

TOPIC: THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH DRAMA IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE.

Manjunatha B

Assistant Professor of English
Government First Grade College.
Gouribidanur-561208
Chickballapur Dist.

Abstract:

Drama is one of the most dynamic literary forms, as it is empowered by its potential to communicate directly with a live audience and the capacity to enable the onlookers to partake in a cathartic experience. It has its own universe, in which human sensibilities and experiences are reflected, through the actions, emotions and attitudes of the characters. It is a literature which is alive- full of voices, laughter, and tears to move the spectators. It is the most powerful genre in world literature. The existence of a dramatic tradition in Greece, Rome, England and India proves theatre to be an integral part of their culture, religion, philosophy, and politics. The origin and development of English drama can be traced to England after the Norman Conquest in the tenth century. The present research paper explores the development of Drama across the globe and also traces its journey on the Indian soil, with major emphasis on the study of the Post-Independence and Pre-Independence Drama.

Keywords: Indian Drama, Pre-independence, post- independence. Miracle Plays. Playwrights.

The existence of a dramatic tradition in Greece, Rome, England and India proves theatre to be an integral part of their culture, religion, philosophy, and politics. The origin and development of English drama can be traced to England after the Norman Conquest in the tenth century. Prior to the Norman rule, a rudimentary form of drama called 'Tableau' existed outside London. In England, the Church played a crucial role in the life of people, and Dramas written by the clergymen were enacted in the Church. These dramas called Miracle Plays were based on religious, ethical, and moralistic subjects and enacted the lives of saints and Christ. In the 13th century, craft guilds began producing Mystery plays at sites other than the church and added satirical elements to them. Plays in England were often performed on mobile wagons called 'pageants', while in France and Italy they were acted on stage. Gradually drama shifted from the clergy to the common man. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, at the time of the rule of Elizabeth I, London became a centre for theatrical activities. Nicholas Udall is credited with writing the first regular play, a comedy called Ralph Roister Doister in 1541. Gorbuduc by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton was the first English tragedy. English Drama attained its glory during the Renaissance, with dramatists like Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Lodge, George Peele and Thomas Nash. These men formed a group called "The University Wits" and were mainly interested in writing for the public stage.

English drama attained full blossoming in the hands of William Shakespeare, who wrote tragedies, comedies, as well as historical plays. He is regarded as the undisputed king of English drama and has been an inspiration for playwrights all over the world. After 1610, a number of changes took place in the techniques and subjects of English drama. A new breed of playwrights came to the fore, who wrote plays that focused on thrill and excitement. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont were two of these new playwrights. The Restoration comedy arrived but could not hold for long and drama declined in the eighteenth century in England. In the later nineteenth century, a significant change came again on the London stage, with the arrival of Irish playwrights George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, and the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, all of whom influenced domestic English drama and revitalized it.

These playwrights became inspiration for other playwrights across the globe, including Indian English dramatists, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani, whose plays are the subject of this research work.

In India, the origin of drama can be traced to the ancient times. Indian drama can be regarded as the most authentic and ancient art form, very indigenous in form and essence. In ancient India drama based on religious scriptures, legends, and myths was performed in temples. It was a synthesis of song and dance in praise of gods, and narrative recitation was later added. Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata also attempt to define drama. Valmiki, the renowned Indian poet and writer of the Ramayana uses the word “Nat” or “Nartaka” meaning an actor or performer. Mahabharata defines drama as a fusion of poetry, story, and action.

The tradition of dramatic activity in India can be traced to the Vedic period. The dramatist Bhasa or Bharata who appeared approximately in the seventh century A. D. is traditionally considered the Father of Indian drama. Bharata describes drama as the “Fifth Veda” or “Nataka Panchamo Veda”, in his renowned book *Natyashastra*. Drama or *Natya* is defined as the ‘imitation’ of the ‘Three Worlds’ or *trilokya*. It represents life with all its joys and sorrows. The aim of drama is to provide entertainment and also instruction on issues of peace, happiness and moral upliftment. *Natyashastra* discusses all aspects of drama like stage setting, music, plot-construction, characterization, dialogue and acting. The soul of Bharata’s poetics of drama can be summarized by this quotation from the *Natyashastra*, “The combination called *natya* is a mixture of *rasa*, *bhavas*, *vrittis*, *pravittis*, *siddhi*, *svaras*, *abhinayas*, *dharmic instruments* song and theatre house”.

