CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Indian English drama has a rich tradition. Its two thousand years old long history is a unique phenomenon in the literary world. The dramatic tradition of the ancient Hindus is believed to have been fully formed even before they came to know about Greek dramas. The *Natyashastra* in Sanskrit by Bharata Muni, a legendary sage, is an authentic, elaborate discussion of ancient stagecraft. All aspects of the drama — stage-setting, music, plot construction, characterization, dialogue and acting — have borne the close critical scrutiny of the author, and a set of rules to guide the conduct of the stage has been elaborately laid down. It analyses searchingly the factors involved in plot, characters and emotions bringing out the far-reaching significance of 'rasa'. Sanskrit drama with its chequered history followed the rules and regulations prescribed by Bharata. Giving importance to Indian aesthetics, it reflected the essential and eternal India of the time to the delight of the audience.

Dramaturgy, as said in *Natyashastra* was created by Lord Brahma for the entertainment of the people on the request of gods. He created this *Natyaveda* by selecting recitation from the *Rigveda*, acting from the *Yajurveda*, music from the *Samaveda* and the sentiments from the *Atharvaveda*, and instructed it to the sage Bharata who in turn taught it to his hundred sons and popularized it in the world. He is also referred to as the dance-teacher of the divine nymphs of Indra’s court
and the choreographer of the drama on *Lakshmisvayamvara*. Thus *Natyashastra* is the basic source of information on the intricacies of the Indian theatre. The text is an encyclopaedia on theatre, and is intended as a manual for the actors.

Bhasa, the celebrated Sanskrit dramatist, was assigned different dates by different scholars. It is presumed that he would have lived towards the close of the centuries before Christ or in the beginning of the Christian era. Kalidasa speaks of Bhasa’s fame and it is the earliest reference made on him. His plays disappeared and their manuscripts were discovered in 1909 in a Kerala Brahmin home named *Manalikkara Matham* near Trivandrum in Kerala by the late T. Ganapati Shastri, then Curator of the Maharaja’s Palace Library. Ten plays and a fragment written in Malayalam on 105 palm leaves were discovered. Subsequently Shastri discovered two more plays. Almost of the same time one of these plays was discovered in Mysore by R. Narasimhachar, the head of the Archaeology department there.

The thirteen plays of Bhasa are: (1) *Dutavakyam* (The Words of the Ambassador), (2) *Karnabharan* (Karna’s Duty), (3) *Dutaghatotkacham* (The Embassy of Ghatotkacha), (4) *Urubhangam* (The Breaking of the Thighs), (5) *Madhyamavayogam* (A Play on Madhyma), (6) *Pancharatram* (The Five Nights), (7) *Abhishekanatakam* (A Play on the Coronation), (8) *Balacharitam* (The Story of the Boy), (9) *Avimarakam* (Avimaraka), (10) *Pratimanatakam* (The House of Statues) (11) *Pratijnayaugandharayanam* (The Vows of Yaugandharayana), (12) *Svapnavasavadattam* (Vasavadatta in a Dream), (13) *Charudattam* (Chrarudatta). The first six are based on episodes in the
Mahabharata. 7 and 10 are Ramayana plays. 11 and 12 are based on legends. 9 and 13 are social romances.

Bhasa was a playwright with considerable originality. He made variations to the borrowed epic themes in order to make them dramatically suitable. He has written plays on a wide range of subjects by adopting epics, mythology, legends, history and social life. His play on the trader, Charudatta and the courtesan Vasantasena is reputedly the first play on social life in Sanskrit. His plays are noted for their speedy action and movement. Many of his characters are heroes of action. Another popular play, *Mrichchhhatra* (The Clay Cart) by Shudraka on the same theme was acceptably influenced by the earlier Bhasa work.

Kalidasa is the greatest classical Sanskrit poet and dramatist. In India, he is called 'Mahakavi' (great poet). Known as the Shakespeare of India, his plays set Indian drama in an undoubted position of supremacy. The time of Kalidasa, however, according to different scholars, ranges from the second century BC to AD the fourth century. The author of three popular dramas, *Vikramorvashiya*, the *Malavikagnimitra*, and the *Abhijnanashakuntala*, Kalidasa also wrote two 'mahakavyas', or secondary epics or long poems: the *Raghuvamsha* and the *Kumarasambhava* and two ‘khandakavyas’, or shorter poems: the *Meghaduta* and the *Ritusamhara*.

The *Malavikagnimitra* considered to be the earliest drama of Kalidasa, is a comedy of harem intrigue. It is the story of the love of King Agnimitra of Vidisha for Malavika, the younger sister of the king of Malava, who happened to
reside incognito in the palace of Agnimitra as a girl student of one of the two royal dance-teachers. Similarly, the *Vikramorvashiya*, is about the love between the mortal king, Pururavas, and the celestial dancer Urvashi, a damsel of exquisite beauty, belonging to the race of the *apsaras*. Though these two plays are enjoyable and rich in aesthetic appeal, the *Abhijnanashakuntala* is his masterpiece. The story was already there in the form of a dull narrative; but Kalidasa turned it into an elegant work of art with many innovations.

*Shakuntala* with its moral that love should not make one forgetful of one’s obligation towards the society depicts both love in union and love in separation with a greater degree of perfection. Dushyanda and Shakuntala had to suffer the pains of separation due to his committing the mistake of marrying her without a reference to her guardians and later leaving the hermitage ignoring his responsibility to his wife and her negligence of duty to her guests like the sage Durvasa. Love, polluted by the rashness of youth is purified by a process of suffering and austerity, like gold purified by fire. Hence, their reunion in the hermitage of Maricha became a deeper conjugal love, where attraction to outward glamour of physical beauty was absent.

In Kalidasa’s *Raghuvaṃsha* one could see his awareness of social problems where he condemns a king for being unjust to his subjects. His exquisite poetic imagination and his most poetic use of the language rendered human sentiments and ideas a colour and intensity. Successive writers for years could find an infallible yet inimitable model in him. Thus, Kalidasa is one of the greatest poets of all times.
Until the twelfth century, Sanskrit drama flourished under the patronage of the court and the aristocracy. Successive Muslim invasions later hampered it to achieve anything remarkable for a long period. Naturally, it saw a period of decline and the glory of Sanskrit drama became a thing of the past. It is generally believed that classical Sanskrit literature had its origin in the folk theatre of this country. Folk theatre, originated and evolved among the common people, had a close relationship with the life of the people. M.L. Varadpande writes in *History of Indian Theatre*, “Mythology is still a part of the living culture of India, particularly of rural India . . . . Indian folk theatre is essentially mythological in character, borrowing themes and conventions liberally from its repertory” (7). Indian folk theatre is mostly narrative in character. The fully developed folk drama forms of today were initially highly dramatic narrative forms. It has adopted the mode of putting across the messages with dancing, singing and music. Theatre of entertainment and theatre of religion are the two categories of folk theatre.

A base for a spirit of a nationalist drama in India was made immediately after the Indian War of Independence in 1857. Before that, dramas in different Indian languages with diverse themes existed. Though the war of Independence was lost on the battlefield, it indeed was a victory of the people because it served as an effective uniting force. In the field of drama, the so far prevalent themes of history and legends gave way to the themes of contemporary conditions reflecting the spirit of nationalism. In *Modern Indian Drama in English Translation*, Veena Noble Dass points out: “A sudden spurt of theatre activities in different
regions of the country on similar lines within almost a decade after 1857 forged national unity” (1).

