CHAPTER - I

POWERFUL STROBES: INDIAN FOLK THEATRICAL AND INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMATIC PANORAMA.

The Folk theatre does not give a slice of life; it offers a panorama of existence.

(Gargi 6)

The trajectory of drama in India, as discussed in the introduction can be recapitulated in three distinct phases, the classical Sanskrit tradition, the folk theatrical tradition and the development of drama under and after the colonial rule. In an attempt to provide a striking panorama of the latter two, the chapter has been divided by the researcher into two sections, the first providing a glance of the folk theatre forms prevalent in India and the second providing an apercu of Indian English drama.

Folk theatres originated in India when it was the land of kings and emperors with their own kingdoms, it was not categorically divided into states, hence though a folk theatre assigned to a particular state it may also be the theatre for the nearby regions and follow a different terminology as it travels in different regions. There are numerous minor folk forms which is a very wide scope of study for example a Tamasha act may consist of Gondhal and Powada, Bhavai finds presence in Gujarat and Rajasthan also etc. which holds true for other folk forms also, therefore the researcher has limited the study to the prevalent full-fledged forms as there are numerous minor ones.

Literature for the same is meagre as a result of the oral nature of the form and if they were written, hardly published, and more so, some of the literature available is in the regional languages and the books difficult to procure and only a few of them have been translated into
English. Though a ray of light beams through, with the works of Balwant Gargi’s *Folk Theater of India*, Valaparande’s *History of Indian Theatre: Loka Ranga Panorama of Indian Folk Theatre*, Kaplia Vatsyayan’s *Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams*, Farley Richmond, Darius L Swann and Philip B Zarrilli’s *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance*, Ananda Lal’s *Theatres of India*, Biswajit Sinha’s *Folk Theatre: Encyclopaedia of Indian Theatre Series 6*, Sudha Desai’s *Bhavai: A Medieval Form of Ancient Indian Dramatic Art (Natya) as Prevalent in Gujarat*, Krishan Sharma’s *The Luminous Bard of Haryana Lakhmichand: A study in the Indian Culture Life and Folk Theatre*, S Karanth’s *Yaksagana*, a few of the Western writers, Kathryn Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India*, Julia Hollander’s *Indian Folk Theatres*, Martha Ashton, and Bruce Christie’s *Yaksagana: A Dance Drama of India*, Ashton and Sikora’s *Krishnattan*, Cecil Ault Junior’s *Folk theatre of Rajasthan: Introducing three Marwari Khayal Plays Translated into English*. The study of the folk theatre forms mentioned in this chapter is based on the literary study of the above mentioned texts. For the sake of convenience the researcher has taken up the study dividing it zone wise and by selecting a few of the folk forms from each of the North, West, East and South zones.

Folk theatre encompasses, interweaves and embraces the genre of folk music and dance as well, which as per the need of the research will be brought under the purview of the study. The mentioned point can be better understood in the words of Mathur, drama in Indian villages encompasses almost the entire inner personality of the villages. It seeks to meet all his intellectual emotional aesthetic needs. Unlike urban and modern drama, it freely uses songs, dances and instrumental music besides dialogue. This multiple approach results in a form that is self-contained and ‘complete’ entertainment for the audience to whom it is directed. It is more than an entertainment, it is a complete
emotional experience and aims at creating an environment of receptivity in which communication of ideas is an effortless process. (Mathur 5)

The folk performing arts genre consists of

1. Folk Dance
2. Folk Music
3. Folk Drama

Folk dances of India represent the collective cultural traditions of a community, region, race or village. They are lively, energetic, spirited, flamboyant, colourful, expressions of the inner thoughts and emotions portrayed in multi-coloured costumes, gestures and body movements, they are also a means of their recreation, celebration, gathering and entertainment. Indian folk dances are classified into three broad categories viz. Community folk dances, dances preserved by hereditary professional families and troupes and tribal dances. Kapila Vatsyayan provides a broad classification of the dance tradition as under

a. Hunt dances or animal –imitation dances of nomads and food gatherers.

b. Dances of fertility rites, rituals, magic, sorcery propitiation of spirits, trance dances and the like of shift cultivation and others.

c. Dances which revolve around the agricultural functions and what has been termed generally as functional occupational dancing of the peasants.

d. Dances revolving around the seasonal cycle, super imposed by dances which belong to particular festivities, festivals and collective participative activity.

e. Dances, dance dramas, which revolve around themes of the epics, Ramayana, Mahabharata and poems like the Gita Govinda etc.
f. Devotional dancing which mainly accompanied by a class of music, which is semi classical such as the kirtanas, the bhagvatas and the harikathas.

g. Traditional dance drama forms which can be seen both in rural and urban milieu, which range from street plays to cycle plays, and the tableaux are classed around kalis and attams of the South India, lilas of the North India and Jatras of East India.

(Vatsayayan 30)

No clear cut distinction can be made to categorise Indian folk dances, as one genre would overlap another, more over music, song and drama may too amalgamate with the form. Rouf ,Dumhal, Hikkat of Kashmir, Pangí, Gaddí of Himachal Pradesh, Dhurang, Jhumela of Uttaranchal, Bihu of Assam, Aji Lamu and Lion and Peacock dances of Arunachal Pradesh, Lai Haraoba of Manipur, Cheilam of Mizoram, Bamboo dance of Nagaland, Giddha and Bhangra of Punjab, Phag and Jhumar of Haryana, Ghoomar of Rajasthan, Raas, Tippni of Gujarat, Rasleela and Ramleela of Uttar Pradesh, Jhoola of Bihar, Santhali Dance of Jharkhand, Panthi nritya of Chattisgarh, Kathi of Madhya Pradesh, Dhali of West Bengal, martial dances Kalaripayattu and Velakali of Kerala are a few forms of folk dances from the exhaustive list provided by Shovana Narayan.

Folk music is another important element of folk performing arts, yet again Indian folk music goes hand in hand with folk songs to which they are attuned to, they may incorporate ballads and are connected to the folk dances of the region. Folk music represents the ethos of the region and is usually local in range and content. Dorson defines folk music as

The term folk music is often loosely applied to cover all traditional or aurally transmitted music, music that is passed on by ear and performed by memory rather than by the written or printed musical score. In a specific sense the term
refers to aurally transmitted music found within a society that also has art or
cultivated music that is transmitted through musical score. (Dorson 363)

Amrita Priyamvada defines it as “Music that originates among the common people of a
nation or region and is spread about or passed down orally. It is characterized by simple
melodies” she further distinguishes between folk music and tribal music, ‘one a mere
reflection the other a culture in itself.’ Music like dance was an integral part of festivals,
social and religious occasions, functions, day to day and agricultural activities. Folk
instruments used are mostly roughly created by the musicians with the available material.
Bhungal, Jjanj, Pakhwaj, Dhol, Daf, Ektara, Dotara, Kartal, Chimta, Surnai, Nagara, Tanpura,
Tuntuna, etc are used. Many of the mystic saints of medieval India employed music as means
to devotion often along with rhythmic dance. On study one may notice that folk dances and
folk music may carry similar labels. Shyam Parmar lists out a few folk musical styles
Burrakatha of Andhra Pradesh, Baul and Bhatiali of Bengal, Bidapad and Bidesia of Bihar,
Garba and Raas of Gujarat, Gi Gi Pad of Karnatka, Kolkali Pattu of Kerala, Ruf and Chhakari
of Kashmir, Sua and Saira of Madhya Pradesh, Powada and Lavni of Maharashtra, Heer and
Giddha of Punjab, Dasskathia and Palla of Orissa, Maand Panihari and Ghuman of Rajasthan,
Chaiti and Kajari of Uttar Pradesh, Dhalo and Dakani of Goa etc.

Another important source of entertainment in the villages apart from folk dance and folk
music is folk drama, Dorson opines

Drama in folk communities has been little discussed in the folklore literature, primarily
because it has not often been regarded as folk genre. Further, even when it has been so
designated, it has commonly been discussed as one of a number of performance-types in
festivals of rituals. This is where it would remain, were it not for the fact that drama
does have certain characteristics and other festival amusements do not and many of
these were developed in sophisticated theatrical form. (Dorson 353)

Folk drama acted as a means of entertainment for the village folk after a season’s hard
toil or as a religious approbation to their local gods and goddesses. In the absence of
technology it served as a pursuit to their amusement through its lively art forms. Every region
imbibed with its own unique culture had different flavour to offer. The contribution of drama
apart from dance and music tradition was the addition of dialogues but differed totally from
the existent modern theatre. An amalgamation of music, dance and drama, which homogenize
to form an inseparable whole to which Dorson remarks,

Folk drama differs from other dialogue pieces only in performance-audience
relationship, in mode of transmission and most important in vocabulary of dramatic
effects…. Drama is by its nature essentially a public performance-it must be capable
of being understood by the audience with a minimum reflection. That is drama, must
deal in publicly understood motives and symbols. As in other genres of art, we may
distinguish however, between these types of drama folk, popular and sophisticated.
Folk drama exists on a village or small of community and therefore known to most of
the audience. The dramas are given on special occasions only, most commonly a
seasonal festival. Popular theatre often arises from folk theatre but the players are
professional and audience comes from places other than the community in which the
players live.