The tradition of drama is about two thousand years old. *Natyashastra* inspired Sanskrit drama and produced great playwrights like Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha and Bhavabhuti. The earliest texts are the Buddhist plays ascribed to Asvaghosh in the first- second century A.D. Sudraka, the author of *Mrichhakatika*, or ‘Little Clay-Cart’ depicted the existing Indian society. The golden age of Sanskrit drama produced world-famous playwrights, among whom is Kalidasa (370- 450 CE), who is regarded as the Shakespeare of India. His masterpiece *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is considered to be the finest specimen of a tragi-comedy. Kalidasa’s *Malvikagnimitram* is a romantic comedy, while *Raghuvansham* traces the history of the clan of King Raghu.

At around the same time that Sanskrit drama flourished, South India boasted of a rich literary and dramatic tradition known as ‘Sangam Literature’, which was more of a dance- drama rather than drama proper. Sanskrit drama gradually shifted to the courts to be patronized by kings and nobles, and was reduced to being a pastime of scholars and learned men. Its growth was further limited due to political changes. With time vernacular or regional languages gained prominence. It is important to mention that Sanskrit drama continues to be a source of inspiration to Indian playwrights even today.

With the advent of Muslim rule, Indian living underwent a sea change. Sanskrit found no patrons among the Muslim rulers and lost its foothold. After twelve hundred A. D. dramatic activities continued in India in regional flavours. Vernacular plays were written in Awadhi, Maithili, Kosali and the like, and most of them were translations of ancient Indian religious texts. A play called *Indar Sabha*, written in Hindi around 1853 under the reign of Wazid Ali Khan, led to an interest in Drama in Hindi. Local dramas in India laid emphasis on dance and music like Bengal’s *Jatra* which means ‘a religious procession’ and still attracts people. *Lavani* comes from Maharashtra, *Bhavai* comprises of the folk- tradition of Gujarat and *Kathakali* represents the life of Kerala. It is interesting to note that there is a similarity between the Indian art form and those belonging to Japan, China and Indonesia, with them using masks and religious themes abundantly, hinting towards some cultural commonness beyond geographical boundaries.

Modern Indian English drama can be divided into two halves, Pre- Independence and Post- Independence Drama. Pre Independence Indian drama is located in the colonial era. The coming of the East India Company and the colonization of India by the British Empire led to the evolution of a new and radical literary genre, widely known as Indian English Literature. Indian English drama is an important form of this literature. In 1789, Sir William Jones translated Kalidasa’s play, *Shakuntala*, into English. The play created ripples in the literary circle. In 1831, the Hindi Rangmanch was established. Theatrical activities began in many cities like Mumbai and Kolkata and theatre groups from western countries started staging plays in India but a majority of these plays were English plays or their translations in regional languages.

The earliest Indian English play from the pre-independence era was *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* (1831) by Krishna Mohan Banerjee.

The play appeared after the establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta. Till then, nearly one generation has received English education and had inculcated western ideas. The play shows the conflict between traditional Indian orthodoxy and modern western ideas. The tides of reformation had thus begun.

The major pioneer in the field of Indian English drama was Michael Madhusudan Dutt. His play, *Is This Civilization* came out in 1871 and is considered a major Indian play in English. The play *Nation Builders* was published after his death. Ramkinoo Dutt wrote *Manipura Tragedy* in 1893. The playwrights from Bengal in the nineteenth century were few. From Mumbai, the first recorded play was a verse play, *The First Parsi Baronet* by C.S. Nazir in 1866. We then have D. M Wadia's *The Indian Heroine* in 1877 and P.P. Mukherjee's *Dolly Parsen* in 1918. In Chennai, the Madras Dramatic society was established in 1875. The most impressive dramatic works in Chennai are attributed to V.V. Srinivasa Aiyangar, whose plays mirror the Indian middle class society and are farcical in nature.