To the theatre-loving English people in India as well as the England-educated Indians and other people with English education, English plays were imported to the Indian soil. Along with the English drama, classical Indian drama also found a prestigious audience. British drama troupes toured India and performed many English plays. They staged mainly the plays of Shakespeare in cities like Bombay and Madras. The Portuguese, on their part, brought the dance-drama to the West Coast. Similarly, towards the end of the eighteenth century, Rebedoff, a Russian music director, produced his drama in Calcutta. This had a telling impact and awakening in the Indian dramatic scene. Owing to this new awakening, creative efforts in the form of translation took shape in the vernaculars. English plays were translated in many Indian languages. The plays of Kalidasa were also translated into English and in other Indian languages.

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed a surge of pioneering efforts boldly employing the mother tongue for creative dramatic expression. Dramatists from different regions of the country tried their hands at different forms like romance, comedy, tragedy, melodrama and historical play. As a result, modern Indian drama became a product of many models and forces.

Though Indian language theatre flourished under the influence of British drama, Indian drama in English could not attain a commendable growth. The number of dramas written in English language in India was very few. In this
regard, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that drama, as a literary genre, can flourish only in the natural soil where it is the ‘Lingua franca’: “Indo-Anglican Drama: isn’t it like talking about ‘snakes in Iceland? Not quite - but the problem is there, for while poetry, novels and non-fiction prose can be read in the silence of one’s study, drama can come to life only in the theatre” (730).

In order to communicate and become a living dramatic experience a play needs a real theatre and a living audience. A playwright, hence, needs a living theatre to stage his plays, evaluate their total effect on the audience, and thereby get a chance to improve upon his performance.

Though English translations of plays in the vernacular have come out, drama in English is yet to register an appreciable growth. Plays written in regional languages dominate the Indian theatre. These plays are easily intelligible to the audiences. Actors too can easily improvise in them, thereby giving vent to their histrionic talents in a natural and uninhibited way. Indian English drama in its earlier periods of development did not see a fast growth like other genres because early Indian English playwrights could not enjoy the patronage of an English-knowing, elitist audience. Hence, the growth of it remained, for a while, lethargic. English, being a foreign language, was not intelligible to the masses, and playwrights too, found it difficult to write crisp, natural and graceful dialogue in English. One among the many reasons is that they did not grow up in an English environment and they had acquired their knowledge of English only at an
advanced age. Besides, the dialogues they wrote proved to be somewhat stilted and artificial.

In spite of these obvious limitations, some Indian English playwrights made earnest endeavour to write plays in English. Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote the first Indian English play, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*, in 1831. A social play, it presents the conflict between Indian orthodoxy and the new ideas, which came from the West. It exposes the hypocrisy of the affluent Hindus in society. It is the earliest play on the historic theme of East-West encounter.

The next one to make a notable presence in this endeavour was Michael Madhusudan Dutt who translated his plays *Ratnavali* (1859), and *Sermista* (1859), originally written in Bengali, into English. He also wrote a play in English, *Is This Called Civilization?* (1871).

Again, there was a long gap for decades to follow Dutt's creative effort. Many reasons can be related to this. However, later, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and H.N. Chattopadhyaya, popularly known as the 'big three' made an epoch-making and abiding contribution to the development of Indian English drama. *Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice, Red Oleanders, Chandalika*, and *Mukta-Dhara* wrote by Tagore are now available to us in their English versions. Tagore himself translated some of them, from Bengali while Indian and English translators translated the others. He was an actor and a theatre artist steeped in the great dramatic tradition of India. Being an ardent admirer of
Kalidasa, Shakespeare and Ibsen, he tried to emulate these great forerunners in his works. However, he was very particular in bringing out his plays free from any obvious touch of these playwrights. Poetical in temperament and outlook, Tagore revelled in the employment of imagery and symbolism in his plays. Being sensitive to Indian tradition, and rooted in the Vedas and the Upanishads, he had an intimate knowledge of Indian epics. He used his familiarity with them often as starting points. His plays have no plots as such, as Iyengar remarks:

Tagore could start the play, strike the opening chords, name the characters — and memory and imagination would do the rest. Not the logic of careful plotting but the music of ideas and symbols is the 'soul' of this drama . . . [it] kindles the sluggish soul to a new awareness of life's "deep magics". (123)

His first play was Ascetic (1884). Another play Sacrifice (1890) is thematically similar to Sri Aurobindo's Perseus, the Deliverer for both the plays are aimed at extirpating social evils. In Sacrifice, he condemns the sacrifice of living beings. In Perseus, the Deliverer, Sri Aurobindo condemns Poseidon's thirst for blood. Both advocate compassion and love. Malini (1912), Natir Puja (1926) and Chandalika (1933) testify to Tagore's fascination for Buddhism.

Man in relation to God is the theme of The King of the Dark Chamber (1910). The Post Office (1912) is autobiographical, in which he projects his own boyhood through Amal, the boy-hero. His romantic play, Chitra (1892) was inspired by the Mahabharata. It is, in a way, a succinct version of Kalidasa's
Shakuntala. Mukta-Dhara (1922) is sometimes referred to as his greatest play. Like Gandhiji, he was against the ruthlessness of the power of technology and its tendency to warp human personality. His Mukta-Dhara is an eloquent protest against the onslaught of machinery on human civilization. He wrote more than forty plays of all kinds — social comedies, allegorical plays, and symbolic plays — spread over more than half-a-century.

A commonly observed opinion about Tagore’s plays is that though his plays have variety, there is repetition of themes in some of them. In his English translations of the original Bengali plays, however, he has severely cut down many of the humorous and farcical dialogues and situations. Thus, problems of language and translation have affected some of his plays. Moreover, his English translations lack the flavour and spirit of the originals in Bengali. Tagore himself used to say that future generations would remember him by his songs, short stories and paintings. It is true, today; Tagore is chiefly remembered more for his poetry than for his plays.

Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to Indian English drama is noteworthy. He wrote in all eleven verse dramas. Five of them, The Viziers of Bassora, Perseus, the Deliverer, Radgune, Eric, and Vasavadatta are five-act plays. The Witch of Ilni, Achabo and Essarhaddon, The Maid in the Mill, The House of Brut, The Birth of Sin and Prince of Edur vary in size from one scene of fifty-two lines to three acts. Four of his five-act plays are comedies, and only one, Radogune is a tragedy. In all the five, the playwright combines his distinctive love of romance with his encyclopaedic knowledge of world history and culture.
Radogune is a modified version of the tragedy of the same name written by Corneille. The play is grim and serious throughout, with no element of comic relief. It owes much to Shakespearean and Jacobean tragedies. It bears the unmistakable stamp of the revived Elizabethan tragedy of the late Victorian era.

The Witch of Ilni and The Maid in the Mill are Elizabethan. They are modelled on Shakespeare's romantic plays. The Maid in the Mill seems to present several echoes of Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer. The House of Brut recalls Marlowe's Tamburlaine. Achab and Essarhaddon and The Birth of Sin are based on the Bible. The Viziers of Bassora reminds the theme of Arabian Nights.

