Chapter I

Introduction

Drama differs from pure literature like poetry and fiction in being a performing art. Hence it is a cooperative and collaborative art form. The simplest of plays can be lyrical or they can be in the form of mime, where gestures dominate. All literature including theatre is the mirror of society and reflection of life. However, the sense of performance is vital to true theatre. One of the major twentieth century American playwrights, Tennessee Williams, once said:

...The printed script of a play is hardly more than an architect’s blue print of a house not yet built. The color, the grace and elevation, the structural pattern in motion, the quick interplay of life begins, suspended like fitful lightening in a cloud, these things are the play, not words on paper.... (qtd. in Narsimhaiah 27) [Afterword to Camino Real]

Performance, therefore, imparts drama its life. It is in this context that all drama should be understood. Some theatrical traditions, however, have greater sense of performance than others. This is particularly true of the Indian theatre.

History of Indian Drama

Though contemporary Indian Drama emerged in colonial time, yet the dramatists had a rich tradition to fall back upon. India, an ancient country known for her variety of climates, customs, languages and literature, has had a long and glorious dramatic tradition of her own. In ancient times, drama was given the status of a religious text. It was conceived as the “Fifth Veda”. Drama is a social form of art and addresses the
audience directly. Right from antiquity, it was believed that drama ought to aim not merely at pleasure but also instruction and enlightenment.

Sanskrit drama, the ancient predecessor of all other forms of drama, adopted themes primarily from Indian mythology and religion. Right from Bharata’s *Natya-Shatra* through Dhananjaya’s *Dhasharupaka* to the modern times in India, we have thought of drama in terms of, music and dance included, primarily a stage performance. In the western context also, theoreticians like Antonin Artaud, Gordon Craig, Bertolt Brecht, Luigi Pirandello and many contemporary playwrights upheld the preeminence of stage performance in drama. Minus the performance, a dramatic text cannot have the desired power: “A drama text becomes merely a pretext, if not a pretext for the performance itself. Thus in drama text is a means to an end, the end being the performance” (Narsimhaiah 273).

*Natya-Shastra* is one of the oldest treatises on dramaturgy written in Sanskrit. It tells us about the birth of drama. Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Visakhadutta were some eminent dramatists who wrote in Sanskrit. For a long time, mythology, religion and folklore continued to dominate the Indian drama, particularly, the great mythological epics like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

Drama in India has its roots in religion. Though contemporary Indian drama emerged in colonial times, yet the dramatists had a rich tradition to fall back upon. The first dramatic presentation which celebrates the victory of good over evil is attributed to Brahma. The demons were annoyed by this performance. However, Brahma explained that the purpose of drama was not propaganda. He also created a pavilion for the protection of the players. This space was the precursor of the modern stage. Legend has it
that, Brahma used the elements of this first dramatic representation to create a fifth *Veda* called the *Natya* or drama which was meant for all --- the high and the low, the learned and the illiterate. The text was taken from the *Rig Veda*, the music from the *Sama Veda*, the action from the *Yajur Veda*, and the *rasa* from the *Atharva Veda*. In the *Natya* the three worlds are described. There is religion for the religious, love for the romantic, knowledge for the ignorant, criticism for the learned, and solace for the afflicted. However, the principal aim of drama was always to provide delight and recreation. This *Natya* was entrusted to the sage Bharata and became the massive treatise Bharata’s *Natya Shastra* meaning Bharata’s laws of dance and drama. After centuries of oral communication, the *Shastra* was put in writing around the 4th and the 5th A.D. In it every aspect of the stage-craft is discussed. The details about costume, make-up, gestures, movements of every part of the body, plot, scene, dancing poses, etc. are minutely documented. No aim like catharsis is proposed. Drama is considered neither moral nor intellectual but spiritual. It is to lead through pleasure to serenity and peace. Thus, providing delight to the audience is one of its prime objectives.

This delight rests on one of the nine major *Rasas*: erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, heroic, terrible, hateful, marvellous, and peaceful. The nine sentiments or *bhavas* these *rasas* produce respectively are: love, laughter, distress or pathos, anger, courage, fear, disgust, wonder, and calmness. The spectator is to be overwhelmed and entranced by one or a combination of the *rasas*. No varieties like tragedy or comedy were recognised. There could be no unhappy ending nor could coarse or unrefined sensations be evoked as these would upset the *rasavada*, that is, disturb the enjoyment of the *rasa*. 
The origin of Sanskrit drama is sometimes traced to puppet shows or to the poetic recitation of the epics. The manipulator of puppets, the string-holder or the Sutradhara, is credited with laying the foundations of drama. He was a wandering folk singer, who recited episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. This first stage of drama is called the Bharati Vritti, or the stage of pure recitation. Then the Sutradhara engaged musicians or Kusilavas and carried on a dialogue with them, or alternately recited verses from the epics. This stage of drama is called the Savatti Vritti, or acting and recitation. Later on a dancer, or nati, joined the group and this is the Kaisikki Vritti, or the stage of impersonation with music and dance. The final stage is Arabhati, or true to life representation on an equipped stage.

Starting from Asvaghosa, who is believed to have lived near the beginning of the Christian era, the classical Sanskrit drama has a few noteworthy playwrights like Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka, Visakhadutta and Harsha.

The earlier existing plays are the 'Trivandram Plays' and ascribed to Bhasa. The major figure in classical Sanskrit literature is Kalidasa who is generally placed in the fifth century and is the greatest playwright of the ancient times. Seven of his works survive: two lyrics, Ritu-Samhara (The Seasons), and Meghadutam (Cloud Messenger); two epics, Raghu-Vamsa (Dynasty of Raghu) and Kumarsambhava (Birth of the War-God); and three plays, Sakuntala, Malavika-agnimitra, and Vikramorvasiya. Another dramatist of significance is Bhava-Bhuti (circa 7th century A.D.) who has given us three plays, one of which is Malati-Madhava and the prologue to the play significantly contains information about the author and his views about drama and also a tradition bound scholar's attempt to take sophisticated drama to a popular festival. Another milestone in
the development of classical Sanskrit drama is *Mudra-Rakhasam* by Vishakhadatta, the one and only example of political play. *Mricechakatika (Clay-cart)* is another major play, the authorship of which is ascribed to a legendary king, Sudraka.