Mythology and history appear to be the recurrent themes in most of the play of this period. The idea was to create a past which could convince the colonised people of a heroic past and reform the society by presenting the character of an ideal Indian. Pre-independence Indian drama is marked by the colossal contribution of two great and learned men, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. All of Tagore's plays are translations from Bengali into English yet they left their imprints on the dramatic scene. Some of his plays in English translations are *The Post Office*, *The King of the Dark Chamber* and *Chitra*. The plays are deeply engrained in Indian philosophy and portray strong and unforgettable characters.

Sri Aurobindo wrote five complete and six incomplete verse plays between 1891 and 1916. His plays show an influence of Sanskrit as well as Elizabethan drama. The five complete plays are *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasvadutta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora*, and *Eric the King of Norway*. The action in *Vasvadutta* takes place in ancient India, *Eric* in Norway and the other three are set in the Middle East. As K. R. S. Iyengar says, "All five plays underline the need for Love, for Love alone is the great solvent of all varieties of evil".

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya is another versatile literary figure of the period who composed several plays and left a vast legacy of Indian English drama. His *Five Plays* written in 1937 reveal his skill in the dramatic articulation of his social consciousness. *The Window* gives an account of the life of the slum residents of Mumbai who work in textile mills and protest against subjugation. *The Parrot* is a play on morality. All his plays serve a didactic purpose and portray modern social realism. He wrote seven plays on the lives of saints like Saku Bai, Raidas, Jayadeva, Chokha Mela, Eknath, Pundalik and Tukaram. Most of the plays show the struggle between the "human 'power' and divine Grace".

T. P. Kailasam is another playwright deserving a place of glory in the Indian dramatic scene. His English plays are based on Puranic themes. *The Burden* (1933) shows the tragic emotions of Bharata after the loss of his father. *Fulfilment*, one of his finest plays shows the ruthlessness of Krishna on one side and his divinity on the other. Kailasam chose Kannada to pen his social plays and English for stories based on epics and tragic heroism. His plays advocate the rights of the subjugated and the less fortunate.

Bharati Sarabhai is a distinguished women dramatist. Her play, *The Well of the People* (1943), is a story of a Brahmin widow who builds a well for the 'untouchables' in her village with all her money when she is unable to visit Haridwar and Kashi. *Two Women* (1952) depicts Anuradha, the wife of Kanakadasa, who is anglicized and Urvashi, a widowed girl who becomes a devotional singer. Both the plays show a society undergoing change and are written in the most natural speech manner characteristic of Sarabhai's style. A.S.P. Ayyar is another playwright of the genre of pre-independence Indian English drama. His first play is, *In the Clutch of Devil* (1929), and the last one is *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity*. His plays have contemporary flavour.

Another playwright of the era is V.V. Srinivasa Iyengar. His plays have elements of comedy, farce, as well as seriousness. Some of his plays are included in the two volumes of *Dramatic Divertissements*. As K. R. S. Iyengar says, he was, "a master of social comedy, delighting in the incongruous, ludicrous and droll elements in the lives of the sophisticated middle- class people most frequently encountered in cities like Madras, Bombay,

Calcutta and Delhi” (241). J. M. Lobo Prabhu is regarded as the last great dramatist of this period. He has written about a dozen plays. His plays *Mother of New India: A Play of the Indian Village in Three Acts* (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945) were published before independence and the rest were published as *Collected Plays* in 1956.

Major reason for the division of the plays into pre- independence and post- independence is to highlight the differences in dramas of both the periods. Pre- independence plays are more of an attempt to create an India with a national identity by invoking history, epics, and religion. The plays are written in the context of the nation and aim to reach higher in metaphysical terms. The post- independence plays on the other hand are more focussed and individualistic in themes. They deal with specific issues, communities, classes and conflicts. After independence the first five year plan came up and the National School of Drama and various State Academies were established to give a boost to performing arts. But the stress was more on the development of Indian languages.

Pratap Sharma is another playwright who portrays bold characters and themes. His play *A Touch of Brightness* was staged in London but banned in India as it was set in a brothel in Bombay, now Mumbai. The *Professor Has a war cry*, written in 1970 is the story of an illegitimate child whose mother is deserted by her lover and sexually assaulted by two men in the past. His themes are firmly rooted in his contemporary world, with all its hideous truths.

