1. Introduction: An overview of theatre

Theatre is a branch of performing arts concerned with the presentation of plays and musicals. Its scope is worldwide and its influence is profound. The art of theatre is concerned almost exclusively with live performance by actors, in which the action is precisely planned to create a coherent and significant sense of drama in a time space-audience framework. Theatre manifests in varied contents and forms as sanctioned by the socio-political and geographical milieu through human activity. There have been widely different opinions as to what the aim of theatre should be. Some have viewed that theatre is goal-oriented with a serious purpose while others stressed theatre as a medium of imparting entertainment and still few see no reason why theatre should not be simultaneously serious and entertaining people. Theatre in general term is inclusive of all the elements that contribute to a performance of dramatic nature.

Theatre is indeed complex and because of its complicated nature it can be understood and discussed intelligently only by beginning with an analysis of the term and its definition. The word theatre has its roots in “Theomai” which means, “to see” and also from “theatron” which literally signify “the auditorium or space” for the audience. To start with the root words; when one goes to be a part of the play, it is almost the same as to see a theatre, so a word taken from the Greek synonymous for a “place for seeing.” As one sit in an auditorium or any space the meaning of theatre refers to a place “for hearing” too. Theatre also denotes “one or more human beings act” which means “the doing of a deed”. Therefore, through the three components “to see,” “to hear” within the “action or deed”, complete the theatrical act. “The audience for theatrical events was known as ‘those who see’ clearly implying that seeing a performance was as important as hearing it.”
There are many interpretations regarding the origin of theatre. Most of the scholars take help of anthropological studies in imagining and understanding the state of the human beings in the ancient times. Since times immemorial, when man started believing the existence of supreme forces beyond him, it led to the practice of worshipping or pleasing these supreme forces through rituals. Although theatre as an art form emerged at a comparatively late stage in man’s cultural evolutions but it is generally believed to have its roots in primitive religious rituals. There were patterns in the behaviour of primitive societies that could justify as pre-theatrical. The various patterns showed the mental state of the people experiencing the unpredictable mysterious cycles. They undertook rituals, which were an appeal to those they believed to control the various elements for their welfare guidance and safety.

In the beginning ritual activity was confined to simple imitation of either the phenomenon or objects observed associated with them. Those persons or main performers involved directly in the celebration of the rites wore the forms of nature, religious characters or emblems associated with the God. The actor, or the medium was possessed and believed that the God took possessions at the height of ecstasy. So, such solemn rites of observance and performance were not only a mere imitation but also transfiguration. There were other rites known as grotesque rites chiefly involved with giving honour, respect and thanks for all the help as well as blessings they received.

On such occasions, the community used to spontaneously participate and react to the performances and celebrations. Scholars viewed the earliest western theatre forms to be closely connected with the solemn rites since the solemn rites always tended to preserve some links with its religious origins. It all began with simple imitation but in the process the rites and rituals became a part of the rigid tradition. And still today many such traditional forms mainly Africans and Asians preserved and cherished the linkage with ancient religious origin.
A closer look at the dances as early theatre developed from religious dances and rituals divulged that theatre was closely affiliated with nature. The mysterious and unknown environment comprehends them to establish contact with those sources of power in nature that seemed most destructive like extreme heat, cold, drought, flood and storm. Thus, the human body emulated and further simulated these activities of nature in body language, gesture and rhythmic movements. The dance steps were simple imitation of the nature’s events, which constitute the soul of all ritual activities. Emotions were later supplemented to it. In its course of growth, the dances were refined, specified and a strict code of conduct was formed. Further it became more stylized. The performance was not individualistic as the community participated by forming processions, executing certain steps and rhythms or by clapping and chanting. They assisted in the transformation though they themselves were not transformed.

The transition from tribal communities towards a society organized by the specialisation and division of labour had imposed massive bodily and mental restraints on man. It has however challenged all of the arts to serve not merely as a means of man’s self-expression but also to become an integral part of his cultures as they evolved.

The transformation from the dance rituals (specimen of which may be still observed in Asia, New Guinea and parts of Africa) to genres of make believed action with dialogue and formal narrative was difficult to examine, as there was little efforts to record the events and details of the changing social order. The people, however, preserved their rich experiences and transmitted verbally or orally to the next generations. The succeeding generation inherited the traditions with spontaneous innovations and modifications, as an immediate response to their present needs. The rituals underwent alteration with the gaining prominence of various fundamental principles of drama, dance, music, songs, costumes, mimetic action and community participation. Many of these elements within the ritual performances and ceremonial environment led to the growth of theatre. Thus, theatre and rituals existed together from the very beginning and theatre
was an important component of the primitive belief system of human civilization. Theatre, therefore, endured a long process of development, giving birth to theatrical genres.

EMERGENCE OF WESTERN THEATRE

With the passage of time in Europe, theatre and rituals soon separated. Rational man started questioning what religion, rituals, beliefs, life and death were all about. And the very essence of theatre was eventually taken as an art form to please and make people laugh. As Western theatre matured and grew more independent of its sacerdotal origins, the common man initiated to represent himself on the stage. The masses procured theatrical enjoyment from seeing themselves and people like themselves portrayed in different situations. This progression exhibited the changing tastes of the public and the efforts of the theatre people to keep abreast of the times.

Thus, in the west, theatre emerged as a whole mode of entertainment. Egyptian, Greek and Roman theatre emerged from the practices mainly dealt with rituals, burials ceremonies, processions, commemorations of dead pharaohs, pageantry, renewal of fertility, musical dancing performances and gladiatorial contests. Most of the theatre experts and historians looked upon the Greek theatre as distinct source for the emergence of western theatre and western drama. Theatre re-emerged later in the religious festivals of medieval Europe. The religious biblical performances (mainly performed by priest in churches to subvert the Pagan rites) loosened the supervision of the church and extended to the common people. The content of the play became secularised and by 19th century theatre turned democratic or at all events more middle class oriented.

Today, the term ‘Theatre’ has become extremely popular. As the usage of theatre is ever increasing, a body of scholars and experts are working on critical analysis and commentary, which is confounding to a common man. For an understanding of the conceptual richness and sharper articulation of the western theatre, it is vital to understand
the closeness and distinctiveness of theatre and drama as two different art forms. Theatre and drama are interdependent and at the same time can exist independently. Theatre exists as a performing art form when the actor expresses his inner feelings and thoughts by using the medium of spoken words, sounds, body movements, music, poetry, dance and mimes to the audience in a time and space framework. On the other hand drama can prevail as a literary art form or as a performance text in which the writer expresses an idea or thought by using the medium of literature. Although, the difference between drama and theatre is sometimes blurred. “In general it may be said that drama or the written text can be read and studied in solitude where theatre covers everything to do with the corporate activities of play going, and play representation, including the text”.6

Theatre, apart from the building, of presentation of plays in front of an audience also amalgamated all the elements, which undertake that presentation. Yet, theatre and drama are interdependent as one is meaningless if isolated from the other. But each theatre form has its own elements of drama. The intimate nexus of Drama and Theatre and yet its differences has always posed certain problems in determining the concept of Theatre. Drama emerged with the performance of the plays written by Sophocles, Aeschylus etc in the 5th century B.C., whereas the existence of ritualistic pre theatrical forms were traced to prehistoric time. They still survived in many parts of Asia and Africa in the traditional theatre forms. Drama has been used to mean “all written plays regardless of their genre or forms”.7 Drama is a play that is specifically written for achieving total action derived by the transaction of audience and actor.8 The Western theatre or popularized as Aristotelian model of theatre in which written play and spoken words predominate is coined as “Drama Theatre” by the noted scholar of theatre Darko Survin.9 The perplexity arises when theatre is strongly supported by drama (i.e. written play). On this basic argument the scholars of western theatre and Asian theatre tends to differentiate their viewpoints.
The non-Western practices of theatrical performances or events were unknown to the western scholars. Only later in late 19th century and early 20th century, the Western theatrical theorist discovered the prevalence of an extraordinary human performance that they categorized as ‘Oriental theatre’. Antonin Artaud who came across the western theatrical practices in Bali and Cambodia became “one of the inspired mythologizers of the oriental theatre”10. He had writings on the Balinese and Cambodian dances and what concerned him was “the other culture that is non Western and non contemporary”.11 Artaud’s legacy remained the term Oriental theatre - a term Antonin created to evoke a magical storehouse of ancient rhythms and gestures shared by diverse theatres from the East.12 The term Oriental theatre was accustomed to denote what the Western theatre was not, by reinforcing its cosmic, metaphysical and supernatural elements.

Most of the early performances of the East were mainly ethnic Dance Theatre, dance essentially is one of symbolic gestures. The ethnic theatre forms express not only the philosophy and mastery over time and space but also the self through movements of exquisite control and manifold meaning. Unlike the movements and gestures of the face as seen in Western theatre, “Gesture in Asian Theatre does not supersede language but it often carries on where language leaves off”.13

Some of the major traditional theatre forms of India like Bharat Natyam, Kathak Kali, Kathak and Manipuri dance all originated in either religious background or folklore. The dancing and chanting of religious rituals not only were “carried over into the performance of drama, but in the Far East remained an essential part of it. In South East Asia, in fact traditional plays with human actors are exclusively in form of ceremonial dance drama”.14 The traditional forms are an entire repertoire of complex vigorous movements, acrobatic agility and expressing a diverse range of emotions and thoughts. Most of these forms are a fusion of song and drama with complete symbolic movements
indicating specific meanings. Patterns are designed for the concerned roles too.

The ethnic dance theatre later became sophisticated as attempts were made to express the emotions. Dance was one such medium adopted to convey the climactic expression of the act. Dance, music and songs, make the oriental theatres intensely metaphorical. The colours and designs of the costumes are equally symbolic. The movements and gestures are choreographed and codified. The acting is subtle and their skills surpassed anything known in Europe. The modes of dialogue delivery are varied, either in declamatory, rhythmic speech, repeated lines at times recited or in a very musical style and in most of the performance the narratives sung by the sutra or chorus are interwoven with the dialogues of the actors.

Elaborate conventions are evolved which substitute the need for scenery or stage properties. Climbing a hill, riding a horse, expression of anger, love, repentance, etc. are shown by using Signs and symbolic objects. The treatment of time and space in Asian context is vital in understanding the religious thought as they are not treated in terms of realistic representation as in the case of Western theatre. For example, flags are waved to represent wind, banners indicate army, place is identified by emblems, change of place by the mime of the actors or by special properties like the Chinese tasselled horsewhip.

The elaborate painting on the face and body is a unique feature in most of the Asian theatre forms as it enlarged the scope of the mimetic expression. The painted face remarkably indicates character determined by the particular colours and lines of the makeup. The character's social status, qualities and temperament are demonstrated by the splendid hardness of the makeup. In the overall performance, colour symbolism is one of the main aspects of Asian performances. Thus, "understanding the Asian Theatre forms requires the knowledge of performances and theatre is equated with performance not literature."
Music at all times is a significant element in the Asian theatre. Music in Asian theatrical perspectives has evolved an independent entity with the assimilation of the elements and techniques of various sources. It determines the mood, rhythm, pace of the theatrical developments and bring forth the background of the dramatic action. In the performances or religious ceremonies, instrumental music introduces the leading players or actors, who perform an explanatory prologue. The orchestra consists of flute, drums, cymbals and gongs. Of all these instruments the drum music is vital as it accentuates the body movements build up the rhythm and mood of the performance. It accompanies the chanted dialogue during performance and maintains a tempo that help the actors in the execution of their movements. Dance in some of the forms is highly stylized with codified dance stances and movements.

The traditional theatre thus, becomes a distinct characteristic of oriental theatre as mentioned in the works of Beril De Zoete, A.C. Scott, James R. Brandon, Faubion Bowers, etc. although Jerzy Grotowski called it as “poor theatre” as it is without the paraphernalia of realistic stagecraft, script, costume and make up. In spite of the development of modern theatre, the traditional theatres continued to dominate throughout the 20th century in Asia, with equal importance of dance, music and symbolic gestures signifying an aesthetic mode of communication. The traditional theatres are still performed with or without written text. The themes revolve around well-known stories from mythic tales or ceremonial and folklore art of ancient rich heritage. Much of dramatic form among non literate peoples consists of “ceremonies that enact various myths or recapitulate group experience of an earlier day; or that comprise rituals demanded by the current system of belief to achieve ends held imperative for survival, such as ensuring rainfall or fertility or victory in combat”.

The existing study of Non European forms therefore is still fragmentary and superficial. The Balinese theatre was not “a revelation of a verbal but a physical idea of theatre where drama is encompassed within the limits of everything that can happen on stage
independently of a written text". Most of the oriental countries under colonial rule experienced European influence either in the form of education, philosophy, thoughts, art, etc. Somehow the strong presence of ethnic beliefs, values and ethno philosophical tradition of the oriental culture could withstand the external forces to a great extent. The European ascendancy cannot divert oriental theatre from the core rituals and its roots in totality. Many cultic ceremonies and highly dramatic ritual performances still survive retaining their traditions and rituals.

**Difference in Eastern and Western theatres:**

From the common roots in prehistory grew two divergent branches or traditions, the theatre of the East and the theatre of the West. Each has its distinctive set of conventions. In modern times, the two groups of theatre remain fundamentally separate both in the form and content though both Western and Asian retained the commonality of basic characteristics of theatre. There is a misconception that theatre can only be studied, discussed and analysed in terms of the drama or script. Western scholars like Antonin Artaud opined Western theatre in terms of the physical reflection of script. The aspects of theatre like realism, contemporaneity, clear dialogue or rational portrayal of immediate problems to connect the stage with the people’s day-to-day life are the primary western conceptions. In Asian theatrical performances, dance absorbed the dramatic elements and overpowered any compulsion to the above western primary aspects. As against the western interpretation the acting, singing and dancing of the Asian forms bring out the implication of the text more enduring impression and stronger impact on the audience.

However, theatre in general has certain basic components and characteristics. To quote Melville Herskovits, “Yet there is one feature that all forms of dramatic expression have in common, whether simple or complex, performed by specialists or the group as a whole manifested in the open air performance of non literate folk, or in the modern
theatre. All performances have structure; all manifest the unities that distinguish any artistic production. There is beginning and an end. There is a sequence in time and in incident. There is a sense of progression of climax”. Despite such generally accepted features, to evaluate or examine all kinds of theatre through one school of thought is impossible to fully identify and if done, it would be a truly wrong approach. Pemina O Mlama in the study on ‘Digubi’ – a ritual performance of initiating the girls into adulthood commonly practised in Tanzania - clearly remarked the problem in tackling the basic elements of African theatre through the western point of view of looking into theatre as a mode of entertainment. Pemina claims the ‘Digubi’ – initiation rite as a kind of theatre due to the inherent presence of theatrical elements, which however question the Western thinking and model of determining theatre.

The theatre forms in Asia and Africa do not conform to the uniformity in motivation, aim, execution and techniques as involved in Western theatre. The new Eastern oriented school brings up the rich indigenous theatrical performances under serious observation and stressed the need to redefine the concept of theatre from the eastern worldview. Scholars are identifying the problems where the Western drama and theatre cannot be the only means to study and access the indigenous or native theatre forms as the latter do not adhere to the western concept. The serious intellectual development has emphasised the basic theatrical elements in the varied traditional theatre forms, which later on proved to be an incentive in attracting the attention of the Western scholars towards Eastern Theatre.

One can see the trend of considering and analyzing the Asian approach to theatres in the West. Quite lately, Western visionaries such as Artaud, Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Brecht responded to the wholeness of Asian that embraced all possible expressive means. “Asian drama on the whole has remained more traditional and the repertoire more permanent than theatre in the west. The emphasis came to be on how a passage was acted not on what was being acted. This is almost antithetical to the Western concept of theatre where
we want to hear and understand every word of the play.21

ELEMENTS OF THEATRE:

Apart from all the differences, theatre in a broad sense reveals certain basic characteristics. It consists of a performance (content) by an actor or the performer, on a certain area or a space and which is viewed by a group of people or audience in a particular time. In theatrical terms it refers to content, space, performer, audience and time. A specified theme is displayed on theatrical performances. It may be based on intense acting, dance, music or the reflection of the culture of a society past or present or what is being observed in every day-to-day life. The actors are performing the self of the audience live on the stage. This gives a sense of participation to the audience. Similarly the art of theatre is concerned with expressing the most profound thoughts and feelings of the actors about the story or theme they are enacting, so that the audience may partake in the event.

The art of theatre therefore involves the close co-operation of many people. Each theatre form has its main criteria but there are some basic universal components of theatre that are to be common in all forms - Actor, Audience, Space and Content. Different theatre activists have put their opinions in ranking the basic components of theatre. The dominant expression so far as the audience can tell is nearly always that of the actor as the most integral part of the performance. In any concept of theatre, the crux of the performance is the actor. The author depends on the actor to reach out his text to the audience as living action. The audience for that reason depends on the actors as through them the ideas or the content are fully manifested either in words, gestures or deeds. The dramatic art (regardless of its types), takes its essence from the mimetic talent of the actor and its quality, to which the talent is put by the society that develops and rewards it.22 The relationship between the actor and the society of which he forms a part is itself responsible for the pattern of birth, growth and decay within every period of the theatre’s
In most of Asian traditional theatres the performance is actor-centric. The actor is the source of conveying the subject to the audience. In Asian theatre, the actor must be a singer, dancer, acrobat and good in mimes. His every gesture must be charged with meanings and must conform to the known convention. In most of the performances, the actor is the lyricist, singer, dancer, choreographer or director. The performer needs to be a skilled artist fulfilling the performance codes of the theatre form. Consequently, in the traditional theatre genres the vision of a director, which is essential in western theatre, is not that important.

The actors and other participants are capable of self-directing and the actor must have an exceptional good voice. For that reason Western scholars often called it “actor’s theatre” as it is focused more on the larger aesthetic of received structure. Female impersonation is a special branch of acting too. “The traditional oriental actor, on the other hand bases himself on an organic and well tested body of absolute advice that is rules of art which resembles the laws of a code; they modify a style of action closed into it and to which all the actors of a particular genre must conform”.23

As theatre is a collaborative art, “performance is always performed ‘for’ someone”.24 Theatre more then most arts depends, upon audience response that recognizes and validates it as performance. If the house is not full it loses force. If a performance is going well the members of the audience tend to subordinate their separate identities to that of the crowd. The audience personality is much more emotional.

The effectiveness of a theatrical performance never depends solely upon the excellence of a text. Theatrical art succeeds to the degree that excitement is engendered in the audience, a factor that is unrelated to the intellectual idea of the text. The closely packed audience generates more concentration and excitement. In open stage, the actors are
nearer to the audiences and can therefore be heard and seen. The performance thereby is appreciated more as an event jointly shared and created by the audience and the actors. Theatre performance also requires space. The shape, size and type of space can vary according to the mode of the theatrical production. The space has the potential of being reshaped and redecorated for each new scene or performance. Several theatrical artistes and services are used in the articulation and shaping of the space. Apart from the manipulation of space, according to scenes, the actor within their bodies designed the additional visuals to the space. Richard Schechner put up the interesting feature of (Indian traditional theatre forms especially Ramleela) the space utilization where the whole shifting and movement of the performance takes place from one space to another involving the same actors and audience. Taken inspiration from such theatre forms, Richard Schechner in his later productions breaks the barrier between performers and audiences.

The theatre auditor is the component which appeals to the ear like the spoken word, poetry, music, etc. It directly makes statement to the ear. The component of movement, though heavily depend on vision directly appeals to sense of motion in space-time framework. It means the visible space transverse by the actor’s movements or motion in actual time. Thus, theatre combines space and time through body movements or motion. What is essential is a human body in visible space. The body makes a total statement if accompanied by sound, voice, music and a meaningful stage setting. Even in the absence of a stage setting, “if a moving body or the actor still remains, we are still in the presence of theatrical art. In short, the theatre’s essential ingredient is the actor not as a speaker or recitor of lines but as a deed maker.” Therefore, in performances before an audience, the essential values of each element of any theatrical performances should be present with equal effort. The realism does not interest the Asian audience as it lacks the vital theatricality of familiar traditional forms.
TYPES OF THEATRE:

James R. Brandon has identified 3 types of theatre that have been nourished by its distinct social milieus. The 1st type is *elite form of theatre* or *court supported theatre* form. This type of theatre flourished with the patronage of the ruling classes propounding the ideology of rulers and audience mainly for the elite groups. In the past it was court theatrical forms performed mainly for court occasions and festivals. The rituals demonstrating performance highlight the social values and cultural traditions. The forms are codified, well structured and nourished by the palatial institutions. Such court supported theatre forms exist in the form of traditional theatres of the concerned society, enriching its traditions. Though in the later period, the, court which had supported the art forms survived with the patronage and support of the audience.

The second type is *folk theatre* that is created by the local villagers turned performers. Such performances are ritual oriented festivals and religious civic rites. It expresses the unity of the local community too. The third category is *commercial theatre* that has emerged in urban environment for the public audiences. Commercial troupes are performed. The subject matter and style have to respond directly to the audience tests. The three broad demarcations however in its historical course entertain certain changes in the form and context. Today the word theatre is used in the extended modern sense with epithets like Chinese, Indian, American and European used in conjunction with it, to characterize the style of text, organization, setting, building, costume, etc. We need to understand the long and illustrious histories of the world theatre as theatre depend differently due to varied time and settings.

