CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Drama is a medium very dear to the heart of man. From time immemorial man has evinced great interest in drama. It still continues to be a popular medium of communication. Drama is appealing to man because it uses not only the ordinary language but it also has a language of its own. Ordinary language with all its intricacies of vocabulary, syntax and pattern is found in drama. Other literary forms too have this language. What is special to drama is that it has its own language which is not verbal at all. The curtains, the lights, the props and the theatricality create this unique non-verbal language. Because of the combination of the ordinary language and the non-verbal language of the theatre, drama continues to be a very appealing medium for man.

In this very popular medium Tom Stoppard has carved a special place in the galaxy of the twentieth century dramatists. Stoppard is a brilliant comic genius. He brings to bear upon his plays great dexterity and precision. Since Stoppard belongs to the second half of the twentieth century dramatists, a brief history of twentieth century drama and specially the post-war British drama will be helpful to place him in the historical perspective.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
DRAMATIC MOVEMENTS

The main thrust of the later part of nineteenth century was realism which Wordsworth advocated through his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. Realism stressed that art should imitate life. According to it dialogue must spring from the experience of day-to-day life. The themes must be culled out from daily experiences. In short, plays must be reconstructed of actual life. Earlier to the movement of realism, the theatre suffered from closed stage, declamatory acting and importance given to star actors. But realism was a reaction against the decadent theatre as it directly addressed itself to contemporary life. The movement of realism was a great success because it came when the theatre was dominated by the "sliding flats, backdrops and general staginess of the old theatre" (Elsom 36). Ibsen was the master of plays of realism by portraying the problems of the contemporary society. He is generally acknowledged as the founder of modern prose drama. About the achievements of realism Rodney Simard says:

People emerge as victims of forces larger than themselves, as individuals confronted with a rapidly accelerating world. These pioneering playwrights were unafraid to present their characters as ordinary, impotent, and unable to arrive at answers to their predicaments. (3)

Soon reaction began to set in against realism. The
theatre goers began to be tired of realism since they found nothing exciting in realism as they were surrounded by it all the time in their lives. A new formula known as 'well-made play' popularised by French dramatists Eugene Scribe and Victorien Sardou came into being. The well-made play had three ingredients namely the crisis, hero and the unities. The philosophy underlying these plays was that drama was not meant for entertainment alone, but had to be used as a vehicle for propaganda—a vehicle to communicate the playwright's ideology and principles. Shaw was a great exponent of this brand of well-made plays.

T.S. Eliot too shares this tradition of well-made plays. But the well-made plays were not spontaneous and were to a large extent mechanical. They served to support middle class assumptions without being threatening. Since the dramatists were constricted by the formula, they began to bend the rules if not break them. The new plays of the 1950s were written according to the formula of well-made play though the playwrights did change something or other in the formula.

The last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of experimental theatre in Europe. Experimental theatre received its name because playwrights were trying to use
surrealism, expressionism and symbolism in the plays. Surrealism prompted playwrights to use dreams without conscious control, expressionism enabled playwrights to use external objects as transmitters of internal impressions and symbolism stressed the immediate, personal and unique experience of the characters. Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet wrote plays with surrealistic trends. Strindberg and Pirandello were the exponents of expressionism. Rimbaud and Synge are notable names in symbolism. Experimental theatre was responsible for enabling playwrights to depict characters' inner lives and subjective reality.

In the 1950s because of the French philosopher-dramatist, Sartre, a new trend of the search for self began. This had its bearings on many a field. In religion the question of free will was upper-most among the people. The Marxists were questioning the importance given to individuals. In this murky situation, Sartre put forward his firm belief that man was capable of free choice. He was an existentialist. Existentialism denies the existence of God. It believes only in existence and not in essence and sees the inadequacy of human reason to explain the enigma of the universe. Speaking about existentialism, John Elsom says:

The individual first had to recognize that there were no divine laws and that he was thus able to
live 'freely': without stock reactions, bad habits and environmentally acquired prejudices. Having reached this state of 'freedom', he was then in a position to decide what sort of person he wished to become. Freedom preceded the formulation of moral judgement. (57)