G.V. Desani is a well-known playwright of post- independence era. His hilarious play *All About H Hatter* is extremely popular. *Hali* written in 1950 won critical success and portrays human longing and fulfilment. *Hali* stands for the entire humanity, faces the trials of life, falls and finally achieves true understanding. It spreads the message that love is the sole cure for violence and lust in the world.

Nissim Ezekiel, a well-known poet is also a playwright of repute. His plays *Marriage- Poem: A Tragicomedy*, *Nalini: A Comedy*, *The Sleep Walkers: An Indo- American Farce*, and *Song of Deprivation* were all written in 1969. His plays deal with human relationships and social issues, depicting his vision and sensitivity. Ezekiel’s poetic vision has proven to be more vibrant than his dramatic contribution.

Lakhan Deb and Gurcharan Das are two other playwrights to have achieved distinction. Both the playwrights won accolades in India and abroad. Lakhan Deb wrote three plays in verse. *Tiger’s Claws* (1969) deals with the murder of Bijapur General Afzal Khan at the hands of Shivaji. *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976), deals with the assassination of Gandhiji. His play *Vivekananda* (1972) was also a verse play. Gurcharan Das’s *Larins Sahib* (1970) is a much acclaimed and performed historic play, based on the life of Henry Lawrence, a British resident in the court of Dalip Singh of Punjab.

Gurcharan Das’s *Larins Sahib*, Cyrus Mistry’s *Doongaji House* (1978) and Dina Mehta’s *The Myth Makers* have won the Sultan Padamsee Award for playwriting. Dina Mehta’s play *Brides are not for Burning* (1971) was named the best play in the worldwide competition held by the BBC. Mistry’s *Doongaji House* is about the Parsi community and shows familial and emotional disintegration and raises the issue of communalism. *The Myth Makers* is about violent demonstrations by migrants from other states in Bombay and the politics it created.

Another dramatic voice of distinction in contemporary era is that of Vijay Tendulkar who has contributed greatly to Marathi as well as Indian English drama. He has to his credit twenty-eight full length plays and twenty-one- act plays. He has also written some children dramas. Most of Tendulkar’s plays are English translations. *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1968) , *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), *Kanyadan* (1982), *Sukhran Binder* (1972), *The Vultures*, and *Kamala* (1982) are some of his renowned plays. He was honoured by Natak Akademi in 1971.

Badal Sircar is a very impressive figure in contemporary Indian drama. His association with theatre began after his graduation and he found in theatre a powerful medium to approach people. Sircar entered the world of theatre with different roles as an actor, director, and playwright. His career in drama started with light and humorous plays written between 1956 to 1960. These plays were titled as *Solution X*, *Ram Shyam Jadu*, *Baropishima* and *Shanibar*. Sircar became famous with the writing of the play *Evam Indrajit* in 1963. His later plays as *Baaki Itihaash (Remaining History)* (1965), *Pralap (Delirium)* (1966), *Tringsha Shatabdi (Thirtieth*

Century) (1966), Pagla Ghoda (Mad Horse) (1967), Shesh Naai (There's No End) (1969) are also significant. These plays displayed the oppression that dominated the society, the worn-out and corrupt system. His plays abound in social messages.

Mohan Rakesh is another prominent playwright of contemporary era. He is known for his play, Halfway House, which is a translation of his Hindi play, Adhe Adhure. The plays are based on the family dissent, marital relationships and its impact on children. One Day in Ashadha and The Great Swans of the Waves deal with the historical past and explore the theme of man- woman relationships.

Manjula Padmanabhan is one of those women playwrights who won accolades for her dramatic output. Her play Harvest (1997) won the prestigious Onassis award. Her other famous plays are Gaslights and Lights Out. Harvest is a play based on human organs selling business in the third world countries and is set in the future. Lights Out is a play based on the middle class urbanites. Padmanabhan repeatedly exposes the wounds of the marginalized classes and their alienation from society.

Mahasweta Devi is a writer with a passion to react vehemently against the unjust and dehumanizing treatment meted out to the subalterns in our society. She is a writer for the marginalized, a voice of protest. Her play Water, talks about gender and caste discrimination, and criticizes society for exploiting the fundamental rights of the underprivileged.

There have also been women dramatists like Usha Ganguly, P Sengupta and many others who have projected the subaltern issues in their plays and articulated the hurt of the feminine psyche with great sensitivity. The question of the 'otherness' of women, their mental, physical, psychological, and emotional torture in today's progressive world has been a cause of concern for most of the contemporary dramatists.

