Chapter – I

Introduction

Literature is an art and a literary art truly succeeds in acquiring its real value when it reflects human experience and sensibility faithfully, and also corresponding with the universal socio-moral codes. Drama, by virtue of its live performance and potential to facilitate direct communication between the artist and the audience, has emerged as a potent literary mode of representation of human sensibility that is universal and is beyond the limitations of time and space. It is the oldest, authentic, and the most appealing form of literature. It has also been acknowledged as an instrument to human entertainment and enlightenment for ages. It has close affinity with religion since time immemorial. The Indian tradition maintains that roots of all art are laying in the Pranav nada, OM. The dance of Lord Shiva is often said to be divine or cosmic play. Our great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata also attempt to define drama and dramaturgy. The Mahabharata defines drama as a mixture of poetry, story, action etc. The great ancient Indian poet and the creator of the Ramayana, Valmiki uses the word ‘Nat’ or ‘Nartaka’-meaning an actor or a performer.

India has always been a multi-cultural country. Its great regional cultures are civilizations in themselves. India became a free nation in the modern sense only sixty-eight years ago, but in a real sense it has existed for thousands of years. The story of India is a tale of incredible drama, great invention, enormous diversity, phenomenal creativity and the very biggest ideas. But it is also the history of one of the world’s emerging powers. Endorsing this concept A. K. Ramanujan writes in his essay ‘Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?’: “There is no single Indian way of thinking. There are great and little traditions, ancient and modern, rural and urban, classical and folk. Each language, caste and region has its special worldview. (qtd. in Chattarji and Chakravarty 143). So, under the apparent diversity, there is really a unity of viewpoint, a single super system. Vedantists see a Vedic model in all Indian thought.
Nehru made the phrase ‘unity in diversity’ an Indian slogan and the Sahitya Akademi’s line has been, ‘Indian literature is one, though written in many languages, writers in one language hardly know anything of what is being written in neighbouring language of the same country” (George 140).

India has the longest and the richest tradition of drama. The origin of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic Period. The dramatic tradition may be said to have matured here even before Greek drama came to the Indians’ knowledge. Bharat Muni took recitation from *Rig Veda*, imitation from *Yajur Veda*, melody from *Sama Veda*, and aesthetic flavor from *Atharva Veda*, and created the *Natyashastra* for the benefit of humanity and called it the ‘Fifth Veda’. Bharata’s *Natyashastra* is considered to be the foundation of the discipline of dramatics in India. Scholars often equate it to Aristotle’s *Poetics* as a treatise in the field of drama, but the text is very comprehensive and elaborately discusses almost all aspects of the poetics and stagecraft of drama. Various aspects of drama, including plot construction, characterization, stage setting and music have been dealt with in this treatise. It was originated with the double purpose of moral upliftment and entertainment. Its importance in ancient India was accepted as a medium to sublimate human sensibility. It is therefore, the spirit of drama which includes social awareness, expression of the suppressed human sensibility and the celebration of art and aesthetics. Bharatmuni himself states the purpose of writing this treatise:

I have created the *Natyaveda* to show good and bad actions and feelings of both the gods and yourselves. It is the representation of (the ways of) the entire three worlds and not only of the gods or of yourselves. Now dharma, now artha, now kama, humour or fights, greed or killing; right for the people going wrong; enjoyment for those who are pleasure-seekings; restraint of the ill-behaved or tolerance of the well-behaved; putting courage into cowards or the exploits of the brave; knowledge for the un-knowing or the wisdom of the wise; enjoyments of the rich or fortitude of the grief-stricken; money for those who want to make a living and stability to disturbed minds: natya is the representation (*anukarana*) of the ways of the world involving these various emotions and differing circumstances. It gives you peace, entertainment
and happiness, as well as beneficial advice based on the actions of high, low and middle people. It brings rest and peace to persons afflicted by sorrow or fatigue or grief or helplessness. There is no art, no knowledge, no yoga, no action that is not found in natya. (4)

Thus, the Indian drama has been acquiring a mythological status since pre-historic times and even in contemporary India we can perceive the presence of rituals related to birth, death, puberty, marriage, food gathering, hunting, in which dramatic elements dominate. More conducive socio-cultural developments made these activities acquire more standardised and intricate forms, such as those of classical Sanskrit drama and theatre. Nemichandra Jain rightly claims: “The distinctiveness of Indian theatre tradition in the dramatic cultures of the world–its antiquity as well as its imaginative and aesthetic quality–is more or less indisputable today” (Jain 1). He further observes that "theatrical activity in this country has always been regarded as not merely a religious ritual or only a form of entertainment, but an important means and instrument for controlling and containing the distortions arising in the life of an individual or society, and to guide them into an edifying direction." (16)

The earliest forms of folk plays paved the way for classical Sanskrit or Indian Drama which evolved out of it. In Vedic era we come across many hymns which contributed to the resurgence of the classical Sanskrit drama. This era saw the appointments of bards in the royal courts, whose job was to capture the fascination of the commoners and win their goodwill for their king through their compositions borne out of the romanticized versions of their experiences. Wandering minstrels were used to compose songs glorifying their patrons; even in the war time they were used to boost the morale of the troops through inspirational prose. The collective effect of this was the emergence of two major epics, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, which have constantly inspired the themes of the playwrights throughout succeeding centuries.

The golden age of Sanskrit drama produced world-famous playwrights, among whom Kalidasa (370-450 CE) is definitely the best known. His masterpiece Abhijnanashakuntalam
is a tragic-comedy of exquisite workmanship, *Malvikagnimitram* a romantic comedy, while *Vikramorvashiyam* is built around the love of Urvashi and King Vikramaditya. Kalidasa is usually celebrated for his beautiful poetry, vast range of characters and spiritual vision. Besides of the magnificence of Sanskrit theatrical tradition, the regional theatres in India significantly contributed to expend the horizon of Indian theatre. The folk theatres and regional theatres have deep social relevance. They were helpful to retain the spirit of Indian cultural sensibility coupled with the various religious faiths. The 'jatras' of Bengal, 'folk plays' of Tamil Nadu, 'Yakshaganas' of Karnataka, 'Kathakali' of Kerala, 'Bhavai' of Gujarat and 'Ramlila' of North India, collectively set the ground for the promotion of theatrical traditions.

As far as the classical Sanskrit drama is concerned it has its own breed of a few legendary dramatists. Bhasa, the earliest playwright has written several plays based on the themes of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata–Pratima, Abhisheka, Madhyamavayayoga, Urubhanga* and *Karnabhara*. His creations also include plays based on folklore or fictional stories – *Swapanavasavadatta, Pratijna Yaugandharyana, Avimarakara* and others. Besides him, Kalidasa’s *Malavikagnimitra* and *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, Shudraka’s *Mrichhakatikam*, Bhavabhuti’s *Malatimadhava* and *Uttararamacharita* and Vishakhdatta’s *Mudraraksha* are prime contributions which enliven the field of Sanskrit drama. Seventh century is marked by a perceptible decline in the quality and originality of Sanskrit drama. The only exceptions that stand out in the midst of this descent are Harsha’s plays like *Nagananda, Ratnavali* and *Priyadarsika* which tower above all when measured on the scale of stage worthiness.

History witnesses the advent of Muslim rulers in Indian in around 8th or 9th century (AD). They ruled for a long time in India and gradually became a part of it. The outcome was a profound socio-cultural amalgamation which not only enriched literature and drama of India but also left an indelible mark on its culture. During this period we witness the rise of Sri Sankara who accelerated the cult of Bhakti in conjunction with a galaxy of saints like Kabir, Chaitanya, Ravidas, Tulsidas, Suradas, Malik Mohd. Jayasi, Guru Nanak, Basavesvara
and Alwars. This Bhakti movement led to the establishment of many temples which in turn
became popular ‘play houses’. The passage of 15th to the 17th century saw the rise of several
new theatrical modes inspired by the Bhakti movement. It also reinvented several other
existing modes in different regions of the country viz. 'Ankianat' of Assam, 'Bhagvatmela' and
'Teerukothu' of Tamil Nadu, 'Krishanattam' of Kerala, 'Kuchipudi', 'Veethi-Natakam' and
'Burra-Katha' of Andhra, 'Dashavatara' and 'Tamasha' of Maharashtra, 'Ramlila', 'Raslila', and
'Nautanki' of Uttar Pradesh, 'Bhavai' of Gujarat, 'Jatra' of Bengal and 'Yakshagana' of
Karnataka. These regional theatres developed as a bonding force for the different regions,
different communities of the same region, and various castes and classes of people, united
and interlinked them and most importantly maintained a constant dialogue between them.

Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the fifteenth century but thereafter Indian
drama activity almost came to an end due to several invasions on India, as well as the decline
of the Sanskrit language. The plays were only read as literature. When the Britishers came in
India, the crippled Indian drama regained its strength. The British impact on Indian literature
and theatre has led to the enlivening of Indian drama and theatre since the last four decades.
However the keen individualism of the modern playwrights, driven by the pride of their
national identity, has inspired them not to emulate the Western models of drama and theatre,
but to imbibe their soul and enrich their indigenous theatrical traditions. In this effort each of
them nourishes the field of drama with his own uniqueness in the style of presentation and
dramatic form. But when we trace the history and development of Indian English drama, we
are convinced that it is not as affluent as Indian English fiction or Indian English poetry. First
and foremost reason for this is that drama being a composite art needs the alignment of
various components like actors, audience and the stage.

English language is a second language in India and it is in itself is a big bottle-neck in
the growth of drama. Playwrights lack the consummate expression and the actors lack the
natural ease of a mother tongue. And the masses too fail to grasp the spirit of whatever is
being enacted, due to poor knowledge of English language. In this regard K. R. S. Iyengar very aptly remarks that drama as a literary genre can flourish only in natural soil where it is the ‘lingua franca’. “Indo-Anglican Drama isn’t like talking about ‘snakes in Iceland? Not quite but the problem is there, for while poetry, novels, and non-fiction prose can be read in the silence of one’s study, drama can come to life only in theatre” (730). However, it is a heartening fact that the English language is gradually sweeping into the role of a common mode of communication in a multi-lingual land like India and hence, the quality as well as the quantity of the English plays is naturally buoyant.