Closely connected with existentialism is the absurd theatre. It is a drama which presents people as bewildered beings in an incomprehensible universe. Samuel Beckett, an Irish born French dramatist, labelled as an absurdist was one such dramatist who came under the influence of the so called movement of the search for self. He wrote about the basic awareness of human being. His writings had profound influence on English playwrights. Rodney Simard speaking about Beckett says, "most critics and scholars generally agree that the emergence of Samuel Beckett in the 1950s represented a turning point in traditional notions about the nature of dramatic literature" (ix). Like Sartre, another who exercised major influence on the English theatre was Brecht. He exploded the Aristotelian theory of identifying with the hero and the purging effect through catharsis. He proposed what is called 'epic theatre' through which he encouraged varied actor and audience response to a given situation. If there were to be a play dealing with an accident, it would not call for identifying with the driver, the hero of the play. Instead various witnesses would be called to act out their versions of what had happened.
through which the audience could get the contrasting views of the same accident. The epic theatre was a decisive break from the well-made play.

In the twentieth century British drama Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956) proved to be a milestone. Gareth Evans Lloyd remarks,

In the whole of recent British theatrical and dramatic history no date has been loaded with such significance as 1956. Equally, no play has been encumbered with such responsibility for initiating, and eventually representing, a break with past dramatic modes and a model for the future as Look Back in Anger. (50)

Before this play came into existence there were certain unwritten laws about the English theatre. One could write about only heroes. The playwright could not present on the stage any thing and everything as only certain things befitting the stage were allowed. There were certain taboos like homo sexuality. The resounding success of Look Back in Anger brought certain freshness and liberation to the theatre. Themes of working class and social alienation began to dominate the stage in the subsequent years. The success of the play was such that all of a sudden many were inspired to write drama. After the World War II, the theatre underwent many changes. Many theatres were destroyed or damaged due to bombing in the war. There was also a high
entertainment tax. The theatres were controlled by a few moneyed persons. The structure of the theatre also prevented new experiments. The playwrights were constrained as they were expected to write to the interests of star actors and influential companies. After Look Back in Anger there was much change in the problems affecting the theatre. Many more drama companies were founded. There were receptive audiences. There was extensive spread of avant-garde and fringe theatrical activities. The abolition of theatre censorship injected new life to drama. Besides the stage, there were other media like the radio and television, which encouraged a great deal of dramatic activities. All these brought about a new interest in writers and audiences as John R. Taylor in his book The Angry Theatre would put it:

Writers who fifty, fifteen or even five years before would probably have adopted the novel as their chosen form but now, all of a sudden, were moved to try their hand at drama and, even more surprisingly, found companies to stage their works and audiences to appreciate them. (9)

Look Back in Anger marked the beginning of new wave writers. After the World War II the society had to adjust to the peace time situation. What was logical for the war time looked to be unreasonable for the time of peace. The play focussed on the angry young men of the time. It gave expression to the hopeless, furious and bitter sentiments of
the angry young generation. N.F. Simpson was one among the new wave writers. He discards any form, characterization or plot in his play One Way Pendulum. Other notable names among the new wave writers are John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter and many others. Their writing was a revolt against the traditional theatre.

In the 1960s the second wave writers came into reckoning. Their strength was the newly liberated imagination. They were also called post-modern dramatists. They were not a break away group like the new wave writers. Their achievement was not a creation of something totally new. It was rather a turning to existing familiar forms of drama. They were linked to the past as they were trying to fuse realism and experimentalism. They were attempting a renewal rather than an iconoclasm. They tried to picture a world incorporating the concerns of their times. Reality is shown as subjective. Their deft use of controlled language places them in the recognizable tradition of Wilde and Shaw. The key figures among the second wave writers are David Mercer, Tom Stoppard, Peter Terson, Peter Nicholas, David Storey, Joe Orton, Charles Wood and many others. Tom Stoppard receives exceptional praise from John R. Taylor in his book Anger And After, as he says, "of the newest generation in the British theatre none has received more acclaim than Tom Stoppard, mainly on the strength of
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" (318).

Having placed Tom Stoppard in the post-war British drama, a quick look at the characteristics of modern drama must be taken for a better understanding Tom Stoppard.