Two eminent and outstanding playwrights whose contribution to Indian English drama remains incomparable are Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. As these two playwrights are the subject of the present research, they have been dealt with in detail.

Girish Raghunath Karnad was born on May 19, 1938, in Mathern, Maharashtra. He is one of India's brightest shining stars and has earned international acclaim as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic, and translator. Karnad received the prestigious Central Sangeeth Natak Akademi award for his play Hayavadana and also the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya award in 1978. His film Samskara won the best film award. He is the recipient of Sahitya Academy, Padmashri, Padmabhusan and the Jnanpith Award. He has represented India as an emissary of Indian art and culture. Girish Karnad comes from a Saraswat, Konkani speaking family. He spent his early years in Sirsi, in Karnataka. As a young boy Karnad admired the Yakshagana and the folk theatre in his village and was deeply influenced by them.

Karnad was caught in a literary dilemma between portraying the western thought and native tradition. He was witnessing the India of the Fifties and Sixties where two streams of thought existed in all walks of life. The conflict lay in the choice of modern techniques left behind by the British, and faithfulness to the cultural past of India. He was as impressed by the Indian folklore tradition as he was mesmerized by the western playwrights and was certain that a synthesis of both would open to him, "a new world of magical possibilities". In the author's introduction to Three Plays, Karnad says: My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries.

Karnad got a chance to watch Strindberg's play, Miss Julie, directed by Ebrahim Alkazi when he moved on to Mumbai for his post- graduation. The play was a turning point for him. As Karnad says, "I felt as though I had been put through an emotionally or even physically painful rite of passage. I had read some Western playwrights in college, but nothing had prepared me for the power and violence, I experienced that day".

Karnad's creativity is multi-dimensional, but plays followed him everywhere. Karnad uses ancient myths and legends to portray the modern man's dilemma and anguish in the contemporary world. Karnad's first play, *Yayati*, was originally written in Kannada. It re-tells the myth of Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, in modernistic terms. It is an existential play based on the theme of responsibility.

Ma Nishad is a one act radio drama in which Karnad depicts the importance of the ordinary man for the hero Rama in the Ramayana. *Hayavadana*, published in 1971 is Karnad's third play and deals with the problem of human identity and the search for perfection. Karnad has borrowed the theme from the *Vetala Panchavimashati*, a collection of old stories from the *Kathasaritsagara*. Critics point out that the plot is influenced by Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*. His play *Anjumallige* uses the myth of Yama and Yami in the Rigveda to explore the problem of incest. His renowned play, *Tughlaq* was written in Kannada and translated by Karnad himself. It is a historical play based on the life of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq whose reign is considered as unique, a rare combination of success mingled with failure. The play shows that politics remains the same in all periods, only the face of power changes.

Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* is based on two folktales he heard from A. K. Ramanujan. It is a story of a young bride who is maltreated by her indifferent husband and attempts to win him over with a love potion, but enchants the King Cobra, who begins to meet her in his husband's guise every night. Another of Karnad's play *Tale-danda* literally meaning, "head Price/Tax" is based on caste and community based politics. *The Fire and the Rain* is based on the myth of Yavakari from the Mahabharata and recounts a seven-year long fire sacrifice, conducted to pray for rains in a drought ridden land. It focuses on the consequences of jealousy and betrayal as well as the positive emotions of love and sacrifice. It is a play on the confrontation of opposite forces in the cosmic and human world.

Karnad's achievement lies in reconstructing India's past and using it to comment on the present human condition. Myths, legends, folklores, and traditions are the spine of the culture and are interspersed with its basic values, modes, and customs. Each play of Karnad presents his multiple ideologies and ideas. Caste and gender is a recurrent theme in most of his mythical plays. Existentialism and other philosophical ideas echo, along with sensitive and socially relevant issues of peace, equality, and non-violence. He uses the myths and folk tales as a vehicle to express his views on the contemporary issues like feminism, marginalization of the downtrodden people, politics of religion, violence, increasing fundamentalism, psychoanalysis and existentialism.