History bears the evidence that the arrival of the Britishers in India marked the beginning of English education which cultivated the critical study of Western literature. Thereon further critical study on Western drama and classical Indian drama gave a big boost to the growth of English theatre in India. The modern Indian drama owed its first flowering to the foreign grafting. Lack of an English educated audience could not deter the rise of English theatre. In fact it originated for entertainment from the social gatherings and dinners held in honour of the English dignitaries in India. These interactions not only introduced Western playwrights to contemporary India, but also impacted the regional theatres as well.

A spot used by the Army officials for their “subscription ball and dinners” came up as Bombay Amateur Theatre in 1776 which was the first in its line and mostly hosted the comedies of the late Georgian playwrights. Financial difficulties, however, marked its doom and it was finally sold out in 1835. This was followed by the opening of Grant Road Theatre. English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare’s, in cities like Bombay and Madras. Fairclough Company, the Lewis Dramatic Company, Norville’s Our Boys Company, the Loftus Groupe, the Willard Opera Company, and the Dave Carson Troupe were some of the main troupes that dominated the scene. The Portuguese also brought a form of dance drama to the west coast. In 1852 the Parsi Natak Mandali was established and followed by several other dramatic troupes like the Parasi
Elphinston Dramatic Society, the Kalidasa Elphinston Society, the Shakespeare Society of Elphinston College, the Bombay Amateur Dramatic Club, the Thespian Club, Victoria Natak Mandali and Orphean dramatic club. Comedies, farces and operas all taken from British Literature were mainly stage played. In 1852-1853, the famous Parsi Theatre was launched in Bombay which left a lasting impact on the theatrical activities throughout the country.

Pestonji Pranji was the pioneer in establishing the Parsi Theatre company in India. Many new theatre experiences were brought up on stage during Parsi Theatre's evolution in India. The emergence of these multi-faceted dramatic activities in Bombay, however, did not contribute to the growth of drama originally written in English by the Indians, but it helped the rise of modern drama in Marathi and Gujarati.

Calcutta (now Kolkata) was another natural choice for the development of Indian drama. Several important theatres of Calcutta were the Calcutta Theatre which came up in 1779, Wheeler Palace Theatre, The Dumdum Theatre, The Baitawanah Theatre, the Sans Souci Theatre, and the Chowranghee theatre. In 1765 one Russian drama lover Horasin Lebdoff and Bengali drama lover Golokhnath, staged two English comedies *Disguise* and *Love Is The Best Doctor* which were translated from English into Bengali. The real launch of the Bengali drama was in 1831 when Prasanna Kumar Tagore established *Hindu Rangmanch* at Calcutta and staged Wilson’s English Translation of Bhavabhuti’s Sanskrit drama *Uttar Ramacharitam*. Social drama of Girish Chander Ghosh, historical dramas of D. L. Roy and artistic dramas of Rabindranath Tagore (*Muktadhara, Chandalika*) enriched the genre of realistic dramas, empathising with the pain of humanity during the worst ever famines of Bengal and the Second World War. Indian English drama was started when Krishna Mohan Banerjee became the first writer to write the first Indian English play, *The Persecuted* in 1831. The real journey of Indian English drama began with Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Is This Called Civilization*, which appeared on the literary horizon in 1871. He also wrote some Bengali plays, *Ratnavali* (1859) and *Sermista* (1859), and later translated them into English.
Dinbandhu Mitra’s *Nil Darpan* is also a very important one which came at the opportune moment when the urge for freedom was raging.

Simla also emerged as a drama hub. A wide diversity of Western theatrical experiments was showcased by the Amateur Club in Simla with the help of Ibsen, Chekov, Camus, Eliot, Ionesco, and Brecht to Indian audiences. The Madras Dramatic Society was established in 1875 in Madras, where the most dominant plays were those of GB Shaw and Ibsen. Other amateur troupes like Saguna Vilas Sabha, Secretariate Party, Kripa Amateur and Walitax Theatre used to enact the classical plays, Shakespearean as well as Tamil Plays. A noteworthy fact in the history of Indian English drama is that irrespective of the region, the English drama saw a nationwide slow but steady decline in the face of the challenges thrown by the dramas in vernacular languages. Propelled by the strong British influence the theatre movement in various Indian languages had already gathered momentum in the early decades of the 20th century. From 1940s onwards several theatrical organisations like People’s Theatre, The Indian National Theatre, Bhartiya Natya Sangh, and Ebrahim Alkazi’s Theatre Unit came up under the affiliation of the World Theatre Centre of UNESCO. During World War II, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya established Indian National Theatre whose first production was a ballad based on Nehru’s book *The Discovery of India*. Several regional amateur theatres also flourished. Some of the important ones were: Little Theatre Group and Sombhu Mitra’s Bahuroopi in Bengal; the Hindi Natya Parishad, the Kalakendra, Rangabhoomi and Natya Mandal in Gujarat; the Prithvi Theare and the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangha in Bombay; Telugu Little Theatre, the Andhra Foundation in Andhra Pradesh; Seva Sangh in Madras and Dishantar in New Delhi.

In the post Independence era, the first five year plan (1951-56) encouraged the performing arts as an effective means for enlightening the public and caused the foundation of the National School of Drama with Ebrahim Alkazi as its first director. Rukminidevi Arundale’s *Kalakshetra* at Adyar, Madras and Mrilanini Sarabhai’s *Darpana* in Ahmedabad
were some of the prominent institutions founded in big cities for the study and training of
dramatics. Even drama departments also started functioning at various universities. The
Annual National Drama Festival was started in Delhi at the behest of the Sangeet Natak
Akademi in 1954. Moreover the British Council and the U.S. Information Service organised
the visits of foreign troupes from time to time. But all these efforts contributed solely to the
growth of regional languages theatre, while most English plays managed to survive with one
performance or two even in big cities, with the exception to Gopal Sharman’s Akshaya Little
Theatre in New Delhi. Sri Ram Cultural Centre, New Delhi organised National Drama
festivals with plays in Urdu, Marathi and Bengali. The forum for the most recent and up to
date information was provided by the journals like Rajinder Paul’s Enact and Nemichandra
Jain’s Natrang.

The post-Independence era witnessed the blooming of the Indian drama in various
languages which was prompted by some of the good plays written during this period. For
example: Vijay Tendulkar’s Santata! Court Chalu Ahe in Marathi, Badal Sircar’s Evam
Indrajit in Bengali; Mohan Rakesh’s Adhe Adhure and Asadh ka Ek Din in Hindi, Srirang’s
Kelu Janmejaya, Chandra Shekhar Kambar’s Jo Kumaraswami, and Girish Karnad’s Yayati
in Kannada. Referring to this growth of Indian drama, M.K. Naik in his anthology
Perspectives on Indian Drama in English has pointed out:

. . . during recent years vernacular Indian drama has been increasingly turning to folk
forms and tapping their springs of vitality with splendid results. Girish Karnad’s use
of the Yakshagana in the Kannada play Hayavadana and Vijay Tendulkar’s
Dashavatara and Khele techniques in the Marathi play, Ghasiram Kotwal; the
adaptation of Bhavai in two Gujarati plays – Dina Gandhi’s Mena Gurjari and Bakul
Tripathi’s Leela; the employment of the Jatra motif in Utpal Dutt’s Jokumareswara
and Badal Sircar’s Evam Indrajit; and Habib Tanvir’s presentation of The Little Clay
Cart in a neo-Nautanki style, etc., are prominent recent examples. (187)

Although there are some brilliant playwrights like Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath
Tagore, T. P. Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Bharati Sarabhai, Asif Currimbhoy,
Manjeri Isvaran, G. V. Desani, Lakhan Deb, Pritish Nandy, Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel, Gurcharan Das, Poile Sengupta, Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani, it is mainly the theatre in Indian languages and those in English translations that have measured an outstanding growth in recent decades. Several vernacular plays have been translated into English. It has been constantly debated whether to incorporate these plays into the corpus of Indian English drama or not. Many academicians favour this because they also contribute in the making of Indian English literature. These plays have worked to create a bridge between the multi-cultural and multi-lingual society of India.

It is a well-known fact that all inter-lingual enquiries in the Indian situation operate within a set of oppositions which may be regarded as the unity-diversity set of oppositions. This unity-diversity act of oppositions is otherwise complementary to each other. There is no doubt that we have multiplicity of ideas, multilingualism and multi level meaningfulness of existence, but at the same time, it is very true that literature in different languages creates visions that transcend barriers of diversities and bring us nearer to one another in relation to our basic unity. The problem of relations arising out of this set of oppositions has made the study of literature crucial and meaningful for the modern Indian society. On the occasion of establishment of the Sahitya Akademi in 1954, Dr. Radhakrishnan stated that its chief motto was to execute the phrase of unity in diversity in its word and spirit through the promotion of unity in Indian literature. This view resonates the obvious significance of the plays of Girish Karnad in Kannada, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, and Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi. Although it is very difficult to distinctly categorise the Indian English plays and playwrights, they can be studied in two phases: The Pre-Independence Phase and the Post Independence Phase.

The well known playwrights of the Pre-Independence phase are Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai. M. K. Naik in his book *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982) has remarked: "Owing to the
lack of firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English drama in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, grew sporadically as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and H. N. Chattopadhyaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing." (98).

Kalidasa was first and foremost but after Kalidasa the name of Rabindranath Tagore can be inscribed as the most phenomenal Indian dramatist. He is the cornerstone of Indian renaissance who gave the first spark to the consciousness of our era through his enriching contributions to the growth of Indian English drama. Tagore tried out all categories of plays: five act plays, heart-rending tragedies and refreshing comedies, farces and satires, lyrical, philosophical, social and political plays. Tagore himself translated a majority of the seventeen out of fifty three plays.