One of the important characteristics of modern drama is its elasticity. In it one finds a wide range of variety and diversity. It is difficult to classify the playwrights. Any nomenclature does not last for any considerable time. Modern drama is given varied names like kitchen sink, non-realist, knicker farce, nuts and bolts, absurd, dark comedy, comedy of menace, comedy of exhaustion and theatre of revolt. These nomenclatures fit only one or two dramatists. There is no appellation which could describe the whole class of modern dramatists.

Modern drama tries to capture the anguish of modern man. In olden times man had a secure place in the society. The society had a neat system of belief in which God, King, Lords and the common man had a place assigned to them. There was perfect hierarchy and everything had its appointed place. In this world view man was the centre and crown of creation. This ordered security was shattered because of certain historical events. The unquestioned place of man was questioned after Darwin's evolution theory. Man lost his preeminent place as the crown of creation. The
psychoanalysis of Freud brought about a revolution in the understanding of man. Hitherto things which were taken for granted were being questioned. The role of religion which was accepted without any question began to be challenged. Modern warfare had pushed man to a very precarious position. Man was living under the fear of possibility of cities and nations being destroyed and razed to the ground in no time. Man was excelling in the systematic destruction of his own species. Victor Cahn beautifully pictures this modern society saying, "Ours is an age of uncertainty: ethical uncertainty, economic uncertainty, political uncertainty and religious uncertainty" (11). People of this age have lived through the agony of two World Wars. As a result people have experienced general restlessness, meaningfulness, breakdown of established social values, disorganisation and frustration. The modern drama tries to portray the unintelligible, painful, distressing and shocking experiences of modern man.

In order to bring out the meaningfulness and chaos in which modern man lives modern drama uses absurd theatre. Absurdism does not accept any meaningful design. It presumes the death of God. From the absurdist world view man is just an alien and a stranger. Absurdism expresses the senselessness of the human conditions and abandons the use of rational devices and discursive thought. Victor Cahn
defines absurd theatre as follows:

Essentially, absurd theatre accepts the absence of guiding symmetry in the world. God does not exist, nor does any world order normally accepted as a result of his presence. Consequently, it is said, our existence is reduced to a meaningless morass of confusion. (17)

Because of the meaninglessness of the world the use of language itself undergoes a change in modern drama. What is stressed is the futility of speech. Inability of man to communicate with others is highlighted. Silences and pauses are cleverly exploited by the playwrights to form a pattern of communication. Playwrights were aware of what language can and cannot do.

Because of the influence of Brecht’s epic theatre, the clear distinction of author, audience, and stage is dismantled. The barriers are removed and very often the audience and the actors reverse roles. Because of this changed role of the audience, drama becomes more a theatrical event than a piece of literature. And hence theatricality becomes an important phenomenon of modern drama.

Modern drama is conspicuously biased towards the working class. From the heroes of the elite class, drama moves into a new phase where the ordinary people like cooks
and prostitutes become heroes and heroines. Most of the playwrights themselves had working class origins.

TOM STOPPARD

A brief sketch of the twentieth century drama and its characteristics inform the reader the time at which Stoppard stages his entry into the world of the theatre. To understand him further, one needs to share a certain cultural and literary background. Stoppard was born on July 3, 1937 in Czechoslovakia. His father was Eugene Straussler. During the Nazi invasion, Eugene along with his family fled to Singapore. Tom's father died in Singapore when the Japanese invaded Singapore. Young Tom came along with his mother to India. He lived as a young boy in India for five years. Tom got his name Stoppard after his step father as his mother got married to one Kenneth Stoppard, a British army officer in India. Eventually the family moved over to England and settled there. The violent movements, dislocations and cultural shocks were to leave lasting impressions on Stoppard. Stoppard worked as a journalist and drama critic for magazines for twelve years. This experience also shaped his views on freedom of the press and theatre performances. His literariness has a great deal to do with his experience as journalist. At the age of twenty three he felt that he had not done anything spectacular and his
creative urge led him to write plays. He has turned out to be an excellent playwright and an ingenious craftsman.

FEATURES OF STOPPARD'S PLAYS

Stoppard shares in the general anguish of modern man and the characteristics of modern drama are applicable to his plays as well. Besides the general characteristics the following are the specific features of Stoppard's plays.