Perseus, the Deliverer is his longest play. It was inspired by his participation in Indian struggle for freedom. To him Andromeda was the symbol of total sacrifice and Perseus, the ideal hero-saviour of a nation in travail. Poseidon was the bloodthirsty oppressor. The political atmosphere in India was such at that time that the Perseus myth offered to Sri Aurobindo the much-needed plot to unfold the agonies, sufferings and travails of the fighters engaged in the struggle for India’s freedom. Andromeda, in his perception was none other than Mother India herself. In presenting the Perseus-and-Andromeda narrative, he was indebted to Sophocles, Euripedes, Ovid and Corneille. Vasavadatta, depicts the developments of love between Prince Udayan and Princess Vasavadatta. He made use of the theme of Somadeva’s Kathasaritasagar, one of the most popular Sanskrit classics. It is said to be the finest product of Sri Aurobindo’s dramatic genius, as it brings out the nature and extent of the influence of Elizabethan romanticism on him. However, despite all the stage worthiness of his plays, they
have never been presented on stage, a fact that exposes these plays to the charge of being ‘closet dramas’.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the last of the great Indian playwright trio, has been more eminent as a poet than a playwright, a fact that has overshadowed the true status of his plays. His plays are, generally, classified as devotional plays, social plays, historical plays and miscellaneous plays. Written in verse, his devotional plays deal with the lives of some Maharashtrian saints. They are rather playlets than full-length plays. *Raidas, Chokhamela, Eknath, Pundalik, Saku Bai, Jayadeva* and *Tukaram* belong to this category. The last play in the group, *Tukaram*, is said to be the best in terms of characterization as well as the development of plot. The distinction of this play is that it is effective as both a ‘closet play’ and a ‘stage play’. It could be regarded as one of the best Indian plays written in English.

The most significant of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya’s social plays are to be found in his collection, *Five Plays (1937)*. *The Windows, The Parrot, The Sentry’s Lantern, The Coffin, and The Evening Lamp* are the plays we find in this collection. *The Windows, and The Parrot* throw light on the playwright’s acute social awareness. *The Sentry’s Lantern* has for its theme the evils of imperialism. *The Coffin*, a two-act play, is the study of a bourgeois artist and his hollow world, and *The Evening Lamp* is about a Narcissistic youth who has fallen in love with his own shadow.
Sympathy for the exploited, revolt against a stultifying code of morality, insurgence against the brute forces of imperialism, and a plea for purposeful writing constitute the themes of these plays. Hence, they may be called symbolic, didactic or propagandistic plays.

Another playwright, T.P. Kailasam, has carved for himself a secure place in the history of Indian English drama. He wrote five plays in English, hoping for a more satisfying self-expression than through the Kannada medium. He felt imaginatively gripped by the heroic characters of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and saw them as apocalyptic figures embodying psychic realities. *The Burden* (1933) is a moving dramatic projection of Bharata’s agony on his coming to know that his foolish and ambitious mother, Kaikeyi, had won the Kingdom of Ayodhya for him and banished Rama to the forest. *The Purpose* (1944) and *Fulfilment* (1933) present Ekalavya, the heroic archer checkmated, first by Drona his Guru, and later by Lord Krishna. In *Karna* he projects Karna as another tragic character like Ekalavya. His *Keechaka* (1949), published posthumously, shows how the hero is transfigured from a merely lustful villain into a fighter and a man of honour. In their conception, characterisation and poetic articulation, these five plays are among the best of their kind. He is best remembered as a pioneer in Indian English drama though his achievement is rather less than his capacity.

In addition to Indian English plays, he wrote twenty-one Kannada plays. He is generally regarded as the master of comedy. His plays range from kindly humour to searing satire. He was also a master craftsman. He is realistic, in his
Kannada plays and a visionary in his English plays. His plays are based on the everyday life of ordinary men and women. He was the first to bring a widow on the stage, focussing her life of tears and sacrifice. Reducing the importance of plot, he made drama a clash of personalities and a vehicle of an individual point of view. In fact, Kailasam and Adya Rangacharya revolutionized Kannada drama, which was deeply entrenched in the mythological tradition, far removed from real life situations. Kailasam blends the best of both the Indian and Western traditions.

Bharathi Sarabhai, the most distinguished woman dramatist, in her *The Well of the People* (1938) gave a Gandhian touch to Indian English drama. In this, one could see Mahatma Gandhi’s influence on her with respect to treatment of the theme of untouchability. Though a high caste woman, she became an ardent follower of Gandhiji and worked in his Sabarmathi Ashram. Naturally, the play became a vehicle of the message of Gandhiji.

Harindranath, A.S.P. Ayyar and Lobo-Prabhu followed the dramatic tradition. A.S.P. Ayyar’s plays are known for their reformist zeal. His plays — *In the Clutches of the Devil* (1926), *Sita’s Choice* (1935), *The Slave of Ideas* (1941) and *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1942) — deal with problems like superstitions, widow-marriage, caste system and materialism. *Apes in the Parlour, The Family Cage, Flags of the Heart* are the plays of Lobo-Prabhu.
The pre-Independence Indian English drama with notable traits like poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical virtuosity, symbolic significance and its commitment to human and moral values, however, lacked the quality of a stage production. On the other hand, Asif Currimbhoy's plays are known for their stage productions. A prolific playwright, committed to social purpose, he has thirty plays to his credit dealing with the social, political and religious problems of contemporary society. His dramatic genius is well understood from his variety of themes, techniques, social realism, opulent scenes, situations, characters, the resourceful improvisation of his stagecraft, and the mastery of his dialogue.

"Among the modern Indian playwrights, none has the international reputation as Asif Currimbhoy whose plays have been staged by dramatic groups of American Universities, repertory companies and the off-Broadway theatre" (35), observes Bayapa Reddy.

Nissim Ezekiel, well known as an Indian English poet has contributed and enriched Indian English drama. *Nalini, A Marriage Poem* and *The Sleep-Walkers* published as a collection, *Three Plays* (1969), handled contemporary social issues like the hollowness of the urban middle class life, fickleness of modern lovers, greedy fascination for American way of life and the hypocrisy in Indian society.

Playwrights like Lakhan Deb and Gurcharan Das are well known for their contribution of historical plays. Through *Tiger's Claw* (1947) Lakhan Deb dramatizes the heroic deeds and nobility of Shivaji in killing Afzal Khan. Similarly, his *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976) is based on the murder of Mahatama Gandhi. *Larins Sahib* by Gurcharan Das is based on the events in
Punjab during 1846-47. Gieve Patel's Parsi play *Princes* (1970) exposed a prevalent Indian characteristic — the obsession with male baby. Partap Sharma handled sex as an issue, worthy of dramatic presentation. *The Professor has a Warcry* (1970) and *A Touch of Brightness* (1970) are his plays dealing with the theme of sex. The thematic boldness, character delineation and technical triumph exhibited in the plays received critical acclaim.

Like playwrights, theatres played a crucial role in promoting Indian English drama. The Bombay Amateur Theatre was built in Bombay in 1779. The plays presented here were mainly the comedies of the late Georgian playwrights. Unfortunately, this theatre was soon crippled by financial difficulties and was finally sold by public auction in 1835. The Grant Road Theatre was opened a decade later.

The upshot of many-sided dramatic activities in Bombay did not result, however, in any growth of drama in English, but rather gave a fillip to the drama in Marathi and Gujarati. Annasaheb Kirloskar's epoch-making production of *Shakuntala* in 1880 successfully launched the modern Marathi drama. Consequently, English drama on the Bombay stage slowly declined in the face of the challenge from the drama in the vernacular. The story of the growth and development of modern drama in Calcutta, Madras, and Delhi also runs along similar lines.