Folk drama, to the outside investigation are those mimetic festival
performances, in which dialogue and action intermingle but in which dialogue
prevails. Even here however it is very difficult to distinguish between drama and
dance, so difficult indeed that the term dance-drama has often been substituted in
academic discussions of this genre. (Dorson 354-355)
Folk theatre is a symbolic reflection of a community, and the manifestation of the folk culture of the region, in the words of Gargi,

Folk theater represents the people in their natural habitat, with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress, behaviour, humor, proverbs, wit and wisdom. It contains a rich store of of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs, and legends. (Gargi 5)

Varadpande further elaborates,

Folk theatre is the theatre which originated and evolved among, and has been transmitted through, the common people. Its relationship with the common people is deep, multiple and multi-layered. It is a kind of entertainment which is not entertainment alone. It carries within it the entire folk culture with all its social and religious institutions. We find reflected in folk theatre the cults, customs, rituals and beliefs of common people. It assumes different forms and fulfils multiple functions...... The common man is emotionally and intellectually involved with his theatre; for him the theatre is not something external or superficial. It is a part of his tradition with which he has lived for generations. (Varadpande 3)

Drama in India developed on two major fronts secular and religious. The secular flourished in the courts and the religious found a platform in and around the temples. Both acted as venues for the performances of the plays. The courts were limited to a certain audience the kings, nobles, scholars , artisans and writers. The main purpose here was to provide entertainment, praise or narrate the glories of the crown, narrate episodes of history or discussion on various issues or the celebration of festivals or social occasions of birth, thanksgiving, recovery from an illness, death etc. Temples in ancient India on the other hand
were also limited to a certain section of the society but was open to a larger audience than the courts. Temples provided a platform for community gathering on various occasions and festivals, provided a means of livelihood for many sections of the society, functioned as a centre for religious learning and acted as venues where plays were enacted and performed. It helped in providing moral education and entertainment to the elite, sophisticated and to the common man also. Goverdhan Panchal remarks,

The temple in India played an important and varied role in the life of the people. It was built to meet the varied needs of the community having its roots in religion.

While its construction provided scope for the aesthetic self-expression of master-builders, sculptors, painters and common workmen for years, the daily temple ritual provided a livelihood to a large number of people of various communities—the pujaris, Brahmans, garland-makers, goldsmiths, temple-cleaners, tailors, actors, musicians and other manual workers. It acted as a banker to the needy agriculturist and gave a living and occupation to farmers who tilled the temple lands.

It met the moral needs of the people as they gathered in the great courtyard or the halls to hear the kathas from the Epics and the Puranas, and the three R’s were taught in the Pathasalas-schools, attached to the temple. The elders met here to discuss local disputes and routine affairs.

On festive days people from far and near gathered here to partake in the general merriment. It provided a social platform, a meeting place for relatives and friends. To the fairs that were held on such occasions around the temple, came traders and merchants and artisans to sell, buy or barter their wares. And here came the minstrels, actors and acrobats to amuse the crowds.

To the more important temples were attached the Natya-mandapas-temple theatres—where Nrtya (dance) and Natya (drama) were performed as rituals to propitiate the
gods. These also provided moral education and aesthetic enjoyment to the sophisticated and the cultured as also to the common man. (Panchal 66)

Plays were enacted and performed on religious festivals and celebrated occasions. In the ancient classical age the literature was passed on orally, the bards or the minstrels also known as the ‘Suta’ would travel from place to place singing the epics, folk tales, myths, legends and the heroic incidents. These were later on patronized by kings. These musicians, dancers, actors unified themselves and formed troupes. Iravati in her book *Performing Artists in Ancient India* mentions that troupes were prevalent in ancient India, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* mentions the troupes of ‘gayaka-vadaka-nartaka’ or ‘suta-magadha-vaitalika’, *Gamani Samyutta*, a Buddhist text, mentions the troupe of ‘Talaputa’, the Jain texts and Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* also mention the presence of such troupes. Sisir Das opines

However, there must have been a space outside the royal courts and the temples, and a different kind of literature was produced there by the poets for the common men who were neither accomplished in arts not steeped in religious fervor, for their entertainment and edification. Much of it, it not the whole of it, had perished within a short period in the absence of any proper method of their preservation. But the writers belonging to the higher strata of the society had often appropriated the themes and forms of the literature, folk or the subaltern, whatever be its character. There was a continuous traffic between the two. From the tenth or the eleventh century onward people’s literature in the Indian languages asserted itself fully, and the fusion of the elite and the folk became more and more common. (Das 11)

Having set the background an overview of the folk theatre forms is provided dividing the study into zones, the forms discussed in the chapter are Bhavai, Tamasha, Dasavtar from the west, Bhand Pather, Karayila/Karyala, Khyal, Naqal, Saang/Svang/Swaang, Nautanki from the north, Ramlila, Raslila, though from north but covering a pan Indian area, Maach,
Nachya/Naach from central, Yakshagana, Krishnattam, Terukuttu/Therukoothu from the south, Ankia Nat, Jatra and Shumang Lila from the east.

Bhavai:

Bhavai is the folk theatre of Gujarat and also performed in Rajasthan. Associated with the legend of Asait, the form includes of performing ‘Vesas’ performed in a strain, they are small individual stories or playlets depicting the myths and legends of the region providing a scathing satire of the society laced with wit and humour as the major elements. Performed mainly by the Nayaks, Bhojaks and Targalas, is an apt projection of the culture of Gujarat. The form will be dealt with in detail in chapter two of the thesis.

Tamasha:

Embedded in the cultural mosaic of the Maharastra is the folk theatre, Tamasha. The form embodies music, dance with the minimalistic use of props. The initiatory rites consist of an invocation to lord Ganesha also termed as the ‘Gan’, followed by ‘Gaulan’, a number of Lavani’s and ‘Vag’ which is the main play. Action and mime are the pillars on which the form rests interspersed with lavanis which are highly romantic and erotic in nature. Chapter four of the thesis provides a detailed view of the form.

Dasavtar:

Dasavtar is the folk theatre of the Konkan region, of parts of Maharashtra and Goa, practised by the Devali and the Lingayat castes. The term ‘Dasavtar’ literally means ‘Ten Incarnations’, true to its name the form is an enactment of the ten incarnations of Lord ‘Vishnu’. The ten forms performed are,

1) Matsya (Fish)
2) Kurma (Tortoise)
3) Varaha (Boar)
4) Narsinha (Lion Man)
5) Vaman (Dwarf)
6) Parashuram
7) Lord Rama
8) Lord Krishna (sometimes Balrama)
9) Lord Buddha
10) Kalki

Developed around the seventeenth century, some scholars opine the form owes its origin to ‘Kuchipudi’ and some to ‘Yakshagana’, believed to have been first staged by Shyamji Naik Kale at Adivare village, the play is performed in an open stage, at the village square or the temple surroundings, the performance is divided into two parts the ‘purvaranga’ which consists of the preliminaries and initiary songs to the local deities and the ‘uttaranga’ consisting of the depiction of the avatars or the latter part of the performance. The Sutradhar is called the ‘naik’ or ‘Haridas’, and the Vidushak termed as ‘Madhavya/Madhavi’, a Brahman/priest who provides comic relief, the performance proper opens with an invocation to Lord Ganesha and then Goddess Saraswati. The invocation is followed by the legend of Shankhasura and of the theft of the Veda, after which any of the avtar is enacted termed as ‘akhanya’. The depiction of the avatars is interspersed with dance and music specially in the battle scenes. The show ends with a song sung by ‘Hardas’ called the ‘Ovi’ or with a reference to other incarnations. The musical instruments used are Harmonium, Pakhwaj Cymbals and Mridamgam. The form employs use of masks for Ravana, Lord Ganesha, props for the battle scenes like swords, spears etc and uses highly ornate costumes. The performers do not follow any written script neither are there any written rules, but rests on the sole
capability and improvisations of the actor. The actors perform travelling from village to village with bare facilities available.

Bhand Pather:

Manifesting the spirit and culture of Kashmir is its folk theatre Bhand Pather, bearing profound Muslim and sufi influence, the form is believed to have reached the Muslim courts from Persia around the fourteenth century. The term ‘Bhand’, derived from the Kashmiri language has been interpreted variously by different scholars as ‘clown’, ‘actor’, or ‘performer’, and ‘Pather’ meaning ‘drama’ or ‘play’. A few scholars opine it to be a derivative ‘Bhana’ from classical Sanskrit theatre. The plays are performed in open air around temple surroundings or Sufi shrines on their Muslim festivals known as ‘Urs’, most of the Bhands follow Islam. Music plays a dominant role in Bhand Pather, the playing of the Swarnai heralds the beginning of the play and is sanctified by the player at the dargah before the commencement of the performance. The musical instruments used are Swarnai, Nagara, Dhol, and thalij or cymbals.

Each Bhand Pather consists of individual musical compositions known as the ‘mukam’, which leads to the Pather. The principal characters are ‘Magun’, the head of the group, a multifaceted personality adept in all arts viz. dance, music and acrobats, ‘Sutradhara’, the narrator synonymous to ‘Sutradhar’ of classical Sanskrit theatre, the ‘Maskharas’ the clown or the jester synonymous to the ‘Vidushak’ is of paramount importance and the soul of the play who criticizes, ridicules the social evils and their conversations bring out the humour and satire instored beneath, the ‘Pariparsok’ or the ‘Kurival’ is an interesting character who lashes the jester with a whip to keep him under control which intturn arises humour. A bamboo stick and a whip are also unique to Bhand Pather. One finds the use of ‘Hazal’ (mockery), ‘Mazak’ (jokes), Tasan (sarcasm) as a tool for edification and entertainment as
well. Though the prominent language of the play is Kashmiri on finds the use of Persian, Dogri, Urdu etc. Termed as a ‘Farcical’ theatre it weighs heavily on social satire lampooning and criticizing the corrupt system and the evil society at large, highly secular in form and influenced by the Shaivist and the Sufi tradition in the words of Anand Lal is a combination of ‘mimicry, buffoonery, music and dance’

Karayila/Karyala:

Sprinkled with the hues of Himachal Pradesh is the folk theatre Karayila or Karyala, performed mainly in Shimla, Solan and Sirmour districts. Developed around the eighteenth century, the word ‘Karayila’ or ‘Karyala’ is variously interpreted by scholars as to be a formative of a Sanskrit word meaning ‘Theatre’, according to M L Varadpande it has been derived from the word ‘Karal’ which means ‘ferocious’ and also ‘an offering made by the devotee to the deity’. Anand Lal opines it to have been derived from the word ‘Karola’ or ‘Karaula’ which means ‘teasing’ or ‘having fun’. Performed usually in the open air on a demarcated piece of land with poles and ropes, wherein a bonfire is lit in the centre termed as ‘Khanda’, ‘Dhuni’ or ‘Ghiyana’ in local language, serving two purposes of sanctifying the stage and providing warmth in the chilly nights of Himachal Pradesh. The musical instruments used are Dhol, Nagara, Shehnai, Ransingha, Flute, Dholak, Khanjiri, Cymbals, Naphiri and Karnal. The performance begins with a ‘Manglacharan’ invoking the blessings of various deities. The theme is introduced to the audience through ‘Mansukh’ or ‘Dandoo’ followed by the acts of ‘Chandravali’ representing ‘Lakshmi’, ‘Durga’ or ‘Shakti’ whose dance marks the beginning of the play followed by ‘Bairagi’ also known as the Sadhu ka Swang. According to Varadpande the form consists of several swangs like ‘Sahdu ka Swang’, ‘Churanwale ka Swang’, ‘Buddhe ka Swang’, ‘Jogi Jogan ka Swang’ etc. Extremely extempore and conversational in style the form is witty and satirical in tone. The language used is mainly ‘Pahari’ and the dialect of Sirmaur district but one also finds the use of Hindi,
Urdu, Punjabi and ‘Gibberish English’ which is used sometimes to evoke humour, termed as a ‘Farcical Theatre’ it is loaded with wit, humour and scathing satire. The themes vary from mythological, historical, religious, social etc but with the final aim being entertainment.