EXALTATION OF THE TRIVIAL

Stoppard celebrates and exalts the ordinary as he has intense sympathy for the underdog and extraordinary concern for the ordinary people. He takes the familiar and transforms it. In Hamlet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are mere ordinary, passive and marginal characters in whom Shakespeare has little interest. Shakespeare was interested in presenting Hamlet's world view. Hamlet's world view consisted of an orderly universe in which values like marriage, love, kingship and honour existed. In fact Shakespeare's play can very well be performed by leaving out these nonentities. But Stoppard takes these ordinary characters who represent the common man and exalts them. These two characters can recollect no past and they have no notion of what they are supposed to do. Instead of finding their identity, proving themselves, winning their place in
the society, they just drift along, looking for somebody to assign them their roles. Stoppard creates a story from the ordinary existence of these two attendant courtiers. Rodney Simard rightly says, "Stoppard's technique is to explore the everyday and the common against a backdrop of the important and significant" (53).

VICTIMS OF CHANCE

The characters in Stoppard's plays are portrayed as victims of chance. The characters face difficult questions for which answers are not forthcoming. They are unable to know whether they are guided by any design or just led by mere chance. The question raised in Shakespeare's King Lear, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; They kill us for their sport" (930) comes up in many of his plays. Problems like free will and desirability of morality are dealt with in his plays. Characters wait in the wings never quite grasping what is happening in the centre-stage. They are uncertain of their roles and are increasingly disturbed by the apparent meaninglessness of their lives. All traces of logical construction and rational behaviour are abandoned. Only chance determines what happens, if anything happens. It is not like the classical play where the disordered world is restored to consonance by lofty sacrifice and heroic action. It is an arbitrary existence
where there is only place for chance. Humanity's plight is seen as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings. The world Stoppard portrays is like the world of Sisyphus, where the mythical hero spends eternity in a futile attempt to push an enormous stone to the top of a steep hill nearing which the stone is always fated to roll down again.

DISINTEGRATED WORLD

Stoppard presents in his plays the disintegrated world by employing different aspects like uncertainty, removal from reality, mystery and wish to be free. These aspects help Stoppard express his vision of the disintegrated world in which man finds his existence uncertain. As modern man is caught up in the chaotic and mysterious world, Stoppard's characters are caught up in the chaotic and mysterious world. In general his characters tend to withdraw into a world of their own. Though Stoppard's plays open with a sense of mystery, as the play progresses all that are strange and bizarre are unravelled and the various levels of mysteries are solved. It is precisely this that differentiates the plays of Stoppard from the absurd plays. In absurd plays one finds only chaos, uncertainty and mystery. But in Stoppard's plays there is finally an explanation for every mystery. This naturally leads to
another characteristic of Stoppard namely absurdism with a difference.

ABSURDISM ALTERED

The theatre of the absurd questions the very metaphysical edifice of life in dealing with the absurdity of human life. Though there are absurdist tendencies in Stoppard, he goes beyond absurdism. His plays are absurd in the sense that they deal with the tragic-comic sense of the absurd and contingent nature of man's existence. His plays deal with man's insignificance, exile and search for self. But Stoppard is no prophet of doom. He is not satisfied with nihilism. He tries to impose order on the chaos. He goes beyond absurdity as he offers hope. Absurdism is altered and given a twist in Stoppard. His drama is altogether a new brand. Sense of the metaphysical anguish proper to the absurd drama is absent in Stoppard. As against absurd drama, his plays do not abandon rational devices and discursive thought but instead depend on them.