From 1940 onwards, one finds several dramatic organizations launched, but none devoted itself exclusively to the drama in English. The impact of
imported English dramas in India, production of Indian plays on the English models, the negligence of the great legacy of Indian tradition like the folk theatre and absence of devoted theatre personalities gave raise to a slackened state to Indian theatre in general during the post-independence period. It was indeed a soul-searching phase for the Indian theatre, which wanted to establish its Indianness because it was neither Indian nor Western but an amalgamation of the two, without much Indian theatrical aesthetics and tradition. In Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker's view, “Since Independence, theatre practitioners in India have embraced and rejected the colonial inheritance in terms of form, language, ideology, and conventions of representation” (11). India has its own literatures, its own religions, its own cultures and its own arts. Girish Karnad writes in this regard:

The basic concern of the Indian theatre in the post-independence period has been to try to define its ‘Indianness’. The distressing fact is that most of these experiments have been carried out by enthusiastic amateurs or part-timers, who have been unable to devote themselves entirely to theatre. (17)

The Indian National Theatre, established under the leadership of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya during World War II, staged a ballet based on Nehru's *The Discovery of India*. Another popular theatre group of this period was Ebrahim Alkhazi’s Theatre Unit, and Bhartiya Natya Sangha affiliated to the World Theatre Centre of UNESCO. Similarly, regional amateur theatres, have also flourished from time to time. These include Sombhu Mitra’s Bahuroopi in
Bengali, the Hindi Natya Parishad, the Kalakendra, Rangabhoomi and Natyamandal in Gujarat; the Prithvi Theatres and the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangha in Bombay, The Telugu Little Theatre and the Andhra Theatre Foundation; the Seva Sangha in Madras and Dishantar in Delhi. It is highly significant that the Little Theatre Group was established in 1947 as an English theatre, but eventually changed over to Bengali in 1953.

Theatre movement received attention during the Post-Independence period. Performing arts were employed as an effective means of public enlightenment during the First Five year Plan (1951-54). It resulted in the establishment of the National School of Drama under the directorship of Ebrahim Alkazi. Institutions for training in dramatics were founded in big cities. Rukminidevi Arundale's Kalakhsetra at Adyar, Madras, and Mrinalini Sarabhai's Darpana in Ahmedabad are notable examples for this kind of theatre. For the first time Drama departments started functioning in several universities. The Sangeet Natak Akademi started the Annual Drama Festival in New Delhi in 1954. The British Council and the US Information Service arranged visits of foreign troupes from time to time.

Dramas in regional languages began to flourish with so much encouragement coming from so many quarters, with the singular exception of the drama in English. Barring Gopal Sharman's Akhsara Little Theatre in New Delhi, only occasionally were Indian plays in English staged even in big cities like Bombay. Paradoxically enough, some of these plays like Gurucharan Das's
Mira, Partap Sharma’s *A Touch of Brightness* and Asif Currimbhoy’s *The Dancer* have successfully been staged in the West.

In later decades, it is mainly the drama in Indian languages and the drama in English translations that have registered a remarkable growth. It witnessed English translations of a number of plays originally written in the regional languages. As a result, Indian literature today has a sizeable number of such plays. It has become the general view of many academics to incorporate these translations into the corpus of Indian English Literature. Such translations of plays have forged an effective link between the East and the West, the North and the South of India. They contributed to the growing harmony and richness of contemporary creative consciousness. According to K. Venkata Reddy and R.K. Dhawan:

Contemporary Indian drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosities. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with splendid results. (20)

When the Sahitya Akademi was set up in 1954, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan spelt out its objective as the promotion of the unity of Indian literature, despite India’s geographical, political, social, and linguistic diversities. He gave a slogan to the Akademi that Indian literature is one, though written in many languages. It now seems certain that we can talk of the entire Indian literature as a single entity. Nemichandra Jain also maintains a similar view: “The theatre has
continuously, down the ages, provided and strengthened this feeling of oneness in sharing a common heritage among people of different regions” (53).

In spite of all these many sided efforts, conducive environments, growth of vernacular dramas, and English translations of regional language dramas Indian English Drama failed to register a remarkable growth like other genres. As M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan rightly observe, “The sad Cinderella of Indian English literature from the beginning, drama remains its Cinderella still, waiting for her prince” (201).

Though Indian English drama has subsequently made quite an impressive record in quantity and quality, it failed to establish and enjoy an imposing place in the Indian literary field unlike the other two genres — Indian English Poetry and Indian English Novel. N.S. Dharan writes in this regard:

Down the centuries, Indian drama has undergone various metamorphoses and it continues to flourish in all regional languages. In regional languages, it enjoys almost an equal status along with two other major literary genres, namely fiction and poetry, though, by and large, fiction has overshadowed drama and poetry. One has to concede, however, that the picture proves to be rather sombre and uninspiring in respect of Indian drama in English. (15)

Many reasons can be attributed to this failure. An important point to be noted is the successful status attained by the vernacular dramas, whereas the Indian English drama could not achieve anything remarkable because it failed to
use and exploit the rich and varied Indian dramatic traditions with its abounding myth and historical heritage. "Another important reason for the meagre achievement in the field is", notes Krishna Bhatta, "the playwrights' failure to employ the rich folk forms, and traditional models and techniques of the Classical Sanskrit Drama" (198). Yet another reason is that the plays lacked, with a few exceptions, the quality of stage production. A play must appeal to the audience. Marjorie Boulton says, "To see a play is, for most people, a more exciting and memorable experience than to read a novel" (4). Vernacular plays succeeded in this aspect whereas Indian English plays failed, again, for another reason — language. English audience in India was less when compared with the present day audience. H.M. Williams feels, "... English is one important minority language among a welter of Indian languages and dialects"(28). Yet another factor is availability of real theatres. To enact a play appealingly, a stage is the most needed basic paraphernalia. Further "... the contemporary Indian theatre movement is" as Som Benegal says, "largely amateur and largely left to its own devices" (119) lacking patronage and assistance unlike the professional Western theatre. Farley P. Richmond also shares a similar view: "Most of India's modern theatre may be categorised as amateur; that is, theatre in which the majority of those who participate do so with little expectation of earning a living" (394).

Further, contemporary Indian English Theatre has become, mostly, an urban affair and the urban social milieu is devoid of the rich Indian legacy of folk tradition. Dattani feels that "... the English theatre scene is a product of the English educated urban milieu, reflecting a certain rootlessness, unconnected
from the richness of folk and classical arts of the country” (8), writes Anjana Rajan in *Novel Journeys of a Playwright*. In another article *The Stage is Set*, Anjana Rajan quotes the veteran theatre actress Jalabala Vaidya who has a similar view: “Your theatre should be based in your classical tradition, because all of us in some way are a product of our past, and if there is continuity of culture in this country it is not because of the kings but the artists” (8).

After all these unpleasant facts of the past, lately Indian English drama has made its presence known to the world literary scene with the coming up of many new faces and experiments. Contemporary Indian English Writing enjoys a significant place in the World Literature today. Experiments in various literary genres are significantly traceable. In various forms of literature and vernacular literatures in English translations, the Indian Writing in English is growing to be the largest body of literature among the literatures of the world. K.C. Baral concludes, “It goes without contestation that Indian Writing in English as a body of literature has arrived in the global market place with its own brand name” (1).