Khyal

Originated in Agra-Bharatpur, Khyal as a folk theatre marks its presence in Rajasthan and in parts of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. The term ‘Khyal’ is said to have been derived from Arabic which means ‘thought’, ‘imagination’ or ‘ideas’ to the Hindi word ‘Khel’ meaning ‘play’ and also a form of classical singing by the term ‘Khyal’. The themes are religious, mythological, folk tales, love tales, historical legends etc. consisting of love romances like ‘Dhola Maru’, ‘Panna Biramde’, martial i.e. Rajput stories ‘Amar Singh Rathore’, ‘Raja Harishchandra’, religious, ‘Narsi Bhagat’, ‘Bhakt Puran Mal’ etc. Performed around Holi, in temple surroundings or ‘Akharas’ is a combination of music, dance and narrative in Marwari and Rajasthani dialects.

Dr. Cecil provides a list of the different styles as,

1. Kuchamani Khyal
2. Shekhawati Khyal
3. Chirawi Khyal
4. Nautaki Khyal
5. Alibakshi/Alibuxi Khyal
6. Ramat Khyal
7. Krishangarhi Khyal
8. Jaipuri Khyal
9. Nagouri Khyal
10. Marwari Khyal
The Kuchamani khyal was created by Lachhiram of Kuchaman, the style usually uses folk music for performance. The Alibakshi khyal was founded by Alibaksh/Aibux, Nawab of Mandawar in Mewat (Alwar), the style uses both the classical and folk genres. The Shekhawat style was founded by Nanulal Rana of Chivada, the form employs the pure classical. In Rajasthan Turra-Kalagi became associated with the Khyal folk theatre, where it led to a separate style called Turra-Kalagi Khyal centered in Chitor and Ghosunda projecting the traditions of its region.

The play opens with a ‘Manglacharan’ with an invocation to the local deities. Dr. Cecil Thomas Ault opines that there are three types of ‘Manglacharan’.

1. Namaskartmak (a greeting)
2. Aashirwadakmak (a blessing)
3. Ghatnapradan (an episode, accepting the power of a bard)

After which the ‘Mehtar’ or the sweeper appears who cleans the stage, followed by ‘Bhisti’, the water sprinkler, an act of purifying the stage, followed by the ‘Vandana’. The play consists of five major characters, the ‘king’, the ‘queen’, the ‘Halkara’ (a friend and advisor to the king), the ‘Daasi’ (maid or servant to the queen), the Joker, Jester, or the Clown.

Dr. Mahendra Bhavanat describes the different stages used by different Khyals, according to him the Khyal stage is of four types.
The first type is nothing but a plain ground open on all sides. People sit all around the performing arena. While enacting the actors move around and face the crowd sitting in all directions. In the second type of stage one curtain is raised at the back of the stage and here people sit on the three sides of the stage and the space behind the back-curtain is used as make-up room. In the third type, a regular Mandap which can be open on all sides or having a curtain at the back is raised and decorated tastefully with flowers, cloth pieces of different colours and paper designs. However, the most decorative stage type is the fourth one which is known as the ‘Attali Manch’. It presents a sight of many floored mansion with decorated windows. At a height of twelve to twenty feet, structures called ‘Attalika’ are erected. This structure is called ‘Mahal’ or palace. In front of this structure the stage is raised. (qtd in Varadpande 163)

Highly musical in nature, instruments like Dhol, Nagara, Harmonium are used. The form seems to be influenced by the Parsi theatre at large.

Naqal:

Associated with the north and the Swang tradition is the folk form ‘Naqal’, the folk theatre of Punjab and of parts of Haryana. The term ‘Naqal’ is derived from Persian, meaning ‘to imitate’, and the ‘imitator’ being called the ‘Naqalchi’. Performed in an open space, courtyard or a street on social occasions, satirizing the societal norms, evoking humour through a witty repartee by the jester, clown or the buffoon. The artists may include the ‘Bhands’, ‘Mirasis’ (Muslim clown artists), and Bazigars (acrobats). The performance consists of ‘Pattri’ or ‘Purav Rang’ (Prologue) followed by the play proper i.e. Naqal. A unique feature is the use of leather strap which is slapped to a character at a climatic moment generating laughter. The language used is mainly Punjabi and Haryanvi, bringing out the dichotomy of the system with themes pertaining to common life.
Saang:

Operatic in nature and infused in music and dance is Saang/Sang, Svang or Swang, the folk theatre of Haryana, meaning ‘disguise’ or ‘imitation’ and also a Sanskrit derivative of word ‘Sangita’ meaning ‘music’, performed on a religious and festive occasions, by Bhat, Mirasis, Jats, Luhars etc. The Nagara is played to announce the performance, which begins with a ‘Bhent’ an invocation to goddess Durga or Bhavani, after which the Sang proper is performed. The stories for the play deals with the myth, legends, folktales and with the lives of historical and religious figures. In their paper “The Ethnography of Sang: A North Indian Folk Opera”, Ved Prakash Vatuk and Sylvia Vatuk remark that the dialogues are composed in a song form called “Ragini”, and each verse of Ragini consist of three parts Tek (refrain), Kali (the main verse) and Tor (a line or lines rhyming with the Tek). Each actor sings his dialogue in the form of a Ragini and Javab. The musical instruments used are Sarangi, Dholak, Tabla, Nagara, Harmonium and cymbals. The dance employed is Goonga Dhamora, a folk adaptation of Kathak. Krishan Sharma in The Luminous Bard of Haryana Lakhmichand: A study in the Indian Culture Life mentions the contributions of Kishanlal Bhat in terms of introducing the romantic and social themes, Ali Baksh’s compositions of ‘Chaubolas, Jikari, Bahar, Ghazals and Bhajans’ using ‘the admixture of local dialect and pure Braj’ highly musical in style. Other notable names that find mention are of Pandit Netaram, Deep Chand, Haradeva, Lakhmi Chand. The Saangs of Lakhmi Chand as mentioned in the book are listed below,

1) Notanki
2) Padmavat
3) Heer Ranjha
4) Chand Kiran
5) Shakuntala
6) Jaani Chor
7) Raja Bhoj
8) Raghbir
9) Jamaal
10) Raja Bharatarihari
11) Harishchander
12) Draupadi Cheer Haran
13) Keechak Virat Parav
14) Satyavan Savitri
15) Nal Damyanti
16) Seth Tara Chand
17) Chap Singh
18) Shahi Lakkarhara
19) Bhoop Puranjan
20) Puran Mal
21) Meera Bai

Nautanki:

Believed to have been derived from the Sanskrit ‘Natak’, ‘Nataki’, which later came to be known as Nautanki, a variant of Swang which resembles it closely and assumes the name of Nautanki as it travels to Uttar Pradesh. The term Nautanki is variously interpreted as to be derived from a distinctive music and drumming style, ‘nav tankar’, the admission fees for the performance which was ‘Nau’ meaning ‘Nine’ and ‘Taka’ meaning ‘coins’ i.e. Nine coins and therefore the term ‘Nautanki’, another theory that associates itself is that of ‘feather light’ princess ‘Nautanki’ who was weighed in flowers and weighed only 36 grams where ‘Nau’ meant ‘nine’ and ‘tank’ refered to a measure of silver currency equivalent to approximately
four grams which equals to 36 grams. As talked about in the previous from of the Saang of Nautanki or the story ‘Shehzadi Nautanki’ as in Punjab was so famous and popular that it blossomed into a separate genre as a whole. The story as narrated by Katheryn Hansen.

Nautanki was a beautiful princess. One day a Punjabi young man Phool singh returned home from hunt. He ordered his elder brother’s wife to fetch him cold water, get his food ready, prepare smoking materials, and make up his bed. She rebuked him sharply, telling him to go win the hand of Nautanki, if he wanted a woman to serve his every need. Phool Singh vowed not to return home again unless Nautanki came with him.....

He entered the city and soon came to the garden of the princess Nautanki. As he entered he was accosted by a malin, an old woman gardener who warned him away.... Phool Singh helped the malin weave a special garland to present Nautanki affixing a gem of his own.... She demanded the malin the producer of the garland. Phool Singh directed the malin to disguise him as her newlywed daughter in law and lead him into court. Nautanki was enchanted by the lovely young girl she saw before her..... Phool Singh recommended she pray for a boon and as Nautanki closed her eyes and prayed to her pir (saint) removed his disguise. The two spent the night together. In the morning when Nautnaki was weighed in flowers as usual the scale tipped, she was heavier from her contact with a man. When the king the father discovered the insult to his honour... Phool Singh was sentenced to hang. The grieving lovers were parted, as Nautanki promised to meet Phool Singh once more.... But Nautanki pulls out the cup of poison and prepares to commit suicide. She turns her sword on her father demanding he pardon her lover at once. The king consents to the marriage and the two are wed on the spot...

