individual and the struggle for existence in a society that binds everyone by its norms.

In Bengali, Utpal Dutt’s plays have been widely performed and accepted; *Kallol, Tiitu Mir* and *Kartoos* are three plays that bring the Indian struggle for independence to the forefront and the sacrifices made by many Indians to achieve it. Dutt’s Marxist beliefs are seen through the themes in his plays such as *Angar, Manusher Adhikar, Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* and *Ferari Fauj*. Badal Sircar belongs to the new theatre movement in India and his plays are almost on the lines of the Absurd and are different from the radical plays of the proscenium theatre. Influenced by Grotowski’s Poor Theatre and Schechner’s Environmental Theatre, he developed a Third Theatre. In his *Evam Indrajit*, the eponymous character vainly tries to find out the meaning of his life in being different from common people; *Stale News* exposes the unpleasant exploitation and domination of British India and those of post-colonial India, while *Bhoma* depicts the exploitation and oppression of women, peasants, workers, villagers and developing countries; *Procession* is about different rites of religions, political parties and trade unions and then how they are made mindless by them. Sircar’s *That Other History* shows the power game in a family. He finds the demon in the human mind itself, which is responsible for war, violence and ultimate destruction. Mahasweta Devi’s plays in Bengali, collected as *Five Plays*, are also worth mentioning. Chandrasekhar Kambar, in Kannada, is known for his *Jokumarswami*, a play about the worship of the phallic god of fertility. The character of a fearless peasant is identified with the myth of the god granting fertility. Kambar uses the folk theatre form of *Bayalaata*, mixing worship, music, dance, song and religion. His plays are full of fantasy or superstitions and they work out the problem
in man-woman terms and not in husband-wife terms, as seen in other plays also such as *Siri Sampige, Kadu Kudure* and *Rishyashringa*. Girish Karnad is another well-known Kannada playwright, writing about the struggles and unfulfilled desires of human beings. Other playwrights hailing from South-India who have made a mark in drama are Sriranga, K. N. Panikkar and Indira Parthsarathi.

Regions like Manipur or Chhattisgarh have made equal contribution to the development of Indian theatre and the dramatic scenario. Ratan Thiyam is a name synonymous to theatre in Manipur and his play *Chakravyuha* has been acclaimed as a masterpiece all over the world. It is taken from the ‘*Drona Parva*’ in the *Mahabharata*, where Abhimanyu, the young prince, goes to fight in the Great War. The story revolves around his innocence and the selfishness of the elders in making the young boy a scapegoat for their selfish motives. The play is replete with metaphors and juxtaposition of various scenes as flashback. The play is in the Manipuri folk tradition called *Thang-Ta*, bringing forth questions of corruption, violence, systems and individual existence. His other plays are *Shanarembi Chaishra* and *Uchek Langmeidong*, which are also a blend of traditional and modern devices. Habib Tanvir is a well-known name in the Chhattisgarhi folk theatre. He too, like his contemporaries, blends the traditional and the modern techniques of theatre; plays like *Agra Bazaar* and *Charandas Chor* are examples of Tanvir’s style. *Agra Bazaar* is a play dealing with the everyday struggles of ordinary people. It is a story of the conflict between the elitist class and the working class. *Charandas Chor* is a play about a thief who is representative of the common man, capable of virtues rare in an unjust, class-based society. It depicts how a petty thief rises to the status of a popular hero. His other plays like *Bahadur Kalarin, Dekh Rahey Ham Nain* and *Hirma ki Amar Kahani* discuss the questions of action and its result in relation to human suffering and the issues of expansion and centralization of political power. Tanvir works with the Chhattisgarhi poets to write poems for his plays, giving his works the flavour of the region.

All these playwrights are concerned with issues related to the rapid growth of social and political power that is taking over the individual. Their plays deal with questions of the present times, of contemporary society and of people who feel alienated from everything around them. All of them have set their plays in an Indian background, using the traditional folk forms, myths and legends, history or present day society. During such a period of playwriting and with such contemporaries
around them, Tendulkar, Karnad and Dattam have also been contributing greatly to the literary output of India. All three of them belong to different generations, yet the issues discussed in their plays are similar; they write in three different styles and their subject matters are also different. But at some point their works tend to intermingle to create a ‘wholeness’ of these issues.

