India can be called the birth place of theatre which seems to have taken form as an art before atleast a thousand years of its recognition. Scholars have tried to trace its development in Sanskrit back to the vedas. That is only natural since the vedas, in the absence of the other literary documents, form the fous et origo of Indian literature. In the Rigveda, for instance, we find a very remarkable series of dialogue hymns in which two or more characters address each other in verse.

Aphorisms on acting appear in the writings of Pañini, the Sanskrit grammarian of the 5th Century B.C. and references to actors, dancers, mummers, theatrical companies and academies are found in Kautilya's book on statesmanship, the Artha Sāstra (4th Century B.C.). But, classical structure, form and style of acting and production with aesthetic rules were consolidated even in Bharata Muni's treatise on dramaturgy, Natya-Sastra or popularly known as fifth Veda.
The earliest specimens of drama in ancient India are found in fragments of some Buddhistic dramas attributed to Asvaghosha, the court-poet of the Indo-Scythian King Kanishka of the 1st - 2nd Century A.D. The plays of Bhasa, the play of Sudraka, the plays of Kalidasa and those of Bhavabhuti (8th Century B.C.), besides few others are among the representative productions of ancient Indian literature.

Classical Sanskrit theatre flourished during the first nine centuries of the Christian era. With the altered political situation, it later became a court art. The conquest of India by the Turks put a full stop to the further development and even to the continuation of the tradition of Sanskrit drama. However all over India isolated scholars continued the tradition more or less as a literary exercise.

After the decline of Sanskrit drama, folk theatre developed in various regional languages from the 14th to 19th Centuries. It has played an important part in the growth of modern theatres in India. The most crystallized forms are: the jatra in Bengal (originated in 15th Century), the naumatii, the rāmlīlā
and rāslīlā of North India, the bhavi of Gujarat, the
tamāshā of Maharashtra, terukkuttu of Tamil Nadu,
yakshagāna of Karnataka, the kathakali of Kerala, the
veedhi-natakam of Andhra Pradesh and so on.

Music and dance formed an essential feature
of folk theatre (dance-drama). The masques as well as
the elaborate painting of the faces in Indian dance-
dramas and the Kathakali have a superficial resemblance
to the masques used in Japanese Kabuki and Chinese
opera. "Thematically folk theatre deals with mytho-
logical heroes, medieval romances and social and poli-
tical events and it is a rich store of customs, beliefs, legends
and rituals. It is a "total theatre" pervading all the
senses of the spectacle. And it inherited from Sanskrit
drama the conventions of the opening prayer song, the
sūtradhāra and the vidūsaka. Unfortunately these folk
forms remained only in oral tradition.

During the British occupation of India,
ancient theatre (folk) forms saw a decline. And modern
Indian theatre first developed at the beginning of the
16th Century as a result of Western influence.

A large number of educated Indian youngsters
were enamoured of English plays. They studied them
voraciously. At the same time, in the after-math of the 1857 war, a dislike of all that came from England was simmering and a revived respect for tradition was being nursed. As a result during the last two decades of the 19th Century not only Shakespeare's plays but also the plays of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Harsha and Bhattanarayana (Venisamhara) were translated and a search for a new theatre started.

With the spread of education and of political consciousness, the need for expression was growing urgent. Annasaheb Kirlosker's epoch-making production of Sakuntala in 1880 launched modern Marathi drama and English drama on the Bombay stage slowly declined in the face of the challenge from vernacular dramatic activity. The first Bengali drama performed, Chhadama-besh, was adapted from an English drama called Disguise. By the end of 19th Century only one English play in English, Madhusudan Dutt's Is Civilization? was staged in Bengal. A hectic theatrical activity followed in India and dramatic associations or troupes were formed throughout India.

T.P. Kailasam is one of the major playwrights in the pre-Independence phase. Though essentially a
Kannada playwright, he has to his credit some plays in English also: The Burden, The Purpose, Fulfilment, The Curse or Karna and Keetchaka. While the story of The Burden is from the Ramayana, the other plays are based upon some episodes from the Mahabharata. He tried to highlight the characters from these myths. But compared to Sri Aurobindo, Girish Karnad and others he does not seem to be so much inclined to be presenting contemporary problems through old myths and legends as to show greatness in his epic heroes.

Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote on the model of English plays, felt that the traditional Sanskrit plays of poets like Kalidasa were better. He was dissatisfied with the English plays as they were full of action and lengthy speeches of a melodramatic character.