Thus, Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Vishakhadatta and Sudraka represent the golden age of Sanskrit drama. From the 7th century onwards, there was a marked decline in the quality of playwriting in Sanskrit. Since independence, along with the impetus given to drama in modern Indian languages, some minor attempts have been made to revive drama in Sanskrit in the country. V. Raghavan’s *Anarkali* is an instance of this kind.

With the decline of the Sanskrit theatre in the country, the popular (folk) theatre of the masses in local languages dealing with well-known themes went on growing in both quality and quantity. At the same time, the tradition of dramatic recitation of epic stories continued and the art was specialised by the professional *charanas* who might be deemed to have founded the modern Indian Theatre. In the process of development, the folk theatre adopted the Sutradhara, the Vidusaka and some other classical conventions.

Saints like Kabir, Chaitanya, Ramdas, Tulsidas, Basavesvara and the Alwars associated with Bhakti cult were mainly responsible for inducing kings to build many temples; which also became, in fact, popular ‘playhouses’. The cult gave rise to different kinds of popular dramatic performances in different regions of the country, viz., *Ramlila, Raslila and Nautanki* of North, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Tamasha* of Maharashtra, *Jatra* of Bengal, *Ankianat* of Assam, *Yakshagana* of Karnataka, *Veethi-natakamu* and *Burrakatha* of Andhra and *Teerukoothu* of Tamilnadu. (Bhatta 3)
In addition to the stories from the epics and legends of the country, satires on men and morals also formed the themes of these dramatic performances. In course of time, the Charanas attracted men from the intellectual classes also, resulting in the birth of Bhands in Kashmir, Jogis in Punjab and Kirtankars in Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra. In the process of evolution of the Indian drama, the interaction of classical Sanskrit Drama and the folk-theatre played a major role. The rejuvenation of the folk-theatre under the influence of the Bhakti cult was followed by translations of the Sanskrit plays into regional languages. At the same time, the establishment of the British rule in the country marked a search for a new theatre.

There came a time when drama suffered a decline. This period is referred to as the Dark Age in the Indian dramatic history. When the revival of drama took place in the middle of eighteenth century, three main tendencies were discernible. The first of these suggested the influence of the western drama, reflected in the popularity of Shakespeare’s plays, which were either translated or adapted into the vernacular languages. The second influence was that of the Sanskrit plays which were also translated and performed on the stage. Finally, the folk theatre too retained its appeal.

Modern Indian English Theatre

‘The beginning of the modern Indian English theatre can be traced back to 1795 when a Russian dramatist, Gerasim Lebedoff, translated two English plays into Bengali and staged them’ (Varadpande 68). Indian drama in English however dates back to the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century.
The famous Bengali playwright Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote *The Persecuted* in 1831. Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English Drama in Bengal developed as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing. (Naik, “A History” 68)

Indian drama of the post independence phase was represented by a galaxy of playwrights who wrote either in regional language or in English. Regional drama in India slowly paved the way for a “national theatre” (Dass 64), into which all streams of theatrical art came together. The use of diverse languages in Indian drama such as those of Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada, only enriched it and led to the emergence of great playwrights in major languages.

Indian Drama has succeeded in retaining its cultural flavour and diversity through the depiction of culture specific ethos, but it also shows a common awareness of shared social anxieties. The literature of the Indian literary movement in various languages seems to be driven by the same objectives. This can also be said of the literature of the Bhakti movement in the past, and of the pioneering movements of the later years, right from the modernism of the sixties to subaltern movements like the Dalit and women’s literatures. “Our shared racial and cultural memories and our visions, struggles and torments have alike contributed to the unity of our literature” (George, “Foreword”).

Indian English literature of the Gandhian Age (1920-1947) was marked by momentous developments in Indian progressive movements, as well as social, political and cultural changes. With the end of the Gandhian era, certain playwrights who experimented with new techniques and trends emerged on the literary horizon. They dealt
with a variety of subjects and themes. Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Utpal Dutt, Mahashweta Devi, Girish Karnard express social concerns in regional languages, whereas Mohan Rakesh and Bhishm Sahni wrote in Hindi. Mahesh Dattani, Asif Currimbhoj, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurcharan Das are significant Indian Dramatists writing in English.

As observed already, in 1831, Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote the first Indian English play entitled *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes (1831)*. The play presents the conflict between the Indian orthodoxy and the new ideas of the western education. It is a social play, which exposes the hypocrisy of the affluent Hindu society of Calcutta. In his preface, Banerji claims that:

Inconsistencies and the bleakness of the influential members of the Hindoo community have been depicted before their eyes. They will now clearly perceive the wiles and tricks of the Brahmins [sic] and thereby be able to guard themselves against them. (qtd. in Naik, “A History” 98)

This elemental presentation of the “conflict in the mind of a sensitive Bengali youth between orthodoxy and modern ideas ushered in by western education remained a solitary dramatic effort, not only in Bengal but also anywhere in India for more than a generation” (Naik, “A History” 99). Michael Madhusuadan Dutt, the poet translated three of his own Bengali plays into English: *Ratnavali* (1859) and *Is this Called Civilisation?* (1871). His play *Nation Builders* was published posthumously in 1922. It was only towards the close of the twentieth century that the playwrights like Sri Aurobindo, H.N. Chattopadhyaya and Rabindranath Tagore appeared on the scene. Ramkinoo Dutt’s *Manipur Tragedy* (1893) “completes the all too brief tale of Indian English Drama published in Bengal in the nineteenth century” (Naik, “A History”
100). Between 1891 and 1916, Sri Aurobindo wrote five complete and six incomplete verse plays. The two early fragments—The Witch of Ilni and Achab and Esar—already indicate Sri Aurobindo's abiding fascination for Elizabethan drama. The Vizier of Bassora is also Elizabethan in conception and structure and clearly modelled after the Shakespearean comedy. His other important plays are Rodgune (Tragedy), The Maid in the Mill, The House of Brut, The Birth of Sin, The Prince of Adoor (incomplete) and Eric. (Naik, "A History" 100)

Harindranath Chattopadhya began his career as a dramatist with Abu Hassan (1918), a light fantasy in prose and verse. His Poems and Plays (1927) contain seven verse plays on the lives of Indian saints: Pundalik, Saku Bai, Jayadeva, Chokha Mela, Ekanath, Raidas and Tukaram. Five Plays (1927) are in prose and are strongly coloured by the author's socialist sympathy. The Windows and the Parrot is a glimpse into the lives of the poor and The Coffin and The Evening Lamp, ironical sketches of two young romantics. The Sentry's Lantern is a symbolic expression of the hope of the dawn of the new era of the poor. There is a blend of symbolism and realism in these plays.