Vijay Tendulkar – an eminent playwright, journalist, and screenplay writer was born in 1928 in Mumbai. He has lived all his life in Mumbai, and in his childhood days lived in a typical chawl crowded with lower-middle-class people. He gave up his formal education in 1943. During his childhood he had seen his father as an enthusiastic writer, director and actor of amateur plays in Marathi (his mother-tongue). He was taken to the rehearsals of these plays, and there he saw living persons being transformed into characters. He had not seen any other theatre except what his father staged. Often, writers came to his house. Thus, he grew up in a literary atmosphere that moulded his career. He had also seen much of the earlier Hollywood films, especially the silent ones like those of Chaplin’s. All these had an impact on his creative genius. Tendulkar had a reading of his own that helped him in his career as a journalist. He started as an apprentice in a bookshop, did proof reading, managed a printing press, and was an assistant editor for Marathi dailies like ‘Navbharata’, ‘Maratha’ and ‘Loksatta’. He also edited issues of Marathi periodicals and managed public relations for a business house. He has to his credit twenty-nine full-length plays, seven one-act plays, five children’s plays, four anthologies of short stories, two biographies, four collections of essays and a novel. He has translated plays and has written five film scripts in Marathi and five in Hindi. Aditi De describes this multifaceted playwright as: “Whether as a journalist, a writer of short stories, a playwright, a scriptwriter, a translator, a ghostwriter or a copywriter, this path-breaking Marathi word-smith helped to usher Indian theatre into its contemporary avatar…” (2). Tendulkar has been a recipient of many honoured awards such as Maharashtra State Government Award, the Padmabhushan, the Katha Chudamani etc.

Girish Karnad was born in 1938 at Matheran in Maharashtra and was brought up in Dharwad. He did his B.A. with Mathematics in 1958 from Karnataka College, Dharwad. He secured a Rhodes Scholarship (1960-1963) and went to Oxford where he did his M.A. with Philosophy, Political Science and Economics. From his childhood, he was exposed to two forms of theatre; his father used to take the family to watch the plays staged by Natak Companies, which had professional actors and
with the servants he went to watch the more traditional Yakshagana performances performed in the open air. Thus, his interest in the modern and the traditional theatre was aroused. On returning to India after the completion of his studies, he worked as Branch Manager of the Oxford University Press in Madras for six years, and later on resigned to concentrate on writing and filmmaking. During 1974-1975, he was the Director of Film and Television Institute, Pune. He has acted in many Hindi and Kannada films, and even directed some films. His awards and honours speak of his creative genius. His contribution to creative Indian literature won him the prestigious Jnanpeeth Award in 1999. This multifaceted personality has always been a fascination for his fans. But he is mainly known as a playwright. As Aparna Dharwadker says: “Among the numerous identities available to him Karnad has persistently chosen the identity of playwright as that which best expresses his own self, perceptions, abilities and accomplishments” (83). For him, his plays are the central activity of his creative career because he finds drama not only a means of self-expression, but also a production of meaning. He says that basically he is a playwright, and then would like to be judged as a director and an actor. Karnad wanted to be a poet in his formative years, but found himself writing plays, and so instead of choosing the form for himself, he was chosen by the form.

Mahesh Dattani was born in 1958 in Bangalore and studied at Baldwin’s High School and St. Joseph’s College. He hails from the Gujarati Lohana community, which tends to ‘stick together’. Having studied in an English medium school instead of Gujarati medium, his first language is English; moreover, in Bangalore, the scope to communicate in Gujarati was limited. As a child, Dattani liked to make clocks and little carts out of cardboard – things that had momentum. This was the reason why he liked dancing as well as watching the dances in Hindi films. As a student in school, he was attentive but not very intelligent. He liked the way the teachers read out extracts from various books in their booming voices; perhaps this gave him an aura of the theatre. This Bangalore-based Gujarati playwright has six full-length plays, some radio plays and three films to his credit. He not only writes plays but also acts in them and directs them. About Dattani’s love for acting, Kaveree Bamzai observes: “Not only did Dattani want to learn Bharatnatyam, but he also wanted to act on stage. He did both, and because he didn’t have enough good plays to act in, wrote some.” In 1998, he established a theatre group called Playpen that trains and exhibits new talents in playwriting, acting and directing. Recently, he has directed two of his plays.
into films. Dattani is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book *Final Solutions and Other Plays*, becoming the first English language playwright to win the award. He teaches theatre courses at Playpen and at the summer session programme of Portland State University, Oregon, USA. He has also written radio plays for BBC Radio 4.

Having discussed the historical background of Indian drama, especially in English, and the social and creative background of Tendulkar, Karnad and Dattani, a detailed analysis of their plays is attempted in the following chapters.
NOTES