NO POINT OF REST

Stoppard's writing is marked by what Stoppard calls 'not knowing'. He says, "My plays are a lot to do with the fact that I just don't know" (Hudson 13). He is of the view that no ready-made conceptual scheme is adequate to the
complexity of experience. He tries to bring the multi
perception of reality by his different characters. Be it
philosophy, art, politics, war, journalism or history, there
is no single view. He tries to present the views from
different angles so much so that one cannot be certain that
a particular view is the view of Stoppard. He illustrates
that the different views contribute to the understanding of
reality. He has said that his distinguishing mark is "an
absolute lack of certainty about almost anything" (Hayman
40). His statements tend to be "firstly A, secondly minus A"
(Hayman 10). One cannot rest and say definitely that this is
Stoppard's view. There is no point of rest as the audience
is constantly kept on its toes. Stoppard enjoys dislocating
audience's assumptions. He likes to play a sort of infinite
'leap-frog' (Hudson 7). By leap-frog Stoppard means constant
playing through arguments, rebuttal of arguments and counter
rebuttals. Briefly it means that the last word has not been
said in any discussion. In other words it is the excellence
of pluralism. In Stoppard's 'not knowing' there is an
implication that he is puzzled at how others could claim
certainty about knowledge. Stoppard's leapfrogging helps him
express his continuing quest for elusive and probably
provisional truths through his imaginative diversity and
stylistic variety. 'Not-knowing' is not negative but an
alertness to a complex life experience. It only means that
he does not endorse any one single view. There is always in Stoppard a questioning temperament ready to shift the perspective and look at the subject of discussion in some new and surprising way. This approach helps Stoppard to come to terms with the complexities of life. Since the life experience is very complex no simple solutions can be offered. One cannot say either this or that but this and that. Through his leapfrogging Stoppard is able to accommodate the multiplicity of perceptions.

SPARKLING DIALOGUE

Closely connected with provisional truths or 'not-knowing' is his sparkling dialogue. When Stoppard creates characters who propose contradictory and complementary views, he tries to present their views as fairly as possible. This enables him to create racy and absorbing dialogues. Stoppard says, "I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself" (Gussow 54). Stoppard is known for verbal fireworks. He revels in the use of puns, jokes and aphorisms. He takes great delight in word-games, conceits, pastiche and parody. At times his dialogue consists of entirely foreign phrases. In fact contemporary playwrights debunk language and that is why there is a lot of emphasis on pauses and silences and incommunicability of language. In
Harold Pinter, for instance, there is minimal use of dramatic speech. But Stoppard is altogether different in the use of language. No one would have predicted that a playwright so literary, so dependent on words for dramatic impact would be a successful writer for the contemporary stage. Stoppard’s exceptional gifts of language are pointed out by Susan Rusinko in her book British Drama 1950 to the Present: “Rich with literary allusions, puns, paradoxes, parodies, verbal and intellectual games, and strong visual images, his language has been likened to Joyce’s and his comedies of ideas to those of Wilde and Shaw” (66-67).

PREOCCUPATION WITH ART

Stoppard’s works not only explore human conditions in the world, but also try to define what art is. He thinks that art with message is bad art. One of his characters says, “if rationality were the criterion for things being allowed to exist, the world would be one gigantic field of soya beans!” (J 30). He thinks that when one is angered at any injustice, writing a play does not alter the situation. He refers to Auden who could not save a single Jew from death because of his poems. However Stoppard thinks that art is important not because it provides the message but because it provides the standard against which men could make their judgements.
INGENIOUS AND ARTFUL

The adventurousness with theatrical form is a key issue that runs throughout his plays. His theatricality is so ostentatious, ingenious and artful that he has created a name for himself in theatricality. In a television interview he said to Melvyn Bragg in 1978, "I am quite hot on the theatricality of theatre. That's not really the tautology it sounds.... For me, theatre is not literature. It's an event" (Brassell 262). Commenting on Stoppard, Jim Hunter perceptively points out:

The criterion of theatrical success tends to be whether the play works. It works if it is absorbing, exciting, moving or funny to watch, so that we would like to watch it again; or, in the case of a scene-change, or transition, if it gets one section of the play to another without irritation. (21)

Theatricality demands that the playwright has in mind the audience before him while he is writing the play.

LITERARINESS

Stoppard has extraordinary skill in drawing from a variety of fields. Literature, history, music, art, philosophy and science serve as various sources from which he draws very freely. If one is not familiar with these fields one may miss a lot in his plays. His plays abound in allusions to
historical and fictional characters. One needs to know the literary and socio-cultural background to appreciate his plays. If at times his plays are obscure it is because of this cultural gap. There is also another reason for obscurity as any play, more so a comedy, begins to date because the allusions lose their significance on account of the unfamiliarity of the audience with the allusions.