The traditional and folk theatres evolved along distinctive lines in different regions of India and differ from each other in the manner of presentation. ‘However, as in all traditional art forms of ancient lands, they have had the common feature of close association with religious beliefs and gods and advised salvation through devotion’ (Raha 5-6).

T. P. Kailasam wrote both in Kannada and in English. His plays are based on the events in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. His play The Curse of Karna is called ‘an impression of Sophocles in Five Acts.’ The protagonists from the Ramayana and the
Mahabharata have sublime and serious philosophical dimensions. His other plays are Eklavya and Sule, The Burden and Fulfilment, Keechaka (1949). A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyer and Swami Avyaktananda also contributed some plays to the Indian dramatic tradition. The post independence drama benefited by the growing interest abroad in Indian English literature. A number of plays by dramatists like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma and Gurcharan Das were successfully staged in Europe and the United States of America. The Tagore-Aurobindo-Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continues but with a difference, in the hands of Manjeri Isvaram, G. V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy.

Other recent successful plays- Pratap Sharma’s A Touch of Brightness, a Commonwealth Festival Play, Nissim Ezekiel’s Nalini, Marriage Poem and The Sleepwalkers (1969), and Gurucharan Das’s Larins Sahib (1971) - encompass forms of realism, comedy, tragicomedy, farce and the historical drama. In this regard Iyengar remarks aptly: ‘Drama too is now becoming a fruitfully cultivated field in Indo-Anglian literature’ (247).

Regional drama in India also benefitted and flourished with the establishment of the National School of Drama in Delhi. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad are the major playwrights writing in regional languages and their plays have also been translated into other regional languages as well as English.

‘The English theatrical conventions came to Bengal from England about two hundred years ago via the early English traders and colonial rulers of Calcutta’ (Raha1). It progressed by the existence of an indigenous traditional form of theatrical entertainment and by the rise of a native middle class. The emergence of this class led to a stirring of interest in English dramatic literature through the spread of English
education in the middle decades of the last century. As a result, the idea of having a play performed in a particular place and on a raised rectangular platform enclosed on three sides took early roots in Bengal. ‘By 1872, the Bengali citizens of Calcutta had taken to it sufficiently to start a playhouse of their own’ (Raha).

The theatre seems to have found a congenial environment in Bengal. Dramatic literature forms an important part of Sanskrit, the mother of many of the major Indian languages including Bengali. Classical Sanskrit drama, in any case, had declined by the end of the seventh century A.D. A revival of interest in classical Sanskrit drama did take place among the Bengali intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century. Raha puts it as:

- It was an expression of a growing national self consciousness and national pride which marked the reaction to the country’s conquest by England.
- Sanskrit plays and dramaturgy have had minimal impact, if at all, on Bengali theatre. (2)

The immediate inspiration came from two sources, the English theatre of Calcutta, and the traditional folk theatre, the “jatra” (Raha 2). The jatra and the contemporary theatre considerably influenced each other and this continues to this day. The traditional and folk theatre continued in an unbroken tradition—‘responding, absorbing, and evolving as they have always done to the needs and urges of the common people’ (Raha 3). The association of Tagore with the theatre was further indicative of the change that had slowly been taking place in Indo-English theatre in India.
Tagore's Life and Works

Hailed by Mahatma Gandhi as 'the Great Sentinel' (Kriplani 11), Tagore was a multidimensional figure—poet, novelist, short story writer, dramatist, musician, painter, philosopher and a great educationist. Tagore's literary output includes approximately fifty plays, hundred books of verse (much of which he set to music), forty volumes of novels and short fiction, essays and philosophical texts.

A man of remarkable appearance, Tagore came to be regarded with reverence, which is due to an ancient teacher. He wrote in Bengali, but translated much of his work into English. His work became popular all over the world. As a result of the recognition of his genius, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in the Year 1913 for his collection of poems entitled *Gitanjali*. His 'Jana-Gana-Mana' (Thou Art the Ruler of All Minds), was adopted as the Indian National Anthem (Bhattacharya 159).

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7th May 1861 in Calcutta at Jorasanko House of the Tagore's and was the eighth and youngest surviving son of his father. His grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore was an associate of Raja Rammohan Roy. His father Maharishi Debendranath Tagore was a saintly Brahma Samaj leader reverently called the *Maharshi* or the great sage. Tagore's eldest brother Dwijendranath Tagore was the first Indian member of Indian Civil Services. Yet another brother was a talented musician composer and a playwright. His sister Swarna Devi was a novelist. In addition to this, frequent musical and theatrical performances, which he witnessed as a child in his home, had a profound impact on him. Thus, Rabindranath Tagore grew up in a vibrant artistic and literary atmosphere.
As a result of the emancipated and unorthodox views of his family, Rabindranath grew up with a sense of freedom and precocious awareness of the new spirit of intellectualism, spiritualism, and nationalism. Listening to the recitations from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* at an early age produced in him great love for these epics.

At twelve, he went to the Himalayas in the company of his father and stayed there with him for four months when he received perhaps the most enduring education of his life. He imbibed his deep love of Upanishads from the Maharshi who gave him lessons in Sanskrit, English, and Astronomy as well as freedom to move about in a way he had never enjoyed before. But the main part of his intellectual and literary education came from the surreptitious reading of journals and books belonging to his eldest brother and from the association of his highly talented brothers and the gifted friends who gathered round them at the Jorasanko House.

By the age of fifteen, he developed an acute distaste for schools. Though he had little formal schooling, yet his sharp poetic sensibility manifested itself very early. His father gave him lessons in Sanskrit, English and astronomy. The main part of his intellectual and literary education came from intense reading of journals and books and through interacting with people. Under the supervision of one of his elder brothers, Hemendranath, seventeen years his senior, he had formal lessons from several tutors with the greatest emphasis on his mother tongue. At fifteen or earlier he had begun writing, and by 1875 his first effort in prose and verse had begun to appear in print. At the age of sixteen, he composed Vaishnava lyrics. Poetry and music were his natural passions. He started composing songs when he was seventeen.
In the words of Iyengar:

Tagore was not a voracious or a systematic reader, but like Shakespeare, although he apparently read at random, he turned to capital use what had come his way. He lisped in numbers, and they came with astonishing facility. He had written about 7,000 lines of verse before he was eighteen!