The first element of realism was introduced in the 'twenties' by Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, Naresh Mitra, Ahindra Chowdhuri and Durga Das Banerjee. They were ably assisted by two talented actresses, Probha Devi and Kanakavati. The depiction of realism in a drama is not a new achievement of India alone. In 1900s, Ibsen:
anticipated our modern desire to explore the contradictions and frailties of our society as well as in ourselves, to search for causes behind effects, to assail compromise, to put a finger on pretence and prejudice, to focus a spotlight on corrupting relationships within the family and between the sexes, to embark on the search for one's identity, to point out the dangers that accompany lies and illusions and the equal danger to those fragile spirits whose self-delusions are forcibly stripped from them in the name of facing reality.¹

In the South social satire has been the forte of the professional and amateur theatre. Even as early as the last decade of the 19th Century, in Telugu, dramatists like Gurujada Appa Rao had written powerful social satires, like *Kanyasulkam*. The first popular Tamil social play, *Dambacari Vilasam* of Kashi Vishwanath Mudaliar was also written about the same time. These plays were not "problem" plays but "solution" plays.

With the formation of Indian National Congress a new momentum started in Indian drama. New plays conveying the message of newly awakened nationalism were written basing on historical events to suit the mood of the country. In Bengal they were suppressed by the Government. Episodes from Maratha history were dramatized depicting a spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity. In Hindi Jayashankar Prasad wrote historical plays during this period but he selected his themes from history to project a particular point of view. What is more important, the dramatists newly discovered the one-act play where they could keep college theatres engaged. In Kashmir, we are told, 70 per cent of the dramas written between 1935 and 1947 were one-act plays. In 1930 history was created in Andhra amateur when Raghava of Bellary presented Rajamannar's Thappevaridi (whose Fault?), a play of entirely new type and of new production methods. In all the regions where the new activity started, an informed criticism both in the press and in the college publications came into existence. The problem of women, the problem of Harijans and such social problems were taken as themes for these plays.
After Independence again the Indo-English playwrights went back to our great epics and vedas for their themes. They took episodes from the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the vedas and interpreted them in the context of contemporary life. V.N.Srinivasa Aiyangar's Ramayana depicts an ideal kingdom of an ideal king. Mathuram Bhoothalingam attempts in his play Alone in Ayodhya to make the hero, Rama, more human than divine. The vedantic philosophy impresses Asif Currimbhoy and in his play, Om, the playwright attempts at an aesthetic appreciation and understanding of thoughts of the Hindu seers. Shiv Kumar Joshi, a modern playwright wonderfully employs the Jaya-vijaya episode of the Bhagavata in his socio-mythological play about Gandhiji entitled, He Never Slept So Long. An evidence of full influence of Sanskrit is clear in the play Sermishta by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. In dramatising the story from the first book of the Mahabharata, the playwright seems to have been fully influenced by the tradition of Sanskrit plays — the dialogue, description, characters like Vidusaka, songs and stage techniques. Smt. K.B.Thakur's Mother and Child is the tragic story of Karna of the Mahabharata. The
playwright focusses light on the natural inseparable bondage between a mother and her son, and the consequent conflict she has to undergo when it comes to a question of one’s birth not sanctioned by the rigid society.

Unfortunately, the dramatist in English has seldom thought of experimenting in this direction, and when he occasionally tried to do so, he has only been guilty of using these traditional elements as little more than clever and exotic gimmicks which can be depended upon to impress a gullible foreign audience which has no familiarity with the genuine article. The "Kathakali Dancer" and the "Self-Whipper and his Drummer" in Pratap Sharma’s The Professor Has a War Cry (1970), for instance, add nothing substantial to the content of the play, except providing some rather confused symbolism. Even the earlier playwrights like Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam and Rabindranath Tagore, though turned to the Indian tradition for themes, never seem to have attempted to draw upon either the Sanskrit or the folk modes. Their model was Shakespeare and not Kalidas. These dramatists failed even to make creative use of the rich fund of myth which our tradition really affords to any modern Indian writer. T.S. Eliot breathed new life into the moribund verse
play by going back to ancient Greek myths, boldly transporting the Eumenides to a country house in North England, inviting Hercules to a cocktail party in London, transforming Ion into an English confidential clerk, and Oedipus into a British elder statesman.

M.K. Naik Said:

The artistic advantage of running a continuous parallel between antiquity and contemporaneity and thus administering a shock of recognition which reveals the modern human condition is abundantly available to the Indian playwright in English; but he does not seem to have made full use of this potent artistic strategy.²

He also seems to have failed to exploit the potentialities of his extremely complex historical heritage. And the Indian playwrights are drawn towards Indian tradition and folk forms and became magnetized by them.