Modern India has produced a band of most brilliant writers. In his Introduction, “Three Little Slices of Indian Urban Life”, to *City Plays* Mahesh Dattani writes, “The period between the seventies and the eighties was an important period for contemporary Indian drama. Some of the great Indian plays were written and performed in that period. From Badal Sircar to Karnad to Tendulkar and Elkunchwar, great dramatists were creating Great drama, . . .” (vii). With playwrights like Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad contemporary Indian English drama breathes fresh life. Mohan
Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Girish Karnad in Kannada are trendsetters in contemporary Indian English drama, as many plays of these prestigious Indian authors have been translated into English. Veena Noble Dass observes in *Experiment and Innovation in Modern Indian Drama in Translation*:

...Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad... are the children of the new resurgence in their own areas and have established that, by translating and performing the translated plays in other language areas than their own, they are marching towards the possibility of building a national theatre movement. (65)

Vijay Tendulkar is a prolific Marathi playwright. Many of his plays have been translated into major Indian languages and English as well. He has twenty-eight full-length plays, twenty-four one-act plays, eleven children’s plays, and a novel to his credit. He, along with Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, and Girish Karnad in Kannada, is credited with having ushered modernity into the theatre. Through his plays, he has portrayed how the modern individual has been alienated. He has satirized contemporary politics. The complexities of human characters find importance in his plays, which portray how the modern man has become a victim of individual and social tension. He deftly treats the plight of women and the husband-wife relationship in a male-dominated urban middle-class society. In *A Rich Tapestry of Women’s Stories* Gowri Ramnarayan writes: “Tendulkar has been criticised for his bleak portrayals
of women . . . women’s issues raised in Vijay Tendulkar’s plays continue to be relevant today . . .” (5).

Since the staging of Vijay Tendulkar’s maiden play *Householder* (1955), Tendulkar has come a long way. His plays vary from purely naturalistic plays and stark tragedies to farces, from musicals set in traditional folk modes to absurd drama, from full-length plays to one-acts. Thematically, his plays have ranged from the alienation of the modern individuals to contemporary politics, from social, individual tensions to complexities of human character, from exploration of man-woman relationships to reinterpretations of historical episodes. As Prachi Pinglay says, “Tendulkar is not only contemporary but also relevant” (5). A journalist by profession, Vijay Tendulkar has contributed to several daily columns in newspapers. He started his career as a creative writer writing short stories and later composed children’s plays. Still later, he took to screen play writing, translation and adaptation of novels and plays both from English and regional languages.

His *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) earned him a special place among leading Indian playwrights in the late sixties, while, his *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972) won him international fame in the mid-seventies. Winner of several national and international awards and fellowships, he is both a venerated and a controversial figure in modern Indian theatre scene. N.S. Dharan’s view, “The greatest quality, which Tendulkar can claim to himself as a creative writer and dramatist, is his singular ability to simultaneously involve and distance himself
from his creations. This endows his work with infinite subtlety. New meanings emerge as one reads his plays in the light of one's understanding” (26-27).

Girish Karnad uses myths and legends to expose the absurdity of modern life with all its passions and conflicts. *Yayati, Tughlag, Hayavadana, Tale Danda* and *Naga-Mandala* testify his dramatic genius. As a noted film actor and director, he had represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. Saugata Kumar Nath says, “His plays are considered to be trendsetter plays in the exploration of Indian myths, legends and folk tradition, and their conversion into a modern theatrical idiom” (87). He is one of the leading Indian dramatists who has contributed to the richness and variety in modern Indian drama.

The plays of Mohan Rakesh dramatize the sufferings of men and women who fall victims to socio-economic hierarchy and cultural hegemony. With his Marxian influence, he throws light on the contemporary problems by making use of history and legend. *One Day in Ashadha* and *The Great Swans of the Waves* are his popular plays. His contributions to Hindi theatre are remarkable that it would be remembered ever in the history of Indian theatre. Vasudha Dalmia writes, “Throughout his short but intense association with theatre . . . Rakesh remained concerned with the formation of a modernist Hindi stage that created to the needs and aspirations of urban modernity” (139).

Badal Sircar projects the existential attitude of modern life by making use of contemporary situations. He left the stage for the street. The street theatre is
an effective medium of communication with the masses. He experimented with themes, archetype and stereotypes, instead of plots and characters. He made theatre a medium of conveying individual responsibility of the people towards the society. In the words of Nivedita Tandon, "... Sircar makes the society, especially the middle class feel guilty for being indifferent towards man and his problems" (106).

With the new vigour and vitality given by these playwrights, the so far chequered-growth of Indian English Drama in the contemporary literary scenario has gained a new stature. Slowly but steadily, it started establishing itself as a strong genre in Indian English literature. Again to quote M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan, "Curiously enough the lack of a living theatre has never deterred Indian English writers from writing plays, probably because India has had a long and glorious tradition of drama" (201).

Indian English drama, recently, has shot into fame with the advent of the young writer Mahesh Dattani. Shana Maria Verghis comments: "The success of his best known production Dance like A Man (still running to packed shows), placed contemporary Indian drama in a new scape" (13). A cynosure of modern theatre lovers, Dattani enjoys the unique distinction of being the first Indian English Playwright to win the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award. Daring and innovative, he has made Indian drama in English a major genre of social critique today. Theatre is his passion and as Meenakshi Kumar in All the World's a Stage for Dattani notes, "If there is something that never stops to excite dramatist Mahesh Dattani, it is theatre" (17). He writes on such sensational
issues of the society, which we know and read now and then but refuse to acknowledge their existence amidst us. His innovative, daring and neat handling of burning issues of social relevance, issues collectively and conveniently stashed away for generations have set him apart as a unique contemporary writer. His increasing presence in college syllabi both in India and abroad, research projects and of late film adaptations speak for his relevance and dramatic uniqueness.

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7 August 1958 in Bangalore where his Gujarati parents Gokuldas Narandas Dattani and Jaya Gouri Dattanni had settled. He studied in Baldwin's High School and St. Joseph's College of Arts and Science, Bangalore. His family consists of his parents and two elder sisters. Interestingly enough, he was not a student of literature. He graduated in History, Economics and Political Science, acquiring a Master's degree in Marketing and Advertising Management. In the early 1980s, still in college, Dattani joined the Bangalore Little Theatre and participated in theatre workshops, acting and directing plays. He underwent western ballet training under Molly Andre at Alliance Francaise de Bangalore and Bharatanatyam training under Chandrabhaga Devi and Krishna Rao.

He founded Playpen, his theatre, in 1984 and he has directed several plays for it, ranging from classical Greek to contemporary works. In 1988, he wrote his first stage play, Where There's a Will. His Playpen first performed the play at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore on 23 September 1988 as part of the Deccan Herald Festival. From 1995, he has been working full-time in theatre. In 1988, he set up his own theatre studio dedicated to training and highlighting
new talents in acting, directing and play writing. **Dance Like a Man**, his next play came out in 1989. **Tara** was staged by his **Playpen** as **Twinkle Tara** in 1990. His **Bravely Fought the Queen** was produced in 1991. **Final Solutions** and **Night Queen** came out in 1993 and 1996 respectively. Dattani was commissioned to write a radio play for the BBC in 1996. As a result came out **Do the Needful** which was first broadcast on 14 August 1997 by BBC Radio 4 and directed by Sally Avens, Producer and Director in BBC Radio Drama. **On a Muggy Night in Mumbai** followed in 1998. He came out with another play for BBC Radio 4, **Seven Steps Around the Fire** which was broadcast as **Seven Circles Around the Fire** on 9 January 1999. Jeremy Mortimer, a director in BBC Radio Drama directed the play. **The Swami and Winston** and **Tale of the Mother Feeding Her Child**, both appeared in 2000 as Radio productions, broadcast by BBC Radio 4. RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest), a Delhi-based organization commissioned Dattani to write a play for it on Child abuse. Hence, **Thirty Days in September** came out in 2001. The play addresses the issue of child abuse in India, emphasising the dangers of silence maintained by the victim and the family to avoid social embarrassment. His **Clearing the Rubble** which was broadcast on BBC World Service in 2001, centres on the lives of the victims of the earthquake that devastated Bhuj, in Gujarat. The episode of a homebound English journalist, who is searching for a boy whom he had met during the catastrophe, lends a tender touch to the story. **Uma and the Fairy Queen** came in 2003. **Two Solos and Dear Diary** was performed at the Bharat Rang Mahotsav in January 2005.
He teaches theatre courses at the summer sessions programme of Portland State University, Oregon, USA, and conducts workshops regularly at his studio and elsewhere. He also writes plays for BBC Radio 4. In the past fifteen years, he has carved out a niche for himself as one of India’s premiere English-language playwrights. His theatre group routinely tours the United States. He is a multi-faceted personality well versed in acting, dancing, teaching, writing, directing and of late producing films. He began his career as a back stage artist, and later started acting and eventually emerged as a stage director. In an interview to Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta, Dattani says, “I’m an actor, I’m a director, so I know the craft of writing a play” (http://www.maheshdattani.com). Today, he is hailed as one of India’s best playwrights writing in English.

Mahesh Dattani, the avant-garde playwright, became a screenplay writer in 1992 when he shared writing the screenplay for Chalo Memsahib. Hum, Tum aur Woh (1994) was his next screenplay, which was followed by another untitled script in 1996. The screenplay of EK Chingari Ki Khoj Mein was written in 1998. He wrote the next screenplay EK Alag Mausam in 1999. Being a socially conscious person, he did not hesitate when an organisation Action Aid approached him to do a film on the AIDS issue. He interacted with AIDS victims at Freedom Foundation in this connection. The experience of meeting children of HIV positive individuals overwhelmed him. He could see the anger and the feeling of betrayal of housewives who had contracted it from their husbands. The film, starring Nandita Das and Rajit Kapoor, was screened at the International Film Festival in Mumbai. In 2001, he wrote the screenplay for Spice Boy. He
emerged as a film director with his Mango Souffle in 2002, which was a film adaptation of his play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai. Pamela Rooks, his friend, directed another Screenplay Dance Like a Man (2004), the screen version of his play with the same title. The next film with his screenplay and direction, Morning Raga came out in 2004.

While young, Dattani with his parents and sisters could attend Gujarati plays that were often performed in Bangalore, by way of keeping in touch with their roots. The aura of the stage and the illusory world of the theatre that would stay with him struck him. Writers like Edward Albee and Madhu Rye influenced young Dattani. According to Ashis Sengupta,

It was after reading Edward Albee’s Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962) that Dattani first felt the urge to write. He really began writing, however, only after he saw Neela Kamra (Blue Room) in Mumbai in the early 1980s. This play was a Hindi adaptation of Madhu Rye’s Gujarathi play Kumarni Agashe (1972, Kumar’s Terrace), which fascinated him for its bold treatment of sexuality and taught him to focus on his own time and place. Dattani’s other favourite playwrights have always been Tennesse Williams and Arthur Miller. (82)

His plays deal with what he calls the “invisible issues” of the Indian society, issues not unknown to us but of which we would not rather talk about and act as though they do not exist. By presenting the “invisible issues” and the subjects despised as “taboos” on stage for public discussion, he challenges the
construction of 'India' and 'Indian' as they have traditionally been defined in modern theatre. He uses theatre as his medium to present the problems to the audience as it is very close to real life. "There is a close parallel between life and theatre and quite often life is theatre-like and vice versa" (38), says P. Ramamoorthi. His plays have varied content and appeal. He does not provide ready-made solutions or fully resolved endings. He aims not at changing society but only seeks to offer some scope for reflection in the hope that his plays will give the audience some kind of insight into their own lives. In Tanu Pant's observations, "His plays have varied content and varied appeal. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire (34).

His plays address various concerns, anxieties and issues of modern India in a very complex and compelling manner. Dealing with the unit of family and the changing, evolving and disintegrating relationships within the family, his plays explore the conflict between tradition and modernity. The factors responsible for these changes and conflict are minor discontents, persistent unhappiness, the anguish and pain of family life, stultifying relationships and patterns of behaviour, which are embedded in the fabric of human life. Kasturi Kanthan notes, "The earlier, idealized Indian view of family harmony, domestic comfort, supportive relationships or nurturing intimacy is somewhat jeopardised in Dattani's plays" (32). His plays present a stimulating and provoking platform for dissenting views, cultural tensions and relationships. They reflect many issues, which are common, urban problems. No issue is sacrosanct or taboo as
far as Dattani is concerned. He deals with social issues, which are firmly based in a contemporary, immediately recognizable domestic context.

He writes about the urban, upper middle-class Indian family. Family is the orbit in which his plays revolve around and breathe in life. They are fresh and alive. His delineation of the complexity of the human heart, man’s helplessness and the intricacies of the chains of relationship attract the audience keeping them enthralled. Neeru Tandon says, “. . . he brings in the dynamics of personal and moral choices while focussing on human relationship” (91).

Literature, defined as the mirror of the society, inescapably reflects every aspect of the society in different modes. As a social art, it is committed to human values. As R. Jothiprakash argues, “Its role as a potent medium of communication entails more of responsibility than privilege to the writer” (1). Writers commit themselves to expose a social malady that disturbs them as a mark of registering their protest. By way of this protest, they hope to create awareness on the part of the people who are expected to find out means of setting right the malady. Being more acutely sensitive to the world around him, a writer commits himself for the social cause. As an artist of a social cause, he may venture to project the cause from the point of view of human values or aesthetic values. The aesthetic commitment of an artist may invite dissentions but not provocations whereas commitment to human values invites criticism, tension, even estrangement of the artist. The ‘fatwa’ on Salman Rushdie or the estrangement of Taslima Nasrin are examples of consequences of commitment of
the artist to human values. The commitment of the artist for human values places him in the realms of political, social or religious transformation.

As far as political commitment is concerned, the writer may detach himself or may identify with the issue because "politics is seen, in the final analysis, as an instrument of oppression, no matter who wields it. The fear of politics lurks in the minds of writers" (6), argues R. Jothiprakash. Unlike the politicians, professionals or religious head, the writers enjoy more freedom as they have no compulsion to commit themselves to any constitution or professional ethics or Gods. However, this freedom imposes tremendous responsibility on the writers.

Social commitment of a writer emerges as an outcome of the writer's social conviction. Hence, literature as a product of social commitment is subject to criticism of social evils, dethroning and destroying all the undesirable values. For example "Agit-prop" plays try to establish a rapport with the audience by portraying social issues of public interest and thereby moulding the conscience of the audience for a collective action. It appeals to the emotions of the people. The conflict between man and his environment is the core of problem plays. Bernard Shaw's plays are examples of problem plays. These plays give scope for alternative solutions and alternative endings as they mostly leave solutions for the contemplation of the audience.

Naturalism considers natural causes as determining forces responsible for human behaviour. It believes that human beings are not products of fate or
supernatural powers. Henrik Ibsen has used the technique of naturalism very effectively proving how the forces of heredity exert vitiating influence over the fates of individuals, thwarting their attempts to emerge unscathed from agonizing situations in life and plunging them headlong into tragedy. The strength of individual character and determination proves to be ineffective. Social and hereditary factors together form the modern equivalent of nemesis. Naturalist writers are known for not only a realistic portrayal of life but also for philosophic determinism and its specific influence, the social environment and that in an uncommonly narrow sense – almost to the exclusion of all others.