(100)

In 1883, Tagore wrote a play which he later translated as *Sanyasi*, or *The Ascetic*. ‘The Sea Waves’ was written in 1887, after the boating tragedy that took its toll on several hundred pilgrims who were on their way to Puri. Iyengar further remarks upon the active part of Tagore on various frontages:

More poems and more plays--plays and play-acting and play-production--and restless activity on many fronts; and during the Partition of Bengal agitation, he identified himself for a time with the movement.... (100)

Rabindranath Tagore wrote the celebrated poem, “Rabindranath Salutes Aurobindo”, when the latter, who was the then editor of the *Bande-Mataram*, was jailed and charged with sedition.

In 1883 he was married to Mrinalini Devi who was to be his close champion. She bore him three daughters and two sons. On her death in 1902 Rabindranath’s grief was expressed through a series of poems entitled *Smaran*. Not wanting to send his children to the usual schools, he started a school at Santiniketan. This was later to become the Vishva Bharti University.

Tagore described his first semi-mystical experience at the age of twenty-one in his Bengali Poem ‘The Awakening of the Waterfall’. One day he stood watching the sunrise
and: "...all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side" (qtd. in Naik, "A History" 58).

Tagore was to be an artist henceforth, searching for truth and beauty. At the age of twenty, Tagore’s first book of acknowledged merit was published, which was entitled Sandhya Sangeet or Evening Songs (1882). This was followed by Chhabi O Gaan (Pictures and Songs, 1884), Kadi O Komal, (Sharps and Flats, 1886), Manasi, (The Desired She, 1886), Sonar Tari, (The Golden Boat, 1893), Chitra (The Wondrous She, 1896) and many others.

In November 1913, Tagore heard the news of the award of the Nobel Prize for literature to him. ‘Henceforth, he was not merely the poet of Bengal, but of India’ (Iyengar 102-03). The phenomenal success of Gitanjali went a long way in establishing his reputation as one of the finest poets of the modern times. As Chaudhari observes:

‘Even a Shakespeare needed the service of a Marlowe to develop the “mighty line” and the sonorous roll of the verse which became a fit vehicle for his tragedies, while Tagore had to hammer out his form single handedly before he could make it the vehicle of his greatest poetry. For sheer “auditory imagination,” and for that ‘fine excess’ of which Keats spoke, one has to look in vain for a poet perhaps in any language to beat him. (Chaudhari 5)

Gitanjali (1912) took the literary world of London by storm and was followed in succession by The Gardener (1913) and The Crescent Moon (1913). Some notable collections of the period include Fruit Gathering (1916), Stray Birds (1916), Lover’s Gift
and Crossing (1918) and The Fugitive (1921). Tagore’s poetry yielded a music, Bengali poetry had never given before and he started a career of great poet producing for another fifty years, poems (put into about 40 books since Sonar Tari) which in sheer number exceed the work of even the most prolific writers. Variety and power rank him with the greatest poets of the world. In 1916 the Knighthood of the British Empire was conferred on him, but disgusted by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre he renounced the title in 1919.

The basic themes of his poetry were love, nature, human beings and relationships between the finite and the infinite. The Themes of his novels are social as well as political. Tagore is the first Indian Writer of the Modern age to produce “novel of Ideas’. In the year 1833 was published Tagore’s first full- fledged novel namely Bau-Thakuranir Hat (The Young Queen’s Mart). His next novel Chokher Bali, (1902) appeared after a gap of fifteen years. Nauka Dubi (The Wreck, 1905) and Gora (1910) are among the greatest novels written by him. The other notable fictional works are Ghar Bahire (the Home and the World, 1916), Doi Bon (Two Sisters, 1933), Malancha (The Gardner, 1934) and Char Adhyay (Four Chapters, 1934). Tagore’s short stories have the same flavour as his novels. As V. S. Naravane puts it:

Tagore’s short stories, like his novels show robust realism and closeness to actual life. There is the presence of same tenderness and pathos, patriotism and humanity, the same philosophical vision which characterises his novels. (124)

The modern short story is Tagore’s gift to Indian literature. Golpoguchcho or Bunch of Stories remains one of the most popular books of stories. Some of the most moving
stories include: "A Wife's Letter", 'The Unknown Girl', 'Debits and Credits', 'Son of Rasmani', 'The Babus of Nayanjore" and "Hungry Stones'.

Tagore’s prose works, are altogether different from his fictional works. He emerges both a philosopher and a mystic. Tagore’s prose works in English were delivered as lectures and the earliest was Sadhana (1913). The autobiographical works My Boyhood Days (1940) and My Reminiscences (1917) were originally written in Bengali and were translated into English.

After the award of the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali, Tagore came to be regarded as a mystic sage who lived in a secluded ashrama, weaving beautiful garlands of songs for the Divine. This image of the poet, created in the west, was accepted without criticism by the Indians themselves. The strength of his ideas and the dynamism of his manifold activities had gone unnoticed earlier. Very few people outside Bengal were even aware of the fact that Tagore had written essays on almost every important social, political and cultural issue of his time. Far from being an escapist he gave careful thought to practical problems and did not hesitate to express views which were not likely to make him popular. Some of his ideas, which were not taken seriously when he put them forward, later gained universal acceptance.

There was hardly any aspect of national life on which Rabindranath Tagore did not have something important and fresh to say. At a time when national sentiment was sweeping the country, he saw the negative side of nationalism and sounded a note of warning about the dangers of chauvinism and narrow-mindedness. He was the first to rediscover India’s ancient ties with countries of the Far East and of South East Asia, and to point out that India must turn her gaze from Europe to other parts of the world. His
travels to Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, China and Japan, described by him in letters and memoirs, focused attention on the need to understand the cultural unity of Asia. However, the tremendous cultural significance of the poet's travels was not appreciated at that time.