(Hansen 72)

The Nautanki is announced by the drumming of the Nakkara followed by the introductory songs in the praise of the Guru, the stage and the deity (Krishna, Shiva, Sarasvati and others),
the ‘Ranga’ is the Stage Manager Director who introduces the main characters. The language used is Persian Urdu, Hindi, Rajasthani etc. The musical instruments used are Harmonium, Sarangi, Clarinet, Dholak and the most important and distinctive is the Nakkara. The themes included heroic and historic legends, Rajput stories, Arabic and Persian tales, folk tales, stories of kings, dacoits, lovers etc. There are five important Akharas of Nautanki, Hatras, Mazaffarnagar, Sahranpur, Kanpur and Kanuj, each named after the town in which it originated. The ones that stand out of these are that of Hathras and Kanpur. Hathras Akhara was founded by a poet named Indarman. Natharam was spotted by Indarman’s disciple Chiranjilal and adopted into his akhara. The Hathras style lays stress on classical singing and ignores dramatic action. The chief proponent of the Kanpur akhara was Shrikrishna Khatri Pehalvan. Varadpande is of the view that it is by Ramnarayan in Kanpur that Swang was changed to Nautanki. The Kanpur style is simple, subordinating singing to the needs of the dramatic action. Some of the Nautankis performed are legend of Alha and Udal, Amar Singh Rathore, Harishchandra, Sultana Daku, Laila Majnu, Jogi Jogan, Hir Ranjha, etc.

Ramlila:

Ramlila is the enactment of the life of the Hindu deity Lord Rama, based on Tulsidas’s Ramacharitmanas, performed and enacted all over the north India, the most famous being that of Uttar Pradesh of Ayodhya, Varnasi, Braj, Awadh etc. Anuradha Kapoor observes that the term ‘Lila’ means a ‘sport’, ‘play’, therefore Ramlila meaning to be ‘Ramas playful deeds’. Enacted during the months of September-October or during the Dushera festival usually in open grounds ranging from 10 to 12 days the longest and the most famous being The Ramlila of Ramnagar which runs for almost a month. The performance takes place on a magnificent scale be it performance wise, locale wise or appearance wise, each region and mandali having its own distinct style. The form is more ritualistic enactment of incidents and stories related to Ramas life, right from birth, marriage, exile, abduction of Sita, the war with
Ravana and the Rama’s victory and the defeat of Ravana culminating in the burning of the Ravan’s effigy. The cities would have a set of committees, ‘samitis’ or ‘mandlis’ who organize the performances. The most important characters of the play viz. Rama Sita, Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrugan are played by young boys under the age of fourteen, signifying purity, holiness and innocence, called the ‘Svarups’, literally meaning an image, here of the heroic and godly characters they portray and therefore they are carried on the shoulders. The troupe consists of the director, sutradhar, chief called the ‘Vyasa’ who looks after the entire performance right from the scenes to the costumes to prompting the actors, ‘Ramayanis’ who sing the Ramyana and other actors. An important piece of literature is the ‘Pothis’ which contains a modified form of Ramacharitmanas, containing, as Kapoor iterates ‘Samvads’ and ‘dialogues’ and stage directions as to be performed, there are two Pothis one for the Vyasa and the other for the Svarupas. The costumes are flashy elaborate and ornate, dense and exaggerated make up is applied along with use of masks, head gears, weapons and most important effigies. Musical instruments used are Pakhwaj, Tabla, Nagara, Cymbals, Janjh, Shehnai, Turahi etc. Ram is the source and substance of Ramlila. Ramlila holds more of the religious sentiment of people rather than that of entertainment.

Raslila:

If Ram is the source and substance of Ramlila, Krishna is source and substance of Raslila, spread over the north in Uttar Pradesh specially associated with Braj, Mathura and Vrindavan, performed during Janmasthmi around the month of July and August. As Gargi observes the term Ras can mean ‘Flavour, enjoyment, communion, quarrel’, and Lila meaning ‘Sport, play or act’ is influenced by the Keertan of the Bhakti Cult specifically to the Pushti cult /marg by Vallabacharyya in which the devotee worships Krishna as a wife. Tradition credits Vallabachraya and Haridas with beginning Ramlila at Mathura, Ghamandeva for originating it at Karahala and Hitharivans as the founder in Vrindavan.
Swami Hitharivans and Swami Haridas established another tradition of raslila at Vrindaban, Naryan Bhat attributed the establishing of ras stages called the ‘mandala’ and the addition of the aspect of nitya ras.

The Raslila is performed in the temples or its courtyards accentuating the sanctity of the form as a devotion rather than mere entertainment. The leader, Sutradhar of the troupe is called the Swami, a Brahmin priest, well versed in scriptures and also the principle singer, apart from the main actors the troupe consists of singers and musicians and instrumentalists who are known as the Samajis, like the Ramlila the parts of Krishna, Radha and the gopis are played by boys under fourteen. The performance as the name suggests consists of two parts Ras and the other Lila, the ras/nityaras deals with the romantic aspect of Krishna Radha’s relation expressed through music, songs and dance and Lila which adds dialogues to it and is divided into three parts Krishnas childhood, youth and his heroic exploits, each and every event of Krishnas life is woven into the Lila some of them listed are ‘Makhanchori lila’, ‘Daan lila’, ‘Nauka Lila’, ‘Uddhav lila’, ‘Mathuragaman lila’, ‘Sankara lila’ etc.

The stage is divided into two parts the ‘Singhasan’, the throne on which Krishna and Radha sit, and the ‘Ras asthan’, the acting area, the backdrop curtain is called the ‘Pichavi’. The performance starts with a ‘Vandana’ by the Swami, followed by a few prayer songs by the Samajis in praise of Radha and Krishna, as they are seated on the throne. This is followed by Ras or nityaras, Krishna, Radha and Gopis sing and dance, followed by adoration in the Keertan style after which the lila starts. The language used is Braj, the musical instruments used are cymbals, drums, harmonium, Sarangi etc, the dance form of Kathak is employed, costumes and makeup are flamboyant. Krishna’s wears a peacock feather in the crown the position of the feather has a great significance. Raslila is not a performed for entertainment by rather a sacred ritual and as an act of devotion.
Maach:

Extremely engaging and delightful is Maach, the folk theatre of the Malva region of Madhya Pradesh. It closely resembles Khyal and Nautanki in form. The origin of Maach is accredited to Guru Gopalji of Ujjain. The other two important figures who contributed to the development and the popularity of Maach are Guru Balmukundji and Ustad Kaluram. The deity associated and worshipped with the form is that of ‘Bhairava’. Poetic and musical in nature attuned to compositions called ‘Rangats’, and termed as ‘Khel’, it deals with a wide variety of themes including religion, epics, puranas, saints, historical figures, love tales, social issues etc. The stage is a raised platform with minimalistic use of props. According to M L Varadpande the stage consists of “Bana Ghat ka Pat, reserved for Maach veterans, a Tek ka Pat where the singers sit who during the act sing the refrain. Musicians with their instruments also take their seat on the stage. The musical instruments used are Dholak, Sarangi, Harmonium etc.” He further elaborates on the opening preliminaries consisting the ‘Bhisti’ carrying a ‘Masak’ sprinkling water on the stage followed ‘Farrasan’ or ‘Sweeper’ who sweeps the floor both accompanied with song and dance and the acts signifying the purification of the stage or the acting area. It is followed by the invocation of the presiding deities viz. Ganesha and Bhairava followed blessing of the actors called the ‘Salami’ after which the play proper starts. ‘Pustakji’ plays the prompter, the character called Sherkhan acts as the vidushak. Immersed in music and dance, with wit and humour enthralls the audience.

Nachya/Naach:

The popular form of folk drama of Chattisgarh is Nachya/Naach derived from the Hindi word ‘Nach’ meaning dance. Driven by humour and satire the form is a dramatic presentation interspersed with music and dance. The form will be dealt with in detail in chapter V of the thesis.
Yakshagana:

Yakshagana is the portrayal of a theatrical ensemble of music, dance, drama and costumes, performed in parts of Karnataka, parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. Originated from the Bhakti and the Lila tradition the term ‘Yaksha’ refers to a supernatural being or a demi god in Hindu mythology and the term ‘Gana’ refers to song or music. In Karnataka the term ‘Yakshagana’ means both a style of singing and a dance drama which employs this style of singing. Chapter III of the thesis talks about the form in detail.

Krishnaattam:

Krishnaattam is religious dance drama of Kerala, based on the book Krishnagiti in Sanskrit composed by Manaveda, the Zamorin of Calicut, deals with the life of Krishna. As the legend goes it was believed that Manaveda envisioned child Krishna playing with a peacock feather near an ‘elanji’ tree at the Guruvayur temple. As he tries to embrace him, Krishna disappears leaving the feather behind. This finds and expression in ‘Krishnagiti’. It is believed that Manaveda got a statue of Krishna made from the wood of the elanji tree when it died, and placed it in the Zamorin temple. The work is believed to have been inspired and considered similar to Ashtapadiyattam which was a representation of Jayadeva’s Gita Govinda. The plays are performed in temples, courtyards of palaces, cherrkal houses etc on festive occasions, on a request or as a thanksgiving. The castes associated are Brahmins, Iyyers and the Nairs. Constituted of three main elements dancing, singing and music the dance element seems to be influenced by the Kalari and Kathakali dance and relies heavily on hand gestures and facial gestures, Krishnattam is sung in the ‘Sopana style’ and important part of the music is drumming. The musical instruments used are Tala (cymbals), Chengala (gong), Topi Maddalam and Shuddha Maddalam (type of drums). Make up, costume, masks are very intrinsic and important part of the performance. The performers apply a paste of any of the
colours Orange, Green and White which is also known as ‘Chhuti’. The shades of the colours used also have a significant meaning. An important part are the head gears, called the ‘Mudi’ and ‘Kiritam’ are considered holy and are paid respect.

The announcement of the performance is made by playing the instruments which may include drums, cymbals or gong. A musical sequence called the ‘Keli’ is performed. The invocative rituals include lighting of a lamp signifying Krishna, by the Brahmin, the musicians worshiping the lamp and paying respect to their musical instruments followed by drumming an invocation dance called the ‘Totayam’ meaning beginning, by poems and dance. On completion the curtain is removed and the dancers perform the ‘Purappatu’ a piece of pure dance. After these the actual play begins. Krishnattam is a series of eight plays which are as follows:

- Avataram
- Kaliyamarddanam
- Rasakrida
- Kamsavadham
- Svayamvaram
- Banayuddham
- Vividavadham
- Svargarohanam

Though the plays consists of various incidents and stories the main theme of the plays are as follows. Avataram deals with the birth of Krishna, Kaliyamarddanam with the defeat of the serpent Kaliya by Krishna, Rasakrida ia about romantic alliances of Krishna specially with Radha, Kamsavadham deals with the killing of Kansa by Krishna, Svayamvaram with the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini, Banayuddham with the battle of Krishna with King Bana,
Vividavadham deals with the killing of the monkey Vivida by Balrama, Svargarohanam deals with the death of Krishna at the hands of a hunter named Jaran, and Krishna’s journey to heaven therefore it won’t be wrong to say that ‘Krishnattam’ is the dramatization of Krishnas life.