Theatre became international and worldwide in the beginning of the 20th century. In Western Europe however gentility continued between the two world wars to be dominant aims of fashionable theatre. Many experiments were made in the use of symbols,
expressionism, epic theatre, absurd theatre, documentaries and environmental production. But the importance of realism in both the staging and writing remained important. In Europe it was not until after 2nd world war ended in 1945 that deep changes in social structure became apparent. By the 1950’s theatre everywhere was making efforts to reflect and to interest a wider section of society. By that time however audiences at all level had lost the habit of theatre going and were fast losing the habit of movie going as television was becoming the popular medium of drama. Theatre began to be developed, to be directed not to any one class in society or to any one-income group but rather toward anyone who was prepared for the energetic collaboration in the creative act that the art demands.

SOME ASPECTS OF ASIAN THEATRE: INDIA, CHINA AND OTHERS.

The traditional theatres of Asia are varied and can be dealt separately. But many Asian countries share common theatrical principles and conventions. Each reflects “the language, religious views, social structures and daily lives of the people – artists and audiences – who have created it. Each is distinguished by its own construction of music, movement, acting style and staging conventions and by dramatic content and form”. In Asia the logical beginning of theatre is made in India. India was considered as the source of most theatre in Asia and still remains the immediate origin of some of its highly evolved and important arts. “The use of poetry, dance and mime, the intermingling of the epic and lyric poetry and narrative and dramatic story material, freedom from the unities of time and place, emphasis on poetic imagination, a highly stylized and choreographic style of acting illuminating the gestures, poses and movements of the actors, conventions of speech, such as the alteration of prose and usage dialogues, a stylized, recitative and rhythmic mode of delivery and multiplicity of delivery patterns, the use of chorus and narrators and a variety of stage conventions - which are the main features of the Indian
classical and folk theatrical traditions characterise all Asian Drama, and it is these features and elements which give to the Asian theatre a systematic composite and a total character”.

Indian theatre has three stages of growth beginning with Sanskrit theatre, continuing through the rural theatre form and concluding with modern theatre. Fragments of the earliest known Sanskrit plays have been traced to the 1st century A.D. It suggested a living theatre tradition must have existed in India at a somewhat earlier date. The most important single source for establishing the character of the Sanskrit theatre tradition in ancient India is the vast compendium—a treatise on theatre or *Natya Shastra*, attributed to Bharat Muni and variously dated between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. *Natya* means drama or theatre and *Shastra* is a generic term referring to any authoritarian text. It is however to be taken into consideration the problems in ascertaining what actually compose the Indian traditional theatre. In traditional theatre there are two aspects or style of acting as laid down in *Natyashastra* in the Indian context i.e. *Natya dharmi* and *Lok dharmi*. The *Natya dharmi* or the classical form is referred as a classical presentation usually organized by a high feudal power with the practices, codification, and immense aesthetic values and exhibitory of a high civilization order. This conventional type receives almost exclusive attention in the text.

The other category *Lok dharmi* or folk form is mostly popular and community oriented with a loose structure and minimal codification. Many performance turns in different geographical regions retained these popular forms without being influenced by the higher principles. Kapila Vatsyayan also commented on the two principal modes of presentation. “The chiseled stylization of the first is derived by a sensitive refining of the reality into the suggestive dynamics of the theatre; the second allows for somewhat freer relationships of word, sound and movement”.

Sanskrit theatre was performed to celebrate important religious occasions in connection
with temple festivals. It served as a model of ideal human behaviour, the plots being considered as the body of the play. Sanskrit drama to the world literature contributed its aesthetic theory. The theory of sentiment (Rasa) relates to the audience perception of the theatre event as well as the contribution of the theatre artist to the process. Every play had dominant emotions that produced corresponding sentiments in the audience. The classical Sanskrit dramas witnessed its decline around 10th century A.D with the emergence of the Muslim rule in India.

The theatre forms were flourished by the particular belief system and cultural influences of different Asian regions, which led to the growth and development of new theatrical genres. The Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Jataka tales became the theme for the varied traditional theatrical expression.33 Theatre based on these themes is found in Bali, Java, Wayang in Indonesia and Malaysia, Khon in Thailand, Nangsbek in Cambodia, etc. most of the Asian theatre forms till today are based on many myths and legends. Ten of thousands of “plays throughout Asia and the pacific dramatise religious beliefs, religious myths, legends and stories, characters of saints, gods, spirits and demons and underlying religious worldviews provide the material of traditional drama in all countries”. 34

Natyashastra and its basic principles of the classical status are percolated in varied regions organizing theatrical forms like Kathakali, kuttiyattam, Teyyam, Yakshagana, Ankia Nat, and Raas leela (Manipur) as followed according to Natya dharma. The above-mentioned forms are also called as Dance Theatre by the West due to the performative principles mainly dance, music and ritualistic elements in sanctified environment. Beginning around the 15th century A.D., theatre emerged again in India through dazzling array of the village theatre form in its own unique and more importantly in vernacular languages to cater the needs of the people. Sanskrit theatre has exhibited a national character because of the widespread use of Sanskrit at the court and in the temple. Rural theatre forms did not travel beyond the boundaries of their communities in which they
were originated. A phenomenon took place between 15th to 19th centuries, where forms of theatre developed in virtually every pocket of the subcontinent.

Chinese dramatic performances go back to the ancient times and were of ritualistic origin. Different dynasties that ruled in China shaped the development of theatre. There was undoubtedly change during the period improving the performance techniques and other theatrical aspects that led to improvement into the totality of theatre. The main forms of Chinese theatre were classical drama (Kunqu – early musical style), song drama or modern opera (Gjiju), spoken drama in westernized form (Hunji) and one of the early 19th century popular form of drama – Peking opera or popularized as the Beijing opera. Peking opera became the most dominant Chinese traditional theatre forms. The performance structures are musical or operatic, expressive, secular (the subject matter mainly derived from legends, historical anecdotes, novels etc.

Choreographic with minimum stage properties and elaborate conventional symbols. There is a synthesis and synchronization of song and dance movements, stylized, gestures, mannerisms and speech. The acrobatics like cartwheels, somersaults, timely kicking, throwing, catching etc. are important in the enactments. The characters are identified by the viewers through the techniques of symbolic gestures of the actor.

Beijing opera’s main characteristics are the complex face and body painting, stage properties, singing and speaking in falsetto accompanied by an orchestra seated on stage. The faces are painted with contrasting colours that hold significant meanings. The stage properties are of symbolic properties and pantomime is used to solve scenic complexities. The elaborate costumes indicate the social status of the characters like red for high class and blue for commoners. The movements are with grace and elegance. The musical rhythms convey the moods.

Likewise China, Japan and other South East Asian countries had rich traditional
performing heritage. *Noh & Kabuki* are important genres of Japan. *Noh or No* is the classical theatre form of Japan, which originated in pre Buddhist period with only one true personage as the protagonist. The *Wayang Kulit, Wayang Beber* and *Wayang Topeng* of Java originated in the traditions of ancestor worship ancient culture. *Barong* of Bali, *Lakon* of Thailand, *Nat Pwe, Nat Kadaw* (very similar to Manipur’s Lai Haraoba) of Burma and other theatre forms of India, Philippines etc. almost have same kind of origin. The *Topeng* of Bali is given as offerings in festivals and religious occasions.

A major catalyst for the re-emergence of theatre in India was *vaishnavism*, a religious movement that is based on Bhakti or devotion. Many theatre forms arose at varied places and times to address the needs of *vaishnavism* for example *Ankiya Nat, Raas Leela, Kuchipudi, Krishnaattam*, etc. “In Indian classical Theatre each act can be performed separately, many folk plays are performed as serials. Rama and Krishna cycle plays are divided into several drama-days. Freedom from the laws of dramatic unities helps in enlarging thematic range of drama and makes possible the multiplicity and simultaneity of action”.^35^ Most of rural theatre forms in India begins with preliminaries and conclude with rituals and the content mainly derived from Hindu Mythology. Some of these forms arose as an expansion of religious zeal and have since made the transition to most secular concerns. Dozens of other regional traditional forms today are played in commercial environs for example, *Jatra, Kathakali, Tamasha, Yakshagana* etc.

Most of the south Indian forms lay stress on dance and indeed some of them qualified as dance dramas, such as Kathakali and Krishnaattam. The north Indian forms emphasise song and those that lay stress on dialogue are *Jatras* of Bengal. Amazing arrays of puppet theatre forms are also part of the heritage on Indian village. Dramatic content may be found in the various solo forms of Indian classified dance like *Bharat natyam*. Dramatic content is rich in ritual ceremonies of some areas particularly *Teyyam*. 
In the post modern era the Western theatre works are developing closeness with the Asian and African theatre. The affinity however has all the more given a chance to reassess, re-examine and to define the traditional theatre. Very recently different interpretations of Asian theatre and African theatre are taken seriously to promote more understanding of the components of the various traditional theatre forms of the Asian and African countries. It highlights the importance of the participatory theatre in fulfilling the ends.

For almost two centuries, the British culture had swept theatre all over India with their plays. Within the Indian theatre world, Manipur has distinctive traditional theatre forms, which are yet to be refined and exposed to the larger world. The study of Manipuri traditional theatre shall have to be emphasised within the realm of Eastern or Asian theatre by virtue of its geography, cultural affiliation, racial and psychological characteristics of its people. In this light the study of the regional traditional theatre forms of Manipur has its relevance and importance.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Dramatic literature in India is an age-old genre in the literary world. Its history dates back to *Rig Veda*, which is the most ancient among Indian literary productions and the oldest of the Vedic collections. Drama in India is as old as the Indian customs and it has, at least, one of its main roots in proto-ballad poetry. The evolutionary evidence of Indian dramaturgy is seen in Vedic era down through the epic, *puranic*, Buddhist and Jaina literature and, we are obligated to map out the origin of old Indian epics in it. Like the way ballads afforded the essential basis for developing the epics, drama took its roots from the dramatic elements of the same ballads in which stories of gods and demi-gods in sacrifices and feasts were narrated.

Drama in India had begun its journey with the Sanskrit plays. A. L. Basham, a prominent historian, has opined that “the origin of Indian theatre is still obscure. It is certain, however, that even in the Vedic period dramatic performances of some kind were given, and passing references in early resources point to the enactment at festivals of religious legends” (Basham 434-435). Vedic collections have presented a lurid picture of dramatic theatre and in them are found the *Samhita* which has fifteen hymns written in a dialogue form, invested with the principle materials for drama. According to the legend, Mahendra and other gods went to Brahma, the Creator, with an entreaty that he creates a pastime that would be shared by all mankind. The Creator had extracted the words from the *Rigveda*, music and songs from the *Sama Veda*, the quality of acting from the *Yajur Veda* and aesthetic flavor from the *Atharva Veda* and composed the *Natya Veda* dealing with the poetics...
of theatre. Indian natya is said to have a unique beginning, having a unique feature and well sealed in Nātyaśāstra.

1. Nātyaśāstra

Indian dramatic traditions are preserved in the Nātyaśāstra, the oldest of the texts of the theory of drama, whose authorship has being believed to be Bharata Manu. Nātyaśāstra claims for the drama divine origin and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. We can clearly perceive from Nātyaśāstra that Bharata is not only familiar with the Vedas and their status in the hierarchy of knowledge, but is also acquainted with the content, substance and form of each. He has also recognized the authority of the Vedas and this has virtually enabled him to carve out the theory of his own by basing on them. K. Vatsyayan has commented on Bharata’s Nātyaśāstra in the following words:

Important is the fact that he identifies pathya, the articulated spoken word, not just the word (sabda) from the Rgveda. The incanted word, the spoken word and its transmission, is a fundamental premise. So also is the case with identifying the Yajurveda as the source of ritual and body language and gestures. Vedic yajna as a per-formative act is considered as a base (Vatsyayan 12-14).

The Nātyaśāstra of Bharata is the principle work of dramatic theory, encompassing dance and music, in classical India. It is believed to have been written during the period between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. “The Natyashastra is the outcome of several centuries of theatrical practice by hereditary actors, who passed their tradition orally from generation to generation. It is in the form of a loose dialogue between Bharata and a number of munis who approach him, asking about nāṭyaveda” (“Natya Shastra” <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org> ).
The *Nātyaśāstra* discusses a wide range of topics, from issues of literary construction, to the structure of the stage (*mandapa*), to a detailed analysis of musical scales and movements (*murchhanas*), to an analysis of dance forms that considers several categories of body movements and their effect on the viewer. It posits that drama has originated because of the conflicts that arose in society when the world declined from the Golden Age (*Kṛta Yuga*) of harmony, and, therefore, drama has always represented a conflict and its resolution. Bharata’s theory of drama refers to *bhavas*, the imitations of emotions that the actors perform, and the *rasas* (emotional responses) that they inspire in the audience. The eight basic *bhavas* (emotions) are: love, humor, energy, anger, fear, grief, disgust and astonishment. By observing and imagining these emotions, the audience experiences eight principle responses, or *rasas*: love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy. The text contains a set of precepts on the writing and performance of dance, music and theater and, its primary dealing on stagecraft has influenced Indian music, dance, sculpture, painting and literature as well. Therefore, the *Nātyaśāstra* is considered the foundation of the fine arts in India.

If drama is born of the divine, it has a causal origin of a happening in no time, a revelation, an intuitive experience. It has a form and structure and, the primary sense perception of sound and speech are its tools. “It deals with the visible and audible, employs body and language (gestures), speech, music, dress, costume and an understanding of psychic states, which involuntarily reflect themselves in the physical body, e.g., tears, horrification, etc., to express and convey meaning and emotive states” (Vatsyayan 48). Bharata has drawn the inspiration from his familiarity with structure and detailed methodology of the *yajna* in conceiving and visualizing his theatrical universe.
He has brought forth the metaphor of bija (seed) to explicate his theory of aesthetics. The tree grows from a seed and, flowers and fruits, in which is contained the seed; the parts distinct and different from each other but are inextricably related, having something from the same source. The interrelatedness and interdependence of the part and the whole is basic and fundamental. The process of growth, the proliferation of each part being different and distinct, and yet developing from the unitary source, is fundamental. Bharata has accepted and assimilated this concept not only as a central principle but also as an enunciation of the process of artistic expression and communication. The metaphor is not watertight and, therefore, is not to be extended literally and this is an invisible foundation of the text of Nātyaśāstra. Theatre is an organism just as life is an organism in which different parts make up the complete whole and they are inextricably linked, though each organ is distinctly different from the other.

K. Vatsyayan has also made an intensive scrutiny on the text of Bharata’s Nātyaśāstra. He has explained that “the Nātyaśāstra does not refer to either purusa or to the elements explicitly. However, a close reading of the text makes it clear that the structure of ‘drama’ is in itself a purusa, a structure of different parts and limbs where each part is related to the whole. The physical, psychical, individual, social, horizontal and vertical dimensions are interconnected” (Vatsyayan 52). The concept of Nātyaśāstra, therefore, is of the same kind with the concept of purusa. Different parts of the body make up the whole man and absence of a part makes an incomplete man. In short, body and mind are interdependent. They are mutually effective and affective. Intellection is vital in man but senses, feeling and sensibility are elemental.
Bharata’s worldview has evolved from his acquaintance and understanding of the world-view of the Upanishads. The Kathopanisad speaks of the hierarchical considerations of man and life. It is given that:

Higher than the senses (and their objects) is the manas (mind), more excellent than the manas, the sattvam (intellect); above the intellect soars the mahatman (great soul) and higher than the mahatman is the avyakta (unmanifest); and higher than the avyakta is the Supreme Soul (purusa here, could also be Brahman) (Kathopanisad, Valli III, Verses 10-11).

The Upanishad, which is considered the most refined avowal of a worldview and thought on the nature of the universe and man, makes it clear that placing the Supreme Soul on the pinnacle of the hierarchy is not a life denying worldview. In fact, it is conscious of the process of a gradual refinement from one plane to the other and the need for restraint and refinement. Bharata has adhered to this worldview when he spoke of sight (eye) and hearing (ear). Through these two elements, human endeavour towards greater refinement is made possible.

Bharata’s theatrical universe has built its basis from here. The audible and visible worlds are the lifeline of a drama and theatre, as it was opined by Vatsyayan that “the senses and the sense-organisms and perceptions play a crucial role in the evolution of the theory, as also the techniques of each of the four instrumentalities of expression – sound, word (vacika) and body language (angika), décor and dress (aharya), internal states (sattvika)” (Vatsyayan 55).

Bharata has created an analogue to the physical layout of yajna at the level of structure. In yajna, as it is in sala, vedis (altars) of different sizes and shapes are built comprising both concurrent and sequential action, accompanied by multiple media for the purpose of replicating the cosmos.
Nātyaśāstra and its different chapters with divisions and components are the ritual altars of this grand and complex design. Like the yajna, the dramatic spectacle has an ethical and moral purpose. It has the path of stirring up dharma (moral duty), artha (economic wellbeing), kama (refine sensibility) and moksa (liberation). Therefore, arts are an alternate, if not a parallel, path for an avowed goals of a culture which move concurrently on the three levels of the adhibhautika (material), adhyatmika (individual soul) and adhidaivika (metaphysical).

Moving further into the text and context of the Nātyaśāstra, the book which has been divided into thirty six chapters, can be regrouped into three sections for the purpose of explicating the art and its form. The first is artistic experience, then the artistic content or states of being, the modes of expression through word, sound, gesture, dress, decorations and methods of establishing correspondences between physical movement, speech and psychical states, as also the communication and reception by the audience or readers and, lastly the structure of the dramatic form, popularly translated as plot.

The artistic experience is viewed from the direction of the creator who may be the writer, poet, artist, singer, painter, architect and interpreter. But in this case, it is the character or the actor, singer, the executor of the architectural design. Bharata has said, “Thus, the events (vārta) relating to the people in all their different conditions, should be included in a play, by those well versed in the canons of drama (natyaveda)” (Chapter XXXVI, verse 123). In verse 128 of the same chapter, it is said that “The men who know in this order the art of histrionic representation and apply it on the stage, receive in this world the highest honour for putting into practice the theory or essence of drama (natyattva) as well as acting (abhinaya).” It also includes the
spectator and the receiver. Therefore, Bharata has consciously felt that dramatists should take them into account while producing and enacting a stage play. He has said, “The people have different dispositions, and on their dispositions the drama rests. Hence, playwrights and producers (prayoktr) should take the people as their authority” (Chapter XXVI, verse 126). This is so, because rules regarding the feelings and activities of the world cannot all be exhaustively formulated by the śāstra. As a matter of fact, people are the critics and authority as regards the rules of the art.

The artistic content is the mid-wife of artistic experience; it facilitates an abstraction of life into its primary emotions and sentiments. The specificity of the individual, like the emotive particularity, is secondary because each is but a carrier of the primary abstracted state of love, hatred and the like. These, then are the content of art, known by their familiar terms, the eight or nine rasas or sentiments and their expressions as dominant states (sthāyi bhāvas). Herein is recognized the two connected levels; the non-duality of the undifferentiated and the differentiated states of diversity and multiplicity. Finally, “the plot is the potential of the artistic work to evoke a similar, if not identical, undifferentiated state of release and emancipation (svatantrya) in the spectator and reader from the immediate so-muchness of life” (Vatsyayan 60).

Theatre is a flexible space with the potential of being transformed into space of any order. The structure of the theatre is a micro-model of the cosmos and its source is the Upanishad. A micro-cosmic model is replicated through the construction of the site, the laying of the foundation, of the theatre, the construction of the stage and the division into central and peripheral areas. Chapter three of the Nātyaśāstra is about the methodology of consecrating the physical space so created. This hallowed cosmic space requires a puja which is universal, whether it is a yajna or temple, stupa,
church or mosque. This shows that Bharata is not only creating a religious drama of a particular class, caste or denomination. His intent in consecrating the space is to prepare the actors or performers and spectators to be transported into the world of the imagination and simultaneously to the divine and the heavenly. It is in this way the terrestrial and the celestial are being interconnected.

Bharata has made a deeper study into the representation of universal by particulars through abstraction. The abstraction of life into vyabhicare bhavas, rasas and staaya bhava is basic and universal to the human. It is not culture specific, individual or particular. They are, in fact, embodiments of the universal human psychical states. He has also presented the creative ability of dramatists through his exploration of life with its sheer joy or pleasure, pain or pathos, wonder or amazement and their mutual interplay. The phenomenon of psychic states and their manifestation through distinctive modes of speech, body language, gesticulation, dress, costume and the like are the universal elements of life which constitute the core theme of a creative art.

Bharata has considred vacika or articulated word as the body (tanu) of a drama and believed in the efficacy of words and its effect on the listener or audience. In M.M. Ghosh’s edition of Nātyaśāstra, it is said that in the literary world “the sastras are made up of words, rests on words, hence there is nothing beyond words, and words are at the source of everything” (Chapter XV, verse 3). Bharata has minutely analyzed the principle units of structures, nouns, verbs, particles, propositions, nominal suffixes, compound words, euphonic combinations and case endings. He has critically placed the importance of verse and prose, metre and rhyme as well as syllables, rhythm and feet in couplets in the artistic composition of poetry or drama. The purpose of such meticulous choice and care in drama is to convey the moods
and sentiments, and present the emotive states appropriately. “Agreeable and appropriate words in a play are like the adornment (alamkara) of swans on a lotus lake; inappropriate ones have the incongruity of a pair of courtesan and ascetic brāhmaṇa” (Vatsyayan 71).

Bharata has moved from the explication of words and language effects (in poetry and drama) to the mode of address and intonation. The description of the modes of address provides an insight into human interaction and social status. He has related the use of specific notes (in intonation) to specific moods or sentiments. He has even identified three voice registers (sthāna) called the breast (uras), throat (kantha) and head (śiras), from which emerges the three pitches and the relative ascending and descending orders are indicated. He has also referred to the accents (udāṭta): grave (anudāṭṭa), circumflex (svarita) and quivering (kampita). These are related to the specific sentiments and moods. Bharata’s purpose of bringing about the basic components of notes, registers, pitches and tempos is to relate them to specific sentiments and moods and, also to prepare the audience for a detailed enumeration on music (sangīta).

