PREFACE

The present study is an exploration of the plays of Gurcharan Das to underline the mode and form of dramatic confrontation. Das took to writing in the mid of nineteenth century when Indian Drama was striving to secure a firm foothold and build a tradition of its own. Indian Theatre and Drama was occupied with plays written in regional languages to which the audiences responded spontaneously. A host of dramatists Girish Karnad, Nissim Ezekiel, Asif Currimbhoy, Badal Sircar, Geive Patel, Mahesh Dattani and Gurcharan Das in the post –colonial period strove to make recognizable impact in the field of Indian English Drama. In addition bold experimentations in the speed of language and technique alongwith a rich diversity of genre like comedy tragic-comedy, tragedy, farce, history and fantasy helped Indian English Drama rise to the acme of popularity.

With a degree in Philosophy from prestigious Harvard University America, former CEO of Procter and Gamble, Gurcharan Das is a dramatist a columnist and a non-fiction writer. He has written *Three English Plays* namely *Larins Sahib, Mira And 9 Jakhoo Hill* and a novel *A Fine Family*, apart from non-fictional works like *The Elephant Paradigm- Indian Wrestles with Change, Indian Unbound and The Difficult of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma*. His contribution to English Drama is immense because his plays prove that Indian Drama in English is both stageable as well as contains literary value.

The present study encompasses six chapters –

**Chapter I** - Recent Indian Drama : A Survey  
**Chapter II** - Gurcharan Das: The Making of New Drama  
**Chapter III**  - *Larins Sahib*: The Complexity of the Legend  
**Chapter IV** - *Mira*: The World of Mysticism
Chapter V - *Jakhoo Hill: A Dilemma of Conflicting values*

Chapter VI - *The Audacity of Gurcharan Das: An Assessment*

Of the chapters, the first one is **Recent Indian Drama: A Survey**. With the rapid growth of English as second language in India, the emergence of electronic Media Indian Drama in English got better opportunities and reception. Theatre Groups in Bombay, Calcutta and New Delhi have successfully produced plays of Partap Sharma, Gieve Patel, Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and others. Of all GirishKarnad and Mahesh Dattani are the two pillars of Indian Drama in English. GirishKarnad has effectively demonstrated how Indian drama in English can revitalize itself by turning back to its roots in Ancient Indian Drama and how myths and history can serve as a powerful medium to dramatise contemporary situations. Other playwrights who deserve greater critical attention are Partap Sharma for his two plays – *The Professor Has a War cry* (1970), *A Touch of Brightness* (1972) Dina Mehta for *The Myth – Makers* (1969), *Brides are Not for Burning* (BBC Radio- Play writing content winner of 1979). *Getting Away with Murder* (2000), ShashiTharu *Twenty Two Months in the Life of a Dog and The Fine Dollar Smile* (1990), Khushwant Singh’s for *Tyger, Tyger Burning bright*, Uma Parameshwar for *Sons Must Dies and Other Plays* (1998), Majula Padmanabhan for *Harvest* (1998), *Lights out* (2000) and B. Ahmed for *Three Days* (1975).

**Gurcharan Das: The Making of New Drama**: records the life and works of Das - the creative artist understudy.

The next chapter is **Larins Sahib: The Complexity of the Legend**. The writing of this play according to Gurcharan Das, was in a sense, search for his own identity because he hails from the state of Punjab. In this respect the background of the play assumes great significance because it draws attention to the larger issues of Punjabi identity. Alongwith Das admirably portrays the 19th century colonial
India. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh ‘the Lion of Punjab’, the British appointed Henry Lawrence as the resident of East Indian Company in the court of Ranjit Singh’s twelve years old son Dalip Singh. The greatest achievement of Larins Sahib is that he is able to project himself to natives as being fully sensitive to their needs. His rise from a mere clerk to the resident of the East Indian company is meteoric. He is totally free from the original sin of the white man’s burden. He is not only generous to the conquered Indians but admires them as well. He shows noticeable fairness, justice, sympathy and understanding towards the natives.