LAUGHTER

The first and obvious thing to be said about the works of Stoppard is that they are almost always very amusing. Stoppard's plays are marked with laughter, which occurs in the setting, characterization, theatrical and dramatic devices and dialogue. Stoppard enjoys setting himself bizarre dramatic puzzles the solutions of which provide great fun. Stoppard considers art as 'play' causing laughter. For him life itself is a game. Because of this vision there is a lot of laughter in his plays. Stoppard constructs his plays in such a way that he causes laughter through exchange of actors and audience, tricks, reversal of principles, madness of different kinds and fouls of different hues. Language slips, juxtapositions, duping the audience, forgetfulness and misunderstanding are also largely responsible for the incessant laughter in his plays. Travestying is another device through which Stoppard is able
to cause laughter. He is first and foremost an entertainer. The element of amusement comes out in whatever be the subject at hand. He deals with board meetings, news reporting, sports coverage, philosophy, psychiatrists, theatre critics and a host of other things. In all these one can see the exceptional wit of Stoppard.

PROFUNDITY

Laughter is only one side of the coin. The surprising thing about Stoppard is that he constantly returns to earnest subject matter. In his works, jokes and seriousness, wit and humour mingle. In Stoppard the siren and the serious artist become one. Behind the laughter and fun there is a seriousness which the audience cannot miss. When the laughter subsides the audience ponders on the serious issues the play has focused. Stoppard attempts the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce. In short there is profound seriousness behind the apparent comic as Rodney Simard says, "while his plays can be enjoyed as theatrical amusements, their value does not lie in their ability to divert, but rather in their insistence on subjective thought" (53). Stoppard's plays contain a serious dialectic as he explores a variety of views instead of giving one answer. After presenting the general features of Stoppard's plays it is fitting to present an overall literature survey
as a prelude to the present study.

LITERATURE SURVEY

There is a welter of critical opinions on Stoppard. There are quite a few useful studies on Tom Stoppard. Jim Hunter has a book titled *Tom Stoppard's Plays* which is an excellent study of the different aspects in Stoppard's plays like staging. Tim Brassell's *Tom Stoppard: An Assessment* tries to show how Stoppard excels as a playwright of performance. *Beyond Absurdity* by Victor Cahn is a remarkable study in tracing the absurd elements of Stoppard's plays.

The other critics who have books to their credit are Richard Andretta, Michael Billington, Lucina Gabbard, Ronald Hayman and Katherine Kelly. These books are valuable aids to understand and appreciate the plays of Tom Stoppard. Innumerable learned and critical articles on Stoppard have appeared in reputed journals like *Modern Drama*, *Comparative Drama*, *Educational Theatre Journal*, *Critical Quarterly*, *English Theatre Studies* and many others. The articles deal with themes like philosophic content, drama criticism, Shakespeare adaptations, political plays, absurd plays and Stoppard's strategy. Ginakaris in his article "Absurdism Altered: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" explores affinities to absurdist drama and points out ways in which Stoppard's plays diverge from the absurdist theatre. Andrew
Kennedy in his article "Tom Stoppard’s Dissident Comedies" critically looks at political plays. Other renowned critics who have contributed useful articles in journals are Kenneth Tynan, William Cooke, Richard Corballis and James Morwood. All these books and articles are definitely significant and useful studies towards Stoppard criticism. They serve as the key to unlock Stoppard’s imagination. These authors have approached the playwright from a particular angle like absurdism or stage craft or theatricality. There has not been any full length study of the blend of the comic and the serious in Stoppard’s plays. Hence the researcher has chosen this field of the blend of the comic and the serious for exploration.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The hypothesis of the researcher is that Tom Stoppard’s vision is both comic and serious. The researcher proposes to make a study of the blend of the comic and the serious in selected plays of Tom Stoppard. Among the many traits of Stoppard plays, the blend of the comic and the serious is a significant trait which accounts for the great appeal of Stoppard. This view is highlighted by Lucina Gabbard: "The acclaim for the Stoppard plays spring in part from their unique appeal to both the escapist and the intellectual for they unite comedy with concern, farce with philosophy" (1).
The blend of the comic and the serious is Stoppard's significant contribution to the modern drama. The blend is also a boon for the otherwise bewildered and battered modern man. The present study is different from other studies that are available on Stoppard and will contribute to the better understanding and appreciation of Stoppard's plays. The study aims at showing how the blend is brought about in Stoppard's entire dramatic career. The study also tries to identify the different levels of this blend in the selected plays of Stoppard. It proposes to study also the different techniques and skills Stoppard employs in bringing about the blend of the comic and the serious. In the process the study proposes to indicate the relevance of Stoppard to modern society.