The theatrical structure of Bharata does not move in an ascending line of beginning, conflict climax and denouement. The structure is based on the concept of bija which moves in a circular manner with a series of concentric circles, all over-layered and connected to each other. Bharata has assimilated the concept of purusa and used the terms bija and bindu (point) systematically throughout his text in dealing with natya. These are the unifying forces of his overall structure.

In terms of shape and form of a drama, three categories are recognized: avasthā or state, arthaprakṛti or progression or movement of the theme and sandhi or junctures. Abstracting them into a geometrical form and considering
their movement in a circular pattern, movement from the centre to the periphery or vice versa and centres of the two types of movements, converging and coinciding, are inevitable happenings. Varied forms of dramatic structure are evidently possible in a drama. This is possible if each category is considered as a volume or a solid mass (ghana). Besides, if they are multi-layered, and can be joined together in a number of configurations, permutations and combinations, infinite variety of dramas are possible.

In Avastha, the movement is from the point of view of the hero or the chief protagonist. This has been vividly seen from ārambha or beginning, prayatna or effort, praptisambhava or the possibility of attainment, niyataphaloprapti or the possibility of resolution but not of certainty of overcoming of obstacles or conflict and, finally, plalayoga or plalagama which is fruition. From the point of view of the hero’s progressive movement toward a goal, there is a linearity but is subsumed in the overall circular structure. The arthaprakṛti is the nature of the movement of the essential theme. Bharata has employed the metaphor of bija and bndu, whose nature of development is akin to an organism which sprouts, grows and reaches a point of fruition. This progression, like the hero’s movement, is also linear and vertical which is pervasive and permeating without losing the connection at any point of different tempos. Then there is the third and the most important concept called the sundhis (joint or juncture). This is responsible for weaving together the elements of progression, permeation and proliferation of a hero or theme without breaking the connectedness.

Having narrated the characteristics and components of the dramatic form called nataka, Bharata has emphasized the fact that drama presents and re-narrates ideas through expression (abhinaya). In chapter XXI, he has put it clearly that the success of this remains in the possibility of self abnegation, or
more appropriately only when the actor has overcome, suppressed, his personal self or \textit{Svabhāvas tajyate} (Verse 121-124). This is the gateway to the possibility of impersonating the character that the actor portrays. Bharata’s ingenuity lies here because authenticity and originality of the character representation depend on shedding of the personal self and putting on the mimicked personality.

From the theory of impersonation, he goes on to delineate the indispensability of the need of external appearance and the inner most of a person called \textit{sāttvika}. On the outermost, he has accentuated on \textit{āhārya}, the dress, costume, décor, props, masks, and the like. In chapter XXXIII, he has laid emphasis on costumes and make-ups where colour, correspondences and understanding of types of make-up for particular characters, people from different parts of India, techniques of constructing mobile and stationary props, and a vast variety of masks. Bharata has recognized the variety and multifarious cultures of India and the world. Therefore, he has left open the choice of colour, texture and costume to bring about a true representation and authenticity of character, personality and culture representation in a drama when he said, “According to one’s pleasures, colours can be changed” (Chapter XXIII, verses 97-98).

Bharata has taken the inner states of the total personality to be fundamental in a drama. He has stated clearly in Chapter XXIII titled \textit{Sāmānya Abhinaya} that feeling and its voluntary expression are crucial and it relates to all parts of the body. This refers to feeling and temperament (\textit{sativa}) which are unexpressed, but can be discerned through physical signs. Intricately linked and inextricably corresponding with the physical body, \textit{rasas} are the fundamental modes of expressing the internal and external states. In Chapter II, verse 6, he has stated that \textit{rasas} arise from the forty-nine
types of bhava: eight sthāyi bhāva (emotive states), thirty three vyabhicare bhava (transient states) and eight satvika (temperament states). In the next verse of the same chapter, he has gone further in the investigation and has presented that the state, proceeding from the thing which is congenial to the heart, is the source of rasa and it pervades the body just as fire spreads over the dry wood (Chapter II, verse 7).

He has elaborated on the correspondence between the internal and external states of a person with emphasis on the senses. He has also delineated the psychosomatic linkage to bring about the true and authentic character in the play. In delineating the fundamental issue of the relationship between the senses and mind, psychic states and involuntary reflexes, Bharata has intended to present the classification and categories of personality types as well as the different types of human temperament. Temperaments of calm, cool, hot, excitable, energetic or dull are indicators of body-mind relationship. There is also another type of relationship laid down by Bharata - Kāma (desire and love) which is the centre of man-woman relationship. Sense, perception, feeling and consciousness play the foundational basis in this intra-gender communication. Kāma is the pulling force that makes the communication going, whether it is introvert and extrovert, inner or outer. In this context, Bharata has pertinently described the different types of graces (alamkāra) or women, namely, feeling (bahva), emotion (ḥāva) and passion (helā) which do not function autonomously. They are the psychic states with their emotional and involuntary reflex physical responses.

Bharata has not only laid down the concepts and design of an art work but also presented the need for a successful work production. In chapter XXII, he has made it clear that the efficacy of an artist’s creation lies in its ability to communicate and this communication takes place at two levels: daivika
(divine) and mānus (human). An artistic creation, a theatre production, can uplift and elevate the audience to a sense of awe, wonder and complete silence (XXII, 17). This evocation is a sure sign of siddhi (success).

To bring about success, the creator artist, dramatist and actor require inner control and description. “There is an indispensable need of impersonalization, depersonalization and detachment in the entire act of creation and presentation” (Chapter XXVI, verse 86). Bharata has also set a guideline for the audience and spectators because success also relies on them. They need to be trained, initiated and attuned. Preparedness, both, of attitude and initiation into some technicalities is an essential pre-requisite.

Bharata’s Nātyaśāstra, therefore, is a keystone work in Sanskrit literature on the subject of stagecraft. It addresses a wide variety of topics, including the proper occasions for staging a drama, the proper designs for theatres, the authentic and success in presentation of an art work and characters and, most especially, specific instructions as well as advice for actors, playwrights and producers. The theory of rasa, described in the text, has been a major influence on “the modern theatre of India as well as Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood” (“Sanskrit Drama” <http://www.enotes.com/>).

Bharata’s Nātyaśāstra has laid down the foundation for classical Sanskrit drama and is one of the most important sources for establishing its characteristics. Theatre is said to have been the inspiration of Brahma as a means to distract people from their sensual pursuits. Legends hold it that when the world passed from the golden age to the silver age and people became addicted to sensual pleasures, undesirable elements like jealousy, anger, desire and greed have filled their hearts. The world then was inhabited by gods, demons, yakshas, rakshasas, nagas and gandharvas. Lord Indra led the gods
and approached god Brahma and, requested him thus, “please give us something which would not only teach us by pleasing both the eyes and ears” (Gupt 86). Therefore, Bharata’s ascription of drama to divine origin is not wrong. He has put down what later playwrights would refer as footnotes.

It is imperative to mention that, according to Bharata, drama is composed of sacred materials and is meant for an audience that is well-versed in the performance tradition. It is performed by members of the highest rank in the caste system that requires special knowledge and skill. To do this, a complete understanding of dance, music, recitation and ritual language is a prerequisite. Drama should be performed on a consecrated space – theatre or stage – and it serves a dual purpose of education as well as entertainment. Bharata’s concept of drama has gone a long way in influencing and inspiring the later playwrights; of which its immediate influence was on the Sanskrit literature, particularly on dramatists.

2. Sanskrit Literature

Sanskrit, in India, has a long history as a language of thought, learning and culture. In the present popular perception of Sanskrit as a major component of India’s cultural heritage, it is best known as the language of religion and philosophy. In fact, it has served as the repository for inspiration for its intellectual and aesthetic achievements. It is popularly believed that from the second century onwards, probably Sanskrit was a spoken language in the whole of Āryāvarta between the Himalayas and the Vindhya range. Sanskrit plays “show that even those who did not speak Sanskrit understood it” (Haksar 3).

Sanskrit literature saw little of prose and largely of verse. Unlike classical literature, Yajurveda and Brahmanas employed prose style. Excepting perhaps grammar and philosophy, nearly every branch of classical
literature is composed in verse; literary prose being found only in fables, fairy tales, romances and partially in the dramas. Dramas, for the most areas, are written in verse.

Sanskrit plays flourished from the 4th century BC to 13th century AD and most of them are moral plays. *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* have being the repository from where Sanskrit playwrights have drawn their themes and characters. Evidently, therefore, Sanskrit plays have dealt with godly events. Henry W. Wells has rightly observed that Sanskrit drama is “an utmost expression of idealism” (Wells 90). Study of the Sanskrit playwrights will show their uniqueness which “can be described as an experience of life beyond the personal” (Reddy 9).

Besides being rich poetry, Sanskrit plays have dealt with the art of acting and of play writing. The driving force for play writing, during this period, was fundamentally aesthetic. As a result “the Hindu mind shrank not only from violence and physical tragedy, but even from the tragic in moral problems which attracted the Greek mind” (Aurobindo 302). Sanskrit has spread its wing far and wide and its appeal has never diminished. Modern literature, in fact, has looked up to it for its richness and wealth.

The sage Bharata is the mythical inventor of *nātaka* (drama) which was already discussed in the former sub-topic. Besides *nātak*, “there are several other forms of dramatic representations, such as Prakaran, Bhāna, Prahasana and others” (Haksar 7). The earliest form of dramatic literature may be found in the *gvedic* dialogues such as those of *Saramā* and *Pa ḍ is, Yama and Yami, Pururavas* and *Urvaśi*. The foremost references to acted dramas, though, are found in the *Māhabhāsyas*, where *Kamsavadha* and *Bālibandha* are mentioned.
The combination of different genres of drama and Sanskrit has resulted into a unique amalgamation of richness that has given us the literary treasure of Sanskrit dramas. Some of the famous dramatists of Sanskrit literature are considered in this chapter for a deeper understanding and better acquaintance and, to lead us progressively ahead in our discussion of Indian English playwrights.

3. Select Sanskrit Playwrights

3.1. Bhasa

Many Sanskrit pandits have created ideological fluctuation regarding Bhasa’s identity, authenticity and authorship of the dramas ascribed to him. But references made by some dramatists, poets and many rhetoricians have guaranteed his authorship and historicity beyond any doubt. Kālidāsa, the best known Sanskrit playwright has referred to Bhasa in the prologue of his first play Mālavikāgnimitram. Bāṇabhaţţa, the court poet of Harsavardhana, has eulogized the dramaturgic excellence and social prestige of Bhasa in his Harṣacharitam. A rhetorician, like Acharya Bhāmala, has also discussed the theme of the Pratijñānātikā of Bhasa.

Rajendra Mishra has categorized the plays of Bhasa into three groups basing on their themes. The first category is based on Rāmāyana and the plays include Pratimānātaka and Abhisekanātaka. The second category is based on the Mahābhārata and the plays that fall into this category are Pañcharātra, Madhyna Vyāyoga, Dūtavākya, dūta Ghatikacha, Kar abāra, Bālacharita and Īrubhaṅga. The final category is based on folktales and Udayana stories. The plays of this category include Daridrachārudatta, Avimāraka, Pratijña Yaugandharaya a and Svapnavāsavadatta.

Bhasa’s contribution to the Sanskrit drama in particular and the dramatic literature in general is prominent. “He is one of the first great
dramatists whose complete dramas are now available to the world” (“About Sanskrit” <http://www.Sanskrit.nic.in/>). He has derived his plots from the Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata and Purānas as well as other semi-historical tales. His greatest contribution is the reproduction of the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata in the dramatic form. Though the poet does not present the stories in their original form, the success lies in popularizing the episodes of the two great epics which were impounded by scholastic society. He has copiously altered the incidents, dialogues and sequences in his presentation for a better dramatic effect and for the sake of dramatic pleasure as well as mass interest.

Swapnavāsavadatta or The Vision of Vasadatta is his furthermost known work. Acharya Rajashekhara has opined that this play is “the only drama which proved itself non-combustible in the fire of criticism” (“About Sanskrit” <http://www.Sanskrit.nic.in/>). His imaginative power is highly commendable and it is reflected in almost all his plays. The concept of Drakula (The Temple) in Pratima and the concept of Svapna (The Dream) in Swapnavāsavadatta are unique. Bhasa stands toweringly tall above other Sanskrit playwrights in his treatment of dualistic love. This love is not merely a physical hunger for sensual pleasure but an overflowing sensual satisfaction which sluices away all physical traumas and dilemmas. Udayana, the hero of Swapnavāsavadatta, has felt the ecstasy of that love that has ended in an indescribable contentment and eternal peace and, not in sensual lust. His treatment of Pra rti (nature) is highly plausible. This drama has its source in Rāmāyana. Bhasa’s depiction of the pathetic condition of the unprotected lawless society has reminded us of Ayodhyā being deprived of the great king Daśaratha.
Bhasa was a born dramatist and has presented other models of Sanskrit drama such as Prakarana and Bhana (One act plays). In his small plays, he has succeeded in making them extraordinarily dramatic. Although his works follow the rules from the Natyasastra, in order to maintain a dramatic integrity, he has often violated them. The outstanding results, as critics assert, only prove that he is a man of the theatre way ahead of his times.

He deliberately plans the purposive use of his dramatic art. His explicit commitment to contemporary relevance is conveyed by a specially coined term “Kala – Samvadiin Pratiī and Ptitijñā” (Rath 55). It is clearly seen that he does not, for a moment, make use of traditional story for his Udayana plays. Besides, the concept of disarmament propounded by him is unique for his age of monarchy. He is astutely conscious of “the dangers of oppression by despotic rulers and does not hesitate to portray his Vasudeva pleading guilty of reckless indiscrimination in so many words” (Rath 56). His dedication to the mission of peace and contemporary relevance is unadulterated. He does not aim at converting the stock of popular tales and mythical stories of historical events into dramatic composition. In his support to monarchy, he has always tried to preserve his right to independent judgment.

3.2. Kalidasa

Kalidasa is the tallest figure among the Sanskrit dramatists and his importance as well as greatness in the Sanskrit dramaturgy cannot be compromised. N.P. Uni has stated that he is “the greatest Sanskriti dramatist” (Uni 7). His life history has being debated among the Sanskrit pandits but, inarguably, important and indispensable evidences have shown that he belonged to the 1st century BC.
A mention of classical playwrights is never complete without a look at Kalidasa, the greatest playwright of his time. He is the brightest star in the firmament of Indian poets and playwrights in Sanskrit and occupies the same position in Sanskrit literature that Shakespeare occupies the same position in English literature. He deals primarily with famous Hindu legends and themes. Actually, it is the synchronizing genius of Kalidasa that has made him fabulous and extraordinary. “In his dramatic works he has ably combined the divine and the mortal (heaven and earth), the urban and the rural cultures” (Haksar 111). He takes the entire universe and the creation to be his province and presents them as a one big family. This harmonization is the backbone of Kalidasan literature as a whole.

His most popular plays are *Abhijnānāsakuntalam* (The Recognition of Shakuntala), *Malavikaggnimitram* (Malavika and Agnimitra), *Vikrmorvasiyam* (Vikrama and Urvashi) and *Ritusamhara*. *Abhijnānāsakuntalam* is a beautiful tale of love and romance and shows how one moment can make or break a relation. Its plot is taken from *Mahābhārata* and *Padmapurana*. Kalidas has added the episode of the curse on Shakuntala by sage Durvasas, through his fancy and adeptness in introducing new elements in the main plot and this has given an additional charm to the love story of Shakuntala and King Dushyana. This has also elevated the character of the hero. *Malavikaggnimitram* is an intrigue drama based on the love story of Malavika and King Agnimitra. The plot of the play is cleverly constructed and it revolves around the King’s love interest on a maid in the royal palace. *Vikrmorvasiyam* is a play that tells the story of a mortal King Vikramaditya who is in love with a heavenly damsel, Urvashi. It enacts the story of his effort and determination and how he won the love of the divine nymph, who is supposed to be the most gorgeous heavenly fairy. Out of desperation, the king wanders through dense forests in search of his love. A truly intriguing tale of
love and possessiveness, it contains beautiful verses that describe true love. Kalidasa has also written two large epic poems, *Raghuvaṃsa* (The Genealogy of Raghu) and *Kumārasambhava* (Birth of Kumara), and two smaller epics, *Titusamhāra* (Medley of Seasons) and *Meghadūta* (The Cloud Messenger). His writing is characterized by the usage of simple but beautiful Sanskrit and by his extensive use of similes.

He has treated nature as a conscious counterpart of sensate society. In fact, he has made no differences between them. Nature is fully active and alive and, his sensitivity to Nature is a distinctive feature. Rajindra Mishra has stated that “what the great English poet Wordsworth did in the 18th century, Kalidasa did more successfully in the 1st century BC” (Mishra 112). Kalidasa has taken nature’s flora and fauna to be the constant companion of humanity in their happiness and sorrow.

### 3.3. Sudraka

Sudraka is a later playwright than Kalidasa. Evidences have made known that he falls between 1st century BC and 7th century AD. Kalidasa, while quoting his predecessors has omitted Sudraka’s name. Acharya Dandin, of the AD 7th century, has quoted Sudraka in his writings. These are the most reliable evidences which have shown that Sudraka was not prior to Kalidasa and not later than Dandin. Acharya Vāmana has flourished under the patronage of the Kashmiri ruler Jayāpida during 779 – 813 AD. He has mentioned the works of Sudraka in his *Kāvyalankāra Sutravṛtti*.

Sudraka is considered to have composed the first social drama in the history of Sanskrit dramatic literature. His play *Mṛcchakaṭikam* or *The Little Clay Cart*, composed in 2nd century BC, “is a drama of the Prakarana genre” (Mishra 113). The play is divided into ten acts and is distinct from other plays in its dramatic qualities of vigourous life, action and its humour. It is a
comedy set in the backdrop in which love and mistaken identity play a major role.

*Mṛcchaka ikam* mirrors the contemporary society and Chārudatta, the hero, is a Brāhamana by caste and a great lover of music. His wife Dūtā is submissive, chaste and virtuous and, has never complained about anything in her life. Chārudatta was previously a great Sārthavāha (Merchant) but became penniless. Despite the misfortune, he has always maintained his social prestige in the city of Ujjayini by possessing the virtues of truthfulness, benevolence, gentleness, munificence and kindness. Chārudatta has never regretted the misfortune of becoming a pauper but was spellbound to behold his friends, visiting his home, slinking down due to his pennilessness. Sudraka has employed love complication in this play to suit the social theme. A beautiful, chaste and affectionate danseuse, Vasantha, has complicated the love plot. She deeply loves Chārudatta but her love is sought by Shakāra who has pursued her to gratify his lust. Vasantasena has hated him and managed to keep herself away from his grips.

The juicy plot of the play anticipates the twists and turns in the further development of the plot. Apart from love complication, the plot is further complicated by thieves and mistaken identities. The play is enriched with elements of hilarious laughter and entertainment. Therefore, “Blending both the serious and humourous, it remains one of the most popular staged pieces of classical Indian drama” (“The Emergence of Sanskrit Drama” <http://www.narasimhan.com>).

Sudraka is acclaimed for the handling of social issues of his time in the plays. In his works, he has presented social issues like deviation from prescribed rules of morality, gambling, litigation, bias verdicts and many other social distortions. The qualitative plays, written by him, have shown that he
has lived ahead of his time in his genius. His plays have reflected the powerful topic and themes that are seriously debated and enacted by later literary authors and the 21st century writers.

3.4. Harṣāvardhana

Harṣāvardhana has a great academic taste and has even inspired his successors for the same taste. He was the ruler of Kānyakubja and belonged to the Vardhana dynasty of Sthānvishvara. He was a great lover of fine arts and an adept in Buddhist canonical literature. He had revived the tradition of high academic taste on kings like Vikramāditya, Śudraka, Rudradāman and others. As a man of good academic taste, his influence on the later poets and critics is immense.

Priyadarśkā, Ratnāvalī and Nāgānanda are the three plays written by Harṣāvardhana. The first two plays are based on the Udayana episode and the third play bases itself on a tragic story of Vidyāadhara Jimūtavāhana. He is well adept in various Shāstras and his dramatic art is excellent. Ratnavali is his masterpiece dramatic work. The erotic scenes in this play have shown his expertise in the science of sex. Rajendra Mishra has stated that “Dramaturgical rules and regulations have been followed by Harṣāvardhana in his plays. He knows well, how a lovelorn heart beats” (Mishra 177). Therefore, it is clear that Harṣāvardhana is a romantic dramatist, whose dramaturgical art has reflected the heart throbbing love stories. This also shows that he has the spirit of modern novelists like Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy.

3.5. Bhavabhuti

Bhavabhuti was born in Padampura, situated somewhere in Vidarbha. He was a Kāshyapa-gotri Brāhamana and belonged to the Taittirīya branch of
the Black Jajurveda. Some commentators have believed his name to be Srika but later on he became famous as Bhavabhuti.

Bhavabhuti’s three famous plays are Mālatimādhavam, Mahāvīracharitam and Uttaramācharittam. The first play Mālatimādhavam is a Prakarana in ten acts. It is framed in the tradition of Ashvaghosa’s Sāriputra Prakaranam and Sudraka’s Mṛcchakaṭikam but not without differences. Mahāvīracharitam is a play in six acts with a dramatic renovation of the primitive Rama episode. He has brought forth an attractive and ideal personage of the hero in this play. Rama, the hero, has killed the monkey commander Bali who came to fight with him at the behest of Ravana. The adverse, objectionable and improper elements in Rama were due to Ravana’s character. The third play has delineated the latter half of the epic Rāmāyana. In this seven act play, Bhavabhuti has dwelt on the theme of the banishment of Sita by Rama. Rama has banished his faultless wife by sacrificing his personal pleasure, for the satisfaction of his subjects. The play begins with the return of victorious Rama to Ayodhya and ends with the reunion between Ram and Sita in the hermitage of Valmiki.