In the 1960s and 1970s vernacular dramatists turned to our folk forms and are tapping their springs of vitality with splendid results. Girish Karnad's use of yakshagana in the Kannada play Hayavadana, and

Vijay Tendulkar's of dashavatār and khele techniques in the Marathi play, Ghashiram Kotwal; the adaptation of bhāvi in two Gujarati plays — Dina Gandhiji's Mena Gurjari and Bakul Tripathi's Leela, the employment of Jatra motif in Utpal Dutt's Tokumareswara and Badal Sircar's Evam Indrajit; and Habib Tanvir's presentation of The Little Clay Cart in a neo-Navtanki style etc., are prominent recent examples. An American dramatic critic who recently visited India has said that "At the moment, the vitality and independence of India's folk theatre exceeds that of any other in Asia."\(^3\)

Modern Indian drama is paving way to a national theatre. Even though such terms as Hindi theatre, Bengali theatre, Marathi theatre or Kannada theatre are still used, the drama is treading unconsciously on the path of oneness or "Indianness" of Indian theatre. Plays written in different languages are being translated into English and other regional languages as they are produced and appreciated in the various parts of the country. A closer contact is being established between these theatres enabling the possibility of an Indian theatre.

Drama has been used in Maharashtra in the traditional way for the spiritual uplift of the people and at the same time, it has acted as the most powerful weapon against social, economic and political evils.

As is well known, the Marathi stage conjured up a world of different rasas, a characteristic not generally shared by the other parts of India. Another striking feature of the stage in Maharashtra is its wonderful combination of the writer, actor and musician. Musicians like Bhaurao Kothalkar and Bal-Gandharva devoted themselves to drama and the theatre drew the best out of these wizards. Public opinion and press criticism was invited by the artists and this contributed much to the development of the Marathi stage. The harmonious blending of these diverse influences, brought about the Golden Age of the Marathi stage which lasted for nearly half a century.

The Marathi theatre seems to have born in 1842. At first the theatre started as an imitation of the Kannada play Keertankar. In the early stages of its development it catered only for the upper layer of society. It was Madhavarao Patankar who wrote plays with an eye to the ordinary villager.
During the period of national discontent, the Marathi stage was not only in the vanguard of freedom movement but also underwent far reaching stages in the techniques of writing and producing plays.\textsuperscript{4}

Actors, dramatists and musicians together fought against the tyranny of the rulers. In 1943, the Marathi Theatre celebrated its centenary in Bombay, Pune and Sangli. During the previous decade it had professionally fallen on evil days. The old glory of the Marathi musical theatre had disappeared long ago. Starting with the centenary celebrations, Dr. A.N. Bhalerao of the Murabai Marathi Sahitya Sangh began organizing annual festivals of Marathi drama at open air theatres. The programme at these festivals consisted of revivals of established classics as well as performances of new plays. Well-known playwrights such as Anand Kanekar and V.V. Shirwadkar started contributing adaptations from Shakespeare, Goldsmith and others as well as independently written plays to these festivals.

Vijay Tendulkar leads the vanguard of the Avant-Garde theatre that developed as a movement separate

from the mainstream. Tendulkar and his colleagues were dissatisfied not with the efforts of Dr. Bhalerao but with the decadent professional theatre that characterized the thirties and forties. They wanted to give theatre a new form and therefore experimented with all aspects of it including content, decor and communication.

Tendulkar began his career as a dramatist in the mid-fifties. He has twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one-act plays and eleven children's dramas to his credit. Many of these have been translated and produced in major Indian languages. His Silence! the Court is in Session earned him a place among leading Indian playwrights in the late sixties while his Ghashiram Kotwal won him international fame in the mid-seventies. But his plays The Vultures and Sakharam Binder made him a highly controversial figure. Encounter in Umbugland is purely a political satire that is free from the themes of sex and violence which are usually considered as the common features of Tendulkar plays.

In almost all his plays — An Island Called Man (1955), The Walls Between (1958), Nest of Wax (1958), I Won, I Lost (1963), School for Crows, Rain, O Rain (1964), Silence! (1967), The Vultures (1970) — Tendulkar is
concerned with the middle class individual set against a hostile society. *Sakharam Binder* is concerned exclusively with sex and violence in lower middle class, whereas *Ghashiram* deals with sex, violence and politics brought into fair play. Even though Tendulkar is criticised for his outrageous naturalism in his plays there is an underlying vein of hope for the revival of humanity in man's life. A discussion of sex and violence with a touch of sympathy for the victims in Tendulkar's plays is intended in the following chapters. And how Tendulkar has experimented on the techniques of folk-theatre is also looked at briefly.