Chapter IV is entitled as Mira: The World of Mysticism. The play explores the phenomenon of Sainthood through the story of Mirabai, the sixteenth century Rajput Poetess Saint. Here Das has attempted to combine the Indian legend of Mira with the sophistication of western Total Theatre. In addition Saints like Mirabai subverted the traditional ideals of Indian womanhood and challenged the social order. Mira’s mystical love for Krishna challenged the social order and completely ruffled the conservative Rajputs.

The play also explores the tragedy of her husband Rana who suffers the misery and pain of his wife’s loss and her transformation into Saint Mirabai. The play opens and concludes with Mira as the bride – to Rana in the prologue and to Lord Krishna at the end – “I am free-free from life and death and time. Look at his light … I am blind. But how I love my blindness (SL.XVIII)

Next play understudy is 9 Jakhoo Hill: A Dilemma of Conflicting values – This chapter presents Indian socio-economic and political history of 1960s and 1970s which is considered to be the most tumultuous period in the Indian context due to demoralizing china war. The play is not only about the traumatic experiences of
partition, one’s individual past but of migrant families in particular and community in general.

The play is set in the autumn of 1962 in Shimla during Diwali. *9 Jakhoo Hill* probes the lives of two established but displaced families from Lahore during the “Partition” – which reduced people to elemental fearful creature desperate to survive clinging to the vestiges of dignity (1943) one of the concerned family is a conventional middle class family consisting of Amrita, her brother Karan Chand alias Mamu and Amrita’s young daughter Ansuya. Amrita’s husband died during the riots, they lost all their wealth they had in Lahore and came to Delhi. Due to lack of business acumen in Amrita and Karan Chand they were all at sea. They were forced to sell their mills and their house, as they suffered heavy losses in their business. Finally, they moved to Shimla to their summer residence, *9 Jakhoo Hill*. This was all they had been left with along with a petty income from bonds and share too inadequate from their kind of life.

The other family comprises of Deepak – twenty seven years old young man and a successful business executive settled in Bombay. His mother Chitra endures the terrors of partition, moves to Mumbai, Where with an obsessive devotion ensures that her son gets the best of education and then a good job in a good company. The play also explores the conflict between the old conventional middle class family represented by Amrita and Anusuya and the new emerging middle class represented by Deepak and Chitra. Gurcharan Das has portrayed Chitra as a die – hard money monger fervently against her son’s Deepak’s decision to marry Ansuya bereft of all the luxuries and affluences and is almost on the verge of being bankrupt.

The study concludes in *The Audacity of Gurcharan Das: An Assessment* – Gurcharan Das is not only an established playwright of international repute but
also a notable communicator and a person of wide business accomplishments and interest. Based on serious explorations, his plays reflect the problems and challenges of contemporary life though he endeavours to forge link between the past and the present. The creative intellectual that he is, Das obviously views the subjects of his plays from his own perspective, develops them in the crucible of his own imagination and personal experiences and employs them as a medium to communicate his own independent and original – feelings, thoughts and interpretations. For e.g. Larins Sahib unfolds against the backdrop of the political chaos and murky intrigue that marked the time immediately following the death of Ranjit Singh. In Larins Sahib one sees the struggle between personal ethics, duty and pride as Lawrence strives to balance the three facets of his self – the enlightened empire builder and agent in the British Government and the part of himself which longs to be the lion of the Punjab. On the other side one has Mira a contemporary retelling of a well-known story. The transformation of Mira from being a princes to a saint is told through a different perspective making her mere human and more endearing to people. There is love, jealousy, sadness and loss in perfect measure to make the play memorable. 9 Jakhoo Hill paints the transition in the thinking of the people and especially in the new progressive generation brought in constructive change in the living condition of the people. The sentiment of the new generation is progressive full of enthusiasm and vigour to build up a new optimist atmosphere in the society. It also emphasizes to maintain a critical balance between economic upliftment and maintaining social and moral order.

Lubna Iqbal