Tagore took up the issues of political crisis, religious fanaticism, clash of the human passions and moral duties, protest against social evils like caste discrimination, gender binary, class struggle and religious controversies. In the treatment of these themes, his humanitarian concern dominates. Social issues are presented in the background of psychological and philosophical realities associated with them. Tagore's experiences with drama began when he was sixteen, with his brother Jyotirindranath. He wrote his first original dramatic piece when he was twenty - *Valmiki Pratibha* (1888) which was shown at the Tagore's mansion. K. Chakraborty describes as "His works sought to articulate, in Tagore's words "the play of feeling and not of action". In 1890, he wrote *Visarjan* which has been regarded as his finest drama. In the original Bengali language, such works included intricate subplots and extended monologues. Later, Tagore's dramas used more philosophical and allegorical themes. (Chakraborty 4) His best-known plays are *Sanyasi or the Ascetic* (1884), *Chitra* (1892), *Sacrifice* (1895), *Raja* (1910), *The Kind of the Dark Chamber* (1910), *The Post Office* (1912), *Chitra* (1914), *The Cycle of Spring* (1916), *Muktadhara* (1922), *Red Oleanders* (1924), *Chandalika* (1926), *Natir Puja* (1926), *Chandalika* (1938), and *Shyama* (1939).
It is the distinction of Tagore that in his plays, he dramatizes social issues with deep human concern, and his plays have timeless social significance. It is also the contribution of Tagore that he made faithful representation of Indian womanhood in theatre, by providing them enough space to construct their voice and identity against existing gender prejudices in society. The social criticism and the celebration of freedom and self-respect of man in Tagore's plays expanded the horizon of Indian drama. S. K. Desai criticizes Tagore's plays for the intricate and complex use of symbols. He admits, "Tagore creates a prison of symbols without genuine vitality and life which is the primary criterion of literature." (153)

Tagore’s plays have several features of Sanskrit drama and Bengali folk theatre along with some western theatrical devices, despite staying aloof of the professional theatre of Bengal and being virtually cut off from the Calcutta stage. His plays were not targeted at common theatre lovers; in fact they enchanted the intellectual class of people through his experiments. However, the under-bed of his plays bear a tone of harmony among the diversities and not of irreconciliation. Despite being deeply submerged in the Indian values, his plays are comparable to those of the famous Irish playwrights W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. Tagore was well aware of the ideas of the French Symbolist Movement and introduced their methods to the world of theatre. His original contribution to the Bengali stage was the introduction of the symbolic style which made his plays highly suggestive and meaningful.

After Tagore, Sri Aurobindo’s name can be cited as another versatile genius. He wrote originally in English on the model of Elizabethan poetic drama. With his deep philosophical vision, he contributed to the growth of the tradition of Indian English drama, and produced five full length plays and five verse plays during 1891 to 1916. He was a powerful poet, reviewer, playwright, seer, philosopher, nationalist and a humanist. He was not only well acquainted with our rich Sanskrit texts but also equally well versed in the classics of Greece, Germany, Rome, Spain, Italy and France.
Aurobindo’s works range from the sociological *The Human Cycle* to the political Ideal of Human Unity, from didactical *The Life Divine* to the psychological Synthesis of Yoga, from critical *The Future Poetry* to the poetical two volumes of *Collected Poems* and the epic poem Savitri or dramatic Five Collected Plays. His well-known plays are *Perseus The Deliverer* (1955), *Vasavadutta* (1957), *Rodogune* (1958), *The Viziers of Bassara* (1959), and Eric (1960). His three plays, *Vasavadutta, Eric* and *The Viziers of Bassara* bear the subtitle 'a dramatic romance' and romance is indeed the pervading quality of these plays. Aurobindo also made experiments with the short plays in comic mode. His well-known short plays are: *Achabo and Essarhaddom, The Maid in the Mill, The House of Brute* and *The Prince of Edur*. In his short comic plays, Aurobindo tried to follow the romantic and comic sensibility of Shakespearean comedies.

Aurobindo’s plays have a fusion of traditional and local elements. The classical themes are presented with a rare sublimity and dynamism. In his famous critical work *The Future Poetry* Aurobindo writes about his own vision of drama, "… Drama must have interpretative vision, the vision must contain an explicit or implicit idea of life, the vision has to arise out of the inner life of characters and through an evaluation of speech leading to an evaluation of action, the true movement and result in all great drama is really psychological." (91). But it is also true, as M. K. Naik points out, "In spite of some scenes of dramatic tension, stray passages of poetic beauty and a few moments of bright wit and humour in the comedies, the drama of Sri Aurobindo is hardly in the same class as his major poetry and prose." (101)

T. P. Kailasam is another playwright whose contribution to Kannada theatrical comedy earned him the title Prahasana Prapitamaha, "the father of humorous plays" and later he was also called "Kannadakke Obbane Kailasam" meaning "One and Only Kailasam for Kannada". He wrote both in Kannada and English. His genius finds its full expression in his English plays such as, *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna
All his five plays are based on various myths from the two great epics of India – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. But out of these five plays four have their themes and characters from the Mahabharata, with the only exception of the The Burden which deals with the story of Bharata of the Ramayana. When asked about his inclination more towards the Mahabharata and Ramayana, Kailasam is said to have replied, "You see, the characters in the Mahabharata are all like us, living rooted to this world. They have their adhyatmic ambitions, but in the way the great saga Vyasa has depicted them, they are all human. But in the Ramayana, sage Valmiki has transgressed humanity." (Sivaram 87).

Kailasam uses Sanskrit and other Indian words to convey the required shades of meaning as the vast cultural background of the country demands, for example, ‘Guruji’, ‘brahmacharya’, ‘pariksha’, ‘sabha’, ‘khadga’, ‘nishada’, etc. The five published and thirteen unfinished and unpublished plays establish him as an original dramatic voice of his times.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya is well-known poet, a dramatist, an actor, a painter and a musician—all rolled into one. His best-known plays may be listed as, Abu Hassan (1918), Five Plays (1937), and Siddhartha, Man of Peace (1956). His Five Plays include social plays like The Window, The Parrot, The Sentry’s Lantern and The Evening Lamp. Chattopadhyaya has written seven excellent devotional plays like Pundalik, Eknath, Saku Bai, Chokha Mela, Jayadeva, Tukaram, and Raidas. These plays deal with the life of saints and religious leaders who made great contribution to the well-being of society. The probable source of inspiration is hidden in our rich history, myths, lives of our saints etc. Themes have not been imposed on the basic structure of the plays by the playwright but they evolve gradually from different situations dealt in his plays.

All these dramatists contributed largely to the development of Indian English drama, and set a direction to the tradition of Indian theatre. Their dramatic canvas establishes a unique pattern of Indian ideology covering its philosophy, religion and humanitarian creed idealism of womanhood uncompromising sympathy for subalterns, celebration of human
values and an inherent quest of blending traditional and modern theatrical art. Their works are notable for their poetical excellence, thematic variety, technical virtuosity, symbolism and moral commitment, but they were not very suitable for stage production. These dramatists of the pre-independence period, despite the poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical competence and symbolic and moral significance of their works, did not give enough weightage to the acceptability and ‘stage-worthiness’ of their plays. The plays produced during this time were more play centered and less performance oriented and they lacked stageability and ardent audience. K. R. S. Iyengar observes:

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. (226)

Among women writers the name of Bharathi Sarabhai can be considered as a refreshing path-breaker towards Indian English drama. *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) are the two plays contributed by her. In her treatment of untouchability, she clearly indicates a Gandhian impact on her. *The Well of the People* was inspired from a story published in *Harijan*. Here, when an old woman fails to go to Kashi and Haridwar for worship, she decides to please God by constructing a well for the untouchables. *Two Women* deals with the practical realisation of God. It establishes that God exists within one’s soul. Precisely, it can be concluded that both the plays testify about her efficiency in rendering a realistic shade to the same old customs and beliefs.

Post-Independence Indian English Drama evolved a revolutionary change with patriotic impulse and the quest for nationalism considerably changed the conditions of life both at social and political level. Theatrical activities got a new life with change of social scenario. There is no remarkable and notable development in the history of Indian English Drama in the first two decades of the Post-Independence era. India still did not have any living theatre to act as a breathing space for drama. Most playwrights wrote not more than two plays
which were not sufficient to provide any theatrical experience, whatsoever. Most of them simply followed their predecessors for their mythical and religious themes with virtually no originality. Dilip Kumar Roy wrote *Sri Chaitanya* (1950) which was a three act verse play. Roy also collaborated with Indira Devi and wrote *Beggar Prince* (1956) based on the life of the saint poetess Mirabai. V. Srinivas Iyengar wrote *Ram Rajya* (1952) giving a modern interpretation to *Ramayana* to reflect the naive idealism of the post independence years.

After the establishment of Sahitya Akademi not only drama but also literature flourished in its totality in various other organisations which made the Indian drama flourish in various languages if not in English. In the middle of all this we come across many dramatists who made their presence paradoxically felt on the Western stage. Among them Gurcharan Das’s *Mira*, Pratap Sharma’s *A Touch of Brightness*, and Asif Currimbhoy’s *The Dumb Dancer* are important.

Mane Padme Hum! (1972), The Miracle Seed (1973), Angkor (1973), The Dissident MLA (1974), and This Alien... Native Land (1975).

The selection of Asif Currimbhoy’s themes proves him as a versatile genius. His plays are eloquent enough to corroborate the fact that Currimbhoy is a man with a vision to realise. The performance of his play in several parts of the United States has given him an international reputation as a playwright. Despite being fully aware of the incorrigible complexities of man, he makes all out effort in the quest for the betterment of human life. He has the unique ability to create visual and auditory images on stage.