Existentialism begins with the fact of individual consciousness as the basis of any philosophical interpretation of life. The study of man, his inner conflicts and genuine choices, his significance in the drama of personal relationships and his responsibility to his fellow men and to God are the elements of human existence. Existentialism considers that man is full of anxiety and despair with no meaning in his life. He simply exists, until he makes a decisive choice about his own future. That is the way to achieve dignity as a human being. Existentialists felt that adopting a social or political stance was one way of giving purpose to life. One of the major playwrights of existentialism is Jean-Paul Sartre. He is well known for the “Theatre engage” or Theatre ‘committed’, which is supposedly committed to social and / or political action. A central proposition of existentialism is a reversal of the Aristotlean premise that essence precedes existence, where man exists to fulfil some purpose. Sartrean existentialism argues that man has no predefined purpose or meaning; rather,
human beings define themselves in terms of who they become as their individual lives are played out in response to the challenges posed by existence in the world. Another popular playwright Albert Camus is best known for his famous essay, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* or *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Sisyphus was the man condemned by the gods to roll a rock to the top of a mountain, only to have it roll back down again. For Camus, this related heavily to everyday life, and he saw in Sisyphus an “absurd” hero, with a pointless existence. *The Myth of Sisyphus* became a prototype for existentialism in the theatre, and eventually ‘The Theatre of the Absurd’.

The rejection of reason as the source of meaning is a common theme of existentialist thought. Kierkegaard considered that human beings use rationality as a mechanism to counter their existential anxiety, their fear of being in the world. If one can believe that, one is rational and everyone else is rational then one has nothing to fear and no reason to feel anxious about being free. For Sartre rationality is a form of “bad faith”, an attempt by the self to impose structure on a world of phenomena – “the other” – that is fundamentally irrational and random. Rationality and other forms of “bad faith” hinder us from finding meaning in freedom. In order to suppress the feelings of anxiety and dread, human beings confine themselves within everyday experience.

Similarly, Camus believed that society and religion falsely teach human beings that “the other” has order and structure. For Camus, when an individual “consciousness”, longing for order, collides with “the other’s” lack of order, a third element “the absurd” is born.
In existentialism, self and the other are two important concepts. Self exhibits ego and treats the other as enemies. Self is a dynamic phenomenon acquired in the process of evolution by an individual from his birth until his death. It is subjective as well as objective. A person can know about himself by reflective things and by his relationship with others. There are positive as well as negative selves. False or negative self leads even to loss of self.

The search for self is an on-going phenomenon. The experience of discrimination imposed on the marginalized necessitates their search for self. Possessing, belonging, and owning refer to selfhood and being loved shows an important link between owning and developing a self. Human beings who are treated with contempt become the marginalized other and are perceived as it and that. Samuel Beckett, master of the Absurd Theatre, exposes man’s helplessness and pointless existence in a world without purpose in his masterpiece Waiting for Godot. Mahesh Dattani’s plays reveal a touch of all these notions.

The present study is based on eight plays of Mahesh Dattani which are published as Collected Plays by Penguin Books India in 2000. The eight plays in this collection, which date from 1988, are printed in reverse chronological order. Among the eight plays, Seven Steps Around the Fire and Do the Needful were written exclusively as radio plays and broadcast by BBC Radio 4. The remaining six are stage plays. The plays are:
1. **Seven Steps Around the Fire** (1999) - A Radio Play
3. **Do the Needful** (1997) - A Radio Play
4. **Final Solutions** (1992) - A Stage Play in Three Acts
5. **Bravely Fought the Queen** (1991) - A Stage Play in Three Acts
6. **Tara** (1990) - A Stage Play in Two Acts
7. **Dance Like a Man** (1989) - A Stage Play in Two Acts
8. **Where There's a Will** (1988) - A Stage Play in Two Acts

A brief conspectus of the eight plays chosen for the study is given below.

**Seven Steps Around the Fire** is a murder mystery revealing the wretched plight of the *hijra* community, inhabiting some invisible pockets of many Indian cities. Subbu, the son of a Government Minister Mr. Sharma, falls in love with a beautiful *hijra*, Kamla, and subsequently marries her. The enraged minister sends his men to kill Kamla and get back his son. Uma Rao, the daughter of the vice-chancellor of Bangalore University married to Suresh Rao, the Chief Superintendent of Police who is the son of the Commissioner of Police, brings out the mystery behind the murder. However, she is helpless before the all-powerful minister supported by her husband and father-in-law. Kamla’s murder as well as Subbu’s suicide is hushed up.

**On a Muggy Night in Mumbai** is a play about the travails of gay men and women. It is the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It also speaks about desirable social behaviour. A bold and sensitive attempt, the play portrays gender roles and
sexual preferences in cosmopolitan Indian cities at the turn of the new millennium. Kamlesh, a successful fashion designer, lives in a flat in one of Mumbai’s more privileged areas, at Marine Drive. He has invited his friends, all-gay and a lesbian Deepali, over a party to seek help to get over his frustrations on the loss of his love to his homosexual partner Prakash who has lately fallen in love with his sister and is to get her married soon. Bunny, another homosexual friend who has turned a bisexual on his marrying a girl is a famous T.V serial actor enacting the role of an ideal husband, and Ranjit, yet another homosexual who has gone to England to live with his English homosexual partner are present. Kamlesh, being unable to forget Prakash seeks help from friends. Sharad, another gay partner suggests a ritualistic destruction of a photograph of Kamlesh with his lover Prakash in a naked tight embrace, which is presumed to be a factor obstructing Kamlesh, in order to forget Prakash. However, the plan is spoiled and the play takes a new twist by the visit of unexpected guests — Kamlesh’s sister, Kiran and her fiancé Ed (another name of Prakash). Kiran is surprised to learn the true nature of Ed as a homosexual and narrowly escapes marriage. Hence, the play is a neat presentation of the lives of people who practice alternate sexuality. Dattani made it into a film entitled Mango Souffle.

Do the Needful also deals with the theme of homosexuality in a different way, clubbed with arranged inter-caste marriage, an unconventional Indian marriage custom. Alpesh Patel, ‘thirty-plus and divorced’, living in Mumbai is a gay man, whose parents Chandrakant Patel and Kusumben Patel are desperate to get him married again. They respond to the matrimonial ad from Devraj Gowda
and Prema Gowda of Bangalore, equally desperate parents of Lata Gowda, ‘twenty-four and notorious’ whose reputation is well-known among the Gowda community after her sleeping with her lover Salim in his college hostel room. Alpesh’s first marriage ended in divorce due to his preference for homosexuality and hatred for heterosexuality. His parents fail to understand his sexual inclination. Similarly, Lata is determined to marry her lover Salim, though he is a terrorist. Finding no other go, Alpesh and Lata disclose their unwillingness in the marriage to each other. Being helpless to stop the marriage, Lata decides to run away to join Salim. However, her plan is thwarted when she finds Alpesh enjoying sex with the servant boy Mali. Consequently, Lata and Alpesh agree to the marriage on a secret understanding between them to live as they wish without bothering each other. Hence, in an extramarital affair, Alpesh leads a homosexual life with his lover Trilok, and Lata sleeps with her lover Salim. The parents are happy because of the marriage and are ignorant of the reality. For Lata and Alpesh their marriage is a marriage of convenience.

Communal harmony is the theme of the play Final Solutions. Transferred resentments in the context of family relations are also handled in the play. The play focuses on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the post-partition riots. The play probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class business family. A Muslim friend, Zarine, obsesses Hardika, the grandmother, with her father’s murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal. Her son, Rammik Gandhi is haunted by the knowledge that his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine’s father, which was burnt down by his relatives.
in the name of communal riots and bought by his grandfather and father half its value. Her daughter-in-law, Aruna, lives by the strict code of the Hindu Samskar and her granddaughter, Smita, cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy, Babban. Love, hatred, likes and dislikes and attitudinal differences in the family get exposed when Babban and his friend Javed knock at their door seeking shelter from the hounding Hindu mob. Babban is a moderate while Javed is an aggressive fundamentalist. Tolerance and forgetfulness emerge out as the powerful and viable ‘final solution’ to solve the crisis of communal disharmony at the end of the nightlong exchange of ideas, arguments and counter arguments among the characters.