Terukuttu/Therukoothu:

Terukuttu or Therukoothu is the folk theatre of Tamilnadu. Teru/Theru means ‘street’ and Kuttu/Koothu means ‘play’ or ‘natakam’ in Tamil and therefore is the street play of Tamilnadu. The plays are a part of the Cittirai festival held around the month of April-May. The performance includes story telling followed by plays. The themes of the plays are based on the Puranas and Mahabharata specially to that of ‘Draupadi’. Tamilnadu consists of various temples dedicated to Draupadi Amman. It is a cycle of eight plays as listed by M L Varadpande, they are:

- Draupadi Kalyanam (The marriage of Draupadi)
- Supattirai Kalyanam (The marriage of Subhadra)
- Alli Arjunan (The marriage of Arjuna with Warrior Queen, Alli)
- Pancali Capatam (The vow of Draupadi)
- Arjunan Tapam (Arjuna’s Tapas)
- Krishnan Titu (The mission of Krishna)
- Abhimanyu Cantai (The defeat of Abhimanyu)
- Karna Mokshyam (The defeat of Karna)
- Patineettam Por (The battle of the Eighteenth Day)

Performed in the temple yards at the village square or open field or shed. The musicians take their seats at the back of the stage, makes use of hand held curtains called ‘Thirai Chellai’, The performance begins with an invocation to Lord Ganesha followed by invocation and
worship of the other deities. The ‘Kattiyankaran’, which Julia Hollander opines means an ‘announcer’, is the stage manager and the Sutradhar of the play, ‘Komali’ or the buffoon is the equivalent of the Vidushak responsible for creating humour. The plays mainly deal with the vengeance and the revenge of Draupadi, there are battle scenes, the most famous of them is the battle between Bhima and Kichaka and Bhima and Duryodhan. The form includes the use of huge effigies of Durydhana and Bhima and also use fireworks for the final and death scene of Duryodhana which is a major attraction. The musical instruments used are Mridamgam, Cymbals, Harmonium, Mukhveenai. The songs are either folk or classical and composed in south Indian raga and tala. Some of the battles are depicted through dance. The dance seems to resemble ‘Kathakkali’. The form also relies heavily on costume, make up and ornamentation. Costumes are befitting the characters, characters paint their faces with different colours, which enhance their characteristic features, give expression to the feeling and thoughts of the character, they are heavily ornamented, most of them wear ankle bells during dance, crowns, headgears etc are used the most elaborate being that of Duryodhan who is also adorned with shoulder decorations.

Ankia Nat:

Ankia Nat is the dance drama of Assam, the presentation or staging of which is called ‘Bhaona’. The origin of the form is credited to Shankardeva, the Assamese Vaishnava saint and his disciple Mahadeva. Ankia Nat are one act plays, according to some scholars the term ‘Ankia’ means ‘one’ and ‘Nat’ meaning to be Natya. The form bears resemblance or have derived from Oja Pali and the Yatra forms. The plays are operatic in nature following the keertan tradition where one finds devotion to Krishna almost leading to a trance. The plays rely more on singing music and dance rather than acting. The themes are mainly taken from the Bhagvat Puranas. To list a few one act plays:
Mahadeva the disciple of Shankradeva wrote short plays called ‘Jhumuras’, depicting the childhood lilas of Krishna. ‘Sattara’ which consists of a ‘Namaghra’, acts as the venue for the performance and is often called the ‘Bhaona Ghara’. There is lot of singing and dance at each stage right from the invocatory preliminaries to the entry of various characters from behind the curtain. The most important character of the play is the ‘Sutradhar’, who is responsible for the managing the performance. The language used is Vrajbauli. The form makes use of masks, accessories and props. The costumes are colourful, a colour set aside for the character depicting their individuality, the makeup is heavy and ornate. The form follows its set of raga and tala in music, ‘Satria’ type of dance style, developed by Shankardeva, musical instruments used are Mrudanga made of clay, Khol (drum), cymbals etc. Ankia Nat lays stress on dancing and singing than prose dialogues which are also lyrical.

Jatra:

Spread over most of the east, in West Bengal and parts of Bihar and Orissa is the folk theatre Jatra. Like the Swang of the North this form too assumes different names as it travels as different regions like it is known as Ankia Nat in Assam, Shumang lila in Manipur etc. The term ‘Jatra’ means a ‘procession’, ‘pilgrimage’ or a ‘journey’. The form owes its origin to the
Bhakti devotion and the Vaishnava saint Chaitanya Deb, performed from September to June, with religious, social, political, romantic tales the most famous being that of Bidya Sunder, the story of princess Bidiya and prince Sundar and most importantly incidents from the life of Krishna and at places include lives of Rama, Shiva and Kali which eventually came to be known as Rama Jatra, Shiva Jatra and Kali Jatra. Unlike other folk forms the actors of the Jatra troupes are not limited to some specific caste it brings under its umbrella people of all castes and different strata of the society.

The stage is called the ‘asar’ a demarcated area for performance consisting of a ‘Gangway’ or ‘Pathway’ which connects the stage to the green room and serves as a platform for the entry and exit of the characters. The musicians occupy their place on the stage and the only prop used is a ‘Chair’, which as and when required serves as different objects as per the requirement.

The performance is announced by the khol(drum) and kartal(cymbals). The performance begins with musical composition termed as ‘concerts’ followed by dance and thereafter by an episode from either the life of Krishna, Shiva or Durga. The stage manager is called the Adhikari. An important character of the play is the ‘Bibek’ or ‘Vivek’ meaning ‘Conscience’ who is a higly paid singer and a man of nobility who enjoys dramatic freedom and serves as caution for the evil to occur. Other important characters ‘Niyati’ meaning ‘Fate’ ‘Badar’ the court fool. The music is a mix of the classical and the folk. The instruments used are Phakwaj, dholak, behala (Violin), cymbals, flute, harmonium etc. The form is lyrical in nature and highly relies on songs also known as the ‘Jatragan’. Gargi opines that ‘the people do not come to see Jatra, but come to hear Jatra.’

Shumang Lila:
Shumang Lila is the folk theatre of Manipur, a form of Jatra that evolved in the region. The term ‘Shumang lila’ means ‘Courtyard Drama’. It is believed to have originated during the reign of Maharaja Chandra Kirti in Manipur. The plays are performed during festivals or social occasions on invitation. The early Shumang Lila consisted of only Phagi (Joke) with any story now the themes cover a wide range of topics containing myths, folktales, social and political issues, corruption etc. The plays are performed in the open area, courtyards, or bank of a river. The stage may be a marked area on the ground or a raised platform. The only props uses are two chairs and a table placed on one side of the stage. The play relies heavily on dialogue and mime, with the introduction of music the form came to be known as Eshei (song) lila. It is a secular form of theatre.

A study of the above mentioned forms helps us to arrive at certain conclusions and common features that run through, a majority of them, the following can be concluded,

- Folk theatre can be broadly classified in two main divisions religious and secular.
- The venue for the performances range from a village square to open grounds, temples, courtyards of temples or houses, street corners etc.
- Most of the performances begin with an invocation to Ganesha or a local deity.
- The characters common to or considered to have been adapted from the classical Sanskrit tradition is that of the Sutradhar and Vidushak which assume different avatars in different genres but the functionality remains almost the same, ie. of the Sutradhar as the backbone in conducting and managing the performance, and of the Vidushak as the humour quotient, lampooning satirizing the follies of the society thereby generating humour and entertaining the audience.
- Use of curtains, masks, puppets is intrinsic to some of the folk theatrical forms.
They rely heavily on dance, music and songs and some of them employ folk music and folk dance as well.

The costumes make-up reveal their own individualistic regional style and tradition and are local in range and variety.

The musical instruments used are not that refined and prepared from locally available material again which has a regional flavour.

The forms in the north are more musical, the southern are dance oriented, the west gives prominence to dialogues and the east is devotional in nature.

The performances are scheduled during the religious festivities, social occasions or during particular months celebrating the harvest or before it etc, the actors either are associated with agriculture or to some profession apart from acting to earn a moderate living and their association remains as more of a passion and devotion towards the art form.

Most of folk theatrical forms are oral in nature, the skills passed on from one generation to another, to the extent that an actor plays the same character throughout his entirety and is passes on to his next generation.

It was an all and all male cast, the female roles too performed by the males, which on later stage in some cases women started being accepted in the troupes.

Humour in some of the folk forms reached to the level of obscenity and vulgarity and therefore shunned by the sophisticated and the elite.

With the onset of technology, cinema and TV and economic viability of the form received a setback in terms of its popularity, it is rarely practised and if at all mostly as a ritual.

Mahesh Dattani remarks,
Theatre has always been a mirror for man. A reflection of his world, of the eternal conflicts that plague him, through which he has experienced a range of emotions. Man has created a very complex language called theatre. A language that has the ability to redefine the natural concepts of time, space and movement that goes beyond the physical. Through this language of theatre he has been able to see himself for who he is, what he has made of himself and what he aspires to be. (Dattani 470)

The folk stage was coarse, crude and did not have any authentic and rigorous framework and technique and hence was limited to the rural sector of the society. Drama after the folk stage appears on the forefront during the colonial rule with the establishment of Bombay Amateur Theatre in 1776. With the defeat at the Battle of Plassey and the establishment of the Imperial power, a new culture emerged, the amalgamation of both led to the following

- The curiosity to know and learn about the new culture resulted into literature being translated both ways from Sanskrit to English and vice versa, the most important landmark being Sir William Jone’s translation of Shakuntala into English.
- The need to teach English to the Indians, use English as tool to colonize them and for the better functioning of the administration, in the words of M K Naik, ‘There was an equally pressing need for Indian clerks, translators and lower officials in the administration and knowledge of English was essential for these jobs.’, which resulted in the emergence of an educated working middle class.
- Establishment of Missionary institutes, schools and colleges severed as platforms for the spread of English and Christianity as well.