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most dynamic and versatile voice of modern Indian English drama. He is known for his innovative techniques in stagecraft. He has shown new possibilities in dramatic techniques and devices to his contemporaries and future playwrights. He writes plays in English and is the first Indian English playwright to win the prestigious National Sahitya Academy award for his play *Final Solutions and Other Plays* in 1994. His play *Dance Like a Man* has won the Best Picture in English award, presented by the National Panorama in 1998. The Sahitya Kala Parishad selected *Final Solutions, Tara and Thirty Days* in September 2007, directed by Arvind Gaur, as Best Productions of the Year. Dattani is a fine artist, craftsman and visionary. All his plays have immense scope for performance. When asked in an interview, what it meant to be a playwright, Dattani says, "I see myself as a craftsman and not as a writer. To me, being a playwright is about seeing myself as a part of the process of a production. I write plays for the sheer pleasure of communicating through this dynamic medium" (Nair).

Mahesh Dattani was born on August 7, 1958, in Bangalore, Karnataka. He joined the Bangalore Little Theatre during his college days, in early 1980's and started participating in workshops, acting, and directing plays. He learnt ballet and also trained in Bharatanatyam. He graduated in history, economics and political science and then post graduated in Marketing and Advertisement Management.

Besides this, the American playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller have influenced Dattani's stage craft. Dattani has a very strong urge and affinity for Indianness. He uses Indian dramatic devices and techniques in ample measures. He writes plays for the urban middle-class people whose basic needs are taken care of and who strive to achieve their goals in life but are disturbed by the issues of family, individual freedom, corruption, social and cultural prejudices.

Dattani is moved by social issues. Like Bertolt Brecht he believes that art is a mirror to society. Dattani believes in showing the mirror, but he presents the story, and does not judge his characters. On being asked why his audience leaves the theatre with a question, searching for an answer on the way back home Dattani's *Where There's a Will* is a humorous and witty play and has its protagonist a rich businessman, Hasmukh Mehta, who dies in the first scene but stays throughout the play as a ghost. He rules his household even after his death through his will. The play explores the lives and motivations of his wife, son, daughter-in-law and his mistress. In *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani analyses the life of a couple, who are Bharatanatyam dancers. It is a play about ambition and manipulation, sacrifices and sins and questions the efficacy of the roles allotted to men and women by society and traditions.

Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* shows the emptiness of urban business families. The play talks about familial violence, homosexuality, deceit and drudgery. The play *Final Solutions* takes on the theme of Hindu-Muslim hostility. On a *Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani's latest stage plays raise the issue of homosexuality and the fear of revelation. The Radio Play *Do the Needful* talks about homosexuality as well as marriage of convenience. Dattani's plays deal with specific themes, the message being pointed and precise. He does not mince his words and hits at the audience openly with his versatile stage craft. Homosexuality is a major, predominant theme in Dattani's plays. He deals with it in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Patriarchal supremacy is another of his recurrent themes. In *Where There's a Will*, he shows a dominating father who dominates the household even after death. In *Tara* he shows how Bharati's father interferes in her decision and forces Patel and Bharati to barter their girl child's happiness and future in order to give the male child an advantage. In *Dance Like a Man*, Amritlal is an autocratic father. Dattani shows a host of hurtful husbands like the physically torturing Jiten and his father, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It will be well suited to say that oppression itself as a dominant theme in most of Dattani's plays.

Another concern of Dattani's plays is gender identity. The constructs of men and women as gender, their roles in the home and society, the guardians of gender constructs, are all examined in Dattani's plays. Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There's a Will* feels that his son is not 'manly', Amritlal in *Dance Like a Man* feels that men should not dance and Patel in *Tara* says that Chandan should not talk about knitting. Dattani raises too many questions simultaneously. He ceaselessly raises questions regarding gender, sexuality and social hierarchy in his plays.

Dattani shows us the hollowness of middle-class lives. He reveals the loneliness of the people behind their masks of normalcy. His characters are vulnerable and disenchanted, wanting in happiness and fulfilment. They seem absolutely normal, but live with a terrible pain inside. Thus Drama has been transformed into a vehicle of protest, a voice of the marginalized and the deprived sections of society. In its journey over ages, Drama has gathered and assimilated all the experiences of the real world and bared them before the audience and readers. Modern Indian Drama continues to entice the audience with slices of reality on board.

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