Characterization in Bhavabhuti’s plays is brilliant. Divinity occupies the centre stage of his poetry. His ebullient knowledge in handling his characters is seen in his dealing with the different sentiments in man. With regard to the dramatist’s aptitude of superbly enacting the varied sentiments, Rajendra Mishra has this to say, “Although he has attempted almost all the sentiments in his plays, his treatment of pathos (Karuna) is superb and unparalleled” (Mishra 120).

Treatment of nature in his plays is only elemental. Rejendra Mishra has commented that Bhavabhuti is “habitual of witnessing only the pristine form of nature where the birds are warbling in ardent passion, hilly rivulets are
flowing swiftly and being echoed by the falling ripe fruit of blackberries” (Mishra 121). In this sense, he is not a Kalidasan who sees the humanized form of nature. He is not as pantheistic as Wordsworth or Kalidasa.

4. A Leap from Sanskrit Drama to Modern Drama

The brilliance and excellence of Sanskrit drama can never be belittled but, sadly, this par excellence did not continue to spread its wings in the later ages. After Bhavabhuti, the enviable trend of excellence in the dramatic art and the grandeur of stagecraft were not the same. Despite the spontaneous flow of dramatic creativity continued, the flavor of Kalidasa or Sudraka or Bhavabhuti has failed to show up in the later period for a long time in the Indian dramatic world. While many have attempted their skills on Sanskrit drama, as years passed by, there has been a steady decline in its popularity. Sanskrit, which was the language of the courts and temples, had begun to be replaced by regional literary traditions that were fast emerging in rural areas. Changes in the field of politics have even influenced the cultural growth of the regional importance.

With the steady decline of Sanskrit plays, Indian dramatic scene has witnessed a dry period for quite sometimes. It has witnessed a decadent period until drama in a new form has stepped into the dramatic scene. The arrival of British to India has awakened the slumbering theatrical taste in India and Indian drama has regained its strength. The rise of a new spirit due to acculturation has, therefore, marked the beginning of modern Indian drama, dating back to 18th century when the British Empire has strengthened its power in India. The impact of Western Civilization on Indian life has also opened the floodgate for a new renaissance to dawn on Indian arts including drama. Besides, English education has given an impetus and a forward motion to the critical study of not only Western drama but also classical Indian
drama. Therefore, the Western impact has triggered “the dormant, critical impulse in the country to bring Indian face to face with new forms of life and literature, and to open the way for a fruitful cross fertilization of ideas and forms of expression” (Iyengar 4).

Drama in India has witnessed transitional periods as it is with the English drama of the West. Indian English drama has its own creativity and richness in its variety. Since its inception, from the Vedic era coming up to the Sanskrit stage, Indian drama has never ceased to appear. In its continuing appearance, it is significantly noteworthy that it also has never come to a close to show a strong Indian character driven by the distinctive Indian spirit. To scan deeper into its historical facts, it is pertinently unavoidable to note that Indian drama had its definite beginning and purpose. According to Maurice Winternitze, a noteworthy fact about the existence of literary drama has been made possible only by the Buddhist Sanskrit texts of the first century (Winternitz 196-197). This has acted as the repository from where Indian dramatic inspiration and module have being oozing out for the later dramatists to either emulate or impersonate.

5. A Bird’s-eye view of Modern Indian English Drama

India has a rich heritage of drama from the ancient times. Drama in India has begun its journey with the Sanskrit plays and, since then India has witnessed the ups and downs of it. A. L. Basham, a prominent historian, has expressed his views in the following words: “the origin of Indian theatre is still obscure. It is certain, however that even in the Vedic period dramatic performances of some kind were given, and passing references in early resources point to the enactment at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and mime” (Basham 434-435). Indian traditions are preserved in the Nātyaśāstra, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama. This text claims
for the drama divine origin and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. Drama in India, therefore, has a sure and firm foundation, having a basement on the Vedas, but a creamy continuance of the same vibrant trend. The hope of its vitality lies in the rich heritage of music and dance because India’s tradition and rituals are always accompanied with music and dance.

Indian drama and theatre is perhaps as old as its music and dance. Right from the Vedic Era, Indian theatre has made its presence felt amidst Vedic ritualism and ethnicities. It is crucially important to take note at this juncture that Indians were indeed comfortable in illustrating their mood through the artistry of mudraa, lasya and Natya. Therefore, a distinct style of dramaturgy has developed as an exemplification of the rich mores of Indian tradition, rituals, customs and ethnicity. India, as a land rich in articulate feelings, eloquent speeches and diverse manifestations, has a unique history of human expression through dramatic composition and techniques since the remote past which can actually be traced back amidst ritualism of the Aryans and also in the midst of the dance pattern and amidst the style of daily living.

This ritualistic and traditional expression, through the dramatic art, was only the beginning. Indian English drama has moved forward from here by developing over the past richness. Right from the ancient to the modern era, theatre in India has enormously contributed its glorious success to the enrichment and fortification of India’s culture to a great extent. With the passage of time, even the larger than life aspects of the ancient Sanskrit drama had gradually faded and Indian drama became a lot more contemporary whilst revealing the naturalistic and realistic attributes of the socio-economic and political scenario of India. Albeit dramas in the past were entirely based on the epics and the Puranas, that was only the beginning and, thenceforth, there was no looking back. A paradigm shift has being taking place, since then, in
the choice of subject and theme. The old narrative forms of dramas narrating
the stories of heroes and celestial beings were overtaken by the true
representation of the unedited realism of human life.

A characteristic feature of the Indian drama is the presence of some
amounts of variation in respect of the language. As Maurice Winternitze has
critically surmised that a greater part of Indian English dramas are written in
prose dialogues, intercepted by verses, some musical and some recitative.
Since the initiation of drama till the present day, in certain measures, the
Indian drama reflects the actual life in respect of the language used
(Winternitze 190-191). Moving back into the factual ground of the Indian
English dramatic scene, despite the rich influence and impact English had on
the Indian soil, Indian drama in English has shown a sluggish growth because
of the language factor. The unacceptability of English as a common language
of India has insulated the smooth path for Indian drama in English to flourish
like other Indian literature. Furthermore, Michael Madhusudan Dutta’s
translations of Ratnavali (1858), Sermista (1859) and Is this called
Civilization (1871) were not in compliance with the traditional Indian
dramatic modes. As a result, they have failed to arrest the interest of the
Indian audience and the world. M.K. Naik has made a significant remark in
this regard:

Drama is composite art in which the written word of the playwright
attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken
word of the actor on the stage and through that medium reacts the
mind of the audience. A play in order to communicate fully and
become a living dramatic experience thus needs a real theatre and a
live audience (Naik 171).
Apart from this, the genre of Indian literature has kept the taste of the audience stale. For a long period of time, the theme of the play has being mythical and celestial. Therefore, it is sad to behold that the story of the English drama in India has assumed mythical structure right from its inception without much change. As such, it has become the sad Cinderella of Indian English literature.

Among the various forms of Indian writings in English, drama seems to lag far behind poetry and fiction. K.R.S. Iyengar has opined that “Modern Indian dramatic writing 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” (Naik 201). However, ever since the English language has firmly established its roots in the country, there has being writing of plays in English in spite of their generally poor stage-worthiness (Bhatta <http://yabaluri.org/>). In fact, new and fresh introduction of the artistic quality through the innovativeness of the English drama in India has added a whole fresh look that constitutes a contemporary dimension to Indian Natya. A praiseworthy note on the Indian English playwrights is the spirit of challenge that has being pulling them through till today.

The arrival of East India Company into the soil of India has greatly influenced the Indian Natya. Dramas in India have become more contemporary while dwelling on social and political themes. The seed of modern consciousness was sown in the field of Indian drama during the British imperialism. However, Indian Natya stood apart as the weapon of protest against the British Raj. It is then that English drama has made her presence felt in Indian soil through the portrayal of the realism of daily life. Indian English drama has carved her niche by presenting and illustrating the
finer aspects of life along with the regular instances of poverty, hunger, sufferings and agony of common people. Indian English playwrights have moved forward in their own styles dealing with society, politics, economic, communalism and the like. However, Indian dramatists have found hard to do away with the influence of British in the in subject matter. For a long period of time, a true representation of British culture and ways of life as well as depiction of the British exploitation has reigned supreme in Indian literature.

In fact, Indian drama in English took its birth out of ennui and a need for entertainment at social gatherings and dinners held in honour of the English dignitaries in India. This has served as an opportunity for Indian playwrights to have the taste of western playwrights and it has influenced the regional theatres. The Bombay Amateur Theatre is the first theatre in Mumbai, erstwhile Bombay, which was set up in 1776. The plays that were produced, by then, were mainly farces on the Georgian playwrights. Unfortunately, this theatre was sold and its fate of late got into oblivion. But many Italian and European dramatic troupes have set their foot in Mumbai and toured Mumbai and its presidency. They performed many plays, especially those of Shakespeare’s. These dramatic companies include the Fairclough Company, Our Boys Company, Norville’s Willard Opera Company and the Dave Carsen Troupe. Albeit good had being done by these early theatres on Indian soil as precursor to indigenous talents, there were no rooms for plays originally written in English by Indians. As a result, Indian drama in English has being staggering to carve out a niche for itself for a long period of time, unlike western dramas that has built a citadel for itself in the dramatic world.

Amidst such gruelling demands for indigenous Indian English playwrights in the firmly established and dominant world of Western English
plays, Indian English drama is yet to establish itself as a distinct and viable genre. Since 1831, Indian English writers have been penning down their minds. English dramas by Indians had appeared on Indian soil with the coming of K.M. Banerjee’s translations of *The Persecuted* or *Dramatic Scenes: Illustration of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta* in 1831 (Jha 170). Since then, a number of plays in English by Indian writers have come into being and it has continued to appear till today. This flowering Indian English plays include translations from other languages and by doing so it carried forward its heritage with alien tastes and values. But it is imperative to take note that numerical abundance does not ascertain the qualitative richness. This has been the concern in the arena of Indian English drama. At the same time this does not mean the complete absence of qualitative sumptuousness in Indian plays in English. Though English drama in India has not lost the tinge of European life style, Indian dramatists, at the same time, have not lost the indigenous hallmark as Indians. The plays have gradually risen to a typical form by epitomizing the socio-political and economic status of Independent India.

6. **Select Indian English Playwrights**

Drama in India has, no doubt, gone through a dreamy period after the hay days of Sanskrit playwrights. Indian drama in English, on the other hand, has for a long period of time struggled to carve a niche for itself in the literary world. Theatrical world in India, side by side with the plays and the indigenous products, has been crouching invincibly hard to imprint its own mark. Amidst such gruelling scenario and despite the encouragement pouring in from different quarters, Indian drama in English has been having suffocating moments. This cloudiness on the path of Indian English drama is
“chiefly because of the continued lack of the living theatre and a live audience” (Reddy 13).

The absence of discipline of theatre has predisposed the Indian playwrights in English to overlook the essential differences between the “voice of the poet addressing an audience and the voice of the poet who attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse” (Eliot 2). P. Bayapa Reddy has opined that “the blurring of this essential difference has made most of the Indian verse drama in English dramatic poetry rather than authentic poetic drama” (Reddy 13). This frustrating effect has made M.K. Naik to remark that “all too conscious as he is of the fact that his play is not going to be staged after all, the Indian playwright in English, perhaps, allows his dramatic vision to be insidiously warped in the embryo itself” (Naik 185). This effect is conspicuously manifested in some of the Indian verse plays in English by the playwrights like T.R. Kailasan and Harischandranath Chattopadhyaya.

The mirage that has illusively gripped Indian playwrights from seeing the difference between dramatic poetry and poetic drama got swept away with the coming of Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo into the dramatic scene. They have succeeded in writing poetic dramas and this has brought about a renaissance in the dramaturgy of Indian English playwrights. Some of the high-flying modern Indian English dramatists are considered in this paper. For a better analysis and a clearer progressive flow, the select dramatists will be broadly grouped into pre-independence and post independence Indian English playwrights.

6.1. Select Pre-independence Playwrights

The pre-independence Indian English playwrights are the evolved group of playwrights who have come right after the Sanskrit dramatists. In this paper
I will humbly and briefly deal with Rabindranath Tagore, who is the harbinger of Bengali theatre, Sri Aurobindo, a major English playwright and an accomplished craftsman in verse, T.P.Kailasam, who is known as the Father of Modern Kannada Drama, and Harindranath Chattopadhaya, a playwright of the underdogs of society who is more akin to post-independence Indian English playwrights in his modern consciousness.

6.1.1. Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore, the youngest of thirteen surviving children, was born on 7th May 1861 in the Jorasanko mansion in Calcutta, India, to “parents Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi” (Dutta 37). He came from a cultured and wealthy family of the Tagores, who got the taste of books and got into writing at a very early age, “as early as seven, when he wrote his first poem” (Farooq <http://globalwebpost.com>). He grew up in a very cultured atmosphere with exposures to religion and arts, with special emphasis on literature, music and painting. Due to the wealthy family background, his early education was through private tutors. Subsequently, he studied at several institutions and even went to England to study law, but did not complete any degree programme. Apparently, he “was recalled by his father in 1880, possibly because his letters home, all indicated his attraction (which was mutual) to English girls” (Farooq <http://globalwebpost.com>).

Rabindranath Tagore became one of the most prolific writers in the world; poet, artist, dramatist, musician, novelist, and essayist. He was completely at home with both Bengali and English languages because he was educated at University College, London, in 1879-80. He had become the national poet of Bengal by the time of his Golden Jubilee in Calcutta on January 28, 1912, but his international fame came only in November 1913 when he won the Nobel Prize for literature for Gitanjali, a collection of poetry
initially brought out in Bengali in 1910 and then translated by the poet and published in English in 1912 with an introduction by W. B. Yeats. He has also translated so many volumes of his own Bengali poems personally that he can be regarded as an Anglo-Indian poet.

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translation of some of his poems, he became rapidly known in the West. In fact, his fame has attained a luminous height that has taken him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. The Nobelprize.org has eulogized him saying, “For the world he became the voice of India’s spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution” (“Rabindranath Tagore-Biography” <http://www.nobelprize.org>). His creative output speaks a lot about him as a renaissance man and the fecund brain that produced variety, quality and quantity works is amazing. Surprisingly, this great writer has written “over one thousand poems; eight volumes of short stories; almost two dozen plays and play-lets; eight novels; and many books and essays on philosophy, religion, education and social topics. Aside from words and drama, his other great love was music, Bengali style. He composed more than two thousand songs, both the music and lyrics” (“Rabindranath Tagore” <http://www.schoolofwisdom.com>).

The inborn gift of Tagore to become a dramatist saw the light of day quite early in his life. At sixteen, he led his brother Jyotirindranath's adaptation of Molière’s Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (Lago 15). At twenty he wrote his first drama-opera: Valmiki Pratibha (The Genius of Valmiki). In this opera, pandit Valmiki is found overcoming his sins, blessed by Saraswati and compiled the Rāmāyana (Chakravarty 123). Through this work, Tagore has explored a wide range of dramatic styles and emotions, including usage of
revamped *kirtans* and adaptation of traditional English and Irish folk melodies as drinking songs (Dutta 79-80). His other prominent plays are *Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice, Red Oleanders, Chandalika, Muktadhara, Natir Puja, The King of the Dark Chamber, The Cycle of Spring, Sanyasi* and *The Mother’s Prayer*. These plays are deeply and firmly rooted in the Indian ethos and ethics in their themes, characters and treatment.

*Dak Ghar* (*The Post Office*) is about Amal who was forbidden by the village doctor to move out of doors. The peculiarity about the boy is that he is not only happy but also makes those who come in contact with him very happy. He is ready to journey from this world to the next. The dramatist has used certain symbols in this simple story which has made the play very powerful. The post office stands for the universe and the king stands for God. The letter represents the message of eternity and the blank slip of paper symbolizes the message of God, which one is free to interpret according to one’s own inspiration. The play is also looked at from a different angle as describing about Amal, who has defied his stuffy and puerile confines by ultimately falling asleep, hinting his physical death. A story with borderless appeal – gleaning rave reviews in Europe – *Dak Ghar* dealt with death as, in Tagore's words and quoted by A. Robinson, “spiritual freedom” from "the world of hoarded wealth and certified creeds” (Robinson 21–23).

*Raktakarabi or Red Oleanders* presents a kleptomaniac ruling over the residents of Yakshapuri. He and his retainers exploit his subjects and are benumbed by alcohol and, numbered like inventory by forcing them to mine gold for their ruler. The naive maiden heroine, Nandini, has rallied her subject compatriots to defeat the greed of the realm's *sardar* class with the belated help of the morally roused King. Skirting good verse on the evil troupe, the work has pitted a vital and joyous lèse majesté against the monotonous fealty
of the king's varlet, giving rise to an allegorical struggle akin to what is found in *Animal Farm* or *Gulliver’s Travels*.

His other works have fused together lyrical flow and emotional rhythm into a tight focus on a core idea, a break from prior Bengali drama. Tagore has accentuated feelings and not of action in his works. In 1890 he has released what is regarded as his finest drama: *Visarjan (Sacrifice)*. It is an adaptation of *Rajarshi*, an earlier novella of his. *Chitrangada, Chandalika* and *Shyama* are his other key plays that have dance-drama adaptations and they are known as *Rabindra Nritya Natya*. *Chitra* has been, particularly, renowned for its exquisite lyrical quality. *The King of the Dark Chamber* and most of his other works are sprinkled with songs which are used to highlight a particular disposition or to provide emotional reprieve.

The enormity and sheer emotional power of his output have made him the one Asian writer whose work is widely known outside the region, and whose reputation has endured for many centuries. “Tagore’s phenomenal dramatic career encompasses over sixty plays in nearly as many years and occupies a prime position in Bengali and modern Indian theatre. He is hailed as the Ibsen of the East” (Lal). Tagore’s occupying a unique place in the history of Indian drama in English is not a mean achievement. Equipped with the classics of Indian drama and, at the same time, alive to the European dramatic tradition, he has definitely evolved a dramatic form in India and has influenced the Bengali and English theatres in India.

Tagore is not without pitfalls despite towering tall among the Indian English playwrights of pre-independence India and even beyond for his contribution to the theatre of India and, Bengal in particular. His plays are weak in plot construction and characterization in the midst of all the rich
variety, symbolic significances and lyrical excellence. His characters are not so complex as to hold the audience awestruck and bamboozled; they are mostly one dimensional. He has also sometimes committed the fault of excesses though there are an abundance of rich symbolic presentations in his plays. Besides, Tagore tends to veer away from the sight of consequences of the overabundance of lyrical appeal; the excessive availability of it, most often than not, gets the better of the theatricality of his plays. Therefore, they become not so much actable because of lack of adequate dramatic action.

All this drawbacks do not throw Rabindranath Tagore into the shadows of other Indian English playwrights. His greatness in his contribution to the Indian English literature has remained intact and particularly his giant presence in the Bengali literature is in the fullest bloom and is hard wither away.

6.1.2. Sri Aurobindo Ghose

Sri Aurobindo Ghose is an Indian philosopher, poet, essayist, critic, historian, translator, journalist, playwright, short story writer, and autobiographer. He was born on August 15, 1872 at Calcutta, the third of six children, into a family with high-caste standing. His father, an eminent physician employed by the civil service, has thoroughly embraced the Western way of life and has attempted to shield Aurobindo from Indian influences from the time he was a baby. Aurobindo had a formal English education at home and abroad and, excelled in “English literature, the classics, and languages, including Latin, Greek, French, German, and Italian” (“Sri Aurobindo 1872-1950” <http://www.enotes.com>). Therefore, it is not astonishing that Aurobindo wrote almost exclusively in English, rather than in Bengali, his native language.
Sri Aurobindo is a major Indian English playwright and an accomplished craftsman in verse. He has inherited and carried forward the tradition of the British poetic drama, revived by Stephen Philips and Robert Bridges. His writing bears authentication to his insightful knowledge of Eastern and Western thought. His plays are Shakespearian in cast, written in blank verse, and well knit plots from the classical mythology of the East or the West. His plays are mostly constructed on the Elizabethan model, with great mastery over English. He has authored five complete plays in English. They are *Perseus the Deliverer*, *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodogune*, and *Eric the King of Norway*. His play *Vikramorvasie* or *Hero and the Nymph* is a blank verse rendering of Kalidasa’s Sanskrit play *Vikramorvasiyam*. In addition, there are some unfinished plays, two playlets and a collection of five dramatic dialogues to his credit. Of the five complete plays by Sri Aurobindo, *Rodogune* is a tragedy and the other four are comedies.

*Perseus the Deliverer* is a romantic play revolving round the ancient Greek legend of Perseus. The play is written in five Acts and it belongs to the early period of Sri Aurobindo’s literary activity. It is based on the Elizabethan model. The scene of the action takes place in Syria where Andromeda, the heroine, is exposed to the sea monster with whom she fought and braved the consequences. The legend, passing through the pen of the playwright, has finally emerged with a message that love and compassion have ultimately defeated hatred and terror. It is through the decisive action and spiritual prowess of Andromeda that Perseus is brought to her side. United in deep love, they are able to fight against the dreaded sea monster and become victorious.