The above mentioned factors gave rise to an urban, educated English speaking class in India moreover, the British back in India were responsible for inviting touring troupes for their entertainment, who staged mainly European plays, to which the Indians did not have a direct
access to and hence was looked upon with curiosity. M K Naik in “The Achievement of Indian drama in English” mentions some of the European touring companies which are,

- Fairclough Company
- The Lewis Dramatic Company
- Norville’s Our Boys Company
- The Loftus Troupe
- The Willard Opera Company
- Dave Carson Troupe

All of them devoted to performing English plays, which actually paved a way for the emergence Indian amateur troupes and dramatic clubs, moreover the interest in the stage and the national fervour led to translations, both ways which eventually witnessed the performances of English plays in English, translation of Indian Sanskrit and regional plays in English, translations of English plays in Indian languages, translations of Sanskrit plays in regional languages and later independent plays in regional and Indian English. Indian drama begins its new innings with translations of English comedies into Bengali by Herasim Lebedeff, a Russian adventurer and Gokalnath Das viz. Disguise in 1795 followed by Love is the Best Doctor. 1831 saw the emergence of the first Bengali theatre, producing English plays by Indians viz. Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and Wilson’s English translation of the Sanskrit play Uttara Ram Charita. A few important landmarks in the history are, Kirtibilas by Jogendra Nath Gupta, Vishnudas Bhave’s Sitasvayamvara (staged 1843) under the protégé of Raja of Sangli, 1853 an Urdu play Inder Sabha (staged 1853) , KulinaKula Sarbasva by Pandit Ram Naryan Tarkaratna, the first original Bengali play written in 1854 and staged in 1856, Thorke Madhavrao Peshwe first original play in Marathi by Vinayak Janardan Keertana staged in 1860. The new wave brought in the urge for the creation of plays for the
educated working class which in turn resulted in the emergence of various mandalis, troupes, dramatic clubs and construction of play houses. To name a few we find, the Madras dramatic society the Parsi Natak Mandali, Elphinstone Dramatic club by students of Elphinstone college who produced mostly Shakespearean and other English plays in English, the Victoria Natak Mandali, the Thespian club, the Orphean Dramatic club, etc. It should noted here that all this flourished at the major port cities under the British rule, viz. Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. At a later on stage drama received a strong support impetus with the establishment of governmental bodies and associations like Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA), The National Theatre, the various Akademis viz. Sahitya Akademi, Lalit Kala Akademi, Sangeet Natak Academy and National School of Drama, which actually concentrated on regional drama, hardly providing a helping hand to English Drama.

Sneaking through these crevices, trying to make a footing and make its presence felt, is Indian Drama in English. The beginnings saw translations or adaptations of English plays but slowly and steadily the wings spread, though the literature produced was meagre in comparison to poetry and prose it did flourish and grow with times. Srinivas Iyengar opines that “Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity nor on the whole of high quality. Enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English but seldom for actual stage production”. M K Naik remarks “If Indian writing in English is the Cinderella of literature in English, Indian drama in English has always been, along with criticism, one of the twin Cinderellas of Indian writing in English.” Refuting the remarks Anita Myles remarks “Contrary to the belief that Indian Drama in English is still in its infancy and that the period of gestation is not yet over, the fact is that it has reached a stage of indefinable maturity and though it may suffer from quantity but certainly not in Quality.” One agrees that drama lags behind in terms of output in comparison to poetry and fiction, though the situation seems to have changed with times. There was spurt in the
production of regional literature which was not the case with Indian English drama, the paucity of the output as Krishna Bhatta puts forth in “Indian English Drama: Why Meagre Achievement? as,

The first and the foremost reason is the want of a living theatre. It is a well-known fact that the real success of a play can be tested only on the stage. A playwright always needs a living theatre to put his work to an acid test, evaluate its total effect on the audience and thereby get a chance to improve upon his previous performance. But, the history of evolution of the modern Indian theatre reveals how the Indian English playwright had to suffer for the want of a regular living theatre in the country. This main handicap did not allow him to pursue playwriting in a systematic and comprehensive way. The result is that most of the dramatists seem to have taken playwriting, not as a ‘cause of the soul’, but only as a light hobby; and they seem to write for the reader (and not the playgoer).... most of the playwrights did not bestow due thought on the stageability of their plays.

Another important reason for the meagre achievement in the field is the playwrights’ failure to employ the rich folk forms, and traditional models and techniques of the Classical Sanskrit Drama..... they have failed to follow the useful tradition of both the folk-stage and the Classical Sanskrit Drama of the country.

Further, drama is a growing art, and, as such, it needs constant experimentation. At best, we have seen only a very few playwrights who have experimented with strategies such as a new interpretation of myths and legends; highlighting the modern relevance of epic character; evincing a deep insight into historic and political events; presenting social maladies as to provoke thought; allegorical representation of ideas and dance-drama; use of suitable techniques-Indian or Western where necessary, etc.....
Also, playwrights’ failure to tackle the problem of language is not a small reason for their meagre achievement. For, dialogue, which is complementary to setting and action, can make or mar a play. In both the pre-Independence and post-Independence phases, may playwrights do not seem to have bestowed sufficient thought on the use of language. Though our country has been and continues to be benefited by the richness of English language, the English-knowing people do not form a considerable majority and much less in number are the people who speak English. Having this in view what type of language is suitable for the Indian English stage? Except in the case of some plays by Sri Aurobindo, Chattopadhy, Currimbhoy and others, many have employed a highly literary idiom irrespective of their themes. For, while stylized language would be effective for mythological or a historical theme, it would be artificial in the case of themes from the contemporary society, which naturally necessitate the use of the spoken language. (Bhatta, 197-200)

At large the reasons attributed to the stunted growth of English can be attributed to the following probable reasons,

- English as a language catered to only a certain section of the society.
- English still remained a second or a foreign language to most of the playwrights and hence the expressions may not be as highly effective as the regional ones.
- Though some of them were true masters of the language, the works remained as specimens of their mastery and command of the written word rather than the colloquial idiom that drama demands of.
- Though the themes of the work were Indian they heavily depended on western models of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Brecht etc which actually were unsuitable for their themes.
The ultimate aim of drama is to be performed or staged but early English drama hardly portrayed the range and variety, they lacked stageability therefore were termed as ‘Closet drama’, which remained confined to the text.

- It relied heavily on translations rather than original works written in English.
- Presence of limited number of play houses and production house which host these plays along with a limited English audience for the plays.

Origin of Indian English Drama is attributed to Krishna Mohan Banerjee’s *The Persecuted of Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* (1831) followed by Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s translated plays *Ratnavali* (1858), *Sermista* (1859), *Is this Called Civilization* (1871), *Nation Builders* (1922), he also translated Dinbandhu Mitra’s play *Nil Darpan* into English. C S Nazir’s *The First Parsi Baronet* (1866), plays like *The Bombay Palkheewala* and *Bengali Baboo*, D M Wadia’s *The Indian Heroine* (1877) Ram Kinoo Dutt’s *Manipur Tragedy* (1893). The history of Indian English drama can be best understood by dividing it in phases viz. The Pre Independence, Post Independence and the Modern phase.

The early period or the pre Independence phase of Indian English drama consists of pioneering figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, T P Kailasom, A S P Ayyar, Bharati Sarabhai etc. A multifaceted personality, Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, sage, seer, philosopher, singer, actor, poet, novelist, dramatist, educationist, nationalist, reformer etc, essentially celebrated for his lyrical poetry has more than forty plays to his credit. The plays translated by him are *Sanyasi* or *The Ascetic* (*Prakriti Pratishodh*), *Malini* (*Malini*), *Sacrifice* (*Visarjan*), *The King and the Queen* (*Raja o Rani*), *Kacha and Devyani* (*Biday Abhishap*) also translated by Edward Thompson titled *The Curse at the Farewell*, *The Mother’s Prayer*, *Karna and Kunti*, *Ama and Vinayaka* (*Sati*), *Somaka*
and Ritvika (Narakbas), Chitra, Autumn Festival (Saradotsava), The Waterfall, Cycle of Spring (Phalguni) also translated by C F Andrews and Nishikanta Sen, out of which most of them are dramatic poems, The King of the Dark Chamber (Raja) translated by K C Sen, Muktadhara (The Waterfall), Natir Puja and Chandalika translated by Marjorie Sykes, Red Oleanders (Rakatakari) and Post Office (Dakghar) translated by Devabrata Mukhopadhyaya . The themes of his plays are mainly derived from the epics Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, Buddhist literature and Classical Sanskrit plays. Highly poetic in nature termed as verse dramas the plays are mostly religious, spiritual in nature, dealing with the quest or search for the divine or the unification with the one depicting varied forms of love etc. His works originally written in Bengali are translated into English by him or by others. Nirmal Mukherji remarks “The English translation, most of which was done by Tagore himself is mostly inexact, clumsy and inadequate. It fails to convey the flavour and spirit of the original... Marjorie Skye’s translations of his plays are far more effective and natural than those done by the author himself.” Scholars believe that his works show the influence of Jatra, the folk theatre of Bengal. Iyengar opines ‘Tagore’s plays are engines of ideas, and men and women are caught just when they are possessed by and have become the vehicles of certain ideas., the plays are steeped into symbolism wherein in most of his one finds the character of the king who is an embodiment or symbol of virtue, vehicle of the play or represents God himself.” The high symbolism, spiritual aspiration and lyrical quality of his plays made them almost unactable and were performed in private in Shantiniketan The lyrical quality of his plays can be understood from the translation of Kacha and Devyani titled as The Curse at Farewell by Edward Thompson.

DEBJANI

.................................................................

My curse with you—the knowledge for whose sake
You scorn me, never, never shall you make
Your own! Mechanic porter! you shall bring
This gift to others, knowing it a thing
You may not use. Never shall you employ
The art you teach—shall give, but not enjoy!

KACH

I have chosen, lady. May you, happy yet,
In your great splendour all distress forget! (Thompson 47-48)

The plays of Aurobindo are also romantic because they are essentially dramas of action. Everything that happens in them happens on the stage, it is never off or simply narrated to the audience. Secondly, action and narrative are employed in them without reference to precepts but as exigencies of the plot may dictate. Each one of the plays of Sri Aurobindo interprets life.....

Inspite of their being so remarkably stageworthy however the plays of Sri Aurobindo have never been staged by dramatic companies. This fact exposes them to the charge of being closet dramas. (Naik and Punekar 13-14)

Verse dramatic form was widely used by the playwrights of the time, worth mentioning are Nala Damyanti by Vasudev Rao and Flute of Krishna by P A Krishnaswamy. Another important figure of the period is Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. His initial play Abu Hassan (1918) is written in prose and verse. His Poems and Plays (1927) contains seven hagiological verse plays mostly dealing with the lives of Maharashtrian saints worshipers and followers of Vithoba of Pardhanpur, Jayadeva (1924), Pundalik (1924), Sakubai (1924), Raidas (1925), Tukaram, Choka Mela and Eknath (1925-26). Five Plays (1937) consists of his five social playlets viz. The Window, The Sentry’s Lantern, The Coffin and The Evening Lamp. His devotional plays also bring out the religious bigotry present in the system. In the words of Krishna Bhatta “While Chattopadhyaya’s social plays ‘manifestos of new realism’ are mostly symbolic, didactic and propagandistic, the main content of the hagiological plays is the conflict between good and evil, and the final triumph of the former over the latter and the assertion of God’s Grace.” Balarama Gupta remarks “considering the large bulk of his dramatic output, the vast variety of themes handled and particularly, the lyrical grandeur of most of his verse plays, it must be admitted that Harindranath Chattopadhyaya emerges as a significant playwright.”
Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam originally a Kannada writer whose oeuvre consists of plays like *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933), *Monologue* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna: The Brahmins Curse* (1946), *Keechaka* (1947). A. Krishna Bhatta mentions that around 13 playlets were also composed by him and recited extempore to his friends but none of them were published. Though he derives the themes for his plays from the two epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and like Aurobindo bases them on the Elizabethan models which is completely contrary to his vernacular Kannada plays. On his dramatic quality Bhatta remarks “The artistic presentation of human life as a series of dramatic pictures shows his amazing gift of dramatization and his compassionate heart... we see in Kailasam English plays ‘quest for greatness’ and his consequent attempt to idealize the characters of the epics... has made an attempt to blend both the Indian and Western traditions...”

Bharati Sarabhai a distinguished playwright and the first Indian woman playwright to write in English has two plays to her credit *The Well of the People* (1943) written in verse and *Two Women* written in prose. *The Well of the People* is based on a true story published in Harijan and thus has an influence of the Gandhian ideology and doctrine. Both the plays deal with the common theme of religion and the existence of God within, the former who upon realization and the plunges into an act of social upliftment and the latter presenting the inner conflict.

V V Srinivasa Aiyengar whose works consist of *Dramatic Divertissements* (1921) a collection of playlets which includes *Blessed in a Wife, Vichu’s Wife, The Surgeon-General’s Prescription, The Point of View* and *Wait for the Stroke*. Playlets like *The Two Selves* and *Sub Assistant Magistrate of Sultanpet* were published separately. The works find mention as they deal city life rather than religion.
A S Panchapakesa Ayyar has to his credit a collection of three playlets (1935) which consists of *Sita’s choice*, *Brahma’s Way*, *The Slave of Ideas*. *Sita’s Choice* is about Sita who is forced to marry by her parents to a man of their choice, but chooses her second husband wisely. *Brahma’s Way* is a dialogue on religious matters. The *Slave of Ideas* is about the conflict between tradition and modernity, depicted by the religious Barrister Rangaranju and his modern wife Subhadra. A study of the above mentioned works of the pre Independence era can be summed up as

- Most of the plays were religious, symbolic, spiritual, devotional in nature deriving their themes mainly from the Puranas and the two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Most of the plays had a lyrical poetic quality than prose dialogues and hence termed as verse dramas.
- Language used was highly ornate, symbolic and allegorical which was more written than spoken.
- Lack of play houses for the plays to be staged
- It is at the end we find plays dealing with social problems of day to day life.

The post independence drama that represents the dramatic achievements of G V Desani, Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Gieve Patel, Guru Charan Das, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy etc. A striking work of the era is G V Desani’s *Hali* (1950) a poetic play which was successfully staged at the Watergate Theatre London in July 1950. In the Foreword to the first edition of *Hali*, T.S. Eliot wrote, "I consider Mr. Desani’s *Hali* a striking and unusual piece of work...". It is a symbolic play representing the inner conflict of Hali.

Faubian Bowers opines “Currimbhoy is India’s first authentic voice in the theatre. Social realism is an outstanding trait of Asif Currimbhoy, a complex playwright and develops his condition on the human condition of life”. The most prolific writer of the post Independence
His plays are richly invested with his understanding of Indian history, society, religion, politics and philosophy. He has brought to Indian theatre a breadth of vision, a metaphysical rigour and depth of thought, a symbolic richness, a lyrical fervor an essential “Indianness” of style. His plays wake the reader upto a critical culture. The demand to be read with attention, to be understood, to reach the point of communion with the playwright so the word disappears and all that remains is the meaning, the sudden light in the reader’s own mind as connections form, shaped by his own experience and present knowledge. (Agrawal 3-4)

Notable in his own style is Lakhan Deb, who wrote three blank verse plays, Tiger Claw (1967), Vivekanand (1972) and Murder at the Prayer Meeting (1976). Tiger Claw centres around the murder of Afzal Khan, the Muslim general of Bijapur by the Maratha ruler Shivaji, Murder at the Prayer Meeting, with the assassination of Gandhiji, modelled on T S Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral. Gurcharan Das has three plays to his credit Larins Sahib (1970), Mira (acted in 1970) and 9, Jakhoo Hill (acted in 1996), all the three plays have been collectively published in Three Plays (2001). Larins Sahib performed at the Edinburgh Festival, won the Sultan Padamsee award in 1968. The play pictures the rise of Imperial power in Punjab after the death of Raja Ranjit Singh. Mira is based on the life of Saint Mira, it traverses the journey of a Rajput princess to sainthood. 9, Jakhoo Hill set during the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 presents the class conflict between two families and the importance of relationships.

Another playwright of prominence, Pratap Sharma whose plays include The Professor has a War Cry (1970), A Touch of Brightness (1973), Sammy!The Word that Broke an Empire, Begum Sumroo, Zen Katha: The Story of Bodhidharma. The plays staged but not published include Brothers under the Skin, Bars Invisible, The Word, The Queen Bee and Power Play.
A Touch of Brightness provides a disturbing account of the red light area of Bombay and Currimbhoy’s Doldrummers was banned which was later lifted by the court. In The Professor has a War Cry Sharma uses the folk dance Kathakali to portray the mental conflict of Virendra. Begum Sumroo is a historical play, Zen Katha is about the transformation of Prince Bodhidharma and the emergence of the cult of Zen. Sammy is about the life of Mahatma Gandhi, journey from a subdued individual to the epic Mahatma.

Introduced into theatre by E Alkazi, well known for his poetry, Gieve Patel’s repertoire includes Princes (acted 1970, unpublished), Savaksa (1989) and Mister Behram (1988). Patel’s plays are Parisian in theme as well as characterization. According to Shanta Gokhale “The desire to possess and control-people, thought, property –is a leitmotif that runs through the three plays.” Princes deals with the Land Ceiling Act and its effect, Savaksa appeared in the Bombay Literary Review is about the exploitation of a young girl at the hands of an affluent landowner, Mister Behram talks of a colonized mindset and the patriarchal society. Known for his use of language and Indian aphorisms, Gokhale truly expresses his views as,

Patel believes that language in theatre is a constructed artifice. The English language is uniquely handled in all his plays, and in each play towards a specific end. In Princes, syntax and grammar are modified to create rhythms of speech that approximate the heavy, in-voluted, and sometimes poetic thinking of his rural characters. He says, ‘I am not interested in the mistakes that Indians make when they speak English. To reproduce these would be a banal use of speech in theatre. I attempt to create a speech that perhaps does not exist in real life, but which nevertheless appears perfectly natural on the stage when spoken with understanding by actors. (Gokhale 345)

Nissim Ezekiel wrote five plays viz. Three Plays (1969) which include Nalini, The Sleepwalkers, Marriage Poem, Songs of Deprivation (1963), Don’t Call it a Suicide, and a
sketch *Who Needs No Introduction. Nalini*, sub titled *A Comedy*, a social satire, presents the contrast between illusion and reality bringing out the concept of a ‘New independent strong woman’. *Marriage Poem* subtitled as *A Tragi-Comedy* is about marital discord between couple. *The Sleepwalkers*, subtitled as *An Indo-American Farce*, Absurdist in style fascination of Indians for everything American satirizes the Indian fascination of America. *Song of Deprivation*, Brechtian in influence, subtitled as *A Comic Morality* an innovate. *Don’t Call it Suicide, A Tragedy in Two Acts*, based on a real life incident revolving around the suicide of the elder son of the family which father is unwilling to accept. In the word of Anita Myles, “The plays of Nissim Ezekiel contain meaningful social criticism combining dexterously the elements of wit, irony and satire for exposing urban middle class vanity and hypocrisy.”

An overview of the phase would lead us to the following conclusions,

- The playwrights have moved towards more contemporary and social themes prevalent yet the influence of religious themes cannot be negated completely
- Writes have been bold and risk taking enough to experiment with form and structure yet modelled on the western idioms, they fail to employ the rich traditional Indian resources.
- The language moves from the highly symbolic, allegorical to the colloquial in the works of certain playwrights.

The contemporary or the modern playwrights of the age consist of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabham etc.