Asif Currimbhoy’s treatment of social realism brings him very close to Arnold Wesker. In his use of theatrical and stage directions, comparisons are drawn with Strindberg and Tennessee Williams. His plays are poetic, symbolic, passionate and even melodramatic. Often he seems to be more interested in creating thrilling narratives rather than probing deep into the ideological and dialectical conflict. Although his plays sometimes suffer from loose plot, vague characters, lack of wit and humour, they undoubtedly underline the fact that Asif Currimbhoy is a noteworthy playwright and his creations are imposing as well as idiosyncratic. K. R. S. Iyengar rightly sums up his contribution and observes: “While Asif Currimbhoy’s resourcefulness and slick efficiency as a playwright is unquestionable, he creates the impression that he is as yet only testing his strength before he can feel ready to embark on something really worthwhile.” (246)

A Touch of Brightness (1968) by Pratap Sharma, performed on two continents abroad, was banned in Bombay for some time. The play is an honest portrayal of the Red-light area of Bombay. The Professor has a Warcry (1970), his next play deals with the theme of sex. It is a story of young Virendra who is shocked after the revelation that he is an illegitimate child of a mother raped by a Muslim and an Englishman, after being deserted by her lover, a Hindu Professor. His other notable plays are The Word (1966), Power Play (1991), Zen Katha (2004) and Sammy (2005).
In the realm of Indian drama, Nissim Ezekiel is accredited for his outstanding poetic class and exceptional theatrical responsiveness. Nissim Ezekiel’s *Three Plays* (1969) including *Nalini: A Comedy, Marriage Poem: A Tragi-Comedy* and *The Sleep Walkers: An Indo-American Farce* are considered to be a welcome addition to the galaxy of Indian English drama. *Songs Of Deprivation* (1969) is also a short play by Ezekiel. He constructs his superstructure of play through the amalgamation of distinctive realities outside the theatre and the reconstructed reality on the stage. Being farcical in tone and configuration, Ezekiel’s plays impart serious and perceptive observation on the modern cultural setting. His drama is that of language as his characters talk more than they act on the stage.

Originating from the real life came his last play *Don’t Call it Suicide* (1993). It probes into the nature of suicide and its trauma on the survivors. We therefore observe that the plays of Nissim Ezekiel unravel a deceitful, distorted and a shallow lifestyle. Farcical in tone and constitution, his plays carry a sombre and perceptive comment on the modern socio-cultural scene. They force us to find out a new way of perceiving at the riddle of living in today’s world.

Gurcharan Das wrote *Larins Sahib* (1970) which is a historical play dwelling in the crisis that seeped in Punjab after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when East India Company under Henry Lawrence routed Sikhs. His other plays include *Mira* (1970) and 9 *Jakhoo Hill* (1996). These have been compiled in *Three Plays* (2001).

*Doongaji House* (written in 1978) was the play which initiated a Parsi writer Cyrus Mistry in the world of theatre and won him second Sultan Padamsee Award for the best new English play from Bombay Theatre Group in 1978. It won the award but stayed unnoticed until 1990 and came into print only in 1991, courtesy “the generosity of a well wisher”. Mistry mainly emphasises on universal concerns and existential themes. His work is all about a common man’s quest for bliss which is often crushed by incomprehensible forces. He also probes into the ultimate solitude as well as susceptibility of all humans. Another major Parsi writer Dina Mehta won the playwriting competition award sponsored by the BBC. Her debut
play was *The Myth Makers* (1969). Her play *Brides Are Not for Burning* (1993) which was broadcast on BBC world service, based on dowry deaths in India where brides have been burnt for want of dowry. Another major playwright Uma Parmeshwaram has written *Sons Must Die*, based on the theme of partition in 1947, *Meera* (1971), *Sita’s Promise* (1981), *Dear Didi, My Sister* (1989), and *Rootless but green are the Boulevard Tree* (1998).

During the last six decades a large number of plays in different Indian languages have been translated into English and vice versa. Some of them have been translated by the original writers and some by others as well. So, they are not mere translations but transformations and should be treated as an important part of Indian English drama as they have immensely complemented in the shaping of contemporary Indian drama. These regional plays have also opened a new path for a ‘national theatre’. Referring to this phenomenon, G. P. Deshpande in his article “History, Politics and the Modern Playwrights” published in *Theatre India* (May 1999) advocates that the term “regional” is a misnomer in the face of the multifaceted evolution in the field of theatre in Indian context, because the convention of each linguistic region is truly a national tradition for, “you cannot belong to the whole of India without belonging to a specific part of India” (94). He further clarifies:

When we speak of national theatre we do so with almost no knowledge of the various Indian theatres. Part of the reason for this ignorance could very well be the attitude or tendency to treat these concrete theatre traditions as “regional” or pradeshika against an abstraction of national or Indian theatre. It must be emphasized that this polarity is neither realistic nor useful in terms of our theatres.....It is essential for our self understanding that the unity of Indian cultural expression is achieved through the plurality of linguistic (in this case theatrical) expressions. For that reason the terminology of “regional” is misleading when it comes to cultural production. Each mode is uniquely important; each mode is uniquely Indian. In that sense there is no regional theatre in India. There are several equally valid and legitimate Indian theatres. (95).

In this context, Mohan Rakesh’s *One Day in Asadha* (1958), *The Swans of the Waves* and *Half Divided*; the plays of Badal Sircar—*The Mad Horse* (1967), *Remaining History*

Girish Karnad can be aptly termed as a perfectionist. He is the guiding star among the galaxy of playwrights in the post colonial era of Indian theatre. He is one of those rarest of creative geniuses who have devoted the best of their ingenuity in the writing of their plays and their productions. A play for Karnad, breathes first on the print and is reared to maturity when it crosses through the channels of continuous thought process, changes and modifications. This entire processing takes four to five years, and has sometimes even taken fifteen to twenty years. This is the reason for the confidence that Girish Karnad exhumes about the plot, sub-plot, characters, dialogues and settings as well as the philosophy behind the idea.

Karnad’s plays, written in Kannada, have been widely translated into English and all major Indian languages. Karnad's plays are written neither in English nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannada. When Karnad started writing plays, Kannada literature was highly influenced by the renaissance in Western literature. Although rooted in Indian mythology and history, his plays at the same time convey a strong and unmistakable Western philosophical sensibility. The existentialist crisis of modern man is conveyed through strong individuals who are locked in intense psychological and philosophical conflicts. Though Karnad has been accused of making use of
myth and legend as a tool for escaping in the past, his use of mythology in modern literature validates individual experience and universalises it. And Karnad has succeeded in the universalising his experiences. Writers would choose a subject which looked entirely alien to manifestation of native soil. C. Rajagopalachari’s version of the *Mahabharata* published in 1951, left a deep impact on him, and soon sometime in the mid 1950s, one day he experienced a rush of dialogues spoken by characters from the Mahabharata in his adopted language Kannada. "I could actually hear the dialogues being spoken into my ears..."I was just the scribe," said Karnad in a later interview. Eventually *Yayati* was published in 1961, he was 23 years old, and went on to win for him the Mysore State Award in 1962. It is based on the story of King Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, who was cursed into premature old age by his father-in-law, Shukracharya, incensed by Yayati’s infidelity. Yayati in turn asks his sons to sacrifice their youth for him, and one of them agrees. It ridicules the ironies of life through characters in Mahabharata and became an instant success, immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages.

Karnad discovered a new approach like drawing historical and mythological sources to tackle contemporary themes, and existentialist crisis of modern man, through his characters locked in psychological and philosophical conflicts. His play *Tughlaq* was his best loved play about an idealist 14th century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughlaq and an allegory on the Nehruvian era which started with ambitious idealism and ended up in disillusionment. This established Karnad as one of the most promising playwrights in the country. It was staged by the National School of Drama Repertory under the direction of Ebrahim Alkazi, with the actor Manohar Singh, playing the visionary king who later becomes disillusioned and turns bitter, amidst the historic Purana Qila in Delhi. It was later staged in London by the National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1982.

*Hayavadana’s* (1971) theme was based on *The Transposed Heads* which was drawn by a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, which is originally found in *Kathasaritsagara*, herein he...
employed the folk theatre form of *Yakshagana*. A German version of the play was directed by Vijay Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar. Karnad won *Padma Shri* in the year 1973 at an enviable age of 35. *Naga-Mandala* (Play with Cobra, 1988) was based on a folk tale narrated to him by A. K. Ramanujam, brought him the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989. It was directed by J. Garland Wright, as part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. The theatre subsequently commissioned him to write the play, *Agni Mattu Male* (The Fire and the Rain). Though prior to it came *Tale-Danda* (Death by Beheading, 1990) which used the backdrop, the rise of Veerashaivism, a radical protest and reform movement in 12th century Karnataka to bring out current issues. It was prompted by the political turmoil in the country at the time of writing- in Ayodhya the agitation regarding Rama Janma-bhoomi and Babri Masjid conflict, and the Mandal commission’s policy of caste based reservations. Both *Naga-Mandala* and *Tale-Danda* received critical acclaim. Both of them were translated into English. *Tale-Danda* brought Karnad the ‘Writer of the Year’ award, instituted by Granthaloka, in 1990, followed by the Karnataka Nataka Academy Award for the best play of 1990-91. In the year 1992, he received the prestigious and coveted *Padma Bhushan* Award from the President of India. He also received the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1993 and the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of the Letters) Award in 1994, both for *Tale-Danda*. Karnad himself has translated all his plays into English. A large number of his Kannada plays have been translated by Dr. Bhargavi P. Rao into Telugu. His play *Agni Aur Varsha* (The Fire and the Rain) was adapted into a Hindi film, *Agni Varsha* (2002).

Among women playwrights, the names of Poile Sengupta and Manjula Padminabhan automatically come to our mind. Poile Sengupta, whose real name is Ambika Gopalakrishnan, is a versatile genius–an educational consultant, a communication and language skills consultant, a college lecturer and a consultant editor. Her first full-length play, *Mangalam*, won the award for the most socially relevant theme in The Hindu-Madras Players Playscripts
Competition in 1993. Her other important plays are *A Pretty Business* (1995), *Keats Was A Tuber* (1996), *Collages* (1998), *Alipha* (2001) and *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001). In 2010, six of her plays were published by Routledge as *Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play*. As is obvious from the title of her play *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*, she has the capacity to revise and re-interpret Indian mythical stories prioritizing women's issues in her plays. Like Mahesh Dattani, Sengupta formed her own amateur theatre group known as *Theatre Club* in Bengalore.

Manjula Padmanabhan is another versatile genius—playwright, journalist, comic strip artist, and children's book author, all in one. She has written several plays. Two of them deserve special mention here—*Lights Out!* (1984) and *Harvest* (1997). She came into lime light with the performance of *Lights Out!* in 1986 by Sol Theatre Company at Prithvi Theatre, Bombay. The futuristic play *Harvest* deals with the organ-selling in India in the near future. Located in Bombay of the year 2010, the play is a critique of the commodification of the third world human beings by the first world citizens. Padmanabhan won the Greek Onassis Award in 1997 for this play on which Govind Nihalani made an award-winning film titled *Deham*.

Contemporary Indian English Drama has come afar from its original form of philosophical, religious, historical, and mythological Drama and is totally committed to arousing the public conscience for a headstrong change via the contemporariness of themes, choice of common men as characters and a literary compassion to the repulsive realities of life.

Mahesh Dattani is one such playwright who engages in contemporary concerns associated to the urban middle-class English speaking society which is going through a social-cultural transformation. He is the first Indian English playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. From religious fundamentalism to child sexual abuse, to gender roles, to homosexuality, to arranged marriage, his plays have confronted issues that could cause many an Indian audience to squirm. Alyque Padamsee, one of the foremost names in Indian theatre, has described him as “a playwright who gives 60 million English-speaking
Indians an identity”. It's rather absurd how easily those laurels sit on the ever-smiling, ever-accommodating playwright, who on some days has three different productions of three different plays in three different countries at the same time.

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7th August, 1958 in Bengaluru, Karnataka, where his parents had settled after leaving Gujarat. He had his early education at Baldwin High School and St. Joseph College of Arts and Science, Bangalore. Though a graduate in History, Economics and Political Science he chose Marketing and Advertising Management for his Post-graduation. He began his career as an advertising copywriter in an advertising firm. Thus, his career shows a blending of several disciplines having no direct relation with theatre. Recalling his early life he observes:

In school I was too shy to try out for the annual school production, usually a Christmas pageant…. I was average at most subjects although quick at grasping things. This was one of the better (read English-medium) schools in Bangalore…. And English was one of the subjects that I quickly warmed to. It was as though the universe was conspiring to wash my brains of my Gujarati heritage and displace me linguistically…. I didn't realize it at the time, but this attitude would spell my doom in the decades to come.” (MMP 9)

He recalls with gratitude his father who used to take him to the Town Hall to see the performance of "Gujarati musical drama near the city's notorious opium bazaar…. I must have been about nine years old when I got to see the real thing…. I remember the Gujarati community, well turned out in their safari suits and American georgette saris…. Class divides were clearly drawn with the local sponsors getting front-row seats, while the rest of us got whatever came to us, scurrying for seats near the fans." (MMP 4-5). When the play began, it made the audience watch it fascination. The magic had started influencing the audience including the child Dattani. He observes, "If something like this could shut the mouths of a thousand Gujaratis, I had to be a part of this magic! This was indeed the beginning of a beautiful relationship. I came to know much later that the play I had seen was Madhu Rye's acclaimed Gujarati play Koi Pan Ek Phool Nu Naam Bolo To (Say the Name of a Flower). (MMP 7)
It was again his father who became his sponsor when he was in utter need of funds as he could sense Dattani’s passion for theatre. He recalls, "I remember he had earlier loaned me Rs. 4000 for a production that never took off…. That sum is now a token of my debt of gratitude to my parents, which can never be repaid." (MMP 22)

His passion for dance, especially Bharatnatyam, brought him into contact with his friend U. K. Jayadev's parents, in whose company he saw Sonal Mansingh perform the ashtapadis from Geeta Govindam. He learnt from this the integration of dance, drama and music. The dance gave him ‘a glimpse of the truth in relation to art.' Recalling his gurus with reverence he observes, "The six years I spent learning dance from them were my most formative years, both as a human being and as an artiste. My gurus could not make a dancer out of me, but they gave me the sense of discipline that set me apart from other theatre practitioners. They put me in touch with the richness of the classical tradition. (MMP 25)

Dattani established his own theatre group named Playpen in 1984, which helped him in managing his plays for performance. His plays are performed at his studio. As soon as the script is ready, Dattani becomes eager to see it performed. This helps him in modifying the script in accordance with the theatrical effect of the play. It also encourages the novice artists to participate in dramatic activities. He attaches his great success to his theatre. In one of his interviews, Dattani says: I wouldn’t say the only one, but I would say that I have been the most successful for various reasons: I have my own theatre company (Playpen), and I have a theatre background. I’m not writing because I’m a writer (of literature), I’m writing because I have theatre back-ground. (Multani 156)

The joint family forms the core of Dattani’s theatre, which has a strong sense of social and domestic history. Yet he also has an unforced, appealing wit. All the plays bear witness to his imagination. Dattani moves freely back and forth in time, typically between generations, occasionally requiring performers to act both in order to stress the links within the generation gap. He constructs interesting spaces with split sets, hidden rooms, and lit
passages revealed behind scrims. Mahesh Dattani is a representative of the new Indian who is not defensive about using English.

Dattani represents a powerful and resurgent Indian drama, with his innovative and experimental work of contemporary relevance, and he has given new directions to Indian drama. One of the things which profoundly unite him is his mutually complementary treatment of the problematic of contemporary Indian subjectivity on the various axes of gender, sexuality, history, politics, tradition, class and socio-cultural change. Focusing on Dattani’s role in foregrounding the issues of social exclusion, Bijay Kumar Das observes:

Mahesh Dattani … deals with the theme of social exclusion in his plays not on the basis of caste but gender. How gender relationship based on sexuality causes social exclusion becomes a prime concern for him in some of his plays. (83)

The plays of Dattani have emerged as ‘fresh arrival’ in the domain of Indian English drama. His plays deal with contemporary issues. They are plays of today sometimes as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same time they are plays which embody many of the classic concerns of world drama. Dattani’s plays have a universal appeal and therefore can be staged anywhere in the world, and they draw full attention of the audience irrespective of culture and nationality. Dattani moulds his subject in such a way that it is both topical as well as appealing. His plays speak across linguistic and cultural barriers. Though he lives in Karnataka, he takes into his orbit the whole of India. His plays have redefined the English theatre movement at a ground-breaking level and are also a societal reference point.

Dattani has a unique capacity to see through the turbulence of the contemporary urban Indian society and catch the whiff of the perpetual classic rift between conventions and innovations. Through his plays, Dattani raises the issues concerning the oppressed, marginalised class such as minorities, women, gays and hijras, child sexual abuse, hypocrisy about HIV positive people, religious intolerance, gender inequalities and even the constituents of the contemporary Indian family. Even a cursory glance at his plays makes us

In 2010, Penguin Books India published his third volume entitled *Brief Candle: Three Plays* which include three plays of Dattani– *Thirty Days in September* (2001), *The Girl who Touched the Stars*, and *Brief Candle*. Penguin Books India published the fourth volume under the title of *Me and My Plays* (2014) which contains his two most recent plays *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* and *The Big Fat City*. These plays extend Dattani’s concerns about the invisible issues. Thus, the play *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* explores the life and travails of Nazia, a feisty actress now in her eighties, who has to confront her past demons when she attempts to come back on the stage again. The other play, *The Big Fat City* is a black comedy about the residents of an apartment complex in Mumbai who unknowingly become accomplices to a murder. Through this Dattani again intends to warn his audience/ readers to beware of the mob mentality which often destroys the healthy mental make-up of the individual. The volume gains more weight because of Dattani’s detailed account of his growth as a playwright. One may easily notice the mellowed tone of reverence and gratitude to all those who helped him in achieving great milestones in his life.

Dattani started employing all his creative energy to theatre by becoming a full-time writer. His first full-length play, *Where There’s a Will* portrays complicated modern urban
family in 1986, where the old patriarchal codes are tested against the new reality. It was followed by *Dance like a Man* in 1989 on the problems faced by a male dancer. He directed and acted in both the plays. Dattani also directed *Bravely Fought the Queen* in 1991 in Bombay. The play highlights the irrationality of the state in which a woman is trapped since her birth. Meanwhile Alyque Padamsee had directed his third play, *Tara* in 1990, a touching domestic drama, and invited him to script a work on communalism. The product, *Final Solutions*, was rejected by the Deccan Herald Festival in Bengaluru for dealing with a sensitive issue, though they had sponsored his first two productions. *Playpen* finally staged it in 1993. The delicate theme led him to create perhaps too perfect a Hindu-Muslim equilibrium, almost consciously free of any perceivable bias. He got the prestigious National Sahitya Akademi Awards for *Final Solutions and Other Plays* in 1994. Sahitya Kala Parishad selected *Final Solutions* (1997), *Tara* (2000) and *30 Days in September* (2007) as best productions of the year directed by Arvind Gaur. Meanwhile, *Dance Like a Man* has won the award for the Best Picture in English awarded by the National Panorama in 1998.

Gay presence in Dattani’s work increases with his first radio play *Do the Needful* (1997). Written for BBC Radio 4, the play exposes the fact that the institution of marriage today has lost its sanctity and is nothing but a compromise to promote personal needs. The play deals with the complex relationship of homosexuality and inter-communal love-affair. Homosexuality is another sensitive issue chosen by Dattani. His *Seven Steps Round the Fire* dwells on the theme of eunuchs, their identity, their constitution and their connotation.

A major part of Dattani’s success goes to his theatre group *Playpen* which was formed in 1984. He wants to bring social change by virtue of the power wielded by theatre. He offers the audience a series of themes and issues which are not only the most relevant but also the most contentious. A deep study of his plays provides us a fascinating study of stagecraft in Indian theatre using innovations introduced by Mahesh Dattani. The earlier stage was a simple platform erected for the purpose in a palace or temple courtyard to serve as backdrop.
The stage setting of Mahesh Dattani is even more complex. There are multilevel sets so that whole interior of the house is visible to the audience. John McRae, Italian Director states: “Mahesh Dattani is always adventurous in his way of using the theatrical space at his disposal: multiple levels, breaking the bounds of Proscenium, wondrously inventive use of lighting to give height, breadth and depth” (CP 45)

Dattani expresses his views and concerns through some powerful images, symbols, stage direction and other means. But he never tried to sermonize, his purpose is chiefly artistic. In his opinion: Theatre is a reflection of what we observe. If one attempts to do anything more one is trying to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre. His plays are an invigorating delight for spectator as his presentations are governed by the pioneering dramatic methodology. But the pinching fact is that Indian English Theatre is still vying for a substantial number of audiences, is still lagging behind in comparison to the world of poetry and fiction. Undoubtedly, a genre like drama needs to be performed on a real stage or in theatre before live audience. As M. K. Naik states, “A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, needs a real theatre and a live audience. It is precisely the lack of these essentials that has hamstrung Indian drama in English all along”. (81)

Lack of imagination and English as second language are the two prominent reasons which restricted the blooming of Indian English Drama for some time. Indian English playwrights were not imaginative enough in the use of Indian dramatic traditions as well as were not so well conversant in English. As a second language English was not a comfortable medium of expression even after a few decades of post-independence era. So Indian playwrights could not make their Indian characters speak in English. The language barrier prevents the lower classes from coming to the Indian English theatre. Actually to form our cultural identity we need tradition, continuity and change. It is only when we accept these three things that we can really have a theatre movement which is completely linked to the development of cultural, social and individual identity. Only then we can achieve harmony
through the language of theatre which must necessarily be filled with a sense of rootedness revealing a true Indian sensibility.

Since my thesis makes a systematic and comprehensive study of the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani, it would be in the fitness of things to make general observations regarding other radio and screen plays. Based on the problems of gay relationship, Dattani’s play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* tries to highlight the basic requirement of their true identity in society. It presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Bombay, their changing mutual relationship, their revelations, their self delusions and self-discoveries. Dattani has made a bold attempt to expose the hypocrisies of social life which permit stereotypical heterosexual relationship and impart normativity to them. And those who have a homosexual orientation are considered as deviants. The segments of LGBT are victims of social ostracism living in perpetual fear and psychological pressures and their life becomes suffocating for them. Through this play Dattani has tried to soften the society towards the gay and subtly aroused the compassion for this class.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* was first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC Radio 4 on January 9, 1999. The play was first performed on stage at the Museum Theatre, Chennai, by MTC Production & The Madras Players on August 6, 1999 directed by Mithran Devanesen. It is a very modern play about the ancient mystery of a whole tribe. It is partly a detective play, in which Uma Rao, a postgraduate student of sociology and the daughter of the Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University is writing her thesis on the origin and contemporary status of the ‘Hijra Community’. Her genuine (re)search for truth bears fruit by her sheer effort and will. Yet she is not powerful enough, in spite of being the daughter-in-law of a Deputy Commissioner and the wife of a Superintendent of Police solves the mystery of the murder of a hijra, who is secretly “married” to the son of a wealthy government minister named Subbu. This shocking revelation culminated into the murder of Kamla and the minister got this hizra burned to death and arranged a marriage reception for
his son to marry an acceptable girl of his choice. But the table is turned. At the wedding, all
the hizras sing and dance and Subbu in a fit of anger takes out a gun and kills himself. The
play offers many insights into the lives of the hijras, and their beliefs and customs.

This play holds up a mirror before the life of the hijra community in India. This no
one has done before in Indian English literature. Dattani’s realism concentrates chiefly on
hitherto sections of the society. The major questions which naturally arise are: (a) Why
should the society be so cruel to the hijras? (b) Why can’t it tolerate a deviant practice? (c)
Why should it object to a man’s marrying a hijra if it makes both of them happy? (d) Is
anything in life more valuable than a happiness which harms no one? To these questions
society has no specific answers. Seven Steps Around the Fire is a peculiar play, perhaps the
only play in Indian drama highlighting the woes of hijras. They are the third gender who
probably exists only in India. The love of a man for hijra may look improbably to most men
who are not acquainted fully with them and their associates. But Dattani must have closely
studied hijras, their emotions, as well as some men’s attraction for them. Dattani shows in
this play how men’s irrational hate of minority leads to murder and suicide in this drama.
That is how this play is a problem play as well as a tragedy.

Dattani’s another radio play The Swami and Winston was first broadcast on June 3,
2000 on BBC Radio 4. The play was directed by Jeremy Mortimer. This is the second play
based on the murder mystery which is solved by Uma Rao, daughter-in-law of Banglore's
Deputy Commissioner of police and wife of superintendent of Police. After solving one
murder mystery in Seven Steps Around Fire Uma Rao, in the process of researching her thesis
on violence in India, comes into contact with religious fanaticism in its most extreme form.
While investigating the duty of a member of English aristocracy, Lady Monte Fiere, Uma
Rao expresses the possibility and finally discovers the real murderer.

A murder mystery is at the centre of the play. After meeting Mr. Trivedi, Uma Rao
plans to visit the place where Lady Montifiere had been murdered. That place is very isolated
having no shop, no building and no light. There is field all over. Suddenly she sees a man wearing a Burberry's expensive raincoat which seems to have been imported from England. According to Uma Rao that raincoat can belong to Charles only. What can be the role of Charles in the murder of his sister? In the process of investigation she gets sufficient clue from the raincoat of Charles and the dog of Mantifiere.

The supremacy and dominance of Hinduism is Trivedi’s primary concern. He is not even the least anxious about the bloodshed which may take place at Ayodhya if an attempt is made to construct the temple. When Uma Rao draws his attention to the horrors of partition, Trivedi contradicts her stand and says that he knows about them because he had lived through them and did have the first hand experience of them. Mr. Trivedi's pretended self is seemingly interested in the spread of Hinduism but his real self is seriously involved in grabbing power and money. Had it not been so, what was the reason for the murder of Lady Montifiore? Mahesh Dattani is fact exposes the hollowness of fake Hinduism through the character of Mr. Trivedi.

With the gradual development of plot we a good deal of confrontation between true Hinduism and false Hinduism. If false spirit of Hinduism is represented by Sitaram Trivedi, true spirit of Hinduism is reported by Swami Chidananda. That is why Trivedi wants to get rid of Swami who is his real rival in the common public He wants to get Swami involved in the murder of Lady Montifiere and get him finished. This is openly admitted by Uma Rao herself: "....by framing the Swami he would get rid of an opposer. The Swami is truly spiritual and wants none of this new brand of Hinduism" (CP II 325).

Swami is perturbed over the loss of human values. While delivering his lecture in the large hall he rightly points out: "The mind of man has lost the point of balance and harmony in every sphere of existence. We are so engrossed in material survival that we are no longer aware of what is happing to us. Today we are so preoccupied with our own sense gratification
that we are unaware of the existence of our fellow human beings." (CP II 311). This is the true essence of Hinduism and this may be regarded as the message of the play.

Dealing with very delicate issue of child sexual abuse, the play Thirty Days in September (2001) focuses on its traumatic effects on their psyche. Child sexual abuse adversely affects the psyche of the child and may lead to several complications like depression, physical injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, poor self-esteem and propensity to further victimisation in adulthood.

The Tale of a Mother feeding her Child is a short radio play which was produced by BBC Radio Drama and was broadcast across BBC Radio 3 and 4 in the last week of October 2000. It had been commissioned as part of 2000 Tales, a landmark drama series marking the six hundredth anniversary of the death of Geoffrey Chaucer, poet and author of The Canterbury Tales. The play had been directed by Jeremy Mortimer.

Anna Gosweb, the protagonist in the play, narrates the story of her journey to a village in India where she had had an affair with a local man at Goa twenty years ago. The village, located in Gujrat had been severely affected by the drought and the man had died on account of starvation. But before his death he wrote a letter to his English lady, Anna Gosweb: “Dear Miss Anna Gosweb, I hope your God has been kind to you and favoured you with a good husband and many children. Our Gods have failed us, or should I say that they did not succeed in reaching us. They were too busy favouring our brethren in the cities and of course, the higher caste people of the villages. I have never begged you or anyone else for anything in all my life. I cannot bear the humiliation any longer of seeing my wife and child suffer so. If you could send me a thousand rupees, I assure you I shall pay it back as soon as we have a good harvest next year. Your friend in need. Jaman Gopalia. Jaman” (CP II 565-566). The letter moved the lady so much that she came to India and after great difficulty reached the village. When she met Jaman’s wife, she didn’t favourably respond to the English
lady who had been her late husband’s girlfriend. Gosweb took Shanti, the starving daughter of Jaman to the town at relief camp and got her cured.

Two important issues of Indian society have been underlined by the Dattani in this play—the problem of husband’s loyalty to the wife and the problem of untouchability. Jaman’s wife can never tolerate her husband having extramarital relationship with any other woman. When Gosweb shows her daughter Jennifer’s picture to Jaman’s wife saying that it was Jaman’s daughter, it was not a happy moment for Jaman’s wife. She started shedding tears from her eyes because it was shocking for her that husband has had extramarital affair with Gosweb. It is evident from Gosweb’s own statement: “I saw tears streaming down Jaman’s wife’s face. She must have been crying for some time now, for the tears to show below the veil.” (CP II 569)

In Gujrat the problem of untouchability has been highlighted. It was really very different to find sufficient water for the family of Jaman who belonged to low caste. They were not “allowed to fetch water from the well close by…. They had to walk three miles every day to fetch a pot of water from the relief tankers” (CP II 570), which also were made available to the upper caste people first. They had to wait for their turn. Lastly Gosweb is happy to know that she has saved the life of Jaman’s daughter, Shanti and she was highly delighted by it. She wanted somebody to save her daughter Jennifer who maintains a veil between herself and her mother. The play ends with the pathetic appeal of Gosweb to others: “I hope somebody will save my Jennifer. By making her accept my help. She just won’t eat. She just won’t eat. At least I saved Shanti.” (CP II 572)

The play Clearing the Rubble was first broadcasted on January 17, 2002 at BBC Radio 4. This play was repeated on January 26, 2002 on the BBC World Service directed by Jeremy Mortimer, who was an Executive Producer at BBC Radio Drama. Mortimer observes in “A Note on the Play”: “Following the earthquake in Bhuj in Jaunary 2001, Mahesh Dattani
was commissioned by BBC Radio to write a play to broadcast on the first anniversary of the tragedy." (CP II 61). The play deals with the story of three people whose lives have been affected by this earthquake—An English journalist, a poor boy Salim and his mother Fatima. The story was narrated by English journalist, Jeffry who visited Kutch, Gujrat after two days of massive earthquake in 2001. He gives a very vivid picture of the scenario.

This play provides an opportunity to Dattani to attack on the hollowness of Indian system brimming with-Hypocrisy of Bureaucracy, Patriarchal structure, untouchability or marginalization etc. Dattani has clutched the nerves of the trademark red-tapism and hypocrisy of the mammoth Indian bureaucracy which never fails to astonish by its thick skinned assertions of die hard habits. “People lining up outside relief camps, waiting for some paper work to be done before they can have access to merge shelters and food packets . . . . a whole row of vans and trucks with equipment and rescue workers, waiting for somebody to give them go ahead . . . .” (CP II 66). Even in the face of the worst ever disaster and consequent human plight, the relief workers appear full of self praise when the worst affected interiors of the earthquake hit region stay untouched. Jeffrey is surprised to see the long serpentine queue of truck loads of relief supplies and the hullabaloo at the relief centre which belies the actual scenario in the worst affected regions. He insightfully sniffs the change or rather mellowing of behaviour of the concerned officials at his introduction as a foreign journalist. As a clear indication of the existence of corruption, Jeffrey’s attempts at snapping around witnesses the transformation from mellowed to unrepentantly violent reactions from the official staff. Feeling cornered by the presence of the foreign media they break his camera and try to manhandle him. However Jeffrey is rescued by his own martial skills as well as the villagers.

The struggle of marginalized in the society has been shown and described by Dattani through the characters like Saleem and his mother Fatima. Fatima lost her husband in drought a few years ago. As a cobbler’s widow she is struggling to make ends meet out of the scratches, overburdened with the responsibility to feed three children. She is eking out her
living as a labourer for the survival of her family. In the earthquake she has lost her two daughters and is crying in excruciating pain over the dead bodies of her daughters. She is confessing her misdeeds in front of Allah and praying for her daughters. The pain of realisation is making her sorrow deeper as she feels that unlike a loving mother she always favoured her son Saleem over Mumtaz and Saira and bestowed unwarranted protection on him, when she pushed her daughters into hard work. Often she made Mumtaz work even more than what she herself had ever done at her age. A mix of emotions, introspections and realisations make her feel elated that her daughters (Mumtaz and Saira) are now liberated from the stereotyped, orthodox, unequal and the ‘not so fine world’. Fatima is begging to be forgiven by her elder daughter Mumtaz, who has done nothing but suffered to earn money in a quest to fulfil her mother’s dream about her brother. She feels that, in a ‘man’s world’ her only option was to prepare her son Salim to be capable enough to evolve as a support system for the entire family including his sisters.

Like Tara in the play Tara Mumtaz has faced the partial treatment of her mother and sacrificed her childhood, she cannot get a chance to think or dream about her own life. She is not allowed to make decision of what to do or not to do. In another way I can say that she has sacrificed her life just to provide her brother Salim a good life, to flourish her family future. Though she is the second child of her parents, she has played the role of a responsible guardian at the tender age of seven. Her sex was the only sin in this patriarchal society. She has paid it by sacrificing her life.

Dattani has attempted to shake the society to the bitter realities about the drudgeries of untouchability through Salim’s character which in itself an eloquent essay on the anguish, miseries and embarrassment that comes with the tag of an untouchable. ‘One day there was dead rat in the classroom . . . . One of the children told the teacher that I should be sent in to pick up the rat and clean the room . . . . The bigger boy called me a cobbler’s son and said that it was my job to do these things. If I could touch the hide of a cow, I could pick up the
dead rat. The teacher did not say a word. (*CP II* 79). It is the most disheartening feature of our societal prejudiced, which render the interact, level of literacy and standard of living as immaterial when measured against the hypocrisy attached with the religious dogmas of the caste system. A sweeper’s son is expected to be a cleaner of toilets throughout his life irrespective of skills and capabilities. Such a treatment imposes an identity crisis triggered by low self–esteem in a person belonging to the marginalized strata of the society. No matter how well read and well placed he may be, his inner conscience always shudders at the reminder of his social tagging, apprehensive of the probabilities of any kind of identity lurking around him.

The film *Mango Soufflé* was released in India on February 2002 and it won the best motion picture award at the Barcelona Film Festival the same year. This film symbolically implies the dish of mango which stands for human passion that has been placed before the readers for consumption.

Dattani's other radio play *Uma and the Fairy Queen* was first broadcast on August 16, 2003 on BBC Radio 4. Directed by Mark Beeby the play is about the third case of murder mystery which is valiantly untangled by Uma Rao, wife of Suresh Rao, Superintendent of Bangalore Police. It happens to be the part of the social event organized by the British council at our Independence Day celebration in Bangalore with the enactment of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by Shakespeare Company. The play moves around the Michael Forsyth and his wife Nila Ahmad and also his co star. They visited Bangalore with their company for the play’s performance.

In the beginning, just before the performance, we come to know through Nila, about Michael being kidnapped but very soon he reappears for his act, that is a big surprise for everybody but ironically just before the end of the act he is found shot dead by his wife Nila, in the green room. Uma Rao is present there with her husband, who is providing security to the foreign delegates. Liam Tate, British Culture Ambassador happens to be the friend of
Charles Montefiore, has a reference about Uma. After knowing about Michael’s kidnapping he goes to meet Uma and requests her to help them. In the very first meeting Uma finds Nila a bit odd in behaviour. Nila arouses Uma’s suspicion about her role in Michael’s murder. Thereon, her queries give her the idea about Nila’s life with the past of her first marriage; which took place in Pakistan, with Aman Malik, when she was a famous TV actress. Nila had a son which is the result of her extra marital affair with her TV co star. Being found unfaithful towards her marriage and her religion, she is forced to leave the country. After leaving Pakistan she gets shelter in UK with the help of Michael, who is not only her rescuer, but they love each other and get married. Finally, Uma’s investigation reaches its climax, when from the hotel reception she came to know that Michael had called for a taxi to visit somewhere, he was not kidnapped and from taxi service she got the address of Nila’s first husband Malik, where he visited just before the performance.

The quest for resolving the disappearance of Michael, Uma and Liam visit Nila’s first husband and son Feroz. After meeting them they come across the frustration and irritation of Feroz, regarding Nila, which leads them to the ‘fairy queen’, Nila. When Uma questions Nila about the murder of Michael, initially she tries to evade the answer but realizing that her son Feroz is about to be convicted for Michael’s murder, Nila took it all upon herself to save her son. Ever inquisitive and probing, Uma forces Nila to reveal the entire story of her past and the consequent guilt about her wronged son, Feroz. It is this guilt which nudges Nila to cover up her son and take the responsibility of the blood of Michael on her own head. However, Uma’s reasoned assertion makes all Nila’s attempts wasteful, failing her miserably in protecting her son. Meanwhile an enraged Feroz appears in the room and for the first time unleashes all the so far chained anger on Nila. But Nila wants to rescue her son at any cost. Ultimately, it is revealed that it was not Michael’s moment to die, but he succumbed in an attempt to save his love. And with the help of Liam, Uma wins over her husband as usual, and successfully uncovers the mystery of Michael’s death.
The screenplay *Morning Raga* (2004) is the first screenplay written by Mahesh Dattani. It is not an adaptation from any of his stage or radio plays. The film was released in India on October 29, 2004. The international premiere was part of the Cairo Film festival in Dec. 2004. The leading character of this film is the acclaimed actress of the Indian film industry, Shabana Azami. In the note on the play she looks at Mahesh Dattani, the author and the director of the film, as an 'original writer' of a 'rare species'. (*CP II* 331)

The theme of the play draws some fusions and blends of the old with the new, heart with mind, the archetypal with contemporary and likewise Carnatic music with Western music, fate and coincidence with individual choices. Generation gap has achieved certain perpetuity in the society and is often the root cause of several broken homes. But like a ray of hope, there are occasions when conscious attempts are being made to bridge the gap through the change of mindsets and innovations in the interpersonal exchanges. Dattani has rightly observed: “It’s about a meeting of two worlds” (*CP II* 331). The theme also depicts the resistance to change and consequent prevalence of reason over the resistance. The theme also has some shades of orthodox Pagan values.

The film is a faithful portrayal of the life of a classic singer and music is the central theme, but the story moves around mainly four characters—Swarnalatha, Abhinay, Priyanka and Mrs. Kapoor. Swarnalatha is the protagonist of the play. The story begins at the village bus stand, where Swarnalatha and Vaishnavi with their kids and instruments board into the bus to the city for their singing show. Their journey ends abruptly by the crash of the bus with Mr. Kapoor’s over speeding car. The bus falls into the river resulting in several deaths including Swarnalatha’s son and her friend Vaishnavi. Here begins the conflict between Swarnalatha’s passion *i.e.*, Carnatic music and the ghosts of her past that have been haunting her since the accident that changed her life forever. After some time the theme takes a leap of twenty years ahead into the life of Vaishnavi’s now grown up son Abhinay, who is working in an advertising firm. His work profile includes making Jingles for the advertisements. The
genetic inheritance of his mother doesn’t let him rest with the average routine creations and fill him up with desire to bring uniqueness in his music. The immediate spark is provided by the pointed comments of his boss Prakash. Disappointed with his current scenario, he just cuts city life and moves to his sedate village for his mother’s death anniversary. Eventually as the fate has, Abhinay, who is in a quest for a breather to his career, coincidently bumps into Swarnalatha’s life, who till now has been draining away her time in obscurity within the confines of her sleepy village, is emotionally stirred by influence brought in by Abhinay. This marks her re-entry into the life of a musician only on the insistence of Abhinay. This also makes one witness the mingling of two contradictions, giving birth to a perfectly blended fusion of Carnatic and western music. Unfortunately, over burdened by her inhibitions from her haunting memories Swarnalatha fails to cross the bridge of her village at the debut performance of Abhinay, which could have achieved the dazzling glory, but unfortunately the venture fails. But the ever persevering Abhinay returns to receive his guru out of muddle, when Swarnalatha fails to walk up to the concert. Abhinay decides to bring the concert to her at the village. The final scene showcases the concert which marks the shedding off of all the inhibitions where Swarnalatha also joins the stage resulting into the creation of a mesmerizing, divine raga. Climax symbolizes the quest against prejudices the human hunger for innovations and the embracing of the pragmatic and modern values against those of Pagan myopia. It is well summed up Swarnalatha herself: “Thank you. It has been a difficult raga for me to learn. Twenty years is a long time. Music is never ending journey.” (CP II 416)

*Ek Alag Mausam* his another screenplay, takes a very recent and important theme of HIV AIDS in contemporary times. This play was released in India on February 4, 2005 and it was directed by K. P. Sasi. Twentieth and the Twenty first centuries have witnessed tremendous prowess of mankind in the field of medical science, yet it has all been trivialized by the challenge thrown by AIDS, which has engulfed and spread around the world as a true pandemic. Ignorant and bewildered by the impact and the known cause of disease, the society
is still suffering with ambivalence and stuttering to find the correct reaction as well as reception of an HIV positive person. AIDS in itself is one of the most contagious and relentless of all infections. Adding insult to injury, the social stigma that has come to be attached with it makes it far worse of an ordeal for the actual victim. Incomplete knowledge about it has given birth to several misconceptions and myths. In a society like India, sex, although omnipresent, is still a sin to be overtly discussed. Anyone who is HIV positive is sidelined after being tagged as one who brought it all upon himself solely because of his sexual perversions. Such people are left to suffer in pain only because of societal ignorance about the facts and sensibilities attached with AIDS. Social Activists, NGOs and the Government have been making constant efforts to spread awareness about the pandemic and kill the prejudices clinging with AIDS. It was left only for the ever courageous Dattani to take the torch in his hands to enlighten the society against the plight of the HIV positive people. This time Dattani, surprisingly and rightfully, chose cinema as a medium to express his views.

In Indian society, cinema is the perfect medium to arouse a hot ideological debate on social issues, or to exert a political pressure. It is very common in India to see producers, directors, or social activists using cinema to assert their views. More peculiarly, Mahesh Dattani has used a genre like a love story in his cinematic venture *Ek Alag Mausam*, a romance of two HIV positive lovers. The objective is to infuse optimism, belongingness and care in the hearts of the HIV infected people. India being a land where myths intermittently influence and re-mould the shape and shade of the present. Narrating a story in an Indian backdrop doesn’t mean merely evoking the past. In fact, it proved to be far more herculean task. Anything involving sexuality makes a theme more of a taboo or prejudiced. The protagonists very nonchalantly decide to get married despite being aware of both being HIV positive. Despite the fact that in India, as a precedence set by Supreme Court an HIV positive person is disallowed the right to get married, the scriptwriter- Dattani and the director K.P
Sasi relentlessly went ahead with the story stating that it is a human rights issue and the courts have no right to interfere in the decision that individual makes, if they are aware that the person they are going to marry is HIV positive. The characters are helplessly and ironically linked to each other by the HIV and the consciousness of the ever impending fear of loss. Respite in the face of despair is provided by the phases of splendor in the anticipation of bliss through love. Commenting upon the impact of the film Dattani is of the opinion that Indian audiences will look forward to such a film, because it’s been nearly twenty years since the virus first appeared in India and people want to know the truth. It is a fact that the film will make people sit up and start thinking about the issue seriously. So far we have only the marginalization of such people. Through *Ek Alag Mausam* we find the problem put in a different a different perspective and help audience understand the issue better. The film medium has been used to reach out to not only to HIV positive people who are feeling isolated, but also to a large section of people.

The film’s story moves round the traumatic journey of two innocent but HIV positive people – Aparna and George. In the very beginning we find that Aparna is pregnant and is very excited about it. One day she gets a call from a volunteer nurse Rosaland Cooper from the hospital who is talking on the behalf of Aparna’s gynecologist Dr. Sanyal who asks Aparna to come to the hospital to meet them with her husband, Suresh. But Suresh refuses to go there and finally Aparna goes there alone to meet her doctor. After little talk she is asked by doctor to abort her child because she is infected with HIV. This revelation hurt her like a lightening. After this shocking event when she comes home to talk to her husband, she finds him quite helpless. He is even incapable of showing his face to her and without any argument he leaves her forever. Finally she has no option but to abort her baby and after losing her baby she decides to serve for the people who are suffering from this disease at Jeevan Jyoti Hospital. At Jeevan Jyoti she meets George who is already there to serve people and to provide them a little happiness. Just a few days are sufficient for George to get attracted
towards Aparna and he proposes her for marriage. Aparna constantly denies his proposal because she measures him at her husband’s scale of betrayal. After a few years Aparna meets Dr. Machado, through whom she comes to know about the truth of George’s suffering, which has unknowingly occurred by the blood transfusion. This truth is sufficient to bridge the gulf between Aparna and George. They are in each other’s arms. Paro is blowing bubbles. We follow the bubbles till they all break except for a few strong ones. (CP II 557)

*The Girl who touched the Stars* was first broadcast on 6 March 2007 on BBC Radio 4. Produced and directed by Tracey Neale the play is inspired by the life of Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian women who went into the outer space but unfortunately could never come back to the earth. Though some twist has been given to the development of the story, Bhavana in the play is no one but Kalapna herself. Commenting upon the theme of the play, Tracey Neale Senior Producer, BBC radio Drama, has rightly observed:

It is a tribute to bravery of Kalpana, but because we took the decision to produce a fictional story, it allowed us to create that dramatic conflict between the older and the young Bhavana, which then allowed a radiophonic conversation to be held in the middle of space. We could explore the dilemma that confronts a woman when she wants to hold on to reality and the present but finds herself drawn back into the past—when she feels a need to understand why she has become the woman she is and why she was so eager to reach out and be *the girl who touched the stars.* (BC 53)

Bhavana has the dream of flying up to moon and touch the stars. While going up into the space her dreams become true. She is an astronaut and in 2005 she is the first Indian woman to fly not to the moon but to the Mars. But immediately after take-off, the spacecraft explodes and in the space she finds herself in dialogue with her childhood self. Both the father and mother of Bhavana feel proud of their daughter’s journey to the moon and the stars. The father is proud of the fact that his daughter has accepted the responsibility of being the first Indian woman to step on the moon. Her father believes that his daughter’s successful space mission will pave the way for future generations of Indians who have similar aspirations. Her mother also feels proud of her daughter.
Dattani’s *Brief Candle* (2010) is a very powerful and thought provoking play expressing the predicament of people on the verge of death. It tells us how people suffering from fatal and incurable diseases are vacillating between life and death. The play is farcical in tone and presents some extremely funny situations revolving around a hotel room near the airport. The characters resort to superstitious dalliances and complicated love affairs in their endeavor to lessen their sufferings. Dattani has used the metaphor of arrival and departure for life and death which allows the characters to reflect on their own struggle for survival.

The year 2014 witnessed two new plays from Dattani’s pen—*Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* and *The Big Fat City*. These plays extend Dattani’s concerns about the invisible issues. The play *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* was performed on October 27, 2012 at TATA Theatre, National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai. It explores the life and travails of Nazia, a feisty Muslim actress now in her eighties, who has to confront her past demons when she attempts to come back on the stage again. It is about her epiphany on the film set where the director wants to restrict her to a line, but she realizes this space is too narrow for her to negotiate. She needs to go back to the larger than life stage musicals of the 50s she used to be a part of in order to touch the essence of her art. The purdah in the play has been used as a metaphor for all kinds of partitions including the one between men and women and also as the veil of modesty that actresses have to give up early in their careers.

Dattani's most recent play, *The Big Fat City* is a black comedy about the residents of an apartment complex in Mumbai who unknowingly become accomplices to a murder. It was first performed on June 22, 2013 at Tata Theatre, NCPA, Nariman Point, Mumbai. The play is an out-sider's perspective of Mumbai which seeks to reveal who we are when we are faced with adversities that compel us to act. The choice of our actions, reveal our true nature. We all wear masks – social masks, professional masks, attitude masks. Through this Dattani again intends to worn his audience/ readers to beware of the mob mentality which often destroys the healthy mental make-up of the individual. The volume gains more weight
because of Dattani's detailed account of his growth as a playwright. One may easily notice the mellowed tone of reverence and gratitude to all those who helped him in achieving great milestones in his life.

A brief survey of Dattani's plays makes one compare him with Henrik Ibsen because the murky secrets of human consciousness that agonise the present, are explored in his plays very persuasively and delicately. Like G. B. Shaw, Dattani has the potential to explore the violence of our private thoughts and double standards of our public morality. His characters boil and divulge, prod and detect, scathing their families and neighbours, leaving each reader or spectator shaken to the core. He has been an adventurist, yearning for exploration of horizons beyond theatre and succeeded as well. His plays deal with real life situations and are rooted in Indian urban life. Precisely, we, the common people are his audience, his characters as well as his critics.