**Bravely Fought the Queen** portrays the clash between traditional and contemporary cultures in the light of emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern-day Indian family. A powerful domestic tragedy, the play highlights the circumstances of a woman fighting against all the odds that the forces of patriarchy have piled up against her. Jiten and Nitin, the joint owners of an advertising agency are the two Trivedi brothers who have married two sisters Dolly and Alka. They live in two adjacent houses. The sisters remain at home most of the time, looking after their ailing mother-in-law, Baa. Jiten who has inherited violence from his father epitomizes male chauvinism. His violence, instigated by Baa, leads him to attack his carrying wife, Dolly, violently and hence Dolly gives birth to a spastic daughter Daksha. Jiten is a drunkard who picks up prostitutes to his office and never bothers about his wife’s aspirations. Nitin, a homosexual, is never attracted to his wife Alka. He enjoyed sex with his
friend Praful, the brother of the sisters who tricked him to marry Alka. He is infatuated with the ‘powerful black arms’ of the auto driver and not with the feminine beauty and grace of his wife Alka. Consequently, Dolly eases her sexual urge with the young cook and Alka suppresses it by becoming addicted to alcohol. Baa finds pleasure in exercising her control over her two sons and ill-treating her daughters-in-law. Her guilt shows its ugly face in the form of excessive love for Daksha. Hence, the play depicts the changing Indian socio-cultural values.

In the eponymous story **Tara**, the characters Tara and Chandan are the Siamese twins, surgically separated. Chandan presents the story of his feminine half through a series of flashbacks. He and Tara are separated surgically for their survival, which eventually resulted in an emotional separation. Mr. Patel, the father of the twins is a Gujarati, married to Bharati, a Kannadiga, daughter of a rich industrialist and an influential minister. During separation, Chandan was unethically favoured just because he happened to be a male baby, whereas, Tara was deprived of what is naturally due to her. Tara’s mother, Bharati along with her father influenced the doctor to fit the third leg of the conjoined twins to Chandan. As the third leg was receiving blood from Tara, it suited naturally to Tara. However, Bharati and her father had separate coercive discussions with the doctor to do the unethical surgery. As a result the leg lost life after two days of the surgery and had to be amputated rendering both Tara and Chandan one-legged. The doctor was bribed with three acres of government prime land in the heart of Bangalore city by the influence of Bharati’s politician-father. Bharati,
torn by guilt, became mentally sick. Chandan escaped to London with a changed identity as Dan, unable to forget his haunting guilt over the injustice caused to Tara. He hated to have any identity, feeling sorry for Tara. Thus, the play poignantly exposes the cruel face of gender discrimination and society's callous attitude towards medically challenged people.

**Dance Like a Man** is one of Dattani's most successful plays repeatedly staged and made into a film. It tells the story of two generations of a family devoted to classical Indian dance Bharatanatyam. Amritlal, a freedom fighter who claims to be a liberal minded man considers Bharatanatyam as a special jurisdiction of women. To him men dancers are effeminate. He cannot just imagine his son, Jairaj, growing hair and dancing Bharatanatyam. He considers Bharatanatyam as a prostitute's dance. For Jairaj Bharatanatyam is not just an art but also a passion he is obsessed with. His wife Ratna visiting an old devadasi's house to learn the nuances of the Mysore School of Bharatanatyam tradition is viewed by Amritlal as a disgrace to the whole family. As Jairaj and Ratna live under the shade of Amritlal, he exerts pressure on Ratna to prevent Jairaj from dancing. Ratna is allowed to continue dance. Ultimately, Jairaj ends in alcoholism unable to fulfil his wishes of becoming a great dancer and teach his son Bharatanatyam, the dance of Lord Shiva. Ratna gets her ambition fulfilled when their daughter Lata becomes a renowned dancer. Lata marries Viswas, a wealthy boy who has nothing to do with dancing but allows her to dance. Hence, the play examines the prejudiced notions attached to Bharatanatyam, a classical dance form of India and stereotyped gender roles.
Where There's a Will is a play, which revolves around a rich and successful businessman Hasmukh Mehta, his wife Sonal, son Ajit, daughter-in-law Preeti, and mistress Kiran Jhaveri. Hasmukh lived a life imposed upon him by his father based on his expectations. As a result, he turned to be a copy of his father's mould. He wanted to dominate his son Ajit who defied him. Consequently he makes a will by which his entire wealth comes under a trust, which is to be managed by his mistress Kiran. Kiran moves into the Hasmukh household after his death and implements his will. The will makes Ajit attend office regularly and is to inherit his father's wealth only when his son attains twenty-one years old. The scheming daughter-in-law Preeti is disappointed, as well the others. Kiran finds out that Preethi was responsible for Hasmukh's premature death. In due course Kiran becomes an indispensable member of the Hasmukh household. Sonal, Hasmukh's wife learns much from her. Hasmukh, who is a ghost now, learns much to his disappointment from Kiran what he was actually. He feels sorry for trying to make Ajit a copy of his own. Thus, the play explores the negative impacts of patriarchy upon the younger generation.

The present thesis entitled Voicing the other: A Study of the Plays of Mahesh Dattani attempts to state that the plays of Mahesh Dattani are the authentic voices of the marginalized voiceless other through three areas of discrimination such as (i) Sexuality and Segregation, (ii) Religion and Restriction and (iii) Culture and Stereotypes.
The dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter, **Introduction**, presents a brief analysis of the origin and growth of Indian English Drama and a brief note on Mahesh Dattani.

The second chapter, **Sexuality and Segregation** presents marginalization based on sexuality and its consequent angst. The eunuchs or the hijras otherwise denoted as the third gender people, women, homosexuals and lesbians are discriminated and marginalized by the mainstream society. They are oppressed and looked down upon.

The third chapter entitled **Religion and Restriction** studies how religion restricts the freedom of individuals. Religion being a sensitive issue in India, the playwright handles it very carefully in a balancing manner. It is also one among the many other factors, which curtails the free vision of modern humanity.

**Culture and Stereotypes**, the fourth chapter, analyses how stereotypes have become an oppressive, inescapable factor of the modern society. Man, woman, love, marriage, parentage and patriarchy have become important stereotypes, which force modern men and women to fall a prey to certain suffocative social constructs, escape from which is hard and mentally agonizing.

The final chapter, **Summation**, sums up all the former discussions. The society gets exposed of its hypocrisy and prejudice in discriminating people based on sexuality, religion, culture and stereotypes denying freedom to these marginalized section of the society. Thus, Dattani's plays are the strong, authentic voices of the voiceless other.
The term ‘other’ in the title of the thesis stands for the marginalized people such as *hijras*, homosexuals, lesbians, physically challenged, *devadasis* and women who are pushed to the brims of the society and whose voices are never heeded to.

The present study is limited to the eight plays mentioned above as they share much of the features taken for analysis — sexuality, religion, culture and stereotyping. These features have become obstacles besides exerting pressure and choking the freedom of modern humanity. It is interesting to note how Dattani has treated the concept of Sexuality and Segregation in his plays. Hence, the next chapter analyses Sexuality and Segregation.