Actor, writer, director and recipient of various awards, Girish Karnad who originally writes in Kannada and translates his own plays in a later phase there are plays which he directly writes

While, I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future. By the time I had finished working on Yayati-during the three weeks it took the ship to reach England and in the lonely cloisters of the university-the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues; the myth had nailed me to my past. (Karnad 3)

*Tughlaq* is a historical play, projects the life of Sultan Mohammad bin Tuglaq from a devout, generous, wise, insightful visionary ruler, to his downfall, a resultant of his own tragic flaw. Though historical in nature he makes it contemporarily relevant he comments,

What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq’s history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failures also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had
also come very far in the same direction - the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel. (qtd in Anantha Murthy 8)

The play is a political allegory, based on the conflict between the ideal and the real, and in the words of Karnad himself is also a reflection of the contemporary political scenario of his times. Hayavadana based mainly on Transposed Heads by Thomas Mann deals with themes of incompleteness and complex relationships. NagaMandala: Play with a Cobra as mentioned in its preface interweaves two oral tales from Karnataka which he had heard from A K Ramanujan viz. the story of flames and the of the Cobra. Tale-Danda which literally means ‘death by beheading’ , termed as a problem play is about religious intolerance and the stigma attached to ones caste in India. Fire and the Rain based on the myth of Yavakari and Paravasu from the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata modified , reinterpreted to bring out the evils of the society as caste discrimination, revenge etc termed as a ‘ambitious meta theatrical play’ . A Heap of Broken Images projects the predicament of the regional writers who write in English, a hint at the growth of technology and above all the conflict between the inner self and the projected self. In the monologue Flowers Karnad is symbolist play based on a the legend of Veeranna from the Chitradurga region. The play is a projection of human emotions of love, lust, hate, submission, pain, passion and of the conflict between the body and the soul. The Wedding Album raises issues related to caste, religion, status of women, sexual desires, infatuation, love, search for identity. Boiled Beans on Toast is based on folklore of King Veera Ballala and presents the urban class, city life of the people of Bengaluru. Anita Myles rightly remarks “ Girish Karnad extracts the material for his plot from history and mythology mostly but interprets the past in the context of contemporary relevance, a system which he evolved from his very first play..”
Vijay Tendulkar originally a Marathi writer whose works have been translated into English. A Projection of extreme violence, a common theme that runs through his plays is violence, anger, frustration, thirst for power, exploitation of women, religious bigotry, castism, sex abuse of power, etc. Kamala (1981) presents the sordid state of women in the Indian Society. Silence! The court is in Session (1967) depicts the exploitation of women by the male chauvinists. Sakharam Binder (1972) is yet another story of violence and sexual exploitation. Vultures (1971) is a depiction of violence and the degeneration of human values in the modern Indian society. It presents the ‘goriest violent scenes on stage’. The play is every inch an embodiment of violence in the characters, representing the vultures who feed on the corpse, similarly they feed on violence and other people’s suffering. Encounter in Umbugland, is a political allegory, reveals gender discrimination, power politics and human relationships. Ghashiram Kotwal (1972) is based on the theme of power, politics, violence, exploitation of women, lust and sex. A Friend’s Story (2001) deals with the theme of homosexuality and heterosexuality and the attitude of the society towards it. It is a bold effort by Tendulkar which is still considered a taboo even today. Kanyadaan (1983) deals with the evil of caste distinction, the hypocrisy of the politics and society to abolish it. A play different from the norm is The Cyclist which depicts the inward and the outward journey of man. It presents the journey at the physical level the actual global journey by the cyclist, the historical journey of the bicycle and the journey of the mind a journey at psychological level of the protagonist. The Fifth woman (2004) the only play written in English to be performed at the Tendulkar festival in New York is considered to be a prequel to the play Sakharam Binder. On the violence depicted in his plays R K Dhawan remarks,

Influenced by Artaud, Tendulkar relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or disgusting in as much as it is innate in human nature. He
says “unlike the communists I don’t think violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or, for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that human being is born with. Not that it is bad, Without violence man might have turned into a vegetable.” While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy trapping so as to make it palatable but rather keeps it raw and natural. (Dhawan 14)

The First and the only recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award for Indian English drama, Mahesh Dattani has a theatre group Playpen and an enormous body of work to his credit originally written in English. His plays can broadly classified into stage plays, screen plays and Radio plays. His plays include Where There’s a Will (1988), Dance Like a Man (1989), Tara(1990), Bravely Fought the Queen (1991), Final Solutions (1993), On a Muggy Night in Mumbai (1998), Seven Steps around the Fire (1998), The Murder That Never Was (2000), 30 Days in September (2001), Brief Candle (2009), Where Did Leave My Purda (2012), The Big Fat City (2012) etc. Where There’s a Will comic in nature presents the theme of Patriarchal hegemony prevalent, projected by the character of Hasmukh Mehta who tries to control his family even after his death. Dance Like a Man subverts the paradigm of subaltern, the gender issue raised here is that of the male rather than the female. Tara a story of two conjoined twins deals with the problem of gender discrimination. Bravely Fought the Queen represents victimisation of women at different levels. The play deals with three generations who are victimised at different levels wherein the victim also transforms to a victimiser, it depicts the subjugation of the women in a partichal society and the fickleness of human relationships, love and lust. Final Solutions deals with communalism, the Hindu, Muslim conflict. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai deals with a taboo theme of Homosexuality, Gay and Lesbian relationships. The play depicts the conflicts, problems, fears, insecurities, dilemma faced by this marginal community who do not find acceptance in the Indian society either on religious,
moral or even lawful grounds. *Thirty Days in September* deals with the taboo theme of child sex abuse. The play was commissioned by an NGO called RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest) that helps the victims live a normal life. The play depicts the tragedy of child sex abuse victims, the problem of incest, the victimisation of women in the patriarchal hegemony. *Brief Candle* deals with the plight, miseries, sufferings of the cancer patients. It is a play within a play where the survivors of Cancer are putting up a play to raise funds for the hospice. *Where Did I leave Purdah?* deals with struggles of an aging actress against the backdrop of history that is the partition of India. The play presents the materialistic attitude, the economical crisis of living in a city, the fickle mindedness of the people in the city. Making a bold experimentation dealing with sensitive issues of child sexual abuse, eunuchs, gays, HIV positive people the playwright seems to be truly modern in sense dealing with the contemporary social issues. Commenting on the stageability of his plays M K Naik comments “Contemporary in tone and spirit, alive to the pressures of the present, and eminently stage-worthy, Dattani’s plays squarely give the lie to the popular notion that Indian English drama is at best only a hothouse plant.

tribe located on the Bihar Bengal Border. Rejecting the traditional elaborate theatrical the
soul of his plays lie in their performance style. In the introduction to *Bhoma* he says “there is
no character, no story, no continuity. Whatever there is to say, the actors say directly to the
audience through words, sounds and their whole body.” The absurdist influence can be
visible from the following lines,

ONE. I know.

TWO. What do you know?

ONE. I know now. I didn’t know before.

THREE. What didn’t you know?

ONE. Days have gone without knowing. Now I know.

FOUR. What do you know?

ONE. Many things. Many, many things.

FIVE. What things?

ONE. Many don’t know those things yet. As I didn’t know before.

SIX. What didn’t you know? (Sircar 59)

A few notable contemporary playwrights Dina Mehta who won various awards for her works
which include *The Myth Maker* (1969), *Brides are not for Burning*, *Tiger Tiger* (1978), *A
Sister Like You* (1996), *Getting away with Murder* (2000), all her plays deal with women
centric issues. Uma Parameswaran whose plays appear in the collection *Sons must Die and
Other Plays* (1998) which include *Sons Must Die, Meera* (1971), *Sita’s Promise* (1981), *Dear
Didi, My Sister* (1989), *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* (1998), settled in
Canada she ‘continues to draw her cultural and aesthetic sustenance and substance from her
Indian past.’ Manjula Padmanabhan’s play *Harvest* (1998), won the first prize in the first
Three Plays* (2000), contain Padmanabhan’s *Light Out*, Dina Mehta’s *Getting Away with
“Murder,” Poile Sengupta’s *Mangalam* as Naik remarks “the leitmotif of all the three plays is the victimization of women in Indian society”. It would not be wrong to say that women find a voice to their issues in the works of these women playwrights. It is difficult to bring together the works of almost all the writers but the mentioned study gives in insight into the works created.

The plays of the modern era deal with contemporary themes and issues, but still it relies heavily on translated works rather than works written originally in English. Veena Noble Dass in her paper “Experiment and Innovation in Modern Indian Drama in Translation: The Plays of Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad” remarks, “Plays written in various Indian languages are being translated into English and other languages as they are produced and appreciated in the various parts of the country. A closer contact is being established between the theatre workers from different regions and languages through these translations.” The exercise brought about a sense of unity under the concept of a National theatre, but Bhatia mentions “NSD’s interest in promoting a ‘national theatre’ through translations of plays from other languages into Hindi further marginalised English language drama.” Translations helped the regional drama reach to a wider audience. A glance at the works created one can broadly classify the plays into two divisions, plays based on western models and plays incorporating the rich Indian tradition. A national seminar on ‘Contemporary Playwriting and Play Production’ was organized in 1961 by the Bharatiya Natya Sangh raising the question of ‘traditional theatre and its relevance for contemporary theatre work’, but the idea was refuted, Suresh Awasthi organized a ‘National Round-table on Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre ‘ in 1971 it is here that ‘Theatre of Roots’ finds manifestation. The ‘Theatre of Roots’ movement was an urge to writers to return and explore the rich Indian tradition that we posses, which according to Mee aims at “combines structural elements, actor training methods, performer-spectator relationships and stylistic
devices from specific traditional Indian performance practices with Western theatrical conventions to create modern plays for urban audiences.” It is this amalgamation of the folk theatrical elements in a modern Indian drama that the thesis aims to explore in the subsequent chapters to follow. Chapter II tries to explore the elements of Bhavai in *Haathi Raja* by Pravin Pandya, a Gujarati play, Chapter III throws light on elements of Yakshagana in *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad, originally a Kannada play translated into English, Chapter IV traverses through Tamasha in *Ghasiram Kotwal* by Vijay Tendulkar, originally a Marathi play translated into English and Chapter V which explore the form of Nachya/Naach in *Charandas Chor* by Habib Tanvir, a play written originally in Chattisgarhi dialect translated into English.

The chapter can rightly be summed up with a quote by Mahesh Dattani “One can have roots, and roots can grow into flowering trees. And on those trees are birds ready to spread their wings and fly. That is the completeness of life and its representative called theatre.”

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