His essay on Samavayaniti was probably the earliest attempt to examine the theory and practice of the cooperative movement in the context of Indian conditions. He was also the first to stress the vital role which cottage industries and traditional handicrafts could play in boosting the Indian economy. His ideas in the field of education were also very significant and original.

Tagore also anticipated the recent emphasis on folk elements in the entire cultural tradition of India. His interest was not confined to the religion of the Sahajiyas and the Bauls. 'He made a careful study of popular proverbs, sayings, legends, fables, ceremonies and social customs. By drawing attention to the vast treasure of folk culture, Tagore initiated a movement which was destined to give a new direction to the study of the Indian music, painting and poetry' (Naravane 3).

**Tradition and Modernity**

Tagore was a fearless critic of social practices and of religious beliefs that had no other sanction than that of continuing over a period of centuries. His non-conformism was more radical and consistent than that of many other leaders of his time. His denunciation of the caste system was total and unconditional. He did not dilute his criticism by offering philosophical justification for the origins of caste.
He rejected the simplistic formulation of 'western materialism versus Indian spiritualism'. He welcomed science as 'Europe's greatest gift to mankind', and dissociated himself from those Indians who looked upon western civilisation, in its entirety, as immoral and superficial.

At the same time, Rabindranath loved the traditional culture of India. This love was not the result of uncritical patriotism or romantic nostalgia. It was based on sound knowledge and deep understanding of those elements in the Indian heritage which have perennial worth.

In an essay entitled *Bharatvarsha Ithihaser Dhara* ('The Stream of Indian History'), written in 1912, he tried to explain the two guiding principles—'unity underlying diversity, and continuity in the midst of change— which have shaped India's destiny through the ages' (Naravane 4).

Tagore was fully aware of the strong points in the tradition: 'a spirit of assimilation; a tolerance for alternative paths leading to a common goal; ability to see the one behind the many and the serenity behind agitation; the conviction that there is a point at which all the basic values—truth, beauty, goodness, love, freedom, tranquility—somehow converge' (Naravane 4). He also understood, as few had done before him, the intimate relationship between the philosophical, the religious and the aesthetic sides of the Indian cultural tradition.

The negative sides of the tradition he had inherited made him sad, as well as sometimes angry. He expressed both his sorrow and his displeasure with these in no uncertain terms. The ascetic, world-denying streak that has repeatedly led India into the morass of inaction; the tendency to lose oneself in abstract speculation about the essence
of reality without focusing attention on the human condition; the ease with which the Indian mind can find high-sounding justifications for customs and practices that are manifestly indefensible; the refusal to strive for greater efficiency and comfort on the ground that contentment is the highest virtue’- all these weaknesses needed to be brought into the clear light of candid criticism. Tagore did not shrink from this task.

In recent years there has been a good deal of discussion about ‘tradition versus modernity’, as though these represent two alternatives of which India has to choose one. The real issue is not whether we should be modern or traditional. Tradition can help people anticipate the future without being uprooted or alienated from the past. This truth is expressed by Rabindranath with great power in his essays, novels and plays.

Tagore’s creative oeuvre is incredibly vast. One rarely comes across chronicles of modern literature another figure gifted with such creative power. In addition to his thousands of poems and songs, short-stories, novels and paintings; he has written thirty-eight plays- tragedies, comedies, farces, allegories, dance-dramas, monologues that constitute his contribution to dramatic literature. He directed many of his own plays, acted in some of them, and supervised the production of dance numbers. “As Goethe molded German literature in his days, so did Tagore dominate the Indian literary scene? An entire generation of writers bears his imprint” (Naravane 6).

Tagore’s contribution to the field of music is unparalleled. “Rabindra Sangeet” is still among the most popular forms of music in Bengal. He wrote more than two thousand songs, and composed tunes for most of them. His music is firmly rooted in the basic framework of the classical tradition and is pervaded by its philosophy. His impeccable credentials as a musician had bearing on his drama as well dance drama.
Tagore had a passion for painting. Prabhat Kumar Mukerjee one of Tagore’s biographers notes that Tagore had drawn as many as three thousand pictures. “Tagore’s versatile genius brought forth a perfect homogeneity among the different fine arts through the medium of rhythm…. love for rhythm was responsible for the poet’s love for painting and his genius as a master poet” (Bhattacharya 36-39). As regards his paintings, Tagore himself has written: “My pictures are my versification, in lines. If by chance they are entitled to claim recognition, it must be primarily for some rhythmic significance of form…” (qtd. in Bhattacharya, “Rabindranath Tagore: An interpretation” 16).

Tagore was a social reformer and he was a great humanitarian. He was against the Indian caste system and denounced the division of society into watertight compartments. He strongly opposed untouchability and negated biases inherent in Indian society.

Rabindranath was a remarkably well-integrated man. All sides of human nature found full expression in his actions and his art. The noble idealism of the Upanishads, the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha, the rationalism of the western thought, the love of the Vaishnavas, the humanism of Jesus, the inwardness of the great mystic poets of all ages and countries; everything had its place in Rabindranath’s world-view and his way of life. His burning patriotism did not prevent him from looking upon the entire world as a ‘single nest for humanity’. He knew the value of simplicity and renunciation, but he refused to turn his back to the joys of the world. Throughout his long life he retained his curiosity, his sense of wonder, his fascination for the smallest details of life, his deep feeling for the distant and the far-away. But these did not affect his fundamentally serene temperament. He was wholly free from aberrations and exaggerations. Through his art and his life, he showed that a man can be unusual without being abnormal.
The *Upanishadic* teaching had insightful impact upon Rabindranath and opened a new panorama of revelation of reality for him. The quintessence of the *Upanishadic* thought forms the edifice of Indian culture. Tagore’s biographer, Prabhat Mukherjee asserts:

> Nothing has influenced him more, both consciously and as under-current of thought, than the *Upanishads*... I maintain that Rabindranath’s entire life is only an evolution and development of his *Upanishadic* education.

(qtd. in Das 3)

In this regard it has been stated by V. S. Naravane:

> This may be an overstatement, but the fact remains that Tagore was able to get more out of the *Upanishads* than most of his contemporaries. And he could do so because his approach to the scriptures was refreshingly different. He did not seek in them evidence of the absolute superiority of Indian over western thought. Nor did he interpret them in the light of preconceived metaphysical system. He regarded the *Upanishads* as a reservoir of inspiring thoughts and ennobling ideals rather than a body of finished theories.

(qtd. in Das 3)

Rabindranath said “for western scholars the great religious scriptures of India seem to possess merely a retrospective and archeological interest, but to us they are of living importance....” (Das 3) Ram Mohan Roy was also deeply moved by the living aspect of religious scriptures. In the words of Rabindranath: “All the great utterances of man have to be judged not by the letter but by the spirit-- the spirit which unfolds itself with the growth of life in history” (qtd. in Das 4).
Rabindranath did not lay stress on religious ceremonies. Though he was
influenced by *Vedic* teaching, he did not like *Vedic* rituals. Rabindranath also said, “To
me the verses of the Upanishads and the teaching of the Buddha have ever been things of
the spirit, and therefore, endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them both
in my own life and in my preaching” (qtd. in Das 5). Therefore, the vision of
Rabindranath is so unified and comprehensive. ‘He is one of the pioneers in this regard.
He was also concerned with the problems of man and destiny of mankind’ (Das 7).

Rabindranath himself declared that his religion is a poet’s religion. He is a mystic
philosopher. He is not only the embodiment of Indian culture but harbinger of synthetic
culture which was the result of metamorphosis of universal elements in broader
perspective and canvas. ‘Tagore transcended the *Upanishadic* ideas and created his own’
(Das 11).

Tagore tried to realise truth, light and beauty through the truth of whole existence
of self. He was able to discern the unity pervading mankind, nature and God. Unity
manifests in the form of bliss. There is harmony between finite and the infinite. The finite
seeks the infinite and infinite seeks the finite:

Thus it is that thy joy in me is so full.
Thus it is that thou hast come down to me.
O thou lord of all heavens, where would be
thy love if I were not?
...And for this thy love loses itself in the
love of thy lover, and there are thou seen in
the perfect union of two. ("Omnibus I" 25)
Truth is not fuller by itself. It will be fuller when it will be realised through deeper feeling.

‘Beauty finds expression in Rabindranath and adds new dimension to our culture. Humanism emerged as new spirit in him. His whole existence is resonant with infinity, humanity and beauty’ (Das 8).

Rabindranath was not only a poet, dramatist and artist but he was sensitive to all human problems. His concept of God was not abstract, isolated from the throbbing hearts of men and women. God is all-pervasive in his literary art. In one of his poem in *Gitanjali* he makes it clear:

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

(“Omnibus I” 31)

Das opines correctly: ‘In Tagore’s work philosophy, religion and poetry fuse together beautifully in a common spiritual vision’ (15). The religious view of Rabindranath is not based on any doctrine. But in him we see the basic element of all religions.
Tagore as a Dramatist

Rabindranath Tagore is 'sui generis' (Raha 105), in Bengali theatre and Bengali dramatic literature. It is not possible to assign him a particular place chronologically. Nor is it easy to label his plays with useful tags, or define their relationship with the theatre. He wrote a large number of plays over a long period of time. Their variety in purpose, theme, structure, language and treatment is astonishing. Indeed. His plays- and his ideas of theatre- developed along lines divergent from the general direction of development of Bengali drama and theatre. They had little influence on other playwrights and his attitude to the theatre in Calcutta was at best, ambivalent. He allowed many of his plays to be staged in the professional theatres but generally disapproved of their ways. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, also called 'Gurudev' is among the most prominent figures in the cultural world of Indian subcontinent. He was the first Asian to be awarded the Nobel Prize.

Tagore's phenomenal dramatic career, encompassing over sixty plays in nearly as many years, occupies the prime position in Bengali and modern Indian drama. In certain ways his dominance is analogous to that of Ibsen in Norwegian literature: both began as products of the nineteenth century but ended up having revolutionised their respective literary traditions; both tried their hand at a wide variety genres and styles during their careers; and both remained virtually unchallenged literary giants during the course of lengthy reigns of over a half century each, even if much of their work was widely misunderstood. “Tagore carried the dramatic tradition of Bengal so much forward that the people could not equally advance in time” writes Amar Mukerji: substituting “Ibsen” for “Tagore” and “Norway” for “Bengal” (qtd. in Lal 13).
Though Tagore is chiefly remembered as a poet, drama too was close to his heart. Among his many gifts was his gift of acting, and he played several roles in his own plays. He admired Shakespeare, and knew his Kalidasa very well. Moreover, drama is in every aspect of the common Indian life, which he was fond of depicting. Thus it was perhaps natural that he turned to drama. Deeply influenced by Classical Sanskrit literature and also by his learning of the West, he created almost a renaissance in Bengali Literature. First, he wrote in his mother-tongue Bengali and then he himself rendered some of his works into English, while many were translated by different persons.

Tagore’s dramatic career may be divided into three periods. The first period begins with Balmiki-Pratibha- The Genius of Balmiki- and ends with Malini. This is the period when non-symbolic plays like Visarjan (Sacrifice), Raja-O-Rani (King and Queen) and Malini were written besides a few one scene short plays like Karna and Kunti and Kacha and Devyani (The Curse at Farewell).

In the second period we may mention Sharadotsav (Autumn Festival), Achalayatan (The Castle of Conservation), Raja (The King of the Dark Chamber) and The Post Office. This corresponds with the Gitanjali period and other plays of this period are Phalguni (The Cycle of Spring), Muktdhara (The Free Current), and Red Oleanders (Raktakarabi).

All his favourite themes and elements are found in his plays: musicality and lyricism, poetry and symbolism, ideas and philosophy. A theme wise classification has been made to categorise his plays into three groups- plays with religious and spiritual themes, plays with epic and legendary themes and plays dealing with epic themes.
The present thesis intends to study the selected plays of Rabindranath Tagore. One of the striking features of Rabindranath Tagore’s drama is the statement it makes against the oppressive caste system and discriminatory norms adopted by society towards the poor, downtrodden and women. This thesis would focus on the study of the themes of voice of protest against caste and class biases; gender biases and the socio-feministic aspect and the conflict between machine and the free human spirit.

For Tagore it was of highest importance that people be able to live, and reason, in freedom. His attitude towards politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can all be seen in the light of belief. Tagore has voiced his ideas regarding spiritualism and humanism in his plays like Malini, Chandalika, Natir Puja etc. By taking his themes from myths, legends and folktales, Tagore constructs his plays as voice of protest against the worn out traditions, customs, superstitions and various restrictions and taboos on free human spirit.

Though belonging to the orthodox pre-independence era, Tagore’s plays highlight the freshness and modernity of thoughts. Tagore has expanded the range of Indian drama in English by utilising various strains culled from traditional and modern dramatic trends. In his plays, spirit and message appropriate to context, are comprehensible even in his translated version of regional dialect into English.

Though Tagore’s plays are written originally in Bengali yet their spirit can be well grasped in translation by the western audiences. His dramatic genius speaks for itself in his handling of theme and context. English versions of Tagore’s plays have a compact and neat structure, though their originals in Bengali often followed the loose Elizabethan model. Tagore’s principal characters tend to be symbolic and allegorical in the thesis.
plays and archetypal in the psychological dramas; providing his theatre certain degree of universality.

The setting of Tagore’s plays is invariably non-realistic, being either Puranic or legendary or feudal or patently symbolic, and the dialogue, time and again attains a true poetic flavour in Karna and Kunti. Music and songs are important ingredients of Rabindranath Tagore’s plays. Musical plays include The Fateful Hunt (Kal Mrigya) 1982, Mayer Khela (The Play of Illusions, 1888), Chitrangada and Natir Puja.

Tagore played a significant role in the development of Indian English drama. Shakespeare’s influence is also evident in his early dramatic writing, particularly in his first two full length plays, Raja O Rani (The King and the Queen, 1889) and Visarjan (Sacrifice, 1890). These are five-act tragedies full of intrigues, violence and conflict of love and duty.

Tagore was deeply inspired by the classical Sanskrit Drama and Bengali folk theatre. He was an ardent admirer of Kalidasa. Tagore revered him and learnt a lot from him. He also drew on the ‘Indian epics’, Vedas and Upanishads for the themes of his plays. Apart from this, Tagore dramatised some of the significant episodes from the great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The adaptations from the Indian classics include plays like Vidaya Abhisahp (Farewell Curse, 1894), Gandharir Avedan (The Appeal of Gandhari, 1897) and Karna O Kunti Sambad (Karna and Kunti), where Tagore drew heavily upon Mahabharata. A mention must be made of Tagore’s lyrical play Chitrangada (1892), which appeared during this phase.

The dramatic milieu of his times compelled Tagore to try his genius in the field of drama. The first form of performance in Bengal was the traditional folk theatre of ‘jatra’.
With the passage of time several playhouses were opened in Bengal. The Tagore family emerged as one of the most important patrons of theatre in Bengal. They encouraged writing of Bengali plays by offering cash prizes.

Tagore’s drama is ‘folk-drama’ in the truly traditional sense. His plays are meant more for the improvised open air theatre held in court-yards or streets rather than the modern-day elaborate theatres. In his plays Tagore strikes a responsive chord in his unsophisticated audience by playing upon their folk-wisdom, traditional value-system, and an intimate knowledge of the epics and cultural traditions. Themes like idolatry, its condemnation, asceticism, its failures, casteism, its excesses, fanaticism and tolerance, pettiness and magnanimity, are age-old themes. The traditional attitudes, the obscure but deep racial memories, and the perennially recurrent archetypal human patterns, form the stuff out of which Tagore weaves his plays. Thus in Tagore’s drama there is pageantry, dancing, music, costume. The dialogue is simple and earthy but often emotive and touching. There are also dramatic and passionate passages which reveal a lofty attitude towards life and express the highest planes of thought and feeling. Emotion is stirred by the simplest devices; the purity and friendliness of a child’s world, the unselfishness of a prince even at the point of death, the loyalty and affection among brothers even though by adoption, the child-like faith and dependence of one human being on another, the natural affection between a mother and her son, etc.

The first original Bengali play to reach the stage was Kulinkul-Sarbsva by Ram Narayan Tarakratna in the year 1857. It is a social play that attacks the practice of polygamy. The tradition of social plays was given further impetus by Dinabandhu Mitra who wrote Saliker Ekadaasi (1868), Lilavati (1872) and Niladarpan (1872). Micheal
Madhusudan Dutt wrote serious plays as well as satirical comedies. The Calcutta theatre staged melodrama, farcical comedies, and musical entertainments. Myths and legends were also dramatised in the 1880s. Such was the state of Bengali theatre when Rabindranath Tagore began his literary career. As a result Tagore’s plays present a blend of folk elements of the ‘jatra’ in combination with classical Sanskrit drama.

Tagore was sixteen when he made his first appearance on stage. He was given the leading role in a comedy written by his brother, Jyotindernath. At twenty, soon after his return from England, he wrote his first play Valmiki-Pratibha (Genius of Valmiki, 1881), a musical drama, which was staged in the family residence at Calcutta. He acted the role of Valmiki; the other roles were taken by his young nephews and nieces. The music was composed by him for the play. The play is based on the story of conversion of a robber into a poet. It is an adaptation of the famous legend of saint Valmiki. “The play was a new form of Bengali opera and the performance was a success” (Sen 276). Among the audience were Bankim Chandra Chatterji and other literary men of Calcutta. His second play, The Fatal Hunt (Kal Mrigaya, 1882), belongs to the same genre as the first one. The story is taken from the Ramayana; it is about King Dasharatha’s misadventure in accidentally killing the son of the sage Sindhu.

In the same year was published his historical verse drama based on the theme of revenge, entitled Rudrachandra (1881). Mrigaya (The Fateful Hunt, 1882) and Mayer Khela (The Play of Illusions, 1888) also adds to the category of the musical plays. About Mayer Khela it has been said, “This was a garland of songs with just thread of dramatic plot running through” (Ghose 58).
As Ananda Lal writes, “the creative peak of this earlier phase of Tagore’s playwriting career came with Prakir Pratishodh (Nature’s Revenge, 1884).” It was later translated into English and given the title Sanyasi. It is “a moving verse tragedy about an ascetic who finds truth not in renunciation but in affection for an ostracised orphan girl” (Lal 18). Tagore himself recognised that his play introduced many of the themes he was to return to in his later works: “This has been the subject on which all my writings have dwelt—the joy of attaining the infinite within the finite.” (Lal 18)

Tagore has dramatised two of his novels. Mukut was dramatised under the same title in 1908. But his novel Bau-Thakuranir-Hat was dramatised into the play Prayaschitta.

The most productive period of Tagore’s career as a playwright begins with the publication of Raja (King of the Dark Chamber, 1910). It is a symbolic play, which highlights the theme of secret dealing of God with the human heart. This was followed by Achalayatan (Immovable Mansion, 1912). In this play Tagore has “parodied in a thinly-disguised language the rigid and often unjust orthodox beliefs of Hinduism” (Lal 21). ‘An attack against soulless rituals and institutionalised religious power, Achalayatan gives a call for breaking down the walls of bondage’ (Raha 110).

Tagore’s best known play Dakghar (The Post Office, 1912) projects a balance between machine and the free human spirit. These plays are called “the best of his prose plays” (Ghose 64). Krimnay Raha opines, ‘Dakghar has the power and poignancy of symbolist drama at its best’ (110). It is, as Edward Thompson remarks, “of one texture of simplicity throughout and within its limits an almost perfect piece of art” (qtd. in Raha 110).
Tagore also wrote a number of plays on Buddhist themes namely *Malini* (1912), *Natir Puja* (1926) and *Chandalika* (1933). Thus, Tagore wrote dance dramas, comedies, romantic plays and symbolic as well as allegorical plays. *Malini* is a short play, much shorter than *The King of Dark Chamber* or *The King and the Queen*. *Natir Puja* (*Worship of the Dancing Girl*) is a simple but moving play. It does not have any complex symbols. The central theme of the play is martyred devotion. *Chandalika* (*The Untouchable Girl*), represents Tagore’s later drama. It has some affinity with *Chitra*.

*The Red Oleanders* is one of the great symbolic plays. ‘More complex in design than the other plays, it has loveliness of imagery and texture unattained before’ (Raha 110). It excited a great deal of interest as to its real meaning. It is a moving parable of contemporary civilisation. It is the story of a community where every member is enslaved to dig the gold mines under the watchful eyes of ruthless bosses.

A very striking feature of Rabindranath Tagore’s drama is the statement it makes about orthodox caste ridden Indian society and the exploitation that takes place in the society on the basis of caste, class and gender biases. The present thesis attempts to study the elements of tradition and modernity both and focuses on the socio-feministic aspect of Tagore’s plays particularly the note of protest and rebellion in his drama as well as the caste, class, and gender biases and conflict between desire and renunciation. He was ahead of his times in so far as his attitude to these issues is concerned.

He severely criticises the social practices and religious beliefs that have been there for centuries. Krishna Kriplani points out that Tagore was against:
blind loyalty to tradition which narrows men’s sympathies and makes them tolerate discrimination of caste against caste, of class against class, of men against women.... (Kriplani 6)

The play *Achalyatan* is the good example of Tagore’s indignation towards all kinds of rotten and worn-out beliefs and traditions inherent in Indian society. To quote Hirankumar Sanyal, “the play is a devastating attack on the bigotry of established religion with its paralysing hold on the mind of man.... ” (237) Edward Thompson says, that here Tagore uses “the most potent of weapons, sarcasm” (qtd. in Sanyal 237).

Thus the play highlights the freshness and modernity of Tagore’s thoughts. The metamorphosis that comes in the play is symbolic of the change that the Indian society has witnessed since the times of Tagore. The discrimination has not ended even today but it has reduced considerably and this metamorphoses, society owes among others, to the great social reformer Rabindranath Tagore.

The first chapter of the thesis examines the note of protest in Tagore’s drama and man–machine dichotomy in his symbolist plays. In *Red Oleander* and *Mukta-dhara* Tagore denounces the blind and thoughtless acceptance of and dependence on the advent of machine. *Mukta-dhara* shows us how the thirst for power brings about tyranny and oppression. *Red Oleanders* depicts how the greed for gold transforms man into a lifeless machine. Tagore strongly felt that modernisation has its pitfalls particularly in its insensitive attitude towards man. The protest in his plays is against the dead and worn-out traditions of Indian society. *Sacrifice* is a scathing attack on the practice of animal sacrifice in the name of religion. *Malini* sets forth the attack on religious bigotry and affirms his faith in the oneness of religion. In both these plays we find a conflict between
orthodox religion and convention on the one hand and the claims of humanity on the other. *Sanyasi* is again the play about conflict of thoughts of a Sanyasi and caste-system in its background. *Achalayatan* ridicules worn out ethico-religious traditions of India and a scathing attack on the rote-oriented education system prevalent in his times.

The second chapter is a study of the theme of caste and class biases inherent in Indian society. Tagore’s attitude towards the people belonging to lower strata is that of genuine sympathy. He expresses a feeling of disgust for the cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian feudal life, with its barriers of caste, creed, worn out customs and its restrictive religious rites and practices. His denunciation of the caste system was total and unconditional. The chapter would discuss and analyse *Chandalika, Sanyasi, Natir Puja,* and *Karna O Kunti,* which deal with this theme. His sensitive handling of the theme of the curse of untouchability lends these plays their power.

The third chapter takes into account the study of the women characters in the plays of Tagore and the note of assertion on their part. Tagore in his presentation of gender deformities present in society and especially its marginalisation of women, unequivocally voices certain facts through the characterisation of Chitra, Prakriti, Srimati, Malini, Sumitra in plays *Chitrangada, Natir Puja, Chandalika, Malini* and *The King and Queen and Karna O Kunti.* Tagore shows deep involvement with his women characters. He describes the innermost feelings and desires of those who live on margin. His women characters interestingly are not submissive and weak but mostly bold, courageous and strong. One important feature of Tagore’s dramatic work is his deep insight into the psyche of Indian woman.
The conclusion to the thesis would sum up the whole study by underscoring how Tagore has handled his theme of man–machine dichotomy and need of religious freedom and humanity. He condemned and expressed the feeling of disgust for the barriers of caste, class and worn-out traditions. Tagore championed the cause of gender equity and sensitively created his women characters. His indignation against tyranny and injustice stemmed out of his sense of empathy with all human beings. Tagore condemned political and social oppression whether it occurred in India or elsewhere. Tagore's compassion for women derives essentially out of deep respect for the basic human dignity. Though belonging to pre independence orthodox society Tagore is quite modern in his outlook. He was ahead of his times in his indictment of the biases against the poor, downtrodden and powerless.