THESIS STATEMENT

Tom Stoppard has emerged as one of the significant dramatists in the twentieth century British drama. He conveys through his plays the typical postmodernistic concerns of contemporary life thus giving expression to meaningfulness of human existence, loss of identity of the individuals and the absence of moral and ethical values. This existential vision of modern man is conveyed to the readers by the harmonious blend of the comic and the serious through his plays. The sense of the comic in Stoppard
arising out of settings, themes, characterization, literary and dramatic devices besides exploiting linguistic potentials reveals the comic vision of Stoppard. But at the same time Stoppard transcends the sense of the comic by exploring some of the most difficult, abstruse and sophisticated ideas clothed in modern philosophy and metaphysics and thereby proves that his plays are among the most profoundly intellectual of dramas written in the twentieth century context. Stoppard's plays have as much fun to read as to see. The texts are replete with puns, aphorisms and repartees that there is laughter all around. Laughter is built into the way Stoppard handles philosophy, linguistics, history and politics. Another major source of fun is the mocking or travestying works of literature and parodying of literary and historical characters. Stoppard's plays are resounding successes in creating fun and laughter. This is only one side of the story. Stoppard, a master entertainer combines the aspects of the serious in a remarkable way. He is busy with serious issues like philosophic ideas, the existence of absolute values, the problem of free will, the uncertainty of all knowledge. Stoppard's works are dramas of ideas. He has said that his aim is "to end up by contriving a perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Hudson 6-7). The thesis tries to explore how Stoppard
blends the comic and the serious in his dramatic career spanning over a period of three decades.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

The introductory chapter, while tracing the development of modern British drama in the twentieth century gives a brief account of the important dramatic movements like Realism, Experimentalism, Absurdism and Epic Theatre characterized by a shift in perspective from an examination of kings and queens to the common man and shows how all these features have a direct bearing on Tom Stoppard's dramatic universe. This chapter also examines the salient features—exaltation of the trivial, absurdism with a difference, 'leap-frogging'—of Tom Stoppard's plays along with highlighting their theatricality evoking a tremendous response from the audience. This chapter, besides giving an account of previous research done in this area, analyses the aims and objectives of the present study to show that the intermingling of the comic and the serious operates both in terms of themes and techniques.

The second chapter "The Blend of the Comic and the Serious" examines the plays of the early phase (1963-1970) of Tom Stoppard and shows that there is a harmonious blend of the comic and the serious elements during this phase of his dramatic career. Plays like Enter a Free Man,
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Albert's Bridge, A Separate Peace are discussed. The researcher shows how Stoppard combines the comic and the serious in themes, plots, structures, settings, characters and in the devices like dialogue and imagery.

The third chapter "Master at Play" which investigates the second phase (1971-1976) in Stoppard's dramatic career, establishes him as the master entertainer where the sense of the comic is generated by playful treatment of variety of subjects like philosophy, art, politics and history. On account of this comic elements gain an ascendancy over the serious. Plays like Jumpers and Travesties are discussed. This chapter traces how the ascendancy of the comic over the serious occurs through the parodying of historical and literary personages and in the structuring of the exquisite and absorbing debates on the contradictory ideas of art and philosophical systems with skillful integration of theatrical images into the action of the plays.

The fourth chapter "Comedy of Conversion" that examines the final phase (1977-1995) in Stoppard's dramatic career shows the conversion in Stoppard as a committed artist imbued with a strong sense of the moral vision. Plays like Professional Foul, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Night and Day are discussed. This chapter shows the ascendancy of
the serious over the comic. This chapter sums up how theatrical devices like play-within-the-play, medley of madness and orchestra have been adeptly used to bring out the sense of the serious in Tom Stoppard's plays.

The concluding chapter attempts to synthesize the various levels of the blend of the comic and the serious seen through the different phases of Stoppard's dramatic career. It also shows the unique Stoppardian features of inimitable theatricality characterized by games, acrobatics, tableaus and the extraordinary verbal pyrotechnics realized in puns, aphorisms, repartees which account for the enduring popularity of Tom Stoppard's plays. The study concludes with presenting Tom Stoppard's holistic vision embedded in the interplay of the comic and the serious which is relevant to the modern man living in a chaotic world.