The story of the play is straightforward. There are no puzzling intricacies in the plot and no psychological conundrums to tax the mind. The
story finds a parallel in the play *Thesmophoriazusae* by Aristophanes, in which Mnesilochus, bound to a plank, is at last rescued by Euripides. It also reminds us of a Celtic myth, according to which, Devorgilla the daughter of the king of the Isles is redeemed by Cuchulainn; and also of our Indian myth of Krishna who has responded to Rukmini’s appeal, eliminated his rival and married her.

In the play, Perseus is, of course, the hero. Though he does not appear as often as he ought to have appeared as a hero, he made his presence and also conspicuous absence felt by all. The audience cannot fail to notice his acts of bravery and compassionate dealings. Similarly, Andromeda, the heroine of the play has risked her life for a noble cause and became the cynosure of all eyes apart from her stunning beauty that has enthralled many. Poseidon, the wicked Priest of a wicked God, is the symbol of corruption ever practiced in the name of religion. The story, therefore, is made to have a happy ending by the intervention of the supernatural instead of projecting it to be a powerful tragedy. At the same time, the playwright has never forgotten to give a modern psychological touch to the plot and characterization.

There is good suspense in the play as the special powers of Perseus are not known in the beginning. Next, the Priest Poseidon has successfully overpowered the king and snatched away Andromeda to punish her cruelly. The climax of the story is astutely handled by the author. The tempo of the play is maintained throughout and the title is very significant. This play indeed bears testimony to the intellectual caliber of Sri Aurobindo. Above all, the play shows that when pure love and God’s grace combine, satanic forces are bound to be vanquished.

*The Viziers of Bassora*, also called the *Dramatic Romance*, is a play in five Acts and in the Elizabethan cast. The theme is from *The Arabian Nights.*
It is a romantic comedy which takes us back to the days of the great Haroun al Rasheed. Haroun al Rasheed is the caliph of Baghdad, having full religious authority over the Muslim kingdom and Jaafar is his vizier. Alzayni, Haroun’s cousin, is the king of Bassora. Alfazzal Ibn Sawy, noted for his goodness, is his Chief Vizier, and the wicked Almuene bin Khakan, his second Vizier; Nureddene is the son of Alfazzal and Fareed, the son of Almuene, is notorious like his father in cruelty.

The author has excellently handled the theme of love in this play. There are characters of shining contrast: the good Alfazzal Ibn Sawy, the Chief Vizier of Bassora and the wicked Almuene, the second Vizier; Nureddene who though full of youth is good like his father and is a thorough contrast to Fareed, who is a lusty tyrant, the Sultan who is wicked enough to be guided by Almuene and Ajebe who is noble unlike his uncle. Above all, there is the kind Caliph, the Commander of the Faithful, Allah’s Vice Regent who puts down all evil and pluck the virtuous out of danger’s hand. One noteworthy thing is that almost all the women characters – Ameena and Khatoon who are sisters, Alrazzal’s niece Doonya, Anice the heroine of the play and other slave girls – are exceptionally good.

Even though the play is on the model of Elizabethan in cast, it has, at times, shown the influence of Sanskrit poetry particularly in the description of Baghdad in Act IV, Scene 1. There is an echo of the Indian philosophy in the words of the hypocrite Ibrahim and both prose and blank verse are effectively employed in this play. The very good suspense maintained is one of the chief attractions of the play. Therefore, the fourth and the fifth acts demand greater attention and interest from the audience. Unlike in other plays of the playwright, lengthy speeches are interspersed with brief conversations here and there in the play.
Aurobindo has given a special flavor to Kalidasa’s Sanskrit play *Vikramorvasiyam* or *The Hero and the Nymph* through a blank verse rendering. Falling onto the hands of a more dexterous writer, the play is more than a literal translation. He has added colour and flavor into the play. The story is quarried from the range of deathless romance which is engraved in the Hindu sacred Rigveda. Aurobindo, though borrowed the title from Kalidasa’s play, has given a modern touch to it.

The story is based on the triumph of love. King Pururavas has helped the gods and displayed his valour. Urvasie, the ornament of Eden and its joy, half-nymph and half-woman was rescued by him from the hands of a Gandharva and, they both fell in love. Meanwhile, while staging a play in heaven, under the direction of the preceptor Bharata, Urvasie has unconsciously uttered the name of her lover Pururavas. Enraged by this, Bharata has cursed her with a damning destiny that she should go down to the earth. Thereupon, Indra, the Lord of gods took pity on her and limited the curse. According to it, Urvasie goes to the earth, lists a married life with Pururavas and disappeared after begetting a son. Stricken with inconsolable grief, the king wandered in the forest nearby like a madman. At last, the compassionate gods have granted him a passage to Indra’s kingdom by making him immortal, to be ever united with Urvasie.

Dwelling on the love between King Pururavas and Urvasie, the playwright has given a psychological touch through his careful and skilful handling of the plot. The ever merciful love and compassion of God is given the pivotal role in this play like that in *Perseus the Deliverer*.

Aurobindo’s *Vasavadutta* is traced back to “Somadeva’s *Kathasaritsagara*, dramatised by Bhasa in his Sanskrit play *Swapna Vasavadutt*. The play has been given a more psychological treatment by Sri
Aurobindo and the romance is heightened in the play” (Bhatta <http://yabaluri.org>). Vuthsa Udayan, the hero of the play, is the young king of Cowsambie and Yougundharayan, his wise old minister and until recently his regent. Mahasegn, the king of Avunthic, is his principle political rival and Vasavadutta is his beautiful daughter. With the help of his son Gopalaca, he has Udayan kidnapped and kept him in a jail under the vigilance of Vasavadutta, in order to make him a slave and in future a vassal of his empire, acknowledging his superiority. Love has played the spoil sports to Mahasegn’s plan and made the jailor herself a prisoner. Vasavadutta fell in love with Udayan. To be freed from the bondage of Mahasegn, both Udayan and Vasavadutta have escaped into Cowsambie with the hearty assistance of her other brother Vicurna, her captive princess Munjoolica, and others. This prestige hurting event has increased the wrath of Mahasegn, who has suddenly sent his forces to capture Udayan again, but was in vain.

The play is written in blank verse and marked with a meager suspense. It is found that the imprisoned king, Vuthsa Udayan, goes out of his way to fall in love with his rival’s beautiful daughter, Vasavadutta. The two became mutually infatuated with each other. The uneasiness of the progress of the play lies only in Vasavadutta, who became fully enamoured with Udayan and forgot her promise which she has made to her father.

The interest of the play lies in the love between the hero and heroine and, the escape they successfully meet with. Beyond this, there is no interesting suspense to hold the breath of the audience. Aurbindo’s skill lies in his romantic triumph that he intentionally puts it in this play.

*Rodogune* is a play that is cleverly tailored by the author. It is a modified version of a tragedy of the same name written by Corneille. It is a play in five acts and is placed in the author’s imaginary Syria. The heroine,
Rodogune, a former Parthian princess, is a captive attendant of the scheming queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. Cleopatra’s two sons, Antiochus and Timocles, by her first husband were living with their uncle Ptolemy in Egypt. At the death of her second husband, they returned to Syria. The selfish queen has mistaken fulsome flattery for real love and has rejected Antiochus. Timocles has been accepted by the queen as the first born. He has revolted to claim the throne of Syria and, both, Rodogune and Antiochus, who are mutually attracted by love, have joined together in this venture. Timocles too fell in love with Rodogune but temporarily he has submitted to the Chancellor Phayllus’ cunningness and his sister Cleone’s seductions. A civil war took place between the brothers in respect of Rodogune and the throne of Syria. Antiochus has surrendered himself to his brother unconditionally but is murdered by the order of Timocles. In this regard, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has remarked that “His long soliloquy on the eve of his decision to return to Syria and throw himself on his brother’s mercy is well-sustained” (Iyengar 1962, 117). The heartbroken Rodogune also dies and Cleopatra and Timocles are left to themselves in the end. The tragic end of the play has only Cleopatra and Timocles left to suffer for their misdeeds.

Aurobindo has framed the play to illustrate how the suffering that comes to men is designed not to crush him but to raise him to a new consciousness. The plot is powerful and the characters of the play are well drawn. Antiochus is a hero subjected to fate. He is frank and straightforward enough to climb the throne not by vulgar riot, nor by fratricidal murder but through the heroic steps of ordered battle. Though brought up along with him by Ptolemy, his brother Timocles is different from him and thus becomes a victim to the net spread by the wicked Phayllus and Cleona.
Cleopatra’s mother-love is selfish and possessive and, she resembles King Lear of Shakespeare in her behaviour towards her sons. The main attraction of the play is Rodogune, who is the haunting creature of beauty, romance and tragedy. She fully responds to Antiochus’ love. Aurobindo has enriched all this actions in the play with arresting dialogues. The play, in fact, is rich in crisp talk which has accelerated the action.

*Eric* is another play which is written in five acts. It was written when he was in Pondicherry in 1912 or 1913 and it deals with Norway in ancient times and the Viking culture of the Nordic race. Eric is the elected king of Norway and Swegne is his enemy. Aslaug, the sister of Swegne and Hertha, Swegne’s wife, arrived at Eric’s court disguised as dancing girls; their motive being to murder Eric. But Eric falls in love with Aslaug and she cannot resist her inner response to this tempting love, in spite of her determination to kill him. Even the tactful Hertha became helpless. In a highly exciting scene, Aslaug lifts the dagger and lowers it twice, then flings it on the ground falling on her knees at Eric’s feet. Eric is bold enough to offer a chance to Aslaug to dance with the dagger and fulfill her design, but love triumphs. In the ensuing battle, Swegne is defeated by Eric but left him alive according to his promise. Further, Eric honours him with his lost titles and wife and marries Aslaug.

Viewing critically on the intensity of love in this play, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has opined that “Love triumphs over Hate, Freya over Thor, even as Pallas Athene triumphs over Poseidon in Perseus the Deliver” (Iyengar 1943, 89). The play shows the various stages of love; love as passion, love as a union of souls and love as a cosmic force which establishes man’s kinship, not only with his fellow human beings but with the universe.

He does not incarcerate himself to one particular place or country in choosing his themes. He has hovered over a wide range of countries from
Scandinavia to India providing material for his plays. There is the romantic impulse in his themes and he tries to view the contemporary problem of slavery and foreign rule against that setting. While presenting his vision of evolution of man, he has accentuated on the harmonizing power of love. Commenting comprehensively on Aurobindo’s plays, Viswanathan Bite has said, “Though his plays display a great exuberance of thought and language and have an appeal to the scholar, they cannot fully meet the demands of the stage and are at best closet dramas” (Bite <http://vishwanathbite.blogspot.in>). However Aurobindo has opened up new vistas in the Indian drama in English by depicting an element of full bodied optimism about the future of mankind. His plays have also revealed his tight grip on rich poetry and his exquisite skill in the portrayal of characters. S.S. Kulkarni has appropriately eulogized Aurobindo by saying that he has created “extremely interesting men and women by developing the psychological element which endows his plays with exhaustible human interest and significance” (Kulkarni 9).

6.1.3. Thyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam

Thyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam was born of a Tamil Brahmin family in Bangalore. His father, Paramshiva Iyer, was an eminent Justice in the High Court of Mysore. He has a keen interest in his son’s future prospect of becoming an eminent geologist, holding a high position. Kailasam, on the contrary, nurtures the desire of entering into the theatre. As he was sent to England to pursue his higher studies in geology, he has evinced a keen interest in theatre and stage shows. As a result, he took six years to complete his three year degree course, so that he could extend his stay in London.

During his life time, he has many accolades. A playwright and a prominent writer of Kannada literature, his contribution to Kannada theatrical
comedy has “earned him the title Prahasana Prapitamaha (the father of humorous plays) and later he was also called as Kannadakke Obbane Kailasam, meaning One and Only Kailasam for Kannada” (“Kailasam” <http://en.wikipedia.org>). He wrote several plays in English and Kannada and has left a huge legacy. It is said that he has a great sense of humour and his wit was unmatched. His plays are replete with these qualities. His humorous expressions and instant witty observations endeared him to all his followers and fans. Here is a flavor or two of his humour: Once when someone has mentioned about his soured relationship with his famous father who considered Kailasam as a wastrel, he said, “Initially, whenever people saw me frolicking on the streets, they used to point at me and say, look at him, he is Kailasam, the son of the well-known Justice Mr. Iyer. But nowadays, whenever they see my father taking a stroll, they say, you know, he is the father of the famous T.P. Kailasam”. At another moment he has remarked on his addiction to alcohol saying, “I am a pure vegetarian. I cannot drink milk because it is a liquid beef, so I drink the vegetarian alcohol” (“T.P.Kailasam: Humorist, Playwright and a Great Soul” <http://shivashankarshastry.sulekha.com>).

Though he is considered as the father of modern Kannada drama, his genius has found its full expression in his English plays. G. S. Amur has precisely remarked, “A talented actor who appeared on the amateur as well as the professional stage, he brought to the writing of drama an intimate knowledge of the theatre. It is for this reason that his plays whether in Kannada or English, have a uniform technical excellence” (Amur 186). His famous English plays are The Burden (1933), Fulfilment (1933), The Purpose (1944), Karna (1946) and Keechaka (1949). These plays have elevated him to occupy a prominent place in the firmament of Indian English drama.
P. Bayapa Reddy has remarked that Kailasam “stands apart from Sri Aurobindo in that he has made an earnest attempt to blend both the Indian and the Western traditions of drama” (Reddy 17). He was acquainted with the rich traditions of Kannada theatre and the glorious cultural tradition of the country. His plays are vivacious representations of themes taken mostly from ancient Indian literature. S. Krishna Bhatta has this to say on Kailasam:

It appears that his knowledge of ancient Indian literature and history and his stay in England urged him to contribute something concrete to this spacey cultivated field…his plays breath throughout, a deep reverence for our ancient culture with a modern critical approach. We find in him a blending of genius and intuitive vision, a fertile imagination, ready wit and subtle humour and a serious presentation of the theme” (Bhatta 86).

Though all his Kannada plays are social comedies, his English plays are mythological and tragic. His explanation for writing his serious mythological plays in English was because the language that needs to delineate the ideal character should not be near to us.

Like Aurobindo, he has desired to address the educated Indians who were gradually being disinherit from their cultural heritage. It is, therefore, lucidly perceivable that he wanted to produce a national literature through English. His English plays are a clear reflection of the inspiration of Puranic themes, especially the Mahabharata. From the inception of his dramatic career, he was preoccupied with the vision of Karna, Draupadi, Krishna, Bheesma, Drona, Bharata, Keechaka, Ekalavya and many other mythological characters. There is a clear and cogent depiction, through his works, that his English plays are concerned with the development of human personality and its inscrutable relationship with destiny. The
development of human personality is unpredictable because the ways of
destiny are mysterious and destiny is more powerful than aspirations and,
moral intentions of the man who chooses to accept the challenge of destiny. A
remarkable hallmark of the dramatist is that he has taken the characters from
the epic *Mahabharata* and tried to interpret them in the light of human values.

*The Burden* reveals Kailasam’s skill for plot construction and character
delineation. Using English as a medium and with his great dramatic skill, he
has expanded a single episode into a powerful and touching play. This is the
only play which has its base in the *Ramayana* and is also perhaps the shortest
play of Kailasam. The incident is from *Ayodyakanda* of Valmiki's *Ramayana.*
The play is about the story of Bharata, who on his way back from his
grandfather’s place to Ayodhya has learnt that his father is dead. He is so
enraged that he did not even spare the royal priest, Vasistha.

Ignoring Rama, the most important character and hero in the Ramayana,
Kailasam has attempted to elevate Bharata to the status of a tragic hero,
though there was only a slight hint of tragedy in the play. It is so brief that it
has ended even before constructing the required emotional effect in the
audience. The lacuna has also arisen from the vague unraveling of the
complication. Here, one wonders whether our dissatisfaction arose from our
prior knowledge of the incident which figures in Valmiki's *Ramayana,* or
whether Kailasam has allowed it to slip from his hands an excellent
opportunity to explore in depth the virtuous younger brother's predicament.
This much seems clear in the context of the other plays of Kailasam, that in
this play he has definitely wished to focus on a character that is penumbral, in
the half-shadows of Rama’s dramatic life. In spite of the limited scope for
character delineation in this play, Bharata is portrayed vividly with his
anguish and mortal conflict in a very convincing way and he is exalted by the playwright.

*The Purpose* has delineated Ekalavya’s conception of idealism. It is the earliest of Kailasam’s plays. The play is more complex in its conception and execution than the plays that followed later, like *The Curse of Karna* and *Keechaka*. If the later plays are concerned with the psychological conflict of an individual and the destiny he confronts, *The Purpose* goes deeper into the exaction of life itself. This play does not explore the destiny of individuals but it endeavours to discover the very meaning of life, the purpose of its creation and growth, life and death. This play, therefore, dwells on the existential problems and its metaphysical complexities.

*Fulfilment* has delineated the story of Ekalavya who is about to join the Kauravas on the war front. Like all his mythological plays, *Fulfilment* also comes to us with a difference. The location of the play is a glade in Ekalavya's forest. Ekalavya has entered the scene to find a person surrounded by the fawns of the forest. He has remained firm in his valour to participate in the war despite Krishna’s effort in trying to dissuade him from doing so. Krishna has failed in his attempt because of Ekalavya's conviction that he owes a duty to his King. He has even reminded Ekalavya of his greater duty towards the fawns but to no avail. Finally, when Krishna has found no way of stopping him and as Ekalavya was relating the story of the Bird’s Tree, Krishna surreptitiously stabs and kills him. Ekalavya’s mother was also killed by Krishna, once again stealthily. The play ends violently with a piercing scream of anguish heard from behind the trees of the forest.

The play is Kailasam’s effort at reshaping traditional interpretations. Doubts arise as to whose purpose has the play finally fulfilled. Our answer to this question may come only when we read the sequel to which *Fulfilment* is,
that is *The Purpose*. The note on *Fulfilment* provides a passage from the *Mahabharata* which supposedly has lent Kailasam the inspiration and support at the time of the creation of *Fulfilment*:

\[
\begin{align*}
Jaraasandhaha Chaydi-raajo mahaatma \\
Mahaabaahu Ekalavyo nishaadaha \\
Ekyekasaha twaddhitaartham \\
hataaha MAYAIVA
\end{align*}
\]

(Kailasam 1987, 636).

According to this passage, Krishna justifies to Arjuna of his act in killing Jarasandha, Shishupala and Ekalavya before the actual commencement of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. They had to be eliminated for Arjuna's own good, lest they would have posed a major threat to the Pandavas by sheer strength and loyalty to their King. With this realization in mind, Krishna's explanation to Ekalavya, that "Your King, his friends, are wolves that hurt my/ fawns; Paarthha and his friends are wolves that might/ Hurt my fawns, and they shall go too", (Kailasam 1987, 649) only seems like a viable tactic employed by Krishna to justify his act of killing Ekalavya. The same thing is witnessed even in the battle scene in *The Brahmin's Curse*. Encouraging Arjuna to slay the paralyzed Karna, Krishna had said:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It is the PURPOSE of the killing, not} \\
\text{the MEANS and MANNER} \\
\text{of the killing that} \\
\text{Decides the FAIRNESS ... JUSTNESS of the killing!}
\end{align*}
\]

(Kailasam 1987, 820).

Therefore, the purpose is crystal clear; it is to protect the Pandavas and restore their right to the throne, whatever may be the cost to anyone else.
In the light of the fate meted out to Ekalavya, Krishna's brutal act of killing Ekalavya and also his mother, however logical his reason may sound, leaves the readers with the feeling that Ekalavya and his mother have not been justly treated. Ekalavya has not only won the sympathy of the readers but also prompted them to think about the unfair treatment to which he is subjected in the name of justice or destiny.

The Curse of Karna or The Brahman’s Curse has described the destiny of Karna and the tragedy caused by Bhargava. The play began with a complication when Karna is cursed by his guru, Raama, after it was discovered that he is, after all, not a Brahmin. Karna’s repeated confession that he is a sootha, which is a forced lie, so as to receive the otherwise unavailable education, does not convince Raama, who has assumed that Karna belongs to the Kshatriya clan, against which he bore vengeful thoughts. Enraged by the deceptions of Karna, Raama had cursed him and, thus, the title of the play. The play does not only revolve around the curse but also the mystery behind Karna’s inability to accomplish any task he undertook. Kailasam’s dexterity lies in such creative weaving of his plays.

The curse has set forth Karna’s downfall in life. The intensity of the post-curse tragedy is further heightened by his discovery that the Pandarvas are his brothers. The thread of conflict is carried forward by Ashwatta, the son of Guru Drona. Ashwatta had cursed Arjuna because he could not bear the tragic plight of Karna. Unfortunately, Aswatta’s words in cursing Arjuna had, ultimately, brought a curse to the sinful ones, in which Karna is the condemned one for his own deeds.

Not a

Single scion of Thy sinful House or Seed
Shall ever rule this
Land
(Kailasam 1987, 825).

The play, therefore, ends with Karna, the scion of the same sinful house, becoming the victim of a Brahmin’s curse.

This play is akin to Sophocles’ *King Oedipus*. It is a trans-creation of it, “… not by creating a new fictional character who would fit an Indian setting but by dramatizing an existing figure from Indian mythology” (“Heroes from the Fringes” <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>). There are striking similitudes between Karna and Oedipus. As infants, both were separated from their real parents. Though innocent, both became victims of fatalistic curses which have ultimately led them to their death. There are also glaring dissimilarities amidst similarities between them. In Sophocles’ play, the complication is unraveled without Oedipus’ realization of his predicament. This realization of Oedipus’ predicament occurred only in the end scene of the play. In Kailasam’s play, Karna suffers his predicament in the knowledge of its causes but he is yet unable to exonerate himself and this has paved the way for a totally tragic situation. Tragically, the predicament is known to those around Karna but not for him.

The last act of the play reveals that Karna has encountered a much more excruciating and traumatic confrontations. Kunti has bartered the knowledge of his royal birth in exchange for a promise from Karna that he will not put the devastating Naga shaft to his bow a second time. The circumstances leading to the gradual revelation of the curse to Suryodana and the princes in each act, along with the final revelation of Karna’s royal birth, has reduced him to a mere shadow of his warrior self. This tragic fall of Karna invites the complete sympathy of the audience.
Keecheka, another play of Kailasam, is based on the legendary story borrowed from Vyasa’s Mahabharata. Keecheka, the protagonist of the play, has been given a different fringe character by the author in this play. Keecheka is portrayed as a villain in Vyasa’s Mahabharata but Kailasam has presented him as a much misunderstood character. The Pandavas in the same play are also portrayed as fringe characters in a different sense, for they are in their thirteenth year of exile. But they are characters who already have the sympathy of the readers. By making Keechaka the hero, Kailasam has explored the forgotten or ignored sides of the story. His selection of varied fringe characters makes us rethink their fate and function. They also impel us to rethink the history transmitted by a complex and pernicious tradition.

It is conspicuous that all the mythological plays of Kailasam have exposed his sensitivity towards and concern for perpetual problems like the caste system of his society. As a necessary part of his rebellion against such cultural practices, Kailasam has created new ideas out of the ancient myths, thus providing his society with modern alternatives. His creativity as a playwright seems to have cut short before its full bloom. His contribution to the Indian English theatre is greatly upheld but there is a sense of incomplete in his contribution. In a real sense, it is a pity that Kailasam did not write more or more fully since the promise of these English plays is substantial.

6.1.4. Harindranath Chattopadhaya

Born to Aghornath Chattopadhaya and Barada Sundari on April 2 1898, Harindranath Chattopadhaya was the first Lok Sabha member from Vijayawada constituency. He is a poet, actor and playwright with a deep interest in theatre. K. Venkata Reddy has termed him as “one of the most versatile and vigorous literary personalities of contemporary India, Harin is a poet, painter, playwright, musician, actor–all rolled into one” (Reddy
<http://yabaluri.org>). He has made a significant contribution in the growth of Indian English drama. He wrote poetic dramas in English through his devotional plays and is “the first dramatist in India who wrote agit prop plays dealing with the real India with all its problems, with all its ugliness, squalor, dirt and disease” (Reddy 20).

His devotional plays deal with certain situations in the lives of the religious leaders such as Jayadeva, Ravidas, Ednath, Pandalik and Sakku Bai. These devotional plays are written in verse, and are playlets rather than full length plays. These plays have certain weaknesses and the criticism leveled against them is that their plot constructions are loose. Characterization is rather blurred and there is a predominance of poetry over action. As a result, boredom sways the audience. Tukaram stands apart among his devotional plays. It is freed from the overabundance of poetry. The saintly ardour, sense of humility and detachment of the hero are markedly brought out in his mellifluous songs as well as dialogues with his wife and Rameshwar. The different scenes are well knit and even the usage of poetry is functional rather than decorative which is found in some other devotional plays. Its chief good point lies in its being effective, both as a closet play and a stage play.

Apart from the poetic plays, Harindranath has to his credit, plays of social protest which are found in his collection Five Plays (1937). Five Plays includes The Window, The Parrot, The Sentry’s Lantern, The Coffin and The Evening Lamp. These plays are warm, humane, sincere, energetic, outspoken, full of enthusiasm and full of concern. Balarama Gupta has this to say with regard to Harindranath’s plays:

Sympathy for the exploited, revolt against stultifying morality, insurgence against brute forces of Imperialism, a plea for purposeful writing – such are the themes of these plays which are either
symbolic or didactic and propaganda. Harin’s plays are all products of an earnest commitment to certain ideas (Gupta 17).

These social plays have heralded the emergence of a significant working class dramatist with innate potentialities. K. Venkata Reddy has eulogized Harindranath Chattopadhyaya by comparing him with the novelist Mulk Raj Anand saying, “like Mulk Raj Anand in the field of Indian fiction in English, Harim has succeeded in bringing a kind of life to the Indian stage that was never there before” (Chattopadhyaya <http://yabaluri.org>). The Window is an authentic account of the slum life of the factory workers, while The Parrot, concerning itself with the unendurable life of a woman, is speaking for the hundreds of women who become a prey to conventional morality. The Sentry’s Lantern is about a poet, a merchant and a worker who are to be hanged. The central theme in this play is the evil of imperialism. The Coffin is a plea for purposeful writing and The Evening Lamp is about a young man who has fallen in love with shadows.

This new genre of dealing with the underdogs of working people is the hallmark of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. It is for the first time in the history of Indian plays in English that working class characters have being introduced on stage as the central figure. Ever since Indian playwrights started penning down plays in English, up till Chattopadhyaya, no playwright had ever cut such large slices of the working class life. Chattopadhyaya has, therefore, carved a niche for himself in the history of Indian English playwrights as the author of this group of people.

Chattopadhyaya’s social plays are more effective than his devotional plays. His enthusiasm in the working class is basically to pave the way for an egalitarian society, to make their presence felt and their voice heard. The main concern is for the well-being of the low grade workers which is laid bare in
his social plays. This is strikingly noticeable in his acute awareness of the social problems around him. These social plays register the author’s protest against the cruelty of capitalist factory owners, the conventional and stultifying morality, subjection of woman as a caged bird and the irresponsibility of writers to social problems. The plays are satirically very powerful with well knit plots and lifelike characters. Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar has rightly described them as “manifestoes of the new realism” (Iyengar 234).

Chattopadhayaya has been deeply influenced by the Leftist Movement during the nineteen thirties. He was a scientist dreamer and a mystic jester. Swerving spasmodically between the extremes of Aurobindonian mysticism and Marxian materialism, he has sampled every variety of experience, and exploited every possible mood, pose and stance. The workman’s wife in The Window has complained: “We, poor workers’ families - untaught, uncomforted, unfed, squalid, ragged, broken - dwelling in dingy holes - frightened walking dead ones, tools’ shadow – possessions of man, themselves possessing nothing – filth, degradation, disease” (10-11). The same air of being trampled to suffer and toil because of being a downtrodden is seen in The Parrot. The woman in this play puts forth her problem in the following words: “One rupee – and for that one stupid little round coin of silver you have lost your freedom. You have lost the sky and the meaning of your wings” (35). The language used is original and authentically social conscious by really conveying the mood and emotion of the class of people to whom it belongs. Chattopadhayaya is, therefore, the voice for the voiceless in society and he truly represents the underdogs in the Indian society in particular and the world in general. He is a lyric poet, a playwright and a mystic turned Leftist. He is a poet every inch. He bears the distinct mark of the Indian mind and unmistakably an Indian speaking English in any form of his writings. His acute awareness of the modern maladies has made him so
satirical and, at the same time, this has made him to be present to his age and period and, even beyond.

The coming of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo into the world of Indian English drama has triggered off a new source of life in the Indian English dramaturgy. These two great personalities, with their powerful impact of the west, have played a significant role in enhancing this particular genre. Tagore’s theme ranges from the pastoral to modern age, from religious beliefs to social comedy, from entertainment and romantic love to martyrdom. Sri Aurobindo’s dramatic creations have the Elizabethan impressions. T.P. Kailasam gives a humorous touch and his plays have a modern impact. He has gleaned his themes from the mythologies of India and Greek and, his plays have psychological dealings.

Plays that came to live during the pre-independence period showed certain differences with those of the Sanskrit plays. When Sanskrit plays were engrossed with the mythological and celestial themes, pre-independence plays showed the signs of deviating from these and eying on social themes. The plays of Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and T. P. Kailasam are essentially lyrical, allegorical and symbolic. They wrote their plays in an idiom which has “an archaic quality and this archaickeness lends the dialogues a charm, a grace and a kind of distance which produce heightened aesthetic pleasure” (Ramamurti 11). These playwrights wrote English dramas not so much for the stage as for being read. Their plays are about what life should be rather than about what life is. The playwright who was more inclined to social realism is Hrindranath Chattopadhaya. His plays have veered away from the overabundance of mythical references to the concrete reality of social situations. With his dealings on underdogs of society, he is more akin to the
post-independence English dramatists of India. In this sense, he has the touch and vein of modernity.

6.2. Select Post-independence Playwrights

A change came about from moralizing and idealizing life, as it was in the pre-independence plays, to presenting the stark reality of life in the post-independence plays. The transition has being affected by the economic depression in 1930s and the growth of National Movements. As a result, playwrights in India during this period were shifting their focus to the realistic picture of society. “Subsequently, there emerged the Indo – Anglian drama of social realism and revolution, both as an Indian phenomenon related to the National Movement and as part of the English social realism of the period” (Reddy 19). This new wave of social realism has enamored the playwrights of this era, making them to pen down plays dealing with the underdogs of society.

Indian English playwrights, who came into the dramatic scene after the Indian independence till today, were exposed to greener pastures. The west influence that was finding a more cordial reception, both in language and culture, has given way for cross fertilization. Besides, the post-independence Indian drama was benefited by the increasing interest of the foreign countries in Indian English literature in general and Indian English plays in particular. Moreover, the growth of theatre has allowed the dramatic taste to steadily but surely percolate into the veins of Indians. This has being further boosted with India’s rich history, culture and diverse heritages. Therefore, Indian dramatists have ample amount of sources to devour and translate it into plays that is palatable to them and to the demands of the audience. Whether it is A.S.P. Ayyar, Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Pratap Sharma, Vijay Tendulkar or Mahesh Dattani, their plays have the touch of modernity. Most of their plays
follow the genre of social realism. Human beings and their existence, enveloped with varied social situations, are their core concern. Select Indian English playwrights of this period are dealt with in brief to lead us into the discussion of Asif Currimbhoy.

6.2.1. Girish Karnad

Girish Karnad, recipient of Jnampith Award, is a living legend in the arena of contemporary Indian English Drama. He is a playwright, actor critic and emissary of Indian art and culture. “He has emerged as the most significant playwright in the post independence Indian literature” (Dhanavel 11). His journey from Yayati to The Fire and the Rain is a reflection of the evolution of Indian theatre for about four decades. He is a leading Indian playwright and one of the most stupendous practitioners of performing arts. His dramatic sensibility has been immensely honed under the influence of touring Natak Companies and especially Yakshagana which was not accepted as the purified form in his days. He is a man with a different bent of mind and is among the foremost media persons to our time and, his achievement, as a playwright, has received a widespread recognition.

He has borrowed his plots from history, mythology and old legends. Well versed in symbolic usage, Karnad has employed symbols to establish the relevance of history, mythology and legends in contemporary socio–political conditions. Historicity and its contemporariness in the present are, therefore, dearly held by him. His five plays Tughlaq (1962), Hayavadana (1970), Nagamanda (1972), Tale-Danda (1989) and Fire and the Rain (1994) have been translated into English; the first two by Karnad himself. He has combined classical, folk and western theatrical tradition in his plays. This creativity and innovativeness have won him great accolades in the field of
Indian English dramaturgy and, therefore, his contribution to Indian English Drama is immense.

C. Rajagopalachari’s version of the *Mahabharata* has deeply impacted him and eventually his *Yayati* was designed and published in 1964. It is based on the story of King Yayati, one of the ancestors of Pandavas, who was cursed into premature old age by his father-in-law, Shankaracharya, incensed by Yayati’s infidelity. The play ridicules the ironies of life through the characters in *Mahabharata*. Karnad’s perceptive intellect could weave such a story into a contemporary relevance. In a situation like that he has found a new approach like drawing historical and mythological sources to tackle contemporary themes and existentialist crisis of modern man, through the characters who are locked in psychological and philosophical conflicts. *Tughlaq* and *Tale-Danda* too reflect the theme of historicity and its contemporariness in the present. *Tughlaq*, his best loved play, relates the story of an idealist 14th century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq. The play is an allegory on the Nehruvian era which started with ambitious idealism and ended up in disillusionment. With this play, Karnad has been shot to popularity and the most promising playwright in the country. *Tale-Danda* deals with the pain and agony in the life of Basavanna who has sacrificed his life in his bid to propagate his revolutionary philosophy.

The main tenets of Karnad’s revolutionary philosophy which are found in this play are abolition of caste, equality of the sexes, rejection of idol worship and the repudiation of Brahminism and Sanskrit in favour of the mother tongue, i.e. Kannada. N.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan have remarked that “the play marks out clearly the dangers of knowledge without wisdom and power without integrity” (Naik 2001, 204). Like other Indian playwrights, Karnad leant on the past mythology and tradition of India for
inspiration. Plays like \textit{Yayati} and \textit{The Fire and the Rain} are drawn from the great Indian epic the \textit{Mahabharata} and has been given a contemporary meaning.

Stories from the age old culture and tradition of India stand as the repository for Karnad to pick and creatively weave it into plays, pregnant with meaning and contemporary relevance. These become vehicles for him to communicate the ideologies and systems of knowledge. The cultural and traditional stories, in effect, turn out to be humble cuisines of Karnad for readers and audience to deliciously devour them. His shrewd mind has penetrated into everything and, in fact, he views everything from a historical and dialectical point of view. Even different ancient stories, which are replete with different cultures and languages, lay fully alive before him and ready to be born anew through his plays.

The plot of \textit{Haryavadana} is drawn from the \textit{Kathasaritsagana} and ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. Karnad, in his creativity has given a brilliantly innovative touch to this story by not borrowing the complete material directly from \textit{Kathasaritsagana}. He has drawn theme from a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, \textit{The Transposed Heads} which is originally found in \textit{Kathasaritsagana} (Naik 2001, 203). Folk theatre form of \textit{Yakshagana} is employed in this play. Unlike Thomas Mann’s purpose in retelling the story, Karnad’s purpose in \textit{Haryavadana} is to deal with human identity in a world of tangled relationships. As the title of Thomas Mann’s novella indicates, in Karnad’s play, too, there is a transposition of heads by Padmini, giving Devadatta Kapila’s body and Kapila Devadatta’s body. This has created confusion of identities and has revealed the ambiguous nature of human personality, which is in a sense incomplete. The sub-plot of his play has also heightened the theme of incompleteness. The horseman’s search for
completeness has ended comically with his becoming a complete human being. The animal body triumphs over the human head, which is what considered the best in man, is what Karnad reveals through the sub-plot.

There is an arresting theme that cannot be avoided in the plays of Karnad. His recurring theme of sexuality has a Freudian undertone. There is a wave of oedipal pattern being employed in *Yayati* and the relation between Yayati and Purru apparently progresses on the line of Oedipus complex. Besides, the ethical and moral habit, attached to human relationship, is tactfully handled by the author in this play. The common belief that a man’s attraction to the opposite sex transcends all barriers is aptly enacted in the play when Yayati, the king, has shared the bed with Sharmishtha, his attendant. Girish Karnad has made the idea of Oedipus complex operational in a mythical story, wherein, he has employed the oedipal pattern of relationship and wove it in the Freudian sense.

Girish Karnad is modern in his entire approach to society and man. He does not even hesitate to plunge himself into the old wine for the sake of bursting it into a new one with a brand new taste and flavor, completely relevant to the people of his time. Aparna Dharwaldker has opined that Karnad “employs traditional Indian narrative materials and modes of performance successfully to create a radically modern urban theatre” (Dharwaldker 355). His contribution to the modern Indian Theatre can never be undermined. G.J.V. Prasad has optimistically remarked, “Suffice to say that at a historical moment, Karnad was among a clutch of playwrights and theatre practitioners who fashioned modern Indian drama, staging the Indian nation in the 1960s and ’70s” (Prasad <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com>).
6.2.2. Mahesh Dattani

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7th August 1958 in Bangalore. His early life, after the formal education, was briefly spent on copywriting for an advertising firm. He has been highly acclaimed as one of the best Indian playwrights and he writes his pieces in English. Dattani is the “first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award” (“Mahesh Dattani” <http://en.wikipedia.org>). He is a playwright, actor, director, scriptwriter and film maker. As he ventured into the creative literary world of India, creative writing in English was quite blunt. Therefore, he went on to explore new genres: from detective stories to comedies. With regard to the choice of his themes, he has revealed to Utpal K. Banerjee in an interview: “I think one recurring theme is the individual’s struggle over societal demands or inflictions” (Banerjee 166).

With this existential dilemma in man bothering him inextinguishably, his first play Where There is a Will came to existence in 1986. After his first play has seen the light of day, he began to concentrate on his writing and wrote more dramas like Final Solutions, Night Queen, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Thirty Days in September, Bravely Fought the Queen and On a Muggy Night in Mumbai. Commenting on these plays, Ratan Bhattacharjee has said that “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” (Bhattacharjee <http://isahitya.com>).

He has started working exclusively in theatre from 1995 onwards and also wrote plays for BBC Radio 4. Dattani, as a playwright, has never failed to impress the audience with his protagonists struggling to exonerate themselves from the overabundance of life’s sorrows and suffering. Dance like a Man
and *Thirty Days* portray the protagonists as striving for their own space or freedom from an unseen, self-inflicted form of oppression.

He does not shy away from acknowledging the fact that he had been inspired and shown the way by his predecessors. In an interview with Utpal K. Banerjee he has frankly revealed that Girish Karnad is his perfect role model of perfection (Banerjee 161). However, Dattani does not fall back to the mythology and history like Karnad to build up the basis for his plays. His mind and heart is inclined towards the social and political realities in India today. It is vividly clear in his plays that the recurring themes, he presents, are the Indian joint family and its impact on the individual, the plight of women in Indian society and homosexuality. There is no denying the fact that his works probe tangled attitudes of contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender.

His plays *Where There is a Will, Dance Like a Man* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* deal with the negative influence of the Indian joint family on its members living together. In *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani dwells on the issue of social prejudice against the art of dance and the plight of dancers. In *Tara*, the dramatist has embarked on the childhood story and powerfully deals on the social evil of gender bias. It is shown that the boy child is preferred to the girl child. The play has shown how the so called, disease of gender domination, has infected Indian society where women are still passive, helpless and shattered in front of the male tyranny.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is another bomb-shelling play of Dattani. It deals with a once upon a time taboo thing in India called homosexuality. The playwright has courageously presented this controversial theme to show that homosexuality is nothing new in the Indian society though it has being constantly looked at as something alien to our culture. In the play, a group of
well-to-do homosexuals in Bombay makes a revelation about themselves, exchange mutual relationship, attain self-discoveries and even go through disillusionment. Dattani’s interest in venturing into the virgin field, that is the areas of fresh interest and least discussed or not discussed at all, such as that of homosexuals, lesbians, eunuchs or hijras, is not something a piece unexplored in our land before but his approach to these topics is certainly peculiar and bold. The play’s circling on the homosexuality, lesbianism and sodomy is to show the deeply and psychologically affected people striving hard to find an answer to their mentally dissatisfied self. All the characters in the play fight with their own prejudices and end up in complete meaningless nothingness.

Mahesh Dattani has based his play *Thirty Days in September* on the issue of child abuse and has tried to lift the veil on the hush-hush subject. He has deftly treated the sensitive and generally taboo issue of child sexual abuse. The play with the story unfolding as a flashback, deals with the anguish of Mala Khatri, who is unable to stick to a steady relationship with any man for more than thirty days. It dwells on her trauma with the haunting memories of her abused past. As a child, she had been abused by her maternal uncle and this has left an indelible mark in her deeper self. As a result, she is unable to cope with the present life normally. Her abuser uncle has subconsciously lived with her all the time, as part of her dirty reflections. A nerve wrecking problem is also mirrored in the character of Mala’s mother. While Mala is withering under the psychological pressure of her abuser, her mother has consciously and silently suffered but has done nothing to exonerate them from it. Dattani has astutely dealt with the paradox of such love and betrayal that a mother and daughter have gone through. There is the severance of it due to helplessness in their unbreakable bond of love.
Dattani has molded his subject in such a way that it is both topical as well as appealing and the universal appeal of it can never be downplayed. The social interest in his plays is what one is most attracted to. He himself has pronounced it in an interview: “I am strongly affected by social issues, especially when it comes to power play in class and gender. A lot of my plays deal with them and they remain the leitmotifs of my plays” (Banerjee 166). This is how his plays speak across linguistic and cultural barriers. “There is an abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals and traditions and contemporary problems India is beset with but he has elevated these themes to a higher level, touching the human chords that emanate love, happiness, sexual fulfillment and problem of identity” (Bhattacharjee <http://isahitya.com>). It is in this way that Indian English dramatists have become socially conscious and have given their plays a contemporary colouring.

6.2.3. Vijay Tendulkar

Ever since his appearance on the literary scene in the 1950s, journalist-turned-writer, Vijay Tendulkar has captured our attention with his deep understanding of human complexity, social hypocrisy and hopes of the weak, particularly women. He is one of India’s most influential playwrights. He is one among the handful of playwrights along with Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and Badel Sircar, who have given a new content and form to Indian theatre by writing about contemporary issues and themes in a novel way.

Born in Kolhapur on January 6, 1928, Tendulkar has spent most of his life in Mumbai, writing sharp critiques of a society that he found increasingly violent and divided. He is one of the conscience-keepers of our society and creative world. He is also an untiring crusader for human rights and justice. This attribute in him has greatly enhanced his caliber as a prolific writer. He has written thirty full-length plays, seven one-act plays, two novels and
seventeen film scripts. His works are not only quantitatively abounding but also qualitatively rich and awe inspiring with sensitive issues of the contemporary era. They have manifested that he is a subtle observer of Indian social reality, a humanist and an innovative playwright. In an interview, Tendulkar has once said, “I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open. My work has come from within me, as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead, but I can’t do it, I have to speak the truth” (Saxena (<http://passionforcinema.com>)). This love for truth and the gift of sharp observation have being the vanguard in his career as a writer and an activist.

His plays, which came in succession, Ghashiram Kotwal and Sakharam Binder, were penetrating studies in violence. Actually, before these plays, he had been drawing the attention of theatre goers and critics with plays like Shantala! Court Chalu Aahe. But he began to get national attention only in the early seventies and became an icon of the young. Kumar Ketkar has wondered at the cosmopolitan knowledge and appeal of Tendulkar: “It is difficult to understand how and from where Tendulkar acquired modernist and, later, post modernist ideas. He had a very modest middle-class background, with little exposure to the European or American world of art and literature” (Ketkar <Http://www.indianexpress.com>). This universal appeal of the playwright as an Indian is clearly revealed in his own words, in an interview with Amrita Shah, “Half-a-dozen writers staying abroad and writing in English don’t affect this country as discussed-if you are not rooted in this reality then writing about this reality is either sheer nostalgia or fiction. You may be able to impress the Booker Prize people but you cannot impress. The poor Indian writers writing in regional languages are impressed not by the
book but by the money they earn. They endure the jealousy because of the money not the quality of writing.” (Shah <http://infochangeindia.org>). Tendulkar’s words are hard nuts to swallow but this is it. His plays are controversial in most cases because they dwell on hushed themes and social evils that many dared not venture into.

He has depicted the plight of women in a most naked manner. His plays reflect how society adds to the depreciation of women as human being and deprives them of most of human rights, relative to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual. There is a powerful reflection of exploitation of women; the way they are tortured and victimized. He has also displayed the way how society is unfair in its treatment of the fair sex by compelling them to tolerate all types of violence; physical, mental and emotional.

The play *Silence!* deals with Leela Benare who gets pregnant and the case is to be examined in the court, a fake court that assumes to be real. The irony of her charge is that the accusation brought against her at the beginning of the trial turns into a verdict at the end. Dr. Rajni Singh Solanki has remarked that “This very reversal in the attitude of the authorities expresses the basic hypocrisy and double standards on which our society is founded” (Solanki 749). A much more penetrating criticism is made my Arundhati Banerjee: “…The accusation brought against Benare at the trial turns into the verdict in last because contemporary Indian Society, with its roots grounded firmly in reactionary ideas, cannot allow the birth of a child out of wedlock” (Banerjee VII). Besides, in the course of Benare’s trial, her private life is exposed and publicly dissected. When Kashikar, the Judge, listened that Benare is a spinster, he has very irrationally approved the custom of child marriage. All this and more go to show that women’s desires are repressed under the onslaught of reactionary ideas of the fundamentally orthodox
society. The play also has shown gender bias through the character of Prof. Damle. He is equally guilty, like Benare, but the court cannot set a trial against him.

*Sakharan Binder* is based on lust of the flesh and the virulent eye of men on women and, conspicuously depicts the male dominance and sexual violence. This play revolves round the central character Sakharan, a book binder, a Brahmin by caste but presents an antithesis to the general perception of a member of his community. Contrary to the external appearance of his life, he exploits women, tortures them and treats them day and night as mere objects of lust, both physically and mentally. He keeps six women who had been kicked out of their homes by their husbands. A nerve wrecking story comes from Champa, whose husband, Fauzdar Sindhe, had lived and treated here like an object of his belonging, subjected to all kinds of violent and despicable acts. She exited from the clutches of her husband and landed up in Sakharam’s home, ironically to experience an unsafe womanhood again. Sindhe had treated her like a beast to gratify his sadism and sexual needs in unnatural ways. Her words are more than a wonder:

> I don’t have a heart. He chewed it up raw long ago. He brought me from my mother even before I’d become a woman. He married me when I didn’t even know what marriage meant. He would torture me at night. He branded me, and stuck needles into me and made me to do awful, filthy things.

> I ran away. He brought me back and stuffed chilly powder into that god-awful place, where it hurts most (Solanki 750).

Tendulkar has pictured the terrifying and horrifying experience of Champa not so much to appease his sense of revealing the naked truth of the stultifying society in which she is placed but to show that such a harrowing
thing does exist in human society even today as it had been in the past. Virginia Woolf has delineated the same picture of women’s plight in her A Room of One’s Own:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history.

She dominates lives of kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact, she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger… (and) in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband (Woolf 66).

Tendulkar’s Kamala is based on a real life incident. Like his other plays of social concern, he has dealt with the disheartening condition of women in contemporary Indian society, women who are toppled throughout and are treated as feeling-less objects as if they have no sentiments. The play revolves around the two women characters, Kamala and Sarita, who experience the same debased status and were debarred of their basic rights to be women with certain abilities. They are prevented from doing certain essential works and suffer an unfair justice. Sarita asks the most painfully recurring questions like why women are not masters like men, why women cannot live her life the way men live and why they cannot have a right to be women. In her most agonized moment, she cries out:

This must be changed. Those who do manly things should be equal to men. Those who don’t are women. And there will be some among them who have beards and moustaches too. Isn’t being Prime Minister of India a manly thing? And isn’t it an effeminate thing to grovel at that Prime Minister’s feet? (Tendulkar 46).
The playwright allows his characters to live and have their being without fettering them with his own mind and emotions as a creator. Sarita speaks out from the gamut of her feeling the pain she cannot keep repressing. In fact, it is the universal voice of women in agony and torment and, the dramatist is a genius in this art of presenting his characters authentically in every way.

His modern themes and perfectionist approach have magnetized the critics and his audience. He has never shrunk from public controversy as it gave him a unique opportunity to engage his opponents in public discourse. Balwant Bhaneja has opined that “There has been hardly a play by him that has not ended up in controversy. Most of the call for banning his plays did not, surprisingly, come from the government but from particular segments of the public who saw in his dramatizations attacks on their power positions – challenges to caste, gender or class structures” (Bhaneja <http://www.hotreview.org>). His famous and highly controversial play Gidhare (The Vultures) has explored the family relationship that lack filial love and understanding. The relationship turns out to be explosive and violent to the extent that the father, brother, sister and the rest get into a murderous mood over a question of property. Another controversial play, Ghasiram Kotwal (Ghasiram – Chief Indpector), has enraged a section of society when it opened in 1972. It was protested because the right-wing Hindu nationalists, RSS, have found it anti-Brahmin and described the negative depiction of the noble character, Nana Phadnavi, as historically inaccurate. But the author has rebutted his point later, in an interview saying that this play was not a historical play but “it is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghasirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwas, Nana
Phadnavis or Ghasiram. The moral of the story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere” (Bandyopadhyay iv).

Women play a major role in Tendulkar’s plays. They are mainly from the lower and middle classes like housewives, teachers, mistresses, daughters, film actors, slaves and servants. In fact, they are the central figures in the plays and they stand out more conspicuous than their male counterparts. This is not so much to show that they need this stage to voice their concerns but to show their real plight as they live with their dominant male human beings who are inclined to be gender bias. These women bring a broad range of emotions in the plays “from the unbelievably gullible to the clever, from the malleable to the stubborn, from the conservative to the rebellious, from the self-sacrificing to the grasping” (Goklhe 81).

Character portrayal is spectacular because he tends to minimize his personal influence on them and their personality development. They are a composite of contradictory personalities struggling between emotion and intellect, physical desires and conscience, espoused values and conflicting actions, seeking independence yet submissive. His genius in handpicking the characters from among the vast sea of population is hugely responsible for creating plays of a public interest and universal appeal. He himself has revealed that the secret behind real and lively characters is because they are in the play “with their own minds, ways and destiny” (Tendulkar 15).

The playwright’s large body of work represents an interesting amalgam of content and structure. In his plays, he has experimented with almost every form like traditional folk techniques in Ghasiram-Chief Inspector, with fifty characters dancing on the stage, to the minimalist Beckettain bicyclist journey in Safar/Cyclewallahi and The Masseur, a full-length one-man’s body in a hand cart. The dramatist insists that the structure of his plays is driven by the
characters, and it is this uniqueness that has brought out the broad thematic impact.

The author’s wide range of appeal does not mean that all his works have been assessed and given a public applause. With such a voluminous oeuvre written over fifty years, most of it in his mother tongue Marathi, it may be premature to give a comprehensive assessment. His notable creations are at the beginning and end of his career.

7. Asif Currimbhoy: A Virtuoso Indian English Playwright

Equally conscious of the contemporary social situations, like other modern Indian English playwrights, and inextinguishably feeling disturbed about the pandemonium of contemporary society, Asif Currimbhoy has plunged into the Indian English dramatic theatre as a playwright. Indian creative writers have attempted drama in English for a century but seldom for actual stage production. Among those countable Indian English playwrights, who have attempted stage production, there are only a few who have made a dent both at home and abroad. A singular exception to this seems to be Asif Currimbhoy who is “India’s first authentic voice in the theatre” (Reddy 22). Currimbhoy has written several plays, both long and short, which show his deep concern for dramatic effectiveness. His plays are primarily meant for the stage and have succeeded in brilliantly producing actable plays.

The coming of Currimbhoy into the Indian English dramatic scene has brought about a sea change in the theatrical field in India. He is one of the first Indian English playwrights to produce plays that could be performed. The watershed in Indian theatre in English came glitteringly inextinguishable after the Indian independence. To this renaissance, Currimbhoy definitely is a mighty contributor. He is the shining star in the new theatrical venture in India. He is one of the most prolific Indian English playwrights and his
position in Indian English theatre, therefore, cannot be compromised. With about thirty plays to his credit, he has written on the social issues that concerned him most.

Born of a Khoja Muslim family in Mumbai, he became a cosmopolitan in his approach to people and places. The family upbringing and the different environment in which he grew up have affected his mental make-up and these have a great bearing on his writing career. Hailing from the family of industrialists, Currimbhoy was introduced into the enterprise of keen observation and intellectual judgment. His father was a liberal minded armchair intellectual and his mother a veteran social worker. This parental dynamism clubbed with their congeniality and the environment of new ebullient ideas has formed an integral part of his temperament in his later life. The varied themes of his plays are a clear depiction of these indelible influences.

His education has backed him in his intellect and wit. Though his early education was in India, those were the days of British Raj. Therefore, he was introduced early into the English language and the influence of the West. He has revealed in an interview:

These were of course pre-Independence days and the colonial influence was felt full blast. It meant going through schools under the institutions that existed at that time for which I have my own sense of preparation and, perhaps, criticism; the family environment was centred around English; we were literally brown Sahibs – as they call it, with a sense of humour and a sense of frustration (Commentary 38).
There is a conspicuous corroboration in Currimbhoy that a sense of something incomplete has already being pre-set in his conscience from his early days. This is ignited further with his experiences at the College in USA:

College was in America, those beautiful mid-west landscapes of snow and loneliness. The love for language and life grew, and in the isolation of a groping search and hyper-sensitivity, I tried again to balance withdrawal with participation: Physical activity, vigour and the consciousness of living seeped through my veins, with tremendous sensuality and sex (Reddy 23).

The experience of his university days has deeply percolated into the core of his being. Therefore, “when he speaks of them he sounds more enthusiastic” (Rao 1986). He has been drawn towards Shakespeare as a University student, witnessed numerous dramatic productions and was quite alive to the various trends in drama in the USA (Commentary 38). These experiences have put in him much of the sophisticated veneer of the West but in spite of all this, the root of indigenous culture was never liquidated. Though born of a non–practicing Muslim family, he has kept his foot firm on the Hindu culture as an Indian. This has been reflected in his thorough knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishad and also the Hindu epics like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. Besides, he has lived through one of the most turbulent moments in the history of India and this has imprinted an indelible mark on his mind. A conglomeration of these registrations, of experiences and knowledge, only waits for the triggering moment to get ejected and splashed on paper in the form of plays, like the bullets in a loaded gun waiting for the trigger to get propelled.

He has also made a revelation about the way people in different societies have impacted him and how it has helped him to become a virtuoso
Indian English playwright. He has revealed the truth of his heart in the following words: “There is a sense of a trigger – I think the trigger was life itself, of what I saw around, of how I reached to it, in other words, an emotional reaction” (Commentary 39). This trigger has catapulted him to become a prodigious post-independence Indian playwright in English. This clarion call to become a playwright has refused to be extinguished under any circumstance until it is fulfilled through play writing. This call has besieged his other professional engagements and beckoning. As a result, he has given up the respectable and lucrative job with the Burmah Shell Oil Co. to devote his full time to writing and he started writing plays in his early thirties, averaging two plays a year.

The technique of evolving complex personalities and dramatic situations from the interplay of a deep rooted and diverse cultural ethos is typical of him. K.M. George spoke about this great playwright, who lay hidden for so long like a daffodil blooming so beautifully among the bushes and yet to be discovered:

I had heard of Asif Currimbhoy earlier. But it is only recently that I realized the power and vitality of his works… As the chief editor (the Sahitya Academy) the moral responsibility was entirely mine. It was a challenging, though highly enjoyable, task. It was in the course of this work that I came across Asif Currimbhoy’s work. I decided to include a part of his play, the *Dumb Dancer* in the anthology. That was also the time when I decided that I should be seriously introducing this talented playwright to Malayalies (George 5).

He is like a voice crying in the wilderness to let his voice be heard. Sadly enough, his works, initially, have seen a bleak future at home. It was in
United States that he saw his first success when his play *Goa* was staged by the University of Michigan in 1965. Four years later, he has tasted the fruit of his labour at home. It was only in 1969 that his play *The Doldrummers* was staged in Delhi by the Little Theatre Group. From then on, there was no looking back on the success of Currimbhoy, especially in the theatre. He has revolutionized the Indian English dramaturgy, with his plays in English dwelling on the subjects and themes of modern concerns.

Currimbhoy stands toweringly high in the Indian English theatre and his plays are profoundly appreciated. C.V. Venugopal, a great critic on the plays of Currimbhoy, has eulogized his eminent stature in theatre in the following words:

If Indian drama in English has had a significant breakthrough of late, only a handful of playwrights can take the credit for it. Among these few, Asif Currimbhoy most definitely figures prominently. For sheer fecundity as a playwright he has no equal: ever since he began writing in the late fifties, he has averaged almost two plays a year. Although the very titles of his plays, most of them at least, betray their stark topicality assurance with which he handles almost every facet of drama, be it farce or fantasy, comedy or melodrama, does made us sit up and take notice (Venugopal 261).

The accolades he receives are not the fruits of a mere chance. He was fully conscious of his works and the subjects he has dealt with are preconceived.

The influences on him were actively alive and they gradually got unfolded in his plays, ever since he started writing. P. Bayapa Reddy has remarked that Curimbhoy “chose to write for the theatre because he thought that this was the art form which allowed him most to show the complexity of the society he lived in” (Reddy 25). By choosing to write for the theatre,
conflict and emotion were the essential creams the playwright has employed. He has used conflict powerfully in his plays and this is the distinctive epicenter from where action of the play gets reeled out. In doing so, he has never failed to lose sight of the visual and auditory sources to ensure an effective communication. Faubion Bowers, the eminent theatre critic and a specialist in the theatre of the Orient, has said,

In sharp contrast to our own playwrights, very few Asians have been able to be prophets both at home and overseas, especially in theatre. Rabindranath Tagore was an exception, although it was his poetry which got him the first Nobel Literature Prize ever given to an Asian. Mishima was another, although not even his bizarre love–suicide (according to the Japanese) has resulted in a successful production of any of his many marvelous plays. Another exception is Asif Curimbhoy, I think for he has now begun to emerge more and more clearly as a playwright of international stature (Bowers 4).

Eulogizing the appeal of Curimbhoy to the international audience, R.L. Meserve and W.J. Meserve have also said that “among the modern Indian playwrights none has the International reputation of Asif Curimbhoy whose works have been performed in several cities of the United States” (Meserve 30).

As a playwright for the theatre, his themes are gleaned from social situations, even controversial ones. So much so that Faubion Bowers has remarked that “He has written that country’s first plays of dissent. He presents life as it is, not as something it should be, the age-old course of India’s classical theatre. Once again, art, that discredited wonder-box of illusions, finds itself telling the truth while politicians lie and people look the other way”
Therefore, there can be no doubting the fact about Currimbhoy’s wide range of knowledge. He has written on a variety of themes and subjects. K.R.S. Iyengar has commented, “Certainly, there can be no question regarding Currimbhoy’s fecundity as a dramatist. Variety and versatility are the other distinguishing ‘marks’ of Currimbhoy as a dramatist” (Iyengar 244). Peter Nazareth has appreciated him for writing “Good plays of the events that boggle the moral imagination” (Nazareth 13). Currimbhoy himself had once commented on the assortment of themes in his plays:

Good theatre does not...depend upon language or geography: rather it depends upon inherent situations, and of course, conflicts...Some people tend to confuse conflict with controversy. They can be alike and different. If genuine conflict gives rise to honest difference in opinion, the controversy is justified as provocation to thought, on the other hand, if controversy is generated as showmanship or sensationalism, it goes without saying that it would be self – defeating and unsubstantive (Currimbhoy 43).

His social concern has penetrated deeply into the everyday problems of every society. As a social realist, the naked reality of society lay before him without veil. Therefore, any striking issue that catches his attention has kept him restless and, finally got streaked in his playwriting. In this regard Meserves have opined:

Social realism as a style is attractive to Third World dramatists because it allows the maximum opportunity for protest and comment. But whereas much of their drama is of a low quality, presenting an unsubtle approach to a localized or immediate problem, Currimbhoy’s plays are concerned with the problems of man everywhere (Meserve 32).
Man reveals himself through the social and political systems prevalent in his community. Due to these social and political effects on man, Currimbhoy has employed the social realistic world as a starting point. As a man beset with a tremendous verve and energy, he does things which bear out his destiny in the world of the mind as well as the social and political worlds that surround him. Faubion Bowers too has wondered at Currimbhoy’s vigour as a playwright:

...But I am saying it is inconceivable to me to estimate what it has meant for Currimbhoy to believe in himself so fiercely, to work for so long totally alone...to be a Bombay–born non–practicing Muslim...to conform and yet create, to obey society and yet destroy it with death–ray words, to write plays like bullets needing only the trigger of a national event, and even to live in this unappreciative world where fame is awarded, others so cheaply and on such a flimsy basis (Bowers 8).

Currimbhoy has an unquenched thirst, not for knowledge but for those things that lay restless in his mind and heart until it rests on the plays. He has lived through some of the most turbulent times in the history of modern India. His preoccupation with socio-literary activities was the result of the climate of the times in which he grew. Independence to India and the consequence of partition of the country have brought some of the most painful experiences to both the countries. Independence and the trauma of partition were responsible for the sudden break down of brotherly relation and the collapse of human values. Clubbed with this anguish is the new current of violence that has erupted in the country in the sixties. Currimbhoy, therefore, has been profoundly influenced by the existential problems and sufferings of humanity.
The playwright has felt a strong urge of “evolving himself in society and seek a full revelation in his plays of what he finds in the world around him and within him” (Commentary 39). The new currents of violence that erupted in the country, India, during the sixties have befittingly served his purpose. As he plunged into the dramatic world, he has chosen to write for the theatre because he thought this would allow him to show the complexity of society he lived in. His acute sense of observation on people and particularly on the mode of expression has made him create unique things. This is evident from what he has revealed to Rajinder Paul and Paul Jacob in an interview about his past experiences and places:

The place had always had a considerable fascination for me and dialogue always appeared to me especially when they incorporated a feeling of diverse opinion. In other words a conflict in theatre, conflict at every level – physical, mental and emotional – because from the time really you meet with other people, what is human relationships, its striking sparks with each other that brings about a feel of life (Paul 1970).

The feeling he has for life has made him go a long way. He has always maintained an independent thinking in his journey through playwriting. He chose controversial themes, embodied them in arresting dialogues with constructed and resolved plots in an unconventional way.

The abundance of Currimbhoy’s plays, which appeared in a quick succession, has perceptibly exemplified the force of compulsion in him toward life and this got sparked off onto the stage of his imagination; a stage that replicates the real social situation he had experienced and perceived. The plays of about thirty in number that came up in a short period of time verify to this effect. He has written a one act plays, two act plays, three act plays and
even a four act play on social, political, romantic, religious and art concerns. Figuring tall among the Indian English playwrights, his emphasis is social realism affected with existential dilemmas. Therefore, as a social realist, his plays reveal a social conscience which has a deep preoccupation with the search of truth. Most of the themes and plots of his plays have their sources in the contemporary problems. For instance, *Inquilab* or Revolution (1970) deals with the Naxalite movement of Bengal, *Refugee* (1971) was inspired by the influx of Bangladesh refugees into India during the Bangladesh’s fight for self-determination, *Sonar Bangla* (1972) dramatizes the liberation of Bangladesh from the clutches of Pakistan and the dented relation between India and Pakistan, *The Captives* (1962) is related to the Chinese invasion of 1962, *Goa* (1964) took shape from the annexation of Goa in 1961 and *Om Mane Padme Hum!* (1971) is a religious-political play regarding the flight of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa and encroachment of Communism into Lamaism, thereby, raising the question of modern human civilization. This theme of civilization is discussed further in *Angkor* (1973) which deals with the past history of Cambodia and Sino-India relationship. The construction of this play is based on the rise and fall of civilization. There are vicissitudes, the alterations and transformation, the disappearance and the recovery in it. These and more of his plays, of the twenty nine (29) plays of his published works, are social-centric.

Currimbhoy has sought to express himself through his plays. Taking everything to be his province, he has an abundance of sources available to weave it into plays. He draws inspiration from the classics of India and West, from the rich Indian epics, *Upanishad* and *Bhagvat Gita*, from the particular historical happenings, from politics and religion of the world and above all from the everyday experiences of his life. Like Arnold Wesker, he is a playwright with a social purpose and he does not only seek to present men and
things as he sees them but also gives an artistic assessment of them. Nevertheless, he always takes a wise precaution to present his thoughts through implication, indirection and innuendo rather than through direct statements. It is clearly perceivable from his plays that he takes a clever approach to his purpose; that is to provoke human thought rather than to persuade them to adopt a specific plan of action.

The playwright has also expressed his vision of man and life through his dramatic art. He sees man as essentially a creature of passion with a potential for great nobility as well as terrible destruction. Man the creator and man the destroyer has the volition to decide for his action but it is the action which designs his destiny. The dramatist, in all his faith, is, therefore, unable to take man to be so fortunate because at every bend of life, there is either pain and suffering or sorrow and sadness. Despite the dark side of man’s life lying indelibly outstretched for every man to tread through, there is always the hope of fulfillment and success, liberation and salvation. Therefore, he sees in man the ideal and the degenerate. This complexity in man makes society to be all the more complex because each human society houses diverse individuals with unique personalities. As a social realist, the author could not but present the conflicting diversities and out of that conflict and dilemma, he has created dramas that are vitally alive.

The dramatist believes that conflicts cannot be divorced from human society which is constantly evolving. He also does not deny the fact that changes are initiated through conflicts. Keeping these conflicts at the basement of discussion, this paper will concentrate on social conflict, inner conflict and human predicament. Prior to the detailed discussion of these themes in the selected plays of Asif Currimbhoy, each chapter will be initiated with some theories.
The Elements Of Drama

The elements of drama, by which dramatic works can be analyzed and evaluated, can be categorized into three major areas:

Literary elements

Technical elements

Performance elements

Aristotle

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a Greek philosopher whose writings still influence us today. He was the first to write about the essential elements of drama more than 2,000 years ago. While ideas have changed slightly over the years, we still discuss Aristotle's list when talking about what makes the best drama.

Aristotle’s Six Elements of Drama

Aristotle considered these six things to be essential to good drama:

• Plot: This is what happens in the play. Plot refers to the action; the basic storyline of the play.

• Theme: While plot refers to the action of the play, theme refers to the meaning of the play. Theme is the main idea or lesson to be learned from the play. In some cases, the theme of a play is obvious; other times it is quite subtle.

• Characters: Characters are the people (sometimes animals or ideas) portrayed by the actors in the play. It is the characters who move the action, or plot, of the play forward.

• Dialogue: This refers to the words written by the playwright and spoken by the characters in the play. The dialogue helps move the action of the play along.

• Music/Rhythm: While music is often featured in drama, in this case Aristotle was referring to the rhythm of the actors' voices as they speak.

• Spectacle: This refers to the visual elements of a play: sets, costumes, special effects, etc. Spectacle is everything that the audience sees as they watch the play.
The Modern Theater

In the modern theater, this list has changed slightly, although you will notice that many of the elements remain the same. The list of essential elements in modern theater is as follows.

- Characters
- Plot
- Theme
- Dialogue
- Convention
- Genre
- Audience

The first four, character, plot, theme and dialogue remain the same, but the following additions are now also considered essential elements of drama.

- Convention: These are the techniques and methods used by the playwright and director to create the desired stylistic effect.

- Genre: Genre refers to the type of play. Some examples of different genres include comedy, tragedy, mystery and historical play.

- Audience: This is the group of people who watch the play. Many playwrights and actors consider the audience to be the most important element of drama, as all of the effort put in to writing and producing a play is for the enjoyment of the audience.

**Literary Elements**

There are six stages in a plot structure.

1. **Initial incident:** The event that “gets the story going”
2. **Preliminary event:** Whatever takes place BEFORE the action of the play that is directly related to the play
3. **Rising action:** A series of events following the initial incident and leading up to the dramatic climax
4. Climax: The turning point or high point of a story, when events can go either way

5. Falling action: The series of events following the climax

6. Denouement: Another term for the conclusion from the French word for “unraveling”

**Other Literary Elements**

Exposition: The “who, when, where and what” part of the play

Story organization: beginning, middle, end

Conflict: The internal or external struggle between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates dramatic tension

Suspense: A feeling of uncertainty as to the outcome, used to build interest and excitement on the part of the audience

Language: In drama, the particular manner of verbal expression, the diction or style of writing, or the speech or phrasing that suggests a class or profession or type of character

Style: the shaping of dramatic material, settings, or costumes in a deliberately non-realistic manner

Soliloquy: A speech by a single actor who is ALONE on stage

Monologue: A long speech made by one actor (a monologue may be delivered alone or in the presence of others.)

**Technical Elements**

- Scenery (set): The theatrical equipment, such as curtains, flats, backdrops, or platforms, used in a dramatic production to communicate environment

- Costumes: Clothing and accessories worn by actors to portray character and period.

- Props: Short for properties; any article, except costume or scenery, used as part of a dramatic production; any moveable object that appears on stage during a performance, from a telephone to a train

**Other Technical Elements.**

Lights: The placement, intensity, and color of lights to help communicate environment, mood, or feeling
Sound: The effects an audience hears during performance to communicate character, context, or environment

Makeup: Costumes, wigs, and body paint used to transform an actor into a character.

Performance Elements

Acting: Use of face, body, and voice to portray character

Character motivation: The reason or reasons for a character’s behavior; an incentive or inducement for further action for a character

Character analysis: In responding to dramatic art, the process of examining how the elements of drama – literary, technical, and performance – are used

Empathy: The capacity to relate to the feelings of another

Other Performance Elements

Speaking: The mode of expression or delivery of lines

Breath control: Proper use of the lungs and diaphragm muscle for maximum capacity and efficiency of breath for speaking

Vocal expression: How an actor uses his or her voice to convey character

Inflection: Change in pitch or loudness of the voice. Projection: How well the voice carries to the audience

Speaking style: The mode of expression or delivery of lines

Diction: Selection and pronunciation of words; clarity of speech.

Nonverbal expression

Gestures: Any movement of the actor’s head, shoulder, arm, hand, leg, or foot to convey meaning

Facial expression: Physical and vocal aspects used by an actor to convey mood, feeling, or personality
Unit – 5

Basics of Stage Directions for Actors

Every play has some degree of stage direction written into the script. Stage directions serve many functions, but their primary one is to help actors situate themselves on stage, called blocking. During rehearsal, a grid will be overlaid on the stage, dividing it into nine or 15 zones, depending on size.

Notations in the script from the playwright, set aside with brackets, tell the actors where to sit, stand, move about, and enter and exit. The directions are written from the perspective of the actor facing downstage, or toward the audience. The rear of the stage, called upstage, is behind the actor's back. An actor who turns to his right is moving stage right. An actor who turns left is moving stage left. In the example above, the stage has been divided into 15 zones.

Stage directions also can be used to tell an actor how to shape his or her performance. These notes may describe how the character behaves physically or mentally and are used by the playwright to guide the play's emotional tone. Some scripts also contain notations on lighting, music, and sound effects.

Stage Direction Abbreviations

Most published plays have stage directions written within the text, often in abbreviated form. Here’s what they mean:

C: Center
D: Downstage
DR: Downstage Right
DRC: Downstage Right Center
DC: Downstage Center
DLC: Downstage Left Center
DL: Downstage Left
R: Right
RC: Right Center
L: Left
LC: Left Center
U: Upstage
UR: Upstage Right
URC: Upstage Right Center
UC: Upstage Center
ULC: Upstage Left Center
UL: Upstage Left

**Tips for Actors and Playwrights**
Whether you're an actor, writer, or director, knowing how to use stage directions effectively will help you improve your craft. Here are some tips.

**Make it short and sweet.** Edward Albee was notorious for using vague stage directions in his scripts (he used "not amused" in one play). The best stage directions are clear and concise and can be interpreted easily.

**Consider motivation.** A script may tell an actor to walk quickly downstage center and little else. That's where a director and actor must work together to interpret this guidance in a manner that would seem appropriate for the character.

**Practice makes perfect.** It takes time for a character's habits, sensibilities, and gestures become natural, which means lots of rehearsal time, alone and with other actors. It also means being willing to try different approaches when you hit a roadblock.

**Directions are suggestions, not commands.** Stage directions are the playwright's chance to shape physical and emotional space through effective blocking. But directors and actors don't have to be faithful to stage directions if they think a different interpretation would be more effective.

**History and development of director for theatre**

A theatre director or stage director is an instructor in the theatre field who oversees and orchestrates the mounting of a theatre production (a play, an opera, a musical, or a devised piece of work) by unifying various endeavours and aspects of production. The director's function is to ensure the quality and completeness of theatre production and to lead the members of the creative team into realizing their artistic vision for it. The director therefore collaborates with a team of creative individuals and other staff, coordinating research, stagecraft, costume design, props, lighting design, acting, set design, stage combat, and sound design for the production. If the production he or she is mounting is a new piece of writing or a (new) translation of a play, the director may also work with the playwright or translator. In contemporary theatre, after the playwright, the director is generally the primary visionary, making decisions on the artistic concept and interpretation of the play and its staging. Different directors occupy different places of authority and responsibility, depending on the structure and philosophy of individual theatre companies. Directors use a wide variety of techniques, philosophies, and levels of collaboration.

**Theatre** or **theater** is a collaborative form of **fine art** that uses live performers, typically **actors** or **actresses**, to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage. The performers may communicate this experience to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music, and dance. Elements of art, such as painted scenery and **stagecraft** such
as lighting are used to enhance the physicality, presence and immediacy of the experience. The specific place of the performance is also named by the word "theatre" as derived from the Ancient Greek θέατρον (théatron, "a place for viewing"), itself from θεάομαι (theáomai, "to see", "to watch"", "to observe").

Modern Western theatre comes, in large measure, from ancient Greek drama, from which it borrows technical terminology, classification into genres, and many of its themes, stock characters, and plot elements. Theatre artist Patrice Pavis defines theatricality, theatrical language, stage writing and the specificity of theatre as synonymous expressions that differentiate theatre from the other performing arts, literature and the arts in general.

Modern theatre includes performances of plays and musical theatre. The art forms of ballet and opera were influenced on the development of musical theatre; see those articles for more information.

Principles of Direction

1. **Harmony of Objectives**: Harmonizing the individual’s objectives with the group objectives is the first principle of directing. Persons join the concern for getting their physiological and psychological needs satisfied. They are expected by the organization to work in such a manner to achieve the organizational goals. Individuals also work well only when they feel that their personal goals will be satisfied. Thus, directing function must first of all resolve the conflict between the individual’s goals and organizational goals.

2. **Unity of Direction**: Another important principle of direction is that the orders should be received by the subordinates from only one superior. In other words, there should not be dual subordination. Dual subordination brings disorder, confusion, chaos and undermines authority and leads to instability. The subordinates should report to only one superior.

3. **Direct Supervision**: It is essential for the managers to have a direct and personal contact with their subordinates because direction involves motivating the subordinates toward work. Direct supervision makes the subordinates happy and boosts their morale. It also ensures quick feed back of necessary information.

4. **Appropriate Leadership Style**: Leadership is a process of influence exercised on group members by the leader in the work environment. There is no one universally acceptable leadership style. No single style is suitable to all situations. The style varies with the situations. Therefore, a manager should exhibit appropriate leadership style i.e., the style that is suitable to a given situation.
5. **Appropriate Direction Techniques**: Direction techniques that are used by the managers should be appropriate i.e., it should be suitable to superiors, subordinates and the situation so as to ensure efficiency of direction.

6. **Use of Informal Organization**: Managers should make use of informal groups so that the formal groups can be strengthened.

7. **Use of Motivation Techniques**: Managers should develop selective motivation techniques such as money, pay, status, promotion, etc., So that the productivity and the quality of the products can be increased. Motivation ensures higher job satisfaction.

8. **Follow Up**: Directing is a never ending process. It involves continuous supervision, advice, counseling and assisting the subordinates in the performance of their jobs. So it requires continuous feedback which is essential to make necessary modifications in the activities of the management.

**How to Analyze a Character in a Drama for Actors**

Characters in a play are either arched (rounded) or stereotyped. Information about who a character is can be given by the author in the list of characters, but most of the information can be found in the dialogue of the character and that of the other characters.

Realistic plays usually have rounded characters whereas absurd, epic and Commedia dell Arte mostly have stereotyped characters.

A rounded character can be analyzed in depth while with a stereotyped character you will focus on one or two typical characteristics and explore that in detail.

To be able to portray the character truthfully on stage, it is important to first analyze and understand the character.
A Stereotyped Character

Scripts usually provide very little information about stereotyped characters, apart from the one or two exaggerated characteristics that define the character. Examples of stereotyped characters can be found in the Commedia dell Arte. Pantelone, for instance, is known as the old man who lusts after women and who is more concerned about his money than about anything else. Other well-known stereotypes are evil characters, nerds, blonds, beggars etc.

When you have to portray any of these characters you have to focus on that one specific characteristic as there is usually no progression in these characters and no visible change as with rounded characters.

It is important to remember that the characters are stereotyped by others and not by themselves. The evil character, for instance, doesn't believe he is evil and the blond won't think she is less intelligent than others.

Even though the character is stereotyped the character will also have a goal as with a rounded character. It is important to find the character's goal within the play. The beggars goal might be to stay alive or find food while the evil character's goal might be to steal the money or kill his enemy. It is necessary to approach the character with his or her goal in mind.
Commedia Dell Arte: Pantalone
A Rounded (Arched) Character

During the period of realism in theatre, it was important to create characters on stage who can be perceived by the audience as a "real" person. In other words the audience was supposed to believe they are not seeing an actor on stage pretending to be someone else, but that the actor has really become the character.

The theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski constructed a four level plan to analyze and understand any rounded character based on the given information in the text. For rounded characters there will always be information about the character's history, personality traits, values, status and relationships with other characters. All of these have to be explored in detail by the actor to establish a truthful and believable character on stage. The next steps will explain the four different levels in more detail.

Konstantin Stanislavski
First level: physical

The text will give an indication of the age and physical appearance of the character. It is not always given in the character list or stage directions of the play, but mostly in what is said about the character by others or the character's own words. We know, for instance, that Nora in a Doll's House is very pretty and still young. We get this information from what she says about herself and what Torvald says about her.

If a character has a disability or a specific mannerism, it will also be clearly stated in the text. It is therefore very important to read the text a couple of times and make notes of all this information. It is very unlikely that you will pick up all the information with one reading.

Second level: physiological

Here you will look at the goals of your character. This is a vast process as you would not only have to find the major goal for character in the play, but also a specific goal for each scene the character is part of.

How this is done is up to each actor and director. Some directors will expect the actor to do his or her analysis first and then discuss it or other directors might want to be part of the process.

You can either first find the main goal for the character in the entire play or you can start by finding specific goals for each scene.

Take Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet as an example, Juliet's main goal is to be with Romeo, but in different scenes she has other smaller goals. In the conversation with her father about marrying Paris, her goal is to convince her father that she is not in love with Paris. Alike she will have goals for all her other scenes. It is the responsibility of the actor to find these goals to be able to portray the character truthfully. Goals provide specific motivation for what the character is saying and doing.

Third level: social

It is important to know your character's status in the play. A character's status can be low or high or even in between. Status can also change. In Antigone, the king, Creon has a very high status in the beginning of the play which changes to a low status at the end when he loses everything. In A Doll's house, Nora has a lower status than Torvald, but when she has the courage to leave him, at the end, her status changes and so does his.

You should also explore relationships with other characters carefully. This can stay the same throughout the play, but many times relationships change and can be different in different scenes. It is also important to know if these relationships are real or pretended.

The words a character say can either be true or not. While you explore the text you will notice if the relationship is based on honesty or not. In The Importance of being Earnest, Algernon pretends to like his aunt, but in reality he sees her as a drag and a nuisance. This is revealed in his conversations with other characters.
Fourth Level: Moral

This is where you will explore the personality, values and beliefs of your character. Again, all this is revealed by the text. You will soon notice if your character is the good or the bad guy. You can create a list of questions you want to ask about the character and then find these answers from the text or your director might be able to provide you with a list of questions you should ask about the character.

You can include questions such as, What will my character do if he stumbles upon a bag of money? Will he keep it or take it to the police? Your answer will be determined by who your character is. If you can answer random questions such as these about your character you will know that you understand your character or it will force you to go explore further if you are in doubt.

STYLES OF DIRECTING

The dictator

In this style of directing, the director has a strongly assertive role and is very dominant in the process of creating a theatrical work. Rehearsals are more or less fully controlled and predictable, with the actors having little or no say.

The negotiator

‘The negotiator‘ is a style of direction in which the director focuses on a more improvised and mediated form of rehearsal and creation, using the ideas of the production team and actors to shape a theatrical work in quite a democratic style.

The creative artist

The director sees himself or herself as a creative artist working with the ‘materials’ of dramatic creativity, be they the actors, designers and production team. The “creative artist” wants input from the actors but, as artist, has final say over what is included and how ideas are incorporated.

The confrontation list

In this style of directing, the director is in constant dialogue and debate with the cast and the production team about creative decisions and interpretations. The director seeks out and actively engages in such exchanges. Out of these exchanges, which can sometimes be heated or risky, comes a final contested product.
THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

The director has two basic responsibilities: (1) to bring about a unified vision within the finished production, and (2) to lead others toward its ultimate actualization. To meet these charges, the director must organize the realization of his or her vision. The director must decide upon the interpretation to be given the play; work with the playwright (if possible), designers, and technicians in planning the production; cast and rehearse the actors; and coordinate all elements into the finished production.

To decide upon interpretation, the director must analyze the script to discover the play’s structure and meanings. Without understanding, the director cannot make choices. He or she seeks to know what the play is about and to understand each character in terms of both the script and the demands that character places upon the actor. The director must be able to envision the play’s atmosphere or mood and know how to actualize in terms of design and theatrical space. And, finally, the director must be able to see the play in terms of both physical and verbal action.

Before rehearsals begin, the director meets with the designers. At this time, the director not only gives his or her vision, but also listens to ideas. This highly creative intercourse results in a compromise which often is better than the original vision, for creative ideas interact with other creative ideas. Ultimately however, the director decides upon the interpretation to be used. The director may have specific requirements that would need to be presented to the designers before their work begins. The director must be aware of actor movement when viewing a design. Also, the director must have an idea of what kind of lighting would help enhance the mood of the production.

When casting a play, the director is aware of the physical demands of a character. Physical appearance must fit the character and must also be seen in relation to other characters. The director also tries to discern acting potential. In his book, Theatre, Robert Cohen describes traits that a director often looks for:

Depending on the specific demands on the play and the rehearsal situation, the director may pay special attention to any or all of the following characteristics: the actor’s training and experience, physical characteristics and vocal technique, suitability for the style of the play, perceived ability to impersonate a specific character in the play, personality traits which seem fitted to the material at hand, ability to understand the play and its milieu, personal liveliness and apparent stage “presence,” past record of achievement, general deportment and attitude, apparent cooperativeness and “direct ability” in the context of an ensemble of actors in a collaborative enterprise, and overall attractiveness as a person with who one must work closely over the next four to ten weeks.
The director’s most time-consuming task is to rehearse the actors. The director must be organized, for he or she focuses the entire cast during this time. The director’s medium is the actor in space and time. Space is defined by the acting area and the setting while time is defined by the duration of the production and the dynamics of the drama. The director must be able to see the actor as a person and strive to draw out that person’s potential. Consequently, the director constantly must be sensitive to both the needs of an actor and at the same time think of ways to meet those needs in positive ways.

Directors tend to follow an established process during rehearsals. Initially, the director usually has the actors read through the script. The read-through allows the director to discuss his or her vision, character motivation, and interpretation which will help the actors begin to see their characters in terms of a unified understanding. The director then blocks the actors. Blocking are an actor’s basic broad movements which serve as the physical foundation of the actor’s performance. The director indicates movement such as entrances and exits and positions actors onstage. Often, this step takes preplanning. During this stage, interpretation begins to be worked out, for blocking is linked to a character’s motivation to move or position.

The next step would be to work on detail, which helps an actor discover his or her character. Detail includes working out stage business, which is an actor’s small-scale movement. For instance, making coffee, answering a phone, putting on shoes, or adjusting a tie are pieces of stage business. Hopefully, the actor will originate much of his or her own stage business.

Motivation and detail continue while time is spent devoted to lines. Interpretation of dialogue must be connected to motivation and detail. During this time, the director is also concerned with pace and seeks a variation of tempo. If the overall pace is too slow, then the action becomes dull and dragging. If the overall pace is too fast, then the audience will not be able to understand what is going on, for they are being hit with too much information to process.

Also, eventually, the actors will need to be off script. Once off script and the lines are well enough that the actor is not thinking “What is my next line?” then the rehearsals are a very rewarding stage of development. For actors cease to read their part and truly make their own interpretation once off script.

Late in the rehearsal process, the director often has the actors run through the production. A runthrough gives the actors a sense of continuity from one scene to the next. At this stage, the director usually does not stop the actors but takes notes to give after the scene is finished.

Nearly all elements of the production — actors, scenery, lights, sound — come together at the technical rehearsal. The stage manager, prop crew, running crew, light and sound board operators all rehearse their various parts to play. Hopefully, light and sound cues will be set before the first technical rehearsal begins. A dress rehearsal is a technical rehearsal with costumes and makeup. At this time, the director must give over the production to the actors and technicians. The final dress rehearsal should be the same as a performance.
Nobody is more useless on opening night performance than the director. The
director’s job is over at this time and is often lost and feeling alone. The best the
director can do is to wish people well, sit, watch the performance, know every
flaw during that performance, and sweat it out.