

Modern Indian English Drama



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Preface

Drama has always been a living and dynamic art form—reflecting the anxieties, aspirations, conflicts, and transformations of society. The edited volume Modern English Drama seeks to explore the vibrant landscape of modern dramatic expression, particularly within the framework of Indian English drama while also engaging with global theatrical narratives. This collection brings together diverse scholarly perspectives that illuminate the evolution, thematic richness, and socio-political engagement of modern drama.

*The volume opens with a comprehensive exploration of the development and significance of modern Indian English drama, tracing its emergence as a powerful literary and performative medium. The chapters collectively foreground the playwright as a social architect, examining how dramatists assume moral and social responsibility in articulating issues of caste, class, gender, identity, and power. Studies on Ambedkarite consciousness in *Kaala*, myth and political ideology in *Game of Thrones*, and the socio-cultural dimensions of drama underscore the intersection of art and activism in contemporary narratives.*

*A significant portion of this volume is devoted to the works of eminent dramatists such as Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, George Bernard Shaw, Vijay Tendulkar, Gurcharan Das, Manjula Padmanabhan, Asif Currimbhoy, and Kiran Nagarkar. Through critical readings of landmark texts such as *Pygmalion*, *Evam Indrajit*, *Tughlaq*, *Tara*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Ghasiram Kotwal*, and *Bedtime Story*, contributors examine themes of alienation, identity crisis, patriarchy, social marginalization, and political power.*

Gender discourse forms a central thread throughout the collection. Chapters analyzing women's resistance, feminist consciousness, gender inequality, sexual violence, and mental health shed light on the lived realities of women in both textual and performative spaces. The studies reflect how modern drama becomes a powerful site for questioning patriarchy and negotiating

selfhood. The representation of marginalized voices—whether defined by caste, class, gender, or diaspora—further expands the scope of the volume, highlighting theatre as a medium of resistance and social transformation.

The inclusion of perspectives on Indian Knowledge Systems, diasporic consciousness, Ambedkarite thought, and the Theatre of the Absurd demonstrates the interdisciplinary and comparative approach adopted by the contributors. By situating Indian English drama within broader theoretical and global contexts, this volume bridges tradition and modernity, myth and realism, performance and politics.

Modern English Drama thus aspires to serve as a valuable academic resource for scholars, researchers, and students of English literature and theatre studies. It underscores the enduring relevance of drama as a mirror to society and a catalyst for dialogue and change. The editors express their sincere gratitude to all contributors for their insightful research and to the readers who continue to engage critically with the evolving world of modern drama.

We hope this collection stimulates further inquiry into the transformative power of theatre and inspires deeper engagement with the complexities of modern dramatic literature

Editors

Modern Indian English Drama

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The Development and Significance of Modern Indian English Drama

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Abstract

This piece of research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of Modern Indian English Drama by examining its historical development, thematic diversity, and formal innovations. The valuable contribution of the authors in the form of chapters makes this book noteworthy. The introductory chapter lays the foundation by situating the genre within its cultural and literary context, emphasizing its relevance in the modern era. Subsequent chapters have covered major playwrights, representative plays, critical perspectives, and emerging trends, different themes and techniques to provide readers with a holistic view of the field. The aim is not only to analyze dramatic texts but also to appreciate their performative vitality and socio-cultural significance.

Keywords: Modern Drama, socio-political movements, cultural and folk traditions and gender inequality.

Introduction

Indian English Drama occupies a distinctive and dynamic position within the broader framework of Indian English Literature. While poetry and fiction in English found early acceptance and readership, drama in English developed more gradually, shaped by complex interactions between indigenous theatrical traditions, colonial influence, socio-political movements, and the evolving sensibility of modern Indian society. Modern Indian English Drama, in particular, reflects the transformation of Indian theatre from mythological and historical representations to psychologically nuanced, socially conscious, and formally experimental modes of expression. It stands today as a powerful literary and performative medium that voices the anxieties, aspirations, conflicts, and contradictions of modern India.

Drama, by its very nature, is a living art form. It does not merely exist on the printed page but comes alive through performance, dialogue, gesture, and

audience interaction. In the Indian context, drama has always been deeply rooted in cultural rituals, folk traditions, and classical forms such as Natya Shastra, Yakshagana, Kathakali, Tamasha, and Nautanki. However, the emergence of Indian English Drama marked a significant shift, as playwrights began to use the English language to articulate Indian experiences, blending Western dramatic techniques with indigenous themes and sensibilities. This fusion gave rise to a unique dramatic tradition that is both Indian in spirit and global in outlook.

Development of Modern Indian English Drama

The term “modern” in Modern Indian English Drama does not merely signify a chronological period; it implies a new consciousness, a departure from conventional norms, and an engagement with contemporary realities. Modernity in Indian drama is associated with realism, individualism, psychological depth, social criticism, and formal experimentation. Playwrights moved away from idealized portrayals of gods, kings, and epic heroes to focus on ordinary individuals grappling with issues such as identity, alienation, gender inequality, caste oppression, political corruption, existential crisis, and the impact of rapid urbanization. Thus, modern Indian English drama becomes a mirror reflecting the changing social, cultural, and moral landscape of India.

Historically, Indian English Drama emerged during the colonial period, when English education introduced Western literary forms, including Shakespearean drama and European theatrical traditions. Early Indian playwrights writing in English often imitated Western models, both in structure and content. However, with the growth of national consciousness and the freedom movement, drama in English began to acquire a distinctly Indian voice. Playwrights started addressing themes related to nationalism, social reform, and cultural identity, using drama as a tool for intellectual and ideological engagement. Post-independence, this dramatic tradition matured further, responding to the complexities of a newly independent nation striving to balance tradition and modernity.

One of the defining characteristics of Modern Indian English Drama is its thematic richness. The plays explore a wide range of subjects, including family relationships, marriage, generational conflict, and the position of women, political power, ethical dilemmas, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world. The family, often depicted as a microcosm of society, becomes a central site of conflict, revealing tensions between tradition and modern values. Similarly, the portrayal of women in modern drama marks a significant shift from passive stereotypes to complex, assertive, and questioning individuals who challenge patriarchal norms and societal expectations.

Another important aspect of modern Indian English drama is its concern with identity. The experience of colonialism, the struggle for independence, and the challenges of postcolonial existence have profoundly influenced Indian

playwrights. Characters frequently grapple with questions of cultural identity, linguistic alienation, and the psychological impact of living between two worlds—the indigenous and the Western. The use of English itself becomes a subject of debate, as playwrights negotiate its role as both a colonial legacy and a global medium of expression. Through innovative language use, code-switching, and Indianized English, dramatists assert their cultural autonomy while engaging with an international audience.

In terms of form and technique, Modern Indian English Drama exhibits remarkable experimentation. Playwrights have moved beyond conventional linear narratives and realistic settings to explore symbolic, absurdist, and expressionist modes. Influenced by modern European drama, particularly the Theatre of the Absurd and existentialist thought, Indian playwrights have incorporated non-linear structures, fragmented dialogues, and open-ended conclusions. At the same time, many have drawn inspiration from traditional Indian theatrical devices such as the Sutraddhar, chorus, myth, and folklore, creating a hybrid dramatic form that challenges rigid categorizations.

Performance and staging play a crucial role in shaping modern Indian English drama. Unlike purely literary drama, these plays are written with a keen awareness of theatrical space, audience response, and visual impact. Playwrights often experiment with minimalistic sets, symbolic props, and innovative lighting to enhance thematic depth. The emphasis on performance highlights the collaborative nature of drama, involving directors, actors, and designers in the creative process. This performative dimension distinguishes drama from other literary genres and underscores its immediacy and social relevance.

The contribution of modern Indian English dramatists to world literature cannot be overlooked. Through their plays, they have introduced global audiences to Indian realities, dilemmas, and cultural complexities. Their works have been staged, studied, and appreciated both in India and abroad, contributing to cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. At the same time, these dramatists remain deeply rooted in Indian traditions, myths, and social structures, ensuring that their plays retain an authentic Indian ethos despite their use of the English language.

Modern Indian English Drama also serves as an important medium of social critique. Playwrights often adopt a questioning and confrontational stance, exposing social injustices, hypocrisy, and moral decay. Issues such as caste discrimination, communal tension, political manipulation, and the erosion of human values are dramatized with sensitivity and insight. By presenting these issues on stage, dramatists invite audiences to reflect, question, and engage with the realities of their society. Drama thus becomes not only a form of entertainment but also a powerful instrument of awareness and change.

In academic discourse, Modern Indian English Drama has gained increasing attention, with scholars exploring its thematic concerns, linguistic strategies, and

cultural significance. The study of this genre provides valuable insights into the evolution of Indian English literature as a whole and highlights the complex interplay between literature, society, and history. Despite facing challenges such as limited readership and performance opportunities compared to regional language theatre, Indian English drama continues to evolve, adapting to contemporary contexts and embracing new forms of expression.

Modern Indian drama marks a significant departure from traditional Sanskrit theatre and folk performance, reflecting the social, political, and psychological realities of colonial and post-colonial India. Indian dramatists writing in English and regional languages introduced realism, symbolism, and experimentation in form and content. Through their plays, these authors addressed themes such as identity, nationalism, social injustice, gender issues, existential dilemmas, and the clash between tradition and modernity. Their contribution helped Indian drama gain both national and international recognition.

One of the most influential figures in modern Indian drama is Rabindranath Tagore, who brought poetic depth and philosophical richness to Indian theatre. His plays such as *The Post Office*, *Red Oleanders*, and *The King of the Dark Chamber* explore spirituality, freedom, humanism, and the individual's relationship with society. Tagore's drama blends symbolism with lyrical expression, moving away from mere realism and introducing a universal appeal. His contribution laid the foundation for modern Indian drama by emphasizing inner conflict and moral consciousness.

Girish Karnad is another towering figure who redefined modern Indian theatre by reinterpreting myths, legends, and history in a contemporary context. Plays like *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, and *Nagamandala* examine power, identity, desire, and alienation. Karnad skillfully combines traditional folk theatre techniques such as *Yakshagana* with modern dramaturgy. His work reflects the crisis of modern man while remaining rooted in Indian cultural traditions, making his contribution both innovative and culturally grounded.

Vijay Tendulkar made a bold and realistic contribution to modern Indian drama by exposing the dark realities of society. His plays, including *Silence! The Court Is in Session*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, and *Sakharam Binder*, highlight themes of violence, power politics, patriarchy, and moral hypocrisy. Tendulkar's drama is known for its stark realism and psychological depth. He challenged conventional morality and forced audiences to confront uncomfortable social truths, thereby transforming Indian theatre into a medium of social critique.

Badal Sircar played a crucial role in bringing theatre closer to the common people through his concept of Third Theatre. His plays such as *Evam Indrajit*, *Bhoma*, and *Procession* focus on middle-class frustrations, alienation, and socio-political exploitation. Sircar rejected elaborate stage settings and emphasized minimalism, direct audience interaction, and collective

experience. His contribution lies in making drama a tool for social awareness and activism rather than mere entertainment.

Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary Indian English dramatist, has significantly contributed to modern Indian drama by addressing marginalized voices and urban realities. His plays like *Final Solutions*, *Tara*, *Dance Like a Man*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deal with issues of gender discrimination, communalism, sexuality, and identity. Dattani's realistic portrayal of middle-class life and sensitive treatment of taboo subjects have broadened the scope of Indian drama in English and made it socially relevant.

Asif Currimbhoy and Mohan Rakesh also deserve mention for their experimental and modern approach to drama. Currimbhoy's plays reflect political unrest, youth rebellion, and contemporary anxieties, while Rakesh's Hindi plays such as *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* and *Adhe Adhure* explore emotional emptiness, broken relationships, and existential crisis. Their works represent the psychological complexity of modern Indian life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Modern Indian English Drama represents a vibrant and evolving tradition that captures the pulse of modern India. It reflects the tensions between past and present, tradition and change, individuality and society. Through its rich themes, innovative techniques, and powerful performances, it continues to challenge, inspire, and engage audiences and readers alike. As India navigates the complexities of the twenty-first century, modern Indian English drama remains a vital literary and cultural force, offering profound insights into the human condition and the ever-changing landscape of Indian society. Modern Indian drama owes its richness and diversity to the powerful contributions of its dramatists. By blending tradition with innovation and addressing pressing social and psychological issues, these authors transformed Indian theatre into a dynamic and meaningful art form. Their plays continue to influence contemporary writers, performers, and scholars, making modern Indian drama an essential part of Indian literary and cultural studies.

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The Playwright as Social Architect: Decoding Social Responsibility in Modern Indian English Drama

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Abstract

Drama as a literary genre has been evolving through the ages. The playwrights go on setting the trend and making drama alive. For centuries, playwrights have been experimenting with drama by introducing various elements that enhance the aesthetic nature of the drama. The playwrights deal with various topics: social, economic, political, socio-political, socio-economic, gender discrimination, poverty, class differentiation, juvenile delinquency, etc. Thus, the playwright is assumed to be a social architect who reflects the social problems in the play and, with it, awakens the people in society to understand their moral duties. Modern Indian English Drama, which arose in the mid-20th century, dealt with the topics mentioned above. The post-independence literature dealt with the concerns that were rooted in Indian Society. The realisation of patriotism in the minds of people awakened them to understand their moral duties and rights. This realisation helped the people to raise their voice against injustice, and this was reflected in the plays by the playwrights. Thus, the playwright acted as a social architect by introducing the social concerns and giving a voice to their problems in his plays. This chapter explores the themes of social injustice, oppression, identity crisis, alienation, tradition vs modernity, gender issues and feminism, politics, corruption & power, existentialism and psychological conflict in the selected plays of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, & Mahesh Dattani. Modern Indian English drama sets a good example of a playwright as a social architect. Plays like *Silence! The Court Is in Session* by Vijay Tendulkar or *Final Solutions* by Mahesh Dattani are examples in which the playwright has not just entertained the masses but also grabbed their attention towards the social problems that were penetrating and hollowing the Indian society. Thus, the chapter argues that modern Indian English Drama serves not just for aesthetic purposes but also reflects the social concerns and raises a voice for marginalised sections of society.

Keywords: Modern Indian English Drama, Social Responsibility, Subaltern Voices, Social Architect, Patriarchal Structures.

Introduction

Modern Indian English Drama refers to plays written in English by Indian Playwrights, mainly from the mid-20th century onwards, portraying the social issues of society, politics, culture, and identity through modern dramatic techniques. The Modern Indian English Drama is influenced by Indian themes and Western dramatic forms, focused on contemporary social, political, and psychological issues. Before Independence, Indian drama in English was limited and imitative. After 1947, Indian English drama started to introduce its own themes that were rooted in indigenous social issues. This new drama got opportunities in Indian theatres, as the audience started to relate it to their own life and their concerns. The playwrights, thus inspired by social unrest and social issues, started to introduce those concerns in their plays. The major themes that they dealt with were: social inequality, oppression of the poor classes by the upper classes, Gender inequality, identity issues, power and corruption, patriarchy, violence, social hypocrisy, etc. In this way, the playwrights acted as a vehicle for mobilising society towards a more dignified and moral way of life. The playwrights, through their plays, informed and awakened the masses about their moral duties towards the nation and taught them the teachings of humanity.

Objectives

- To explore the role of playwrights as social architects in the context of Modern Indian English Drama.
- To examine the specific dramatic techniques used by the playwrights to portray the issues of gender, caste, and communalism.
- To evaluate how the reinterpretation of myth and history helps to analyse modern political and social commentary.

Data and Methodology

This chapter employs a qualitative and descriptive-analytical methodology to investigate the sociopolitical dimensions of modern Indian drama. The data for this study is categorised into primary and secondary sources:

Primary Data: The study focuses on close textual reading of Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*, Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* and Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*. These texts were selected because they represent critical shifts in post-independence dramatic themes, specifically regarding gender and communalism.

Secondary Data: To provide a robust theoretical framework, data is drawn from authoritative academic sources, including Dharwadker's (2005) theories on the

theatre of independence and existing scholarly essays that employ diverse critical frameworks to analyse thematic depth.

Analytical Framework: The analysis is conducted through the lens of Social Realism and Subaltern Studies, focusing on how dramatic techniques like the “play-within-a-play” and “mobile choruses” are used as tools for contemporary critique.

Result and Discussion

Architecting Gender Justice: Vijay Tendulkar’s Critique: Vijay Tendulkar, as a playwright, wrote on gender issues and the injustice faced by women in a male-dominated society. His plays do not merely portray gender oppression but also architect a critique of social, moral, and institutional mechanisms that sustain inequality. Tendulkar’s plays became the voice of oppressed women who faced injustice in society. *Silence! The Court Is in Session* its Marathi translation “*Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe!*” was first written in Marathi and staged in 1967 by Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar was actually inspired to write this play from a short story by Friedrich Durrenmatt (1921-1990). “*Die Panne*” the short story by Swiss author and Playwright Durrenmatt was written in 1956 and its English translation is titled as “*Traps*”. Actually, this short story portrays the experiences and irony of World War II. Tendulkar in this play portrays ten characters who are members of “*The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association (SMTPA)*”. These characters play a court room scene rehearsal but after sometime this rehearsal shifts to real sinister interrogation. Tendulkar here adopts this transition to expose the veneer of urban sophistication. The female character Miss Leela Benare, an independent and spirited schoolteacher, becomes the target of collective moral assault. The court tries her for crimes that are deeply personal that is her pregnancy which is none of their business. Actually, the institution which are meant to provide the justice now became the mere assaulter. People acting as a justice deliver should be free from bias and prejudice. Characters who are well educated are the ones who cast stones, showcasing the hypocrisy inherent in the middle-class morality of the time. Tendulkar has filled the character of Miss Leela Benare with Independence and that’s evident from her dialogue. “*In school, when the first bell rings, my foot's already on the threshold... I'm never behindhand with my lessons! Not a bit of room for disapproval—I don't give an inch of it to any one!*”. From this dialogue it is evident that the woman is shielding or defending herself of the assaults by showcasing herself as an ideal teacher. Further Tendulkar has portrayed the New Woman archetype. “*My life is my own—I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own... I'll do what I like with my life.*” She assumes that women are not the one who only follows orders of her kith and kins

but beyond that she is free to live her life on her own terms which mock court tried to refuse. Here Tendulkar acts as architecting gender justice by showcasing in his play how the institutional and patriarchal power silence's woman's voice.

The Architecture of Power: Tughlaq (1964)

Girish Karnad in his play Tughlaq has employed a technique of symbolism, specifically through the allegorical representation of the 14th century Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq's reign to reflect the contemporary political disillusionment of 1960s, India. Through this play Karnad acts as a social architect who chronicles historical events to analyse, criticize, and reorder modern socio-political realities. Karnad crafts Tughlaq character as a visionary architect who tries to build a rational and secular state ahead of its time. However, the power politics destroy this vision and exposes the flaw in this design: Tughlaq who wants to reform the state on ideal terms is failed to do so. Tughlaq's visionary missions that he adopted failed in terms because he didn't consider people's opinion regarding this. Any state runs not just on the decisions taken by its king but also when people support the king. And the same happened with Tughlaq, he shifted the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad which serves as a primary architectural metaphor but ignored human suffering for the sake of a strategic vision. In the same way, Tughlaq's introduction of copper coins represents the delicate political credit. When citizens lose faith in its ruler the affairs of state crumbles. Karnad in his play has depicted Tughlaq as a failed reformer. Though Tughlaq was quite brave and learned man but his political ambitions and his tyranny couldn't see the reality of a divided populace. The play also portrays some minor characters like Aziz and Aazam who locate the holes in the Tughlaq's grand design. Their success in fooling the state highlights the cracks in the institutional foundation. Dialogue of Tughlaq "I am not a cruel man. I only want my people to see the light... I want to build a empire where every man is equal, where justice is not a word but a reality." Reflects the Social Architect's initial blueprint. Tughlaq has a great vision of building a new moral order and it is evident from his dialogue. Through this play Karnad has warned against the "Architecture of Absolute Certainty." He tries to convey that when a ruler views his state as a mere static and manipulative rather than the living organism, the result is inevitably tragedy.

The Architecture of Prejudice: Final Solutions (1993): A play by Mahesh Dattani Final Solutions uses the physical stage to represent the divided mind of a nation. His play is a good example of how the prejudice and bias divide people in the society. Dattani in this play uses a chorus wearing masks to represent the "architecture of a mob". Their presence marks that communal prejudice is a structural force that surrounds the individual. The middle-class Hindu family named Gandhi acts as a fortress against the outside world, which is presently

engulfed in communal riots. Dattani uses the physical constraints of the house to reflect the mental constraints of the characters. Daksha (grandmother) has disillusionment after marriage and her forbidden friendship with two Muslim girls depicts the communal separation. The play depicts the scene from town in 1990s, the two young Muslim men, Bobby and Javed, are being chased by mob. The reason was the breaking of a chariot during a procession. These two men seek refuge in the Gandhi household. Ramnik Gandhi allows them in, against the wishes of his mother and wife Aruna. Dattani has crafted these characters ingeniously reflecting the social mindset of the contemporary period. Javed is defensive and aggressive; he is the product of the violence he has suffered from. Bobby is the moderate voice, seeking assimilation and peace. Aruna represents the rigid architecture of tradition. She is obsessed with purity and is terrified that the presence of these two Muslim men will impure and pollute her house. Smita is a character who acts as a bridge. She is tolerant towards communism. She has friends of Muslim religion and challenges her mother's hypocrisy. Bobby performs the most radical act in the play by entering Aruna's kitchen and picking the idol of Lord Krishna. He proves that God is not polluted by his touch, delivering the final solution that communalism is not violence or separation, but the recognition of shared humanity. Daksha's dialogue "The same things were happening then... and they are happening now." Depicts the cyclical nature of hate. The architecture of prejudice remains unchanged over 50 years. Javed's dialogue "I was not born like this. You made me." Explains the social construction of a terrorist".

Conclusion

The exploration of the plays of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani confirm that the playwrights act as a social architecture. They moved from mere aesthetic nature of plays to more morally responsible situations in the Indian society. Their plays deconstruct the failures of Indian social, political, and domestic institutions. Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* architecturally exposes the irony of justice delivering institution. It depicts how the patriarchal power and hypocrisy of middle-class morality silence the independent woman. It shows how women are the mere puppet of the hands of the patriarchal power of the society. Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* depicts how the vision of power makes the sultan blind for his visionary missions for more ideal state ignoring the opinions of his citizens. It also depicts how the idealistic governance ignores human suffering when Architecture of Absolute Certainty blinds the Tughlaq. Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* uses the physical stage to map the internal "architecture of prejudice," demonstrating how communal bias is a structural force that can only be dismantled through the recognition of a shared humanity. Dattani's architecture is internal. While Tendulkar deals with social

institutions and Karnad deals with State. Ultimately playwrights fulfil their social responsibility by acting as mirrors to society, transforming the theatre into a site of dissent and awakening. Their works serve not mere for aesthetic purpose but gives bitter lessons of morality and humanity. They awake the people to do their social responsibility and depict the real picture of the society.

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Ambedkarite Consciousness Reflected in Kaala

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Abstract

This paper examines *Kaala* as a significant articulation of Ambedkarite consciousness within contemporary Indian popular cinema. Situating the film within the political and cultural history of Tamil cinema, the study argues that *Kaala* translates core Ambedkarite ideas such as dignity, social equality, collective resistance, and ethical leadership into an accessible cinematic language. Rather than treating caste as a peripheral or symbolic issue, the film foregrounds it as a structural reality operating through urban space, land dispossession, cultural domination, and state power. Drawing on Ambedkar's critique of caste, culture, and myth, the paper reads *Kaala* as a political text that challenges dominant cinematic and cultural narratives. The representation of Dharavi as a site of collective memory and resistance highlights the intersection of caste, space, and modern development. The protagonist's leadership rejects messianic heroism and instead embodies Ambedkarite principles of collective agency and moral responsibility. Through its symbolic use of colour, mythological subversion, and visual politics, the film reclaims stigmatized identities and contests the cultural foundations of social hierarchy. By engaging with popular cinema as a medium of ideological intervention, the paper demonstrates how *Kaala* expands the terrain of Ambedkarite discourse beyond academic and political spaces into mass culture, reaffirming the potential of popular cinema as a site of emancipatory politics and democratic imagination.

Keywords: Ambedkarite Consciousness; Popular Cinema; Caste and Culture; Urban Space; Collective Resistance; Tamil Cinema; Cultural Politics

Introduction

Indian popular cinema has long functioned as more than a medium of entertainment; it has played a decisive role in shaping social imagination and political consciousness. In regional contexts such as Tamil Nadu, cinema has historically been intertwined with social reform movements, linguistic assertion,

and political mobilization. From the early Dravidian use of cinema to propagate rationalist and anti-Brahminical ideas to the later emergence of star-centric political culture, Tamil cinema has repeatedly served as a site where questions of power, identity, and social justice are negotiated (Pandian 23–25). Yet, despite this politically charged legacy, caste as a lived and structural form of oppression has often remained marginal, diluted, or misrepresented within mainstream cinematic narratives.

Against this backdrop, *Kaala* (2018), directed by Pa. Ranjith, marks a significant ideological intervention in contemporary Indian cinema. The film departs from conventional portrayals of marginalized communities as passive victims or recipients of benevolence and instead places them at the centre of political struggle. Set in Dharavi, one of Asia's largest urban settlements, *Kaala* foregrounds the politics of land, space, and dignity while engaging directly with questions of caste, power, and resistance. The narrative situates urban displacement not merely as a development issue but as a continuation of historical exclusion rooted in social hierarchy.

Pa. Ranjith's cinema is deeply influenced by anti-caste intellectual traditions shaped by the ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Unlike earlier popular films in which caste identities were either erased or romanticized, *Kaala* presents a politically conscious community that resists dispossession through collective action. The protagonist is not imagined as a messianic saviour detached from the masses but as an organic leader emerging from within the community, embodying values of dignity, justice, and solidarity. This paper argues that *Kaala* reflects Ambedkarite consciousness by translating core Ambedkarite ideas into cinematic form and demonstrates how popular cinema can function as a site of emancipatory discourse.

Understanding Ambedkarite Consciousness

Ambedkarite consciousness emerges from the intellectual and political legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and represents a radical critique of caste as a foundational structure of inequality in Indian society. Ambedkar argued that caste is not merely a division of labour but a division of labourers, sustained through religious sanction, cultural authority, and social custom (Ambedkar Annihilation 14–15). Unlike reformist approaches that seek accommodation within the Hindu social order, Ambedkarite consciousness demands a decisive rupture with caste ideology and its moral foundations.

Ambedkar's critique extends beyond economic exploitation to encompass cultural domination and symbolic violence. Myths, rituals, and traditions function as ideological tools that normalize hierarchy and moralize inequality, making oppression appear natural and inevitable. In this sense, caste operates not only as a social system but also as a psychological condition that shapes everyday

behaviour and self-perception. Consequently, Ambedkarite consciousness insists that emancipation must confront cultural authority alongside political and legal power. The annihilation of caste, for Ambedkar, required a transformation of social consciousness itself.

A defining element of Ambedkarite consciousness is its emphasis on dignity as a non-negotiable ethical principle. Ambedkar rejected the notion that social equality could be achieved through benevolence, charity, or paternalistic reform. Instead, he framed dignity as a matter of rights grounded in human equality. This ethical foundation distinguishes Ambedkarite thought from both liberal reformism and abstract egalitarianism. Social justice, within this framework, requires the active assertion of rights by oppressed communities rather than their passive inclusion within existing hierarchies.

Ambedkar consistently warned that political democracy without social democracy would remain fragile and superficial (Annihilation 29). He introduced the idea of constitutional morality to emphasize that democratic values must be internalized within social life, not merely codified in law. Ambedkarite consciousness therefore places collective action and sustained social struggle at the centre of emancipatory politics. Leadership, within this vision, must be ethical and accountable rather than charismatic or authoritarian. When applied to cinema, Ambedkarite consciousness enables a reading that examines how power, resistance, dignity, and collective agency are imagined and represented. In *Kaala*, this consciousness is embedded in narrative structure, spatial politics, and symbolism, making Ambedkarite ideas accessible to a mass audience.

Urban Space, Land, and Collective Assertion

Urban space in *Kaala* is presented as a deeply political terrain where dignity, belonging, and power are continuously contested. Dharavi is depicted not merely as a slum or zone of deprivation but as a lived space shaped by labour, migration, social networks, and collective memory. By foregrounding everyday life within Dharavi, the film challenges dominant cinematic and policy-driven representations that view marginalized urban spaces as disposable or dysfunctional.

The struggle over land occupies a central ideological position in the film. Development is not portrayed as a neutral or benevolent process but as a discourse that frequently masks dispossession. *Kaala*'s question, "If we have to live the slum life, why do we need buildings?" (*Kaala*), exposes the contradiction between promises of modernization and the lived realities of displacement. Land, in this context, is inseparable from dignity, identity, and historical belonging. Losing land signifies not merely economic loss but social erasure.

From an Ambedkarite perspective, dispossession of land represents the continuation of caste-based exclusion in modern urban form. Historically denied access to land and resources, marginalized communities have been repeatedly pushed to the peripheries, both spatially and politically. *Kaala* situates this historical injustice within contemporary urban governance, revealing how caste operates through alliances between state power, capital, and legal authority. As Dickey observes, urban space for marginalized communities functions as a site of survival, identity, and resistance rather than mere shelter (Dickey 87).

Crucially, resistance in *Kaala* is collective rather than individual. Although *Kaala* emerges as a leader, the struggle is sustained through community participation, negotiation, protest, and solidarity. The film refuses the logic of individual rescue and instead emphasizes democratic struggle rooted in shared experience. This emphasis aligns closely with Ambedkarite consciousness, which privileges collective assertion and organized resistance over paternalistic leadership. By portraying urban space as a site of contestation and collective agency, *Kaala* expands Ambedkarite politics into the terrain of contemporary urban life.

Symbolism, Myth, and Cultural Resistance

Symbolism in *Kaala* operates as a deliberate and sustained mode of cultural resistance. Visual symbols, colours, and mythological references are not deployed merely for aesthetic effect but function as ideological interventions that challenge dominant cultural narratives sustaining caste hierarchy. Through this symbolic language, the film intervenes in the cultural domain where inequality is often normalized and legitimized.

The reclamation of black as a symbol of power is central to the film's visual politics. Within caste-based cultural codes, black has historically been associated with impurity, inferiority, and stigma. *Kaala* reverses this meaning by asserting blackness as strength, resilience, and political assertion. This visual strategy directly challenges aesthetic hierarchies that privilege fairness and purity, revealing how cultural norms reproduce social inequality.

The symbolic use of blue further anchors the film within Ambedkarite political tradition. Blue functions as a visual marker of anti-caste assertion, equality, and dignity, drawing on Ambedkarite iconography familiar to marginalized communities. Its recurring presence in costumes, flags, and background imagery enables the film to communicate political meaning without overt exposition. In mass cinema, where symbolism often shapes audience perception more powerfully than dialogue, this visual language becomes a crucial site of ideological communication.

Mythological subversion constitutes another significant dimension of the film's cultural resistance. Dominant Hindu myths have historically functioned as instruments of social control by moralizing hierarchy and legitimizing power.

Kaala destabilizes this function by reversing familiar mythic binaries of good and evil. Characters aligned with authority and order are exposed as agents of domination, while marginalized figures emerge as ethical and politically conscious. This reworking of myth reflects Ambedkar's critique of religious narratives as tools of oppression. By reinterpreting rather than rejecting myth, Kaala invites audiences to question inherited cultural meanings and imagine alternative moral frameworks grounded in dignity and equality.

Conclusion

Kaala stands as a significant intervention in Indian popular cinema by articulating an emancipatory politics rooted in Ambedkarite consciousness. Through its representation of urban space, ethical leadership, collective resistance, and cultural symbolism, the film challenges dominant narratives that erase caste or reduce injustice to individual suffering. By translating Ambedkarite ideas into popular cinematic language, Kaala expands anti-caste discourse into mass culture and reaffirms cinema's potential as a site of democratic imagination and social critique.

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From Page to Screen: Myth and Political Consciousness in Game of Thrones

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Abstract

The alteration of myth, ideology, and political meaning in modern culture may be examined in great detail through the conversion of literary narratives into visual media. A compelling case study of how epic fantasy is reimagined to reflect contemporary political consciousness may be found in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its television adaption *Game of Thrones*. The television series expands the ideological breadth of the original texts by reinterpreting mythic structures, medieval history, and heroic archetypes through the lenses of power politics, governance, gender relations, and social inequality.

This chapter looks at how *Game of Thrones* emphasizes political consciousness as a major narrative element while translating mythological imagination from page to screen. The study examines how the series modifies narrative structure, character arcs, and symbolic frameworks to address modern issues including authority, corruption, resistance, patriarchy, and marginalization. It does this by drawing on adaptation theory and myth critique. The story's ethical and political resonance is changed as a result of the visual medium's increased emphasis on spectacle, violence, and emotional immediacy.

The chapter also examines how mythological history is rewritten in Westeros, where realist depictions of power struggles interact with made-up pasts, dynasty disputes, and prophetic traditions. Gender politics, family relations, and subaltern viewpoints receive special emphasis, demonstrating how the adaptation redefines agency within a rigid social hierarchy and amplifies voices of opposition. The chapter illustrates how adaptation serves as both a translation process and an act of cultural reinterpretation by contrasting the narrative techniques used in the novels and the series.

In the end, this paper contends that *Game of Thrones* is a prime example of how contemporary television adaptations turn epic fantasy into a vehicle for political criticism, expressing current concerns about identity, power, and social order

while staying rooted in mythological traditions.

Keywords: Adaptation; Myth; Political Consciousness; Narrative Transformation; Game of Thrones

Introduction

Fantasy, Adaptation, and Political Meaning

Through symbolic and mythic storylines, fantasy literature has long been a potent tool for examining societal systems, moral dilemmas, and political ideologies. In particular, epic fantasy creates fictional worlds that reflect actual political concerns by referencing myths, tales, and historical trends. Within this genre, George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is notable for its persistent emphasis on power, governance, and moral complexity as well as its rejection of romanticized heroism. By rearranging the story for a worldwide visual audience, the television adaptation of *Game of Thrones* exacerbates these issues even more. Page-to-screen adaptation is an act of reinterpretation influenced by the needs of the medium, audience, and cultural context rather than a neutral process of reproduction. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptations are not just copies of the original texts but also creative and interpretive acts that provide new meanings. In the instance of *Game of Thrones*, the transition from novelistic narrative to serialized television turns legendary storytelling into a politically charged spectacle where issues of class, gender, authority, and legitimacy are highlighted through dramatic and visual devices.

This chapter looks at how *Game of Thrones* expresses a unique political awareness by reworking legendary elements from epic fiction. The show uses prophetic tales, dynastic conflicts, and made-up histories to highlight the brittleness of societal order and the instability of power. The adaptation questions conventional mythic dichotomies of good and evil by portraying rulers as imperfect, institutions as corruptible, and wars as morally complicated.

This study focuses on two areas: first, how myth and history are reinterpreted during the adaptation process; and second, how narrative transformation, character development, and visual representation lead to the emergence of political consciousness. The chapter aims to show how modern television reimagines epic fantasy as a kind of political critique that resonates with current audiences and reflects ongoing issues about power, resistance, and identity by placing *Game of Thrones* within adaptation theory and myth criticism.

Objectives of the Study

This chapter looks at *Game of Thrones* as a major cultural adaptation of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, focusing on how mythic frameworks are rearranged and how political consciousness is expressed. The main goal is to

examine how the televisual media reinterprets elements of epic fantasy, such as dynastic lineage, prophecy, heroic archetypes, and cyclical history, to highlight issues of legitimacy, power, and governance.

Investigating how the adaptation modifies character development and story structure to meet current issues with gender hierarchy, family structures, social inequity, and marginality is another goal. The chapter also aims to evaluate how much the ideological implications of the source texts are changed by visual spectacle, episodic pacing, and performance.

Lastly, the study aims to place *Game of Thrones* within larger discussions in myth criticism and adaptation studies, showing how the series serves not only as a translation of literary content but also as an act of cultural reinterpretation that turns epic fantasy into a vehicle for political criticism within the framework of popular culture in the twenty-first century.

Data and Methodology

A qualitative and comparative research design based on in-depth textual and visual analysis is used in this chapter. Selected books from George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* trilogy and its HBO-produced television adaptation, *Game of Thrones*, make up the primary data. In order to find patterns of condensation, omission, amplification, and ideological shift that arise during the adaptation process, key scenes and narrative arcs are analyzed alongside similar passages in the novels.

The methodology is based on well-established frameworks in myth criticism and adaptation studies. The discussion of intermedial transformation is informed by ideas expressed by theorists like Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam, while mythic and archetypal readings influenced by Northrop Frye and Roland Barthes offer instruments for deciphering political allegory, invented histories, and symbolic structures. These viewpoints are used to examine how the creation of political meaning on screen is influenced by visual techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, costumes, architecture, cinematography, and sound design.

Rather than providing comprehensive treatment of the complete narrative corpus, the study is mostly interpretive in nature and concentrates on sample case studies. Power, governance, gender, class, and marginality issues are highlighted as they emerge in key narratives. The chapter recognizes the series' worldwide distribution as a contextual aspect influencing its political relevance, even though it does not conduct audience-reception study or quantitative data collecting. As a result, the scope is restricted to textual and audiovisual data, enabling a targeted analysis of the adaptation's political consciousness and mythological reinterpretation.

Results and Discussion

Mythic Reinterpretation and Invented History

The way that *Game of Thrones* reimagines mythic structures in a fictional yet historically rich universe is one of its most remarkable aspects. Martin's books present Westeros as a world ruled by dynastic memory, prophesy, and heroic ancestry. They do this by strongly referencing Norse and Celtic myth, medieval European history, and epic romance traditions. These mythological underpinnings are preserved in the television adaptation, but they are reframed via a realism visual style that highlights violence, material constraints, and political contingency.

The show emphasizes made-up histories, including Robert's Rebellion, the Targaryen conquest, and the Long Night, as ideological tools used by governing houses to justify power rather than as far-off myths. The film version makes myth apparent as a political tool rather than just a setting for a story through dialogue, heraldry, and architectural symbolism. For example, Barthesian ideas of myth as a system that normalizes power relations are reinforced by ancestral castles, royal halls, and sigils that serve as visual shorthand for dynasty continuity.

Another important legendary component that has been altered by the adaption is prophecy. The series transforms these times into powerful visual spectacles—visions in flame, dream sequences, and ritualized performances—that raise the political and ideological stakes, even though the novels frequently convey prophetic visions through inward focalization and ambiguous narrative. Heroic teleology is undermined by the ambiguity surrounding prophecies like the "Prince That Was Promised," which substitutes narrative indeterminacy for the consoling logic of epic myth. This tactic fits the series with Frye's theory of cyclical history, which holds that rulers rise and fall repeatedly without providing a moral conclusion.

The conflict between myth and reality is also heightened by the adaption. Legendary houses are shown to be susceptible to chance and treachery, battles are portrayed with vivid detail, and noble ideals crumble under practical calculation. *Game of Thrones* reinterprets epic fantasy as a critique of the frailty of political order by presenting mythic themes within a harsh televisual framework. As a result, mythical pasts coexist with questioning contemporary sensibilities in a hybrid form that allows the series to question rather than merely replicate the ideological comfort typically associated with epic storytelling.

Political Power and Governance

The long-term analysis of sovereignty, governance, and the morality of rule in *Game of Thrones* is where political consciousness most strongly manifests. The adaptation portrays authority as a tenuous construct upheld by alliances, brutality,

and symbolic performance rather than as a divinely approved prerogative. The fantasy setting becomes a testing ground for political criticism as kingship, queenship, and lordship are frequently stripped of their heroic aura and examined.

The Iron Throne itself serves as a powerful visual representation of power; the brutality that underlies political dominance is made tangible by its sharp edges and massive size. Television is able to externalize ideological systems that are more discreetly conveyed in text thanks to such images. Public executions, coronations, and court ceremonies are all presented as theatrical performances intended to ensure compliance, implying that governance relies as much on spectacle as on legal validity.

In the political vision of the series, war plays a major role. *Game of Thrones* emphasizes civilian misery, dislocation, and moral compromise in contrast to classic epic narratives that exalt martial bravery. Large-scale violence is transformed into a condemnation of aristocratic ambition by the adaptation's visual emphasis on destroyed landscapes, famished refugees, and broken families. A contemporary mistrust against absolutist authority is reinforced by the revelation that competing claims to power, whether based on heredity, conquest, or prophecy, are contingent and unstable.

By using these techniques, the adaptation turns epic fantasy into a reflection on ethical ambiguity and political fragility. *Game of Thrones* expresses a political consciousness sensitive to instability, negotiation, and the price of dominance by denying any regime moral permanency. These traits are highly relevant to current concerns about leadership and institutional failure.

Gender, Family, and Patriarchal Structures

One of the main facets of the political consciousness expressed in *Game of Thrones* is gender politics. Westeros is portrayed in both the books and the series as a strictly patriarchal culture where inheritance, marriage, and ancestry serve as political consolidation processes. However, the visual emphasis on bodily vulnerability, public ritual, and domestic confinement in the television adaptation accentuates these dynamics, making gendered power relations more immediate and emotionally fraught.

Within patriarchal structures, female characters like Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, Sansa Stark, and Arya Stark represent various tactics of resistance and negotiation. Through performance and spectacle, the series highlights their political agency; story arcs are frequently condensed to highlight instances of change and authority assertion. Queenship is frequently portrayed as unstable, reliant on military might and alliances rather than just inherited legitimacy.

Similarly, family structures become more than just emotive; they become politically instrumental. Parental control, marital exchange, and familial loyalty

are portrayed as tactical tools used in power battles. The adaptation reframes private interactions as extensions of public authority by emphasizing these dynamics.

In this manner, *Game of Thrones* converts domestic and familial spaces into sites of ideological conflict, aligning mythic narratives of lineage with contemporary debates about gender, authority, and resistance.

Marginality, Class, and Subaltern Voices

In addition to elite political scheming, *Game of Thrones* makes references to underrepresented groups whose lives are influenced by rulings from far-off courts. A shadow network of social actors is formed by the "smallfolk," enslaved villages in Essos, and institutional misfits like the Night's Watch, whose suffering highlights the effects of aristocratic conflict. Through recurrent visual images of starvation, displacement, and destroyed settlements, the television series intensifies this viewpoint.

Characters in liminal roles, like as Jon Snow and Tyrion Lannister, serve as go-betweens for social outsiders and the ruling class. Their partial separation from prevailing systems enables the adaption to challenge inherited privilege and norms of legitimacy. Additionally, by emphasizing scenes of group suffering, the series places individual stories within larger systems of exploitation.

By highlighting systemic inequity, these subaltern voices undermine heroic mythology, even though they rarely hold political power. As a result, the adaptation expands the ideological purview of epic fantasy, making it a story that pays attention to both soldiers and rulers as well as people who are made susceptible by political ambition.

Narrative Transformation from Page to Screen

The needs of serial storytelling, financial limitations, and audience accessibility all influenced the substantial narrative reworking required for the television version of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Characters are combined, chronology are accelerated, and intricate subplots are condensed to create a more condensed yet ideologically centered story.

A large portion of the novels' internal commentary is replaced by visual symbolism. While spectacle-driven battle scenes externalize political conflict, costumes, lighting, and spatial structure convey hierarchy and loyalty. In order to maintain episodic momentum, the series also rearranges characterisation, sometimes highlighting dramatic turning points or escalating moral polarization.

These changes reconfigure political emphasis in addition to changing the tempo of the story. The adaptation highlights issues of resistance, institutional frailty, and sovereignty by emphasizing particular arcs and visual elements. Thus, the transition from page to screen serves as a process of selective reinterpretation,

illustrating how media-specific tactics recalibrate legendary content to address current political issues.

Conclusion

The mythic underpinnings of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* are transformed into a politically relevant story for modern viewers in this chapter's analysis of *Game of Thrones*, an important television adaptation. The show highlights issues of authority, legitimacy, gender hierarchy, and societal inequity by reworking epic conventions—dynastic history, prophesy, heroic archetypes, and cyclical conflict—through the visual language of serialized television.

The investigation has shown that adaptation is a type of cultural reinterpretation influenced by audience, medium, and ideological context rather than just a straightforward act of story transfer. Martin's imaginary world's political implications are recalibrated through visual spectacle, narrative compression, and revised character trajectories, strengthening its critique of absolutist power and institutional frailty. The ideological scope of epic fantasy is further expanded by gendered struggles of authority, the politicization of family systems, and the portrayal of marginalized people, bringing mythological storytelling into line with contemporary political concerns.

The chapter emphasizes how modern television appropriates conventional narrative structures to express new forms of political consciousness by placing the series within adaptation theory and myth criticism. Thus, despite staying rooted in timeless mythic patterns, *Game of Thrones* serves as an example of how fantasy adaptations may function as critical reflections on governance, brutality, and resistance. In order to investigate how visual media continue to transform literary epics for shifting cultural and political contexts, the study concludes that future research might expand this method to additional worldwide fantasy adaptations.

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Alienation in Metropolitan Life: A Study of Modern Indian English Drama of Mahesh Dattani and Gurcharan Das

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Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of alienation in metropolitan life as depicted in modern Indian English drama. The rapid urbanization and cultural shifts in India's cities have led to individuals experiencing disconnection and isolation amidst crowds. Through plays like Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solutions' and Gurcharan Das's 'The Last Sunset', this paper examines how metropolitan settings contribute to characters' sense of alienation, impacting their relationships and identities. The study highlights how these dramas reflect and critique the complexities of urban life in contemporary India.

Keywords: Alienation, metropolitan life, modern Indian English drama, urban isolation, disconnection, etc.

Introduction

The metropolitan landscape of modern India, characterized by rapid urbanization and cultural flux, has significantly influenced the thematic concerns of contemporary Indian English drama. One prominent theme that emerges is the pervasive sense of alienation experienced by individuals in these bustling cities. Plays like Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solutions' and Gurcharan Das's 'The Last Sunset' poignantly depict characters struggling with isolation, disconnection, and the search for identity amidst the anonymity of urban life. This paper examines how modern Indian English drama portrays alienation in metropolitan settings, exploring its causes, manifestations, and implications for individual and social identity.

Objectives

There are some possible objectives for this research paper:

- To analyze the representation of alienation in metropolitan life in selected modern Indian English dramas.
- To examine how urban settings contribute to characters' sense of disconnection and isolation.

- To explore the impact of alienation on individual and social identity in the context of metropolitan India.
- To discuss how these dramas reflect and critique the complexities of urban life in contemporary India.

These objectives align with this research goals. The analysis of selected modern Indian English dramas reveals that alienation is a pervasive theme in metropolitan life. Plays like *Final Solutions* (Mahesh Dattani) and *The Last Sunset* (Gurcharan Das) depict characters struggling with isolation, disconnection, and identity crises in urban settings.

Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* is a significant work in Indian English drama, exploring alienation through the lens of Indian societal complexities. Mahesh Dattani is a prominent voice in modern Indian English drama, known for his nuanced portrayals of contemporary Indian life. He wrote plays as a subject of Identity and Alienation: Explores characters' struggles with identity, societal expectations, and disconnection. Next aspect as Societal Critique: Critiques rigid social structures, communal tensions, and norms. Also discussed Human Relationships: Delves into complexities of family dynamics and relationships. His plots are showing Realistic Portrayals: Dattani's plays reflect everyday Indian realities. Multi-layered Characters: Characters grapple with internal and external conflicts. His works shows as *Final Solutions*: Explores communal tensions and alienation. *Tara*: Tackles themes of identity, family, and societal expectations. *Dance Like a Man*: Explores family dynamics and societal pressures.

Dattani's works reflect modern India's complexities, making him a significant figure in Indian English drama. Global Relevance: His themes of identity, alienation, and societal critique resonate globally. The plays also explore as Communal and Social Isolation. Dattani critiques communal tensions and social hierarchies, highlighting characters' alienation. The play reflects India's complex social fabric and the marginalization of individuals. Then it has also shown Fractured Identities as Characters grapple with identities shaped by caste, religion, and sexuality. Hardy's struggle with his sexuality exemplifies the alienation faced by those who don't conform. It has included as Urban Anonymity through the urban setting amplifies characters' disconnection and isolation. And reflects the challenges of modern Indian urban life.

In Indian Literature Context Postcolonial Alienation also shown in Dattani's work echoes themes found in other Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Aravind Adiga, exploring disconnection in postcolonial India. Social Realism focus on marginalized voices and societal critique aligns with Indian social realist traditions.

The play delves into the longstanding Hindu-Muslim discord, a bitter legacy of

India's partition that continues to threaten peaceful coexistence. Beyond communal violence, it explores characters' struggles with alienation and identity crises, trapped in distorted memories. Their desperate cling to secure identities fuels tension, as these identities breed hatred and mistrust. The Gandhi family's internal disconnections are exposed by outsiders Bobby and Javed, who also grapple with alienation and insecurity. Intellectual incompatibilities exacerbate the family's isolation, highlighting the play's multifaceted portrayal of communal tensions and personal struggles.

Major Characters Are Experienced Alienation in Their Lives. Like As

1. **Hardy's Isolation: Sexuality and Rejection:** Hardy's sexuality is a taboo, leading to rejection by his family. Internalized Alienation: He struggles with self-acceptance, amplifying his isolation. Impact: Highlights the human cost of societal expectations and the struggle for identity.
2. **Arjun's Disconnection:** Traditional vs Modernity: Arjun grapples with reconciling his traditional upbringing with modern values. Feeling Lost: Struggles to find his place, leading to disconnection from his roots and himself. Impact: Reflects the broader struggle of individuals navigating India's changing societal landscape.
3. **Bobby's Innocence Vulnerability:** Bobby's innocence highlights the harsh realities of societal norms. Marginalization: Represents those who don't fit societal expectations, facing alienation. Impact: Serves as a critique of societal rigidity and its impact on the vulnerable.
4. **Daksha,** a 15-year-old bride, shares her diary, revealing a lonely life amidst turmoil. Her entries transport us to post-Independence India, where her father's death and destroyed gramophone still haunt her. In her new home, she's denied her favorite Noor Jehan songs, fueling her longing for connection. Daksha's diary exposes her isolated life, marked by trauma and loss. She yearns for friendship, finding solace in neighborhood girls, especially Zarine. Shared love for Noor Jehan's songs bridges their differences, offering hope.

Gurcharan Das is another significant voice in modern Indian drama, reflecting contemporary Indian life and societal complexities. This paper explores Das's contributions to Indian English drama, focusing on themes, style, and notable works. Gurcharan Das's plays offer insights into modern India's urban landscape, identity struggles, and societal changes.

A Reflection of Modern Indian Alienation Gurcharan Das's *The Last Sunset* explores alienation in modern urban India this play has some alienation aspects as Urban Anonymity expressed through Characters experience disconnection and isolation in the city's vastness. Highlights the struggle to find meaning in a fast-paced urban life. Endings and Transitions show in the last sunset symbolizes

endings, prompting characters to reflect on their lives. The Characters grapple with lost dreams, faded connections, or disconnection from roots. Identity and Belonging as another aspect of alienation as characters search for purpose and belonging in a changing urban landscape. Reflects the challenges of balancing individuality with societal expectations.

The Last Sunset play depicts modern urban India through the lens of alienation and disconnection. It reflects Urban Landscape as Fast-paced, anonymous city life amplifies characters' isolation. Contrasts traditional values with modern urban realities. Societal Pressures reflects through Characters grapple with societal expectations vs personal aspirations. It highlights the struggle to balance individuality and conformity. Then Changing Dynamics also characteristics of urbanization's impact on relationships and identity. Reflection of the complexities of modern India's urban experience.

Key Findings

- **Urban Anonymity:** Characters experience anonymity and detachment in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, leading to feelings of alienation.
- **Cultural Displacement:** Migration to metros leads to loss of traditional support systems, exacerbating isolation.
- **Impact on Relationships:** Alienation strains familial and social bonds, as seen in fractured relationships in the plays.
- **Critique of Urbanization:** The dramas critique rapid urbanization's toll on individual well-being and social cohesion.

The portrayal of alienation in these dramas reflects the challenges of metropolitan life in India, where traditional community structures are giving way to urban individualism. The plays highlight the need for connection amidst urban disconnection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, modern Indian English drama poignantly portrays alienation in metropolitan life as a complex, multifaceted issue stemming from urban anonymity, cultural displacement, and strained relationships. Through plays like Final Solutions and The Last Sunset, we see how metropolitan settings contribute to characters' disconnection and identity crises. These dramas not only reflect the realities of urban India but also critique the social and cultural costs of rapid urbanization. As cities continue to grow, understanding and addressing alienation's impact on individuals and communities becomes crucial for fostering inclusive, empathetic urban space.

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Revelation of Socio-Cultural Consciousness and Social Transformation in George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) is a landmark drama that exposes the socio-cultural structures shaping identity, class, and gender in Edwardian England. Through Eliza Doolittle's transformation from a Cockney flower girl into a socially refined woman, Shaw critiques rigid class hierarchies, linguistic discrimination, and patriarchal authority while advocating social reform. This chapter explores Shaw's socio-cultural consciousness and examines how the play foregrounds social transformation through education, language, and individual agency. Drawing on cultural materialist and socialist frameworks, and integrating critical perspectives from Holroyd, Bloom, Bertolini, Innes, Eagleton, and Williams, the paper demonstrates that *Pygmalion* challenges societal norms and promotes human dignity, equality, and moral responsibility.

Keywords: George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, socio-cultural consciousness, class, language, gender, social transformation

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), a towering figure in modern drama, consistently utilized theatre as a medium for social critique. His plays interrogate class disparities, gender norms, and institutionalized inequalities, often blending satire with realism (Holroyd, 1997). *Pygmalion* (1913), one of Shaw's most widely studied works, exemplifies this socio-cultural engagement. Superficially a comedy of manners, the play reveals profound insights into the construction of identity, the arbitrariness of class boundaries, and the moral implications of social hierarchy.

Shaw adapts the classical myth of *Pygmalion* and *Galatea*, transforming it into a social allegory. In his version, Professor Henry Higgins seeks to “refashion” Eliza Doolittle through phonetic training, illustrating the artificiality of class distinctions. Shaw's epilogue clarifies that *Pygmalion* is not a romance but a

drama of self-respect and independence (Shaw, 2003, p. 143). Eliza's journey from subordination to self-realization exposes the societal mechanisms that limit opportunity based on accent, appearance, and gender.

This chapter argues that Shaw's socio-cultural consciousness is central to *Pygmalion*. By foregrounding class, language, and gender, Shaw critiques entrenched social structures while envisioning transformative possibilities. This chapter examines the mechanisms of social inequality and explores how individual agency, education, and moral conscience contribute to social transformation.

Objectives

The study pursues the following objectives:

- To analyze Shaw's representation of class hierarchy and mobility in *Pygmalion*.
- To examine the role of language as cultural capital and its influence on social positioning.
- To investigate gender dynamics and the negotiation of female identity in the play.
- To evaluate Shaw's socialist and moral critique of Edwardian society.
- To assess the enduring relevance of *Pygmalion* in discussions of social transformation.

Data and Methodology

This chapter employs a qualitative literary analysis using primary and secondary sources. The primary text is Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Penguin Classics, 2003). Secondary sources include scholarly monographs and critical essays by Holroyd (1997), Bloom (2007), Bertolini (1981), Innes (2002), Eagleton (2002), and Williams (1968).

The methodology follows cultural materialist and socialist criticism, emphasizing the socio-economic and ideological conditions that shape character behavior, social interaction, and power relations (Williams, 1968; Eagleton, 2002). Close textual analysis identifies representations of class, language, and gender, while critical synthesis with secondary scholarship situates Shaw's work within broader socio-cultural discourse. The approach is interpretive, aiming to demonstrate how literature can both reflect and challenge social norms.

Results and Discussion

• Class and Social Mobility

Class distinctions dominate the social landscape of *Pygmalion*. Eliza Doolittle's Cockney accent immediately identifies her as lower class, exposing her to social marginalization. Higgins asserts, "A woman who utters such depressing and

disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live” (Shaw, 2003, p. 23). This statement reflects the moral and social judgments attached to linguistic markers. Shaw critiques a society in which identity and worth are encoded through accent, dress, and social behavior rather than intrinsic capability.

Higgins’ wager that Eliza can pass as a duchess demonstrates the constructed nature of social status: “The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she’s treated” (Shaw, 2003, p. 87). The play thus challenges deterministic notions of class, emphasizing perception, training, and social recognition as decisive factors. Alfred Doolittle’s trajectory further complicates the picture; initially content as one of the “undeserving poor,” he is forced into middle-class respectability following an inheritance, lamenting, “I’m expected to live for others and not for myself” (Shaw, 2003, p. 112). Shaw exposes the contradictions of social mobility and the moral compromises embedded in bourgeois ethics (Holroyd, 1997).

- **Language as Cultural Capital**

Language operates as a central instrument of inclusion and exclusion. Higgins’ phonetic expertise allows him to classify individuals based on speech, emphasizing the social power of language. Eliza’s transformation demonstrates that linguistic mastery grants access to elite spaces but also imposes psychological costs. Her dislocation is evident when she asks, “What’s to become of me?” (Shaw, 2003, p. 104).

Scholars note that Shaw anticipates Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, wherein language functions as a symbol of social legitimacy (Bertolini, 1981). Bloom (2007) observes that Shaw critiques superficial refinement and social pretension, exposing society’s reliance on performance rather than ethical substance. Through Eliza, Shaw illustrates how communication and social reception are tightly bound to power structures and mobility.

- **Gender, Power, and Identity**

Shaw’s treatment of gender foregrounds female agency and autonomy. Higgins initially regards Eliza as an experiment, subordinating her individuality to his intellectual project. Eliza’s insistence, “I’m a good girl, I am” (Shaw, 2003, p. 56), asserts her moral and personal worth. Her eventual confrontation with Higgins represents a broader critique of patriarchal control and the ethics of authority (Eagleton, 2002).

Unlike conventional romantic resolutions, Shaw refuses to bind Eliza to Higgins through marriage. Mrs. Higgins serves as a moral arbiter, reminding Higgins of the importance of empathy and recognizing Eliza’s humanity. This dynamic aligns with feminist readings that highlight the negotiation of identity within constrained social structures (Innes, 2002). Eliza’s transformation is thus both

social and psychological, reflecting self-determination in the face of structural constraints.

- **Socialist Ethics and Moral Consciousness**

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* reflects his deep commitment to Fabian socialism, which emphasizes gradual social reform, education, and moral responsibility rather than revolutionary upheaval. Through the play, Shaw critiques the structural inequalities of Edwardian society, particularly the rigid class system and the superficial markers of social respectability. The poverty of characters like Eliza Doolittle is not depicted as a moral or personal failing but as a consequence of systemic neglect and social indifference. By foregrounding these inequities, Shaw challenges the audience to reconsider the ethical dimensions of social organization and the responsibilities of those with power and privilege (Holroyd, 1997). The juxtaposition of Higgins' intellectual brilliance with his lack of empathy highlights the ethical vacuum of talent untampered by moral awareness. Shaw's satire thus underscores that skill and knowledge alone cannot rectify social injustice; they must be accompanied by ethical consciousness.

The moral dimension of the play extends beyond individual virtue to encompass the broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality. Innes (2002) observes that Shaw employs humor and satire to make these contradictions visible, exposing the hypocrisy of a society that rewards surface refinement while ignoring underlying human worth. For example, Higgins is celebrated for his ability to transform Eliza linguistically, yet he initially disregards her feelings, autonomy, and dignity. Likewise, society quickly accepts Eliza when she meets conventional standards of refinement, demonstrating that social acceptance is often conditional, superficial, and morally arbitrary. By dramatizing these tensions, Shaw foregrounds the necessity of integrating ethical awareness with social action, emphasizing that genuine social transformation requires both structural reform and moral reflection.

Alfred Doolittle's trajectory provides a particularly compelling illustration of the limitations of meritocracy and the ethical dilemmas embedded in social mobility. Initially content with his working-class lifestyle, Doolittle is thrust into middle-class respectability after inheriting a substantial sum. While economically elevated, he experiences new obligations and societal pressures that constrain his freedom, revealing that upward mobility can inadvertently reproduce forms of inequality and moral compromise (Williams, 1968). Shaw uses Doolittle's predicament to demonstrate that social reform cannot merely rely on economic advancement; ethical awareness, equitable responsibility, and compassion are necessary to ensure that mobility promotes human well-being rather than merely imposing conformity.

Shaw's socialist ethics in *Pygmalion* insist on human dignity and moral responsibility as integral to any vision of social transformation. Education, in Shaw's framework, is not solely a tool for professional advancement or social refinement; it must cultivate conscience and social responsibility. Through the interweaving of personal transformation, societal critique, and ethical reflection, the play conveys that true progress is measured not by outward appearances or institutional accolades but by the enhancement of human dignity and the cultivation of empathy (Bertolini, 1981). In this sense, Shaw's moral consciousness extends beyond individual characters to the audience, challenging them to recognize the ethical imperatives inherent in social structures and to consider how justice and compassion might reshape society.

- **Contemporary Relevance**

Over a century later, *Pygmalion* retains relevance in discussions of social inequality, language discrimination, and gendered opportunity. Eliza's struggle resonates with contemporary debates about cultural assimilation, identity negotiation, and access to social capital. Eagleton (2002) emphasizes that Shaw's critique of meritocracy continues to illuminate how privilege and systemic bias shape social outcomes. By foregrounding human agency and moral responsibility, Shaw's work provides enduring insight into pathways for social reform.

- **Reflection of Socio-Cultural Consciousness**

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* demonstrates a profound socio-cultural consciousness by revealing how social identity is constructed through language, class, and gender norms. Through the transformation of Eliza Doolittle, Shaw critiques the rigid class hierarchy of Edwardian England, showing that social status is not innate but performed and enforced through societal expectations (Shaw, 2003). Eliza's journey exposes the ways in which accent and manners operate as markers of respectability, illustrating the arbitrariness of social distinctions and the moral implications of exclusion (Holroyd, 1997). By highlighting these dynamics, Shaw encourages audiences to reflect on the ethical responsibility of those in positions of power and the societal structures that limit human potential.

The play also foregrounds the intersection of gender and class, reflecting Shaw's awareness of patriarchal authority and its impact on female agency. Higgins' treatment of Eliza as an experimental subject exemplifies the objectification of women, while her eventual assertion of independence underscores the importance of self-determination and moral autonomy (Eagleton, 2002). This tension between control and agency emphasizes Shaw's critique of societal norms that prioritize appearance and social conformity over individual dignity, thereby

linking personal transformation to broader social critique (Innes, 2002). Finally, Shaw's socio-cultural consciousness extends to the moral and ethical dimensions of social mobility. Characters such as Alfred Doolittle illustrate the contradictions of middle-class respectability, revealing how economic advancement can impose new social and moral constraints (Williams, 1968). Through comedy and satire, Shaw exposes these inequities, demonstrating that true social transformation requires not only material change but also an awareness of ethical responsibility, empathy, and equitable treatment of all members of society (Bertolini, 1981). *Pygmalion*, therefore, remains a compelling reflection on the interplay of culture, morality, and social structure in shaping human identity.

Conclusion

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* exemplifies the intersection of socio-cultural consciousness and the potential for social transformation. Through Eliza Doolittle's transformation, Shaw critiques class rigidity, linguistic prejudice, and patriarchal authority while advocating moral responsibility and human dignity. The play's engagement with education, language, and agency underscores the socially constructed nature of identity and the ethical imperatives of reform. Shaw's integration of realism, satire, and socialist thought demonstrates that theatre can illuminate social structures while inspiring reflection and action. *Pygmalion* remains a vital text for understanding the dynamics of class, gender, and cultural capital, affirming the transformative potential of consciousness and human agency in the pursuit of social justice.

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Negotiating Identity and Modernity: A Comparative Study of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani

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Abstract

Modern Indian English drama has emerged as a significant literary space for interrogating questions of identity, selfhood, and socio-cultural transformation in postcolonial India. This chapter undertakes a comparative study of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani, two of the most influential playwrights who negotiate the complex interface between tradition and modernity in Indian society. Through their dramatic representations, both playwrights foreground the identity crisis of individuals caught between inherited cultural frameworks and rapidly changing social realities.

Girish Karnad's plays draw extensively on myth, folklore, and history to explore the psychological fragmentation and moral dilemmas of modern subjects. Works such as *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Tughlaq* reveal how ancient narratives are reworked to question contemporary concerns related to selfhood, power, and cultural continuity. Karnad's dramaturgy reflects the tension between collective cultural identity and individual desire, highlighting the struggle to reconcile tradition with modern sensibilities.

In contrast, Mahesh Dattani situates his drama within urban, middle-class milieus, focusing on marginalized voices and silenced identities shaped by gender, sexuality, and family structures. Plays like *Final Solutions*, *Tara*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen* expose the psychological conflicts, emotional alienation, and social anxieties experienced by individuals negotiating modernity within rigid patriarchal and communal frameworks. Dattani's theatre powerfully articulates resistance and self-assertion, especially through female and subaltern characters.

By placing Karnad and Dattani in dialogue, this chapter demonstrates how Indian English drama evolves from mythic introspection to urban realism while consistently engaging with the question of identity. The comparative approach reveals that modernity in Indian theatre is not a rupture from tradition but a

continuous negotiation, marked by conflict, adaptation, and redefinition of the self in a transforming society.

Keywords: Modern Indian English Drama, Identity Crisis, Tradition and Modernity, Cultural Hybridity, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Urban Middle-Class Consciousness, Gender and Patriarchy, Psychological Conflict, etc.

Introduction

Indian English Drama and the Question of Identity

Modern Indian English drama has emerged as a crucial literary and cultural medium for exploring the complexities of identity, selfhood, and social transformation in postcolonial India. Unlike poetry and fiction, drama directly engages with lived realities through performance, dialogue, and embodied experience, making it an effective site for examining the tensions between tradition and modernity, individual desire and collective identity. In the decades following independence, Indian dramatists writing in English began to interrogate the psychological, cultural, and ideological consequences of colonialism, modernization, and rapid socio-economic change.

The question of identity crisis occupies a central position in modern Indian theatre. Postcolonial Indian society is marked by fragmented identities shaped by competing forces—indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, Western education, urbanization, and global modernity. As Stuart Hall observes, identity in postcolonial contexts is not fixed or essential but “a matter of becoming as well as of being,” continuously formed through historical and cultural processes (Hall). Indian English dramatists reflect this instability by portraying characters who struggle to negotiate inherited belief systems and contemporary realities.

Within this evolving theatrical tradition, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani stand out as two of the most influential playwrights who explore identity through distinct yet complementary dramaturgical strategies. Karnad turns to myth, folklore, and history to reinterpret traditional narratives in the light of modern anxieties, while Dattani focuses on urban, middle-class spaces to expose silenced identities shaped by gender, sexuality, and social prejudice. Despite their stylistic differences, both playwrights foreground the individual’s struggle for self-definition within restrictive social and cultural frameworks.

Karnad’s plays such as *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Tughlaq* dramatize the conflict between personal aspiration and collective cultural norms, revealing the psychological fragmentation that accompanies the encounter between tradition and modernity. Similarly, Dattani’s *Final Solutions*, *Tara*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen* depict urban individuals negotiating modern values while remaining entangled in patriarchal, communal, and moral constraints. As Erin B. Mee

argues, modern Indian theatre often functions as a “site of cultural negotiation,” where the past and present coexist in creative tension (Mee).

This chapter undertakes a comparative study of Karnad and Dattani to examine how Indian English drama articulates identity as a process of continuous negotiation rather than a stable essence. By placing mythic and historical frameworks alongside urban realism, the chapter seeks to demonstrate how modern Indian drama reflects the evolving nature of selfhood in a transforming society.

Theoretical Framework: Identity, Modernity, and Cultural Negotiation:

The analysis of identity and modernity in Indian English drama necessitates a theoretical framework grounded in postcolonial and cultural studies. Identity, in contemporary critical discourse, is understood not as a unified or essential category but as a dynamic construct shaped by history, culture, power, and representation. Erik Erikson’s concept of identity crisis, initially developed in psychological theory, has been extended to socio-cultural contexts to describe the anxiety and fragmentation experienced by individuals in periods of rapid social change (Erikson). In postcolonial India, such crises are intensified by the coexistence of traditional value systems and modern influences.

Modernity in the Indian context does not signify a complete break from tradition; rather, it involves a complex process of adaptation, resistance, and reinterpretation. As Partha Chatterjee argues, postcolonial modernity develops within indigenous cultural frameworks, producing alternative modernities rather than replicating Western models (Chatterjee). This perspective is particularly relevant to Indian drama, where modern themes are often articulated through traditional forms, myths, and narrative structures.

Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridity provides a crucial lens for understanding this negotiation. According to Bhabha, postcolonial identities are formed in the “third space” of cultural interaction, where meaning is continuously contested and redefined (Bhabha). Karnad’s reworking of myth and folklore exemplifies this hybridity, as traditional narratives are infused with modern psychological and existential concerns. Similarly, Dattani’s urban plays reveal hybrid identities shaped by Western education, metropolitan lifestyles, and enduring social taboos.

Theatre, as a performative and dialogic art form, becomes an ideal space for staging these conflicts. It allows for the simultaneous presence of multiple voices, perspectives, and temporalities, thereby reflecting the fragmented nature of modern identity. As Ania Loomba notes, postcolonial cultural texts often dramatize the tensions between continuity and change, revealing how power operates within familial, social, and institutional structures (Loomba).

By employing the theoretical concepts of identity crisis, cultural hybridity, and negotiated modernity, this chapter examines how Karnad and Dattani construct characters who are caught between inherited traditions and contemporary realities. The framework enables a comparative reading that highlights both convergence and divergence in their dramatic visions, ultimately presenting identity as an ongoing, contested, and transformative process within modern Indian society.

Girish Karnad: Myth, History, and the Fragmented Self

Girish Karnad occupies a pivotal position in Modern Indian English Drama for his innovative use of myth, folklore, and history to interrogate contemporary questions of identity and modernity. Rather than treating traditional narratives as static or reverential, Karnad reinterprets them as dynamic cultural texts capable of addressing modern psychological and social dilemmas. His dramaturgy reveals how the modern Indian self is shaped by conflicting impulses—between inherited cultural memory and individual aspiration, between continuity and change.

Myth and the Crisis of Identity

In *Hayavadana*, Karnad employs myth and fantasy to dramatize the problem of fragmented identity. The central motif of the transposed heads foregrounds the tension between body and mind, raising fundamental questions about the nature of selfhood. Devadatta's intellectual superiority and Kapila's physical strength represent incomplete aspects of identity, suggesting that modern individuals struggle to achieve wholeness in a world governed by competing values. The play exposes the instability of identity and challenges the notion of a unified self, aligning with modern existential concerns.

Similarly, *Naga-Mandala* reworks folk narratives to explore female desire and agency within patriarchal structures. Rani's transformation from a submissive wife to an assertive woman reveals how tradition can simultaneously function as a site of oppression and resistance. Karnad's use of folklore allows suppressed voices—particularly those of women—to emerge, thereby questioning dominant cultural norms. As Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker notes, Karnad's plays "revitalize traditional forms to address the anxieties of contemporary life," bridging the gap between past and present (Dharwadker).

History, Power, and Modern Consciousness

Karnad's historical play *Tughlaq* presents a profound exploration of political identity and modern idealism. Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq emerges as a tragic figure whose rationalist vision and reformist zeal collide with social reality. His failure underscores the dangers of imposing abstract modern ideals without acknowledging cultural and historical contexts. Tughlaq's internal conflict

reflects the broader crisis of leadership and identity in postcolonial India, where the legacy of the past coexists uneasily with aspirations for progress.

Through *Tughlaq*, Karnad interrogates the relationship between power, morality, and individual conscience. The protagonist's psychological disintegration mirrors the fragmentation of a society struggling to reconcile tradition with modern governance. The play thus becomes a metaphor for the postcolonial condition, revealing how modernity, when detached from cultural rootedness, can lead to alienation and disillusionment.

Tradition and Modernity as Cultural Negotiation

What distinguishes Karnad's dramaturgy is his refusal to view tradition and modernity as binary opposites. Instead, he presents them as interdependent forces engaged in continuous dialogue. His plays suggest that modern identity in India cannot be constructed by rejecting tradition altogether; rather, it must emerge through reinterpretation and negotiation. This approach resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity, where new meanings are produced through interaction between the past and the present (Bhabha).

Karnad's characters are rarely able to resolve their conflicts fully. Their struggles highlight the ongoing nature of identity formation in a society undergoing transformation. By embedding modern concerns within traditional narrative frameworks, Karnad demonstrates that the search for self in Indian society is a complex, unfinished process.

In this sense, Karnad's theatre serves as a bridge between cultural memory and modern consciousness. His plays not only reflect the tensions inherent in postcolonial identity but also suggest that tradition itself can be a powerful resource for reimagining the self in a changing world.

Mahesh Dattani: Urban Spaces, Marginalized Voices, and Modern Anxiety

Mahesh Dattani represents a decisive shift in Modern Indian English Drama from mythic and historical frameworks to the immediacy of urban, middle-class life. His theatre focuses on contemporary social realities, exposing the psychological conflicts and identity crises experienced by individuals negotiating modernity within restrictive familial, communal, and patriarchal structures. Dattani's dramaturgy foregrounds voices that have traditionally remained silenced in Indian society, thereby transforming the stage into a powerful site of resistance and self-assertion.

Urban Middle-Class Consciousness and Alienation

Dattani's plays are deeply rooted in metropolitan settings, where urban spaces function as sites of both aspiration and anxiety. Characters in plays such as *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Final Solutions* inhabit a world shaped by material success, social respectability, and moral hypocrisy. Despite the promise of

modern freedom, these individuals experience emotional isolation, fractured relationships, and a persistent sense of insecurity. The urban middle class, often perceived as progressive, emerges in Dattani's drama as deeply conservative in its attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and social difference.

This alienation is not merely personal but structural. Modern education, economic mobility, and exposure to Western values coexist uneasily with traditional expectations, producing conflicted identities. As Erin B. Mee observes, Dattani's theatre exposes "the contradictions of contemporary urban life, where liberal self-images often mask deeply entrenched prejudices" (Mee). Through realistic dialogue and intimate domestic settings, Dattani reveals the psychological costs of this contradiction.

Gender, Patriarchy, and the Politics of the Body

One of the most compelling aspects of Dattani's drama is his sustained engagement with gender discrimination and patriarchal control. In *Tara*, the denial of bodily autonomy to a female child in favor of her male twin exposes the deep-rooted bias embedded within familial and medical institutions. Tara's physical disability becomes a metaphor for the systematic marginalization of women, while her emotional resilience reflects the struggle for selfhood within oppressive structures.

Similarly, *Bravely Fought the Queen* presents a disturbing portrait of domestic violence and female subjugation concealed behind the façade of urban affluence. The play critiques the normalization of male aggression and the complicity of social silence, while simultaneously articulating moments of female resistance. Dattani's women characters challenge the patriarchal family not through grand rebellion but through emotional endurance and self-awareness, asserting agency within constrained circumstances. As Anjum Katyal argues, Dattani's theatre "brings the private into the public domain, forcing audiences to confront uncomfortable social truths" (Katyal).

Communal Identity and Generational Conflict

In *Final Solutions*, Dattani extends his exploration of identity to the domain of religious and communal conflict. The play juxtaposes past and present to reveal how inherited prejudices shape contemporary identities. Generational conflict becomes central, as younger characters struggle to free themselves from communal hatred passed down through memory and narrative. The chorus-like presence of masked figures underscores the persistence of collective fear and stereotyping in modern society.

The play suggests that modernity alone does not guarantee tolerance or ethical progress. Instead, it demands critical engagement with history and self-reflection.

Dattani thus portrays identity as socially constructed and historically conditioned, requiring conscious negotiation rather than passive acceptance.

Theatre as Social Protest and Self-Assertion

Dattani's realism is inherently political. By focusing on everyday lives and domestic spaces, his theatre challenges dominant narratives of progress and modernity. His plays give visibility to marginalized identities—women, religious minorities, and gendered bodies—thereby transforming theatre into an instrument of social critique. Unlike mythic resolution, Dattani's endings often remain open-ended, emphasizing the ongoing nature of struggle and self-definition.

Through his portrayal of urban modernity, Dattani demonstrates that the search for identity is inseparable from questions of power, representation, and resistance. His drama complements Karnad's mythic introspection by revealing the lived consequences of modernity in contemporary India, making him an indispensable voice in Modern Indian English Drama.

Comparative Analysis: Negotiating Identity and Modernity

A comparative reading of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani reveals how Modern Indian English Drama negotiates identity and modernity through diverse dramaturgical strategies while addressing shared socio-cultural concerns. Though separated by thematic focus and theatrical form, both playwrights engage with the central postcolonial question of how individuals construct and reconstruct the self within shifting cultural, historical, and social contexts.

Karnad's engagement with identity is largely mythic and historical, rooted in collective cultural memory. By reworking folklore, myth, and history, Karnad situates individual identity within a broader civilizational framework. His characters often grapple with existential dilemmas that transcend specific time periods, suggesting the continuity of human conflict across ages. In contrast, Dattani's dramaturgy is contemporary and realistic, focusing on the immediacy of urban life. His characters are shaped by social institutions such as family, religion, and the middle-class moral order, revealing identity as a product of lived experience rather than inherited narrative.

The treatment of tradition and modernity further highlights this contrast. In Karnad's plays, tradition functions as a cultural resource that enables reinterpretation and self-discovery. Myths are not static remnants of the past but flexible narratives capable of accommodating modern anxieties. Dattani, however, often presents tradition as a constraining force that reinforces patriarchy, communalism, and silence. Modernity in his plays does not dismantle these structures but frequently masks them under the guise of progress. This difference underscores two modes of cultural negotiation—one that seeks renewal through tradition and another that demands critical resistance to it.

Gender and identity form another significant axis of comparison. While Karnad's female characters, particularly in *Naga-Mandala*, negotiate agency through symbolic and folkloric modes, Dattani's women confront oppression in tangible, domestic spaces. Dattani's emphasis on bodily politics and emotional trauma exposes the everyday realities of gendered violence, thereby intensifying the political urgency of identity formation. As Ania Loomba observes, postcolonial cultural texts often reveal how power operates through both symbolic representation and social practice (Loomba).

Despite these differences, both playwrights converge in their rejection of fixed or essentialist notions of identity. Their characters rarely achieve resolution; instead, they remain suspended in processes of negotiation and self-questioning. This aligns with Stuart Hall's assertion that identity is "always in process," shaped by difference, conflict, and historical contingency (Hall). Whether staged through mythic allegory or urban realism, Karnad and Dattani portray identity as fragmented, contested, and perpetually evolving.

Together, their works demonstrate that modernity in Indian English drama is not a linear movement away from tradition but a complex dialogue between continuity and change. By juxtaposing cultural memory with contemporary social realities, Karnad and Dattani expand the scope of Indian theatre, offering complementary perspectives on the enduring search for self in a transforming society.

Indian English Drama: From Myth to Metropolitan Reality

The transition from mythic and historical frameworks to urban, contemporary settings in Modern Indian English Drama reflects the broader transformation of Indian society in the post-independence period. This movement does not indicate a rejection of traditional forms but signals an expansion of theatrical expression to accommodate changing social realities. The plays of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani together exemplify this trajectory, demonstrating how Indian drama evolves while continuing to engage with the persistent question of identity. Karnad's use of myth, folklore, and history situates modern concerns within a continuum of cultural memory. By revisiting traditional narratives, his plays suggest that the dilemmas of selfhood, power, and morality are not unique to the modern age but are recurring human experiences. Myth, in this context, becomes a symbolic language through which contemporary anxieties are articulated. As Rustom Bharucha observes, Karnad's theatre reclaims indigenous performance traditions to critique modernity from within rather than from a position of cultural rupture (Bharucha). This approach affirms the relevance of the past in shaping present identities.

In contrast, Dattani's urban realism captures the immediacy of metropolitan life, where identity is shaped by social institutions, economic pressures, and interpersonal relationships. His plays reflect the fragmentation of the self in environments marked by competition, material aspiration, and moral ambiguity. The metropolitan setting becomes a space of alienation, where individuals experience isolation despite physical proximity. Dattani's focus on domestic spaces underscores how large social forces—patriarchy, communalism, and class anxiety—operate within intimate spheres.

The movement from myth to metropolitan reality thus represents a shift in dramatic idiom rather than thematic concern. Both modes address the instability of identity in a changing society, albeit through different representational strategies. While Karnad employs symbolic abstraction and archetypal narratives, Dattani relies on realism and psychological depth to expose the lived consequences of modernity. Together, they illustrate the adaptability of Indian English drama in responding to socio-cultural change.

This evolution also reflects the diversification of Indian theatre audiences and concerns. As Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker notes, post-independence Indian drama increasingly negotiates between indigenous traditions and global influences, producing a theatre that is simultaneously local and modern (Dharwadker). The coexistence of mythic introspection and urban realism enriches Indian English drama, allowing it to address identity not as a singular experience but as a multifaceted process shaped by time, space, and social context.

In bringing myth and metropolitan reality into dialogue, Karnad and Dattani collectively demonstrate that modern Indian drama is not defined by form alone but by its sustained engagement with the search for self in a rapidly transforming society.

Conclusion: Identity as Continuous Negotiation

This chapter has examined how Modern Indian English Drama articulates the question of identity through the works of Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani, demonstrating that identity in postcolonial India is neither fixed nor unified but remains a process of continuous negotiation. By situating individual struggles within broader cultural, historical, and social frameworks, both playwrights reveal the complexities involved in constructing the self in a rapidly transforming society.

Karnad's engagement with myth, folklore, and history underscores the enduring relevance of cultural memory in shaping modern identity. His plays suggest that tradition is not an inert inheritance but a living resource that can be reinterpreted to address contemporary anxieties. Through symbolic narratives and archetypal figures, Karnad presents identity as fragmented yet meaningful, rooted in the past

while oriented toward the present. His dramaturgy emphasizes continuity, revealing how modern dilemmas emerge from long-standing cultural tensions. In contrast, Dattani's urban realism foregrounds the lived realities of individuals negotiating modernity within patriarchal, communal, and middle-class structures. His focus on marginalized voices exposes the contradictions of urban progress and challenges dominant narratives of social advancement. By dramatizing gender discrimination, communal prejudice, and emotional alienation, Dattani highlights the psychological cost of modern life and the necessity of resistance and self-assertion. Together, these approaches illustrate how identity is shaped by both symbolic inheritance and social experience.

Despite their differences, Karnad and Dattani converge in their rejection of essentialist notions of selfhood. Their characters rarely achieve closure, reflecting what Stuart Hall describes as identity being "always in process," formed through difference, conflict, and historical contingency (Hall). This open-endedness affirms the dynamic nature of identity in postcolonial contexts, where tradition and modernity coexist in tension rather than opposition.

The comparative study thus reveals that modernity in Indian English drama does not signify a rupture from tradition but a sustained dialogue between continuity and change. As Homi K. Bhabha argues, cultural meaning is produced in spaces of negotiation, where new identities emerge through interaction rather than replacement (Bhabha). By bringing mythic introspection and metropolitan realism into conversation, Karnad and Dattani expand the possibilities of Indian theatre, offering nuanced representations of the ongoing search for self in contemporary Indian society.

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Gender, Patriarchy, and Women's Resistance in the Select Plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad

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Abstract

Gender has emerged as one of the most significant thematic concerns in modern Indian English drama, as contemporary playwrights increasingly interrogate the structures of power that govern women's lives within family, society, and culture. The stage becomes a critical space where the workings of patriarchy are exposed, questioned, and resisted, allowing drama to function not merely as representation but as social critique. Indian English dramatists reveal how gender roles are culturally constructed, how female identity is shaped through silence, obedience, and control, and how women are subjected to psychological, emotional, and physical oppression within patriarchal systems.

This chapter examines the interrelated themes of gender, patriarchy, and women's resistance in selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad, with specific reference to Dattani's *Tara* (1995) and *Thirty Days in September* (2013) and Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* (1988) and *Hayavadana* (1971). These plays present women who are constrained by traditional expectations of marriage, sexuality, family honour, and social respectability, yet they also portray female characters who gradually negotiate these limitations and attempt to assert voice and agency. Through close textual analysis, the chapter explores how patriarchal ideology operates within domestic, cultural, and psychological spaces and how resistance emerges through speech, self-awareness, emotional struggle, and symbolic transformation.

The chapter argues that the selected plays of Dattani and Karnad function as powerful feminist spaces that not only expose the mechanisms of gendered oppression but also reimagine women as thinking, feeling, and speaking subjects capable of challenging dominant structures. By foregrounding women's lived experiences and their struggles for identity and dignity, these plays contribute meaningfully to contemporary debates on gender justice and the ongoing process of social transformation in India.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter is informed by selected ideas from feminist and cultural theory in order to understand how gender, patriarchy, and resistance operate in modern Indian English drama. The theoretical approach remains selective and functional, supporting textual analysis rather than overwhelming it.

Simone de Beauvoir's influential argument that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" provides an important foundation for this study. Her idea emphasizes that femininity is not a natural condition but a social construction shaped through education, tradition, and cultural expectation. This perspective helps in reading women characters in Indian English drama as products of social conditioning rather than as inherently weak or submissive.

Judith Butler's concept of gender as performance further develops this understanding. Butler argues that gender identity is repeatedly produced through everyday acts, behavior, language, and social roles. This framework is useful in analyzing how women in plays by Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, and Manjula Padmanabhan are pressured to perform the roles of obedient wife, dutiful daughter, or respectable woman, and how resistance often begins when these performances are questioned or disrupted.

Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy helps explain the systemic nature of women's oppression. She identifies patriarchy as a network of social structures such as family, marriage, culture, and institutions that collectively maintain male dominance. This concept is particularly relevant to Indian English drama, where domestic space, kinship systems, and social norms repeatedly function as sites of control over female identity.

Michel Foucault's ideas on power and voice are also significant to this study. Foucault views power not only as repression but as something that circulates through discourse and social practices. From this perspective, silence itself becomes a form of control, while speech becomes a form of resistance. Many women characters in modern Indian English drama move from silence toward articulation, suggesting that the act of speaking can itself be a challenge to patriarchal authority.

Representation of Patriarchy

The selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad offer a powerful critique of patriarchy by revealing how women are controlled and marginalized within family, marriage, and society. Rather than presenting patriarchy as an abstract concept, these playwrights locate it within everyday social relationships, showing how power operates through ordinary practices, traditions, and expectations. In *Tara* and *Thirty Days in September*, Dattani exposes the psychological and physical consequences of gender discrimination, while in *Naga-Mandala* and

Hayavadana, Karnad explores how cultural traditions and social norms regulate female identity and behaviour.

One of the most visible forms of patriarchy in these plays is the control over the female body. In Dattani's *Tara*, gender discrimination operates at the level of both family decision-making and medical authority. *Tara*, though equally deserving, is denied her share of the leg because her parents choose to privilege the future of the male child, Chandan. This decision reflects a deeply rooted belief that the boy's life is more valuable than the girl's. *Tara*'s body becomes a site where patriarchal values are violently imposed, revealing how even parental love is shaped by gender bias. The play clearly shows that the female body is often treated as expendable within a male-centered social order.

Patriarchy also functions through silence and the suppression of women's voices. In *Thirty Days in September*, Dattani presents the painful reality of sexual abuse and the culture of silence surrounding it. Mala's trauma is intensified by the fact that her suffering remains unspoken for years, as fear, shame, and social stigma prevent open discussion. Her mother's silence further reflects how women themselves are often forced to participate in maintaining secrecy in order to protect family honour. The play demonstrates that patriarchy survives not only through violence but also through silence, denial, and emotional repression.

Marriage and domestic life are also shown as key institutions through which patriarchal power operates. In Karnad's *Naga-Mandala*, Rani is trapped in a marriage where she is neglected, isolated, and treated as an object rather than as a partner. Her husband imposes strict control over her movement and behaviour, reflecting the traditional expectation that a wife must remain obedient and confined within the domestic space. Similarly, in *Hayavadana*, women are judged according to ideals of purity, loyalty, and perfection. Padmini's emotional conflict and her ultimate suffering highlight the rigid expectations placed upon women within both marriage and society. These plays reveal how cultural norms define what a woman should be and punish those who fail to conform.

Through these four plays, patriarchy emerges as a pervasive and deeply embedded system rather than a series of isolated incidents. It controls women's bodies (*Tara*), silences their trauma (*Thirty Days in September*), restricts their freedom within marriage (*Naga-Mandala*), and confines their identity within rigid social ideals (*Hayavadana*). By dramatizing these realities, Dattani and Karnad compel readers and audiences to confront the uncomfortable truths of gender inequality and prepare the ground for the exploration of women's resistance, which becomes central to the next stage of analysis.

Gender Construction and Female Identity

The selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad clearly demonstrate that female identity is not natural or fixed but is shaped

through social conditioning, cultural expectations, and family control. In *Tara*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Hayavadana*, women characters are taught how to behave, how to speak, and how to understand themselves according to patriarchal norms. These plays reveal that femininity is carefully produced through discipline and restriction rather than through individual choice. The idea of the “ideal woman” strongly influences the lives of female characters in these plays. Women are expected to be silent, patient, obedient, and self-sacrificing. In *Tara*, Tara is raised in a family that outwardly claims to treat both children equally, yet the hidden preference for the male child shapes her emotional world. She gradually realizes that her worth is considered secondary to that of her brother. In *Thirty Days in September*, Mala grows up under conditions of fear and emotional control, where silence is taught as a necessary part of being a “good girl.” Her identity is shaped by shame, secrecy, and the pressure to protect family honour rather than her own well-being.

This process of conditioning often results in internalized oppression. Women begin to accept restrictions as normal and may blame themselves for the suffering imposed upon them. Tara’s emotional struggle is not only about physical loss but also about her growing awareness that she was deliberately denied opportunity because of her gender. Her feelings of rejection and insecurity show how deeply patriarchal values can affect a woman’s self-image. Similarly, Mala’s trauma in *Thirty Days in September* reveals how psychological wounds shape identity over time, making it difficult for women to trust others or to assert their own needs.

Psychological conflict is also central to female identity in Karnad’s plays. In *Naga-Mandala*, Rani is initially shaped by traditional expectations of a silent and obedient wife. She accepts neglect and isolation as part of her duty. However, her emotional journey reflects the tension between social expectation and personal desire. As she begins to recognize her need for affection and dignity, her sense of self gradually transforms. In *Hayavadana*, Padmini’s identity is shaped by conflicting expectations of ideal womanhood. She is expected to embody loyalty and purity, yet she also experiences intellectual and emotional desire that cannot be contained within rigid social roles. Her inner conflict reveals the limitations imposed on women’s identity within traditional structures.

Across these plays, family, society, and culture function as powerful forces that shape female identity. Parents, husbands, and social traditions continuously define what is acceptable and what is forbidden for women. Through the experiences of Tara, Mala, Rani, and Padmini, Dattani and Karnad show that women’s identities are produced within a network of expectations, silence, fear, and emotional pressure. By exposing these processes, the plays encourage audiences to question the naturalness of gender roles and to recognize female identity as a site of struggle, negotiation, and possible transformation.

Women's Resistance and Assertion of Voice

While the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad strongly expose the workings of patriarchy, they do not present women only as helpless victims. Instead, these dramatists construct the stage as a space where women gradually move from silence to awareness and from submission to self-expression. Women's resistance in *Tara*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Hayavadana* is not always loud or confrontational; rather, it often appears as subtle, emotional, psychological, and symbolic acts. These moments of resistance are significant because they challenge patriarchal authority and redefine women as thinking and speaking subjects.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Girish Karnad presents a clear movement from silence to self-assertion. Rani begins the play as a frightened and obedient wife who accepts neglect and confinement as part of her duty. Her husband's indifference and control initially reduce her to a silent presence within the household. However, through her relationship with the Naga, Rani experiences affection, recognition, and emotional fulfilment for the first time. This experience transforms her sense of self. By the end of the play, Rani no longer speaks as a submissive woman but as someone who commands authority and respect. Her growth suggests that resistance can emerge through self-awareness and emotional awakening rather than direct rebellion.

A more complex form of resistance appears in *Hayavadana*. Padmini does not openly challenge social norms, yet her inner conflict itself becomes a form of resistance. She refuses to accept the rigid ideal of womanhood imposed upon her and struggles to reconcile her intellectual and emotional desires. Her attraction to both Devadatta and Kapila reveals her refusal to fit into the limited role of the "perfect wife." Although her story ends tragically, her psychological struggle exposes the limitations of patriarchal definitions of femininity. Karnad thus uses Padmini's conflict to question the social expectations that restrict women's identity and desire.

In Dattani's *Tara*, resistance takes a tragic but meaningful form. Tara is physically and emotionally marginalized by the decision that privileges her brother's life over hers. However, as she gradually becomes aware of the truth behind her suffering, she begins to question the moral foundations of her family. Her growing consciousness represents an important form of resistance. Even though she cannot undo the injustice done to her body, her ability to understand and articulate her pain affirms her intellectual and emotional agency. Tara's awareness exposes the cruelty of gender discrimination and challenges the values that sustain it.

The movement from silence to speech is most directly visible in *Thirty Days in September*. Mala's journey is one of confronting trauma and breaking long-standing silence about sexual abuse. For years, fear and

shame prevent her from speaking about her experience, but when she begins to articulate her pain, this act itself becomes resistance. Her decision to speak challenges both personal trauma and social stigma. The play suggests that speech has transformative power: it allows women to reclaim their identity and confront the structures that have oppressed them.

Across these four plays, resistance is shown not as a single dramatic act but as a gradual process of awakening. It appears through self-awareness (Tara), the courage to speak (Thirty Days in September), emotional self-discovery (Naga-Mandala), and psychological questioning of imposed roles (Hayavadana). Through such portrayals, Dattani and Karnad reimagine women not as passive victims but as active subjects struggling to reclaim voice and redefine identity. In doing so, the theatre becomes a powerful space for feminist critique and social reflection.

Comparative Views on the Works of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad

Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad are two of the most significant playwrights in modern Indian English drama, yet their thematic concerns and dramatic techniques differ in meaningful ways. While both writers interrogate issues of identity, gender, marginalization, and social power, they do so through distinct aesthetic strategies and ideological frameworks. A comparative reading of their works reveals how contemporary Indian drama accommodates both realism and myth to critique patriarchal and social structures.

Both Dattani and Karnad expose the oppressive nature of patriarchy, particularly in relation to women's lives. In Dattani's plays such as Tara and Thirty Days in September, patriarchy operates within the family and everyday social relationships. Discrimination is subtle but deeply damaging, as seen in the preferential treatment given to the male child in Tara and the culture of silence surrounding sexual abuse in Thirty Days in September. Dattani presents patriarchy as an internalized system, maintained by both men and women.

Karnad, on the other hand, explores patriarchy through myth, folklore, and history. In Naga-Mandala, women's confinement within marriage and their lack of emotional freedom are exposed, while in Hayavadana, Padmini's psychological conflict reflects the restrictions imposed on female desire. Rather than focusing only on domestic realism, Karnad uses symbolic structures to show how patriarchy is culturally embedded across time.

Both playwrights are deeply concerned with identity, but they approach it differently. Dattani's characters struggle with identity in concrete social contexts. Tara's identity is fractured by gender discrimination; Mala's identity in Thirty Days in September is shaped by trauma and silence. Identity in Dattani is psychological, personal, and socially conditioned.

In contrast, Karnad presents identity as philosophical and symbolic. In *Hayavadana*, the question “What makes a complete identity?” becomes central to the play. The transposition of heads and bodies raises complex questions about the nature of selfhood. Similarly, in *Naga-Mandala*, Rani’s identity evolves through a mythic transformation. Karnad thus treats identity as both cultural and metaphysical.

A key difference lies in dramatic form. Dattani uses realism, familiar settings, and conversational dialogue to make social issues immediately relatable. His plays resemble everyday life, which makes the critique of social hypocrisy more direct and uncomfortable.

Karnad, by contrast, employs myth, folklore, fantasy, and traditional performance teachings. Masks, storytellers, chorus, and symbolic characters are central to his dramaturgy. This distancing effect allows Karnad to critique social realities indirectly but profoundly.

Both playwrights give voice to marginalized figures. Dattani foregrounds those silenced within contemporary urban society: women, children, LGBTQ individuals, and victims of abuse. His theatre becomes a platform for suppressed voices to speak.

Karnad’s marginalized figures often appear within allegorical or symbolic frameworks. Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Padmini (*Hayavadana*), and even *Hayavadana* himself represent psychological, social, and cultural marginality. These figures challenge normative ideas about identity, gender, and belonging.

Dattani’s vision is often grounded in social realism and emotional complexity. His plays suggest that change begins with recognition, dialogue, and confrontation of uncomfortable truths. Resistance, therefore, emerges through speech and awareness.

Karnad’s vision is more ambiguous and philosophical. His plays do not always offer clear solutions but instead invite reflection on cultural contradictions. Resistance in Karnad is embedded in transformation, symbolism, and questioning of traditional narratives.

In comparison, Dattani’s drama is socially immediate and realist, exposing hidden injustices within contemporary Indian society, whereas Karnad’s drama is symbolic, mythic, and philosophically layered, using traditional narratives to interrogate enduring cultural ideologies. Together, their works demonstrate that modern Indian English drama is both socially engaged and aesthetically diverse, capable of addressing issues of gender, identity, power, and resistance through multiple dramatic modes.

Contemporary Relevance

The themes of gender, patriarchy, and women’s resistance presented in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad remain highly relevant in

contemporary society. Despite legal reforms and increased awareness about gender equality, women continue to face discrimination, violence, and social control in everyday life. The issues dramatized in *Tara*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Hayavadana* therefore reflect not only literary concerns but also continuing social realities.

Gender-based violence and the silencing of women are central to Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*. The play addresses the trauma of sexual abuse and highlights how fear, shame, and social pressure often prevent victims from speaking out. This situation continues to exist in contemporary society, where many women still struggle to report abuse. Similarly, *Tara* exposes the deep-rooted preference for male children within families. The discrimination suffered by *Tara* remains relevant in a society where gender bias, unequal opportunities, and emotional neglect of girl children are still visible.

Karnad's plays also offer important insights into present-day gender relations. In *Naga-Mandala*, Rani's confinement within marriage and her lack of emotional freedom reflect the experiences of many women who are still expected to remain silent and obedient within domestic spaces. Her gradual assertion of selfhood speaks to contemporary women's struggles for autonomy and recognition. In *Hayavadana*, Padmini's inner conflict and her desire for an ideal partner reveal how women's choices are often restricted by social expectations and moral judgement. Her situation remains relevant in a culture that continues to regulate female desire.

The persistence of patriarchal values explains why these plays continue to resonate with modern audiences. Social ideals of obedience, sacrifice, and respectability still shape women's lives, just as they do in the dramatic worlds of Dattani and Karnad. By questioning these ideals, the plays encourage readers and viewers to reflect critically on gender roles and power structures.

For these reasons, the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad continue to matter in the contemporary context. They function not only as artistic works but also as instruments of social critique. By giving voice to women's experiences and by exposing the mechanisms of patriarchy, these dramas contribute to ongoing discussions on gender justice, equality, and women's empowerment.

Conclusion

The interrelated themes of gender, patriarchy, and women's resistance emerge with striking clarity in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad—*Tara*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Naga-Mandala*, and *Hayavadana*. These plays go beyond the mere depiction of women's suffering and instead expose the social, cultural, and psychological forces through which female identity is constructed, regulated, and constrained.

Patriarchy in these dramatic works operates through everyday institutions such as family, marriage, tradition, and social respectability. In *Tara*, gender discrimination becomes visible through unequal treatment within the family and the control exercised over the female body. In *Thirty Days in September*, patriarchal power is sustained through silence, shame, and the suppression of trauma. *Naga-Mandala* reveals the confinement of women within marriage and the denial of emotional freedom, while *Hayavadana* illustrates how rigid cultural ideals limit female desire and identity. Together, these plays demonstrate that patriarchy is not an isolated phenomenon but a deeply rooted system shaping women's lives at multiple levels.

Female identity in these plays is shown to be socially produced rather than natural or fixed. Characters such as Tara, Mala, Rani, and Padmini are shaped by silence, obedience, fear, and internalized oppression. At the same time, their inner conflicts and moments of self-awareness suggest that identity is a dynamic space of struggle, questioning, and potential transformation.

The theatre in the works of both Dattani and Karnad emerges as a space of resistance. Women's resistance may appear subtle, emotional, or symbolic, yet it carries significant power. Tara's growing consciousness, Mala's courage to articulate her trauma, Rani's emotional awakening, and Padmini's questioning of imposed ideals each represent different ways of challenging patriarchal authority. Through these portrayals, women are reimagined not as silent victims but as individuals capable of reflection, speech, and agency.

Although Dattani employs social realism while Karnad draws upon myth and symbolism, both playwrights share a deep commitment to foregrounding marginalized voices and questioning gendered power structures. Their dramatic works reveal the aesthetic richness of modern Indian English drama and its capacity to function as a meaningful site of feminist critique.

Ultimately, the selected plays affirm the continuing importance of theatre as a cultural space that challenges patriarchal ideology, interrogates the construction of female identity, and foregrounds women's resistance. By giving voice to women's experiences and struggles, these dramas contribute to broader conversations on gender, justice, and equality, and encourage ongoing reflection on the need for social transformation.

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Negotiating Selfhood: Identity and Alienation in Mahesh Dattani's Drama

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most significant Indian playwrights in English whose works deal with the fragmentation of self, limitations of the society and the conflict between tradition and modernity. The characters often exploited through the discursive practices of gender, sexuality, religion, class and caste. The characters often undergo the process of identity crisis and existential dilemma. Quest for the self is represented through the literary works. Through plays such as *Tara*, *Final Solutions*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani probes the construction of identity crisis, and the search for authenticity in conflict with external forces.

The search for the self is the complex process where the individuals go through the clash between the traditional norms and the modern aspirations. The approach towards oneself and the society is the attitude that defines one's identity. In the post-modern period these clashes are often reflected through the fragmented characters. In modern Indian theatre, identity is often contextualized through clashes between traditional norms and individual desires. Mahesh Dattani's dramatic corpus consistently highlights this tension, making identity — and the crisis resulting from its suppression — a central thematic focus. His characters frequently confront internal contradictions and societal prejudices, navigating spaces where personal selfhood is threatened or marginalized.

Keywords: Fragmentation of self, societal impositions, identity crisis etc.

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani as a Playwright

Mahesh Dattani born on 7th August 1958 in Bangalore, India is one of the most significant contemporary Indian Dramatists writing in English. He has given a strong native voice to the Indian English theatre. He focused on the social

realities which are often prohibited and considered as a taboo. In a way, he has tried to centralise the marginal ideas in literary writings. The serious and complex issues such as gender discrimination, identity crisis, search for the self, sexuality, communalism, and the struggle between traditional set frameworks and the modern inspirations are addressed through his works.

Mahesh Dattani employs techniques like flashbacks and memory sequences, symbolic stage settings, chorus or masks and intertwining of past and present. These techniques reinforce the fragmentation of identity and the instability of truth, central concerns in his plays. Mahesh Dattani's plays are recognised for exploring the issues such as identity crisis, gender discrimination, sexual marginalisation, familial dysfunction, and communalism. His characters often embark on a painful search for the self while navigating patriarchal constraints, societal expectations, and the weight of their own pasts.

Mahesh Dattani began writing plays in the late 1980s and he is notable for his bold themes and innovative dramatic techniques. Mahesh Dattani focuses on the modern urban middle class India by uncovering the suppressed identities and hidden anxieties. His plays are remarkable for the psychological depth, symbolism and the use of memory, existential dilemma, quest for the identity at the content level, and they are known for the non-linear narrative structures and realistic dialogues at the level of form.

Mahesh Dattani was a first playwright for receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 for his collection *Final solutions and Other Plays*, a landmark moment in Indian English drama.

Major Literary Works

Some of the plays written by Mahesh Dattani include 'Final Solutions' (1993) which explores communalism, prejudice and fractured identities in post-partition in India. The play (1990) *Tara* is a powerful critique of patriarchy and gender bias. The drama 'Dance Like a Man' (1989) examines gender roles, artistic freedom, and conflict in generations. *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) deals with gender politics, domestic violence, and suppressed sexual identities. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) addressed homosexuality and identity. *Where There's a Will* (1988) is a satirical take on family power dynamics and patriarchal control. The play 'Seven Steps Around the Fire' (1999) highlights the marginalisation of the transgender communities.

The themes of the literary works are identity crisis and search for the self, gender discrimination, patriarchy, sexuality, communal and religious conflict and the tension between tradition and modernity. His characters often experience inner conflict as they struggle to reconcile personal desires with societal expectations, making his drama deeply psychological and socially relevant.

Identity Crisis as a Central Theme

1. Gender and Selfhood in Tara

In the play *Tara*, the gender discrimination is harshly represented. The play is centred on the conjoined twins separated at birth, where Tara, the girl twin is denied the stronger leg in favour of her brother due to patriarchal practices. Identity crisis is the severe result of this gender discrimination. Tara is a representative of the women who are denied the privileges due to their gender. This injustice is a symbol of social injustice. Tara struggles for the recognition, equality, freedom, and the sense of life. The cultural upbringing of the women in Indian scenario leads them towards the fragmented identities. Both Tara and Chandan grapple with these anxieties imposed by the social forces. They represent the clash between internal sense of self and the norms imposed by the traditions.

The gender hierarchy distorts the true self which leads to the psychological conflicts. The sense of the self is formed at the complex levels through the invisible forces of the society. The identity does not operate stably, rather it is intertwined by the layers of the relationships, memory and the set frameworks of social norms.

His play ‘*Tara*’ which was published in the year 1990 is focused on the gendered self and physical disability. *Tara* is a profound exploration of gender discrimination where the central character, Tara suffers from identity crisis caused by the patriarchal discursive practices.

The twins Tara and Chandan are separated. Tara represents the suppressed potential of the girl child in India. The play centres on conjoined twins, Tara and Chandan who were born joined the hip and shared three legs. For their survival, a separation surgery was performed although the third leg had a better blood supply from Tara’s body, their mother and grandfather conspired with a doctor to graft the leg onto Chandan.

The surgery failed for Chandan- his body rejected the leg-leaving both siblings with a single leg. The play follows the emotional and physical aftermath of this decision, which ultimately leads to Tara’s death and Chandan’s lifelong guilt. The play exposes how deeply patriarchal values affect the life-changing medical decisions, prioritizing a boy’s future over a girl’s health. It explores the fractured relationship between the parents, Bharati and Patel and the crushing burden of guilt carried by Chandan who later renames himself ‘Dan’ while living in London. Through the characters Dattani criticises the urban Indian middle class that outwardly claims progressive approach but inwardly keeps traditional biases. The major characters are such as Tara, Chandan, Bharati, and Mr. Patel. Tara is a protagonist who is an intelligent, spirited girl who is primary victim of her family’s prejudice. Chandan or Dan is Tara’s twin brother, who shares a deep

bond with her but feels like a 'partner in crime' for surviving at her expense. Bharati suffers from the intense guilt over her role in the surgery which eventually affects her mental health. Mr Patel, her father attempts to provide a normal life for his children but struggles with the secrets of the past. Conjoined twins (Tara and Chandan) are separated, but the medical procedure is manipulated to give the boy (Chandan) the better chance at life by taking the third leg, which belonged to Tara. Tara represents the suppressed potential of the girl child in India. Her identity is stunted, symbolized by the artificial legs she wears and the emotional, often shallow, love from her mother. Tara's quest for identity ends in tragic failure as she fades away, while her brother, Chandan, struggles with the guilt of his survival and identity at his sister's expense.

2. Communalism, Memory, and Self in Final Solutions

The communal violence is reflected in the play *Final Solutions*. The character such as Hardika who is formerly known as Daksha, represent the identity crisis. Her efforts to change herself lead her to the fragmented self. Here, her personal identity is damaged by the social biases and the traumatic legacy of the collective history. She is unable to reconcile her past as Daksha with her present self as Hardika. This helplessness is an emblem of the struggle of the identity which is closely associated with the memories of violence, exclusion and the denial.

The line between the self and the other is blurred by the shifting communal roles. The collective identities can subsume the individual selves which lead to the loneliness and an existential crisis. The confrontation to the embedded histories is required by the identity formation, rather than denying them.

3. Socio-Psychological Marginality in Dance Like a Man

The play *Dance Like a Man* which was published in the year 1989 explores the crisis of identity in men, specifically challenging the traditional definition of masculinity.

The play represents the conflict between the protagonist, Jairaj who wants to pursue a career in classical dance and his father who considers this profession as unworthy of man. The aspiration and the traditional role of masculinity are at the conflict. Jairaj goes through the identity crisis and also goes through the social pressure of norms. The social conditioning demands to conform to the traditional roles. His wife Ratna goes through the identity crisis who wants to become a famous dancer. The play illustrates how social conditioning forces individuals to suppress their true selves, leading to a dysfunctional existence.

4. Bravely Fought the Queen (1991): Domesticity and Hidden Identity

The women are confined to the patriarchal chains and it is represented through the play. The exploitation of the women is shown as trapped in patriarchal middle-class homes.

Women like Dolly and Alka are confined, their identities stunted like the bonsai plants mentioned in the play. They face the psychological trauma as they are subjected to the emotional and physical abuse. They struggle to find their identity by moving out of their prescribed identities as wives and mothers. The marginalised figures here, try to find their voices. It is their brave attempt to fight against the ‘unscrupulous men’ in their lives. The play uncovers behind the veneer of a ‘conservative Indian marriage’.

Dattani extends the theme of identity crisis into gender and sexual identity in *Bravely Fought the Queen* and generational conflict in *Dance Like a Man*. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, characters negotiate unconventional sexual identities, resisting social expectations and revealing the inner fragmentation that comes with suppressing authentic desires. Here, the narrative exposes the binary identities and highlights the multifaceted selves.

5. Final Solutions (1993): Communalism and Fragmented Identity

The play recreates the historical trauma of the partition and its after effects of communal riots. The identity crisis is caused by the religious prejudices. The Hindu and Muslim clash is explored by the play. A character like Hardika is trapped in the nostalgic memory of the past. The identity is always fluctuating and dynamic. The firm ground to stand on is always missing for the characters. They cannot move beyond the communal hatred.

The search for self is hindered by collective prejudice, with the play suggesting that true identity can only be found by shaking off the prejudices inherent in religious fundamentalism.

Key Themes in Dattani's Search for Self

- **The Body as a Site of Identity:** In *Tara*, the body itself is a site of gender discrimination. In *Dance Like a Man*, it is a site of artistic expression and gender performance.
- **Memory and the Past:** The nostalgic past ties the memories of the principal characters. They often use their past to define their present life. The characters are often trapped in past which often leads to the alienation and a distorted self.
- **Subversion of Patriarchy:** Dattani’s characters often struggle to break free from pre-determined roles assigned to the individuals. Patriarchal discursive practices are opposed by the characters.

The search for the self is associated with the crucial negotiation between individual aspirations and the heavy weight of the social norms. The social conditioning is often restrictive. The literary works by Mahesh Dattani often reveal these intertwined negotiations.

Throughout the works by Mahesh Dattani, identity is not seen as a fixed entity

but a dynamic to and fro interaction between the internal drives and external pressures. The characters face the challenges such as gendered biases, communal hatred, socio-cultural norms, and conflict between tradition and modernity. While dealing with all these challenges, the identity formation is often marked by conflict, memory and resistance. Identity is a layered construct continually shaped by the socio-cultural forces. The characters always assert themselves by striving for the self-definition.

Moreover, Dattani's dramatic technique — using flashbacks, symbolic devices, and non-linear structures — mirrors the fractured experience of his characters, reinforcing the notion that identity is not seamless but composed of interlocking subjective experiences and social narratives.

Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani occupies an essential place in Indian English literature as a dramatist who gives voice to the silenced and marginalized. His fearless exploration of identity, sexuality, and social injustice has expanded the scope of Indian theatre in English. Through his plays, Dattani not only criticises societal norms but also invites audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and the society they inhabit.

Through his major plays, Mahesh Dattani articulates a compelling analysis into the nature of identity and the existential struggle. The identity crisis in his dramas emerges through gender discrimination, communal conflict, and social marginalization, making his work deeply relevant to contemporary discussions on personal autonomy and cultural resistance. Ultimately, his characters' search for the self reflects both the pain of alienation and the possibility of achieving inner coherence through self-actualization and empathy.

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Gauri as a Victim of Sexual Abuse and Violence in Vijay Tendulkar's Ghasiram Kotwal

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar was a renowned playwright, essayist, journalist, and screenplay writer. Ghasiram Kotwal was first performed in the Marathi language on 16 December 1972, at the Bharat Natya Mandir in Pune. Ghasiram Kotwal is not a historical play. According to Vijay Tendulkar:

*"This is not a historical play. This is a non-historical myth presented with dance and music. Ghashirams are the creations of certain social circumstances. These social circumstances and the Ghashirams go beyond time and space. Though the playwright accepts some support from history, he does not intend to express any views on existence of Peshwai (the rule of Peshwas), Nana Phadnavis and Ghasiram Kotwal, as historical personages. If at all this feable conveys any message, it is completely different."*¹

Gauri is the daughter of Ghasiram Kotwal. She is beautiful and innocent in appearance, which is evident from her very first entry in the play. She enjoys performing rituals and offering prayers. At the place of bhajan, Nana tries to seduce her through the power of his wealth. Ghasiram's daughter has lived her life in poverty. At the outset, Ghasiram wandered in search of a livelihood. Having spent her days in poverty with her father, Ghasiram, Gauri is attracted to the wealth of Nana Phadnavis and becomes a victim of his lust. Her victimisation does not appear to be entirely her own fault. Initially, she does manage to escape from Nana's clutches, but later, on her father's command, she goes to him. Nana is pleased by her beauty and therefore bestows the kotwali of Pune upon her father. Once his desires are fulfilled, he has killed and buried her in the ground.

Keywords: Poverty, Desires, Lust, Sexual Abuse, Victim, Violence.

Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar in Ghasiram Kotwal reveals the theme of sexual abuse and violence. The innocent Gauri is the daughter of Ghasiram Kotwal, who is one of

the victims. In Vijay Tendulkar's play, Ghasiram Kotwal, Ghasiram is a Kannauji Brahmana, a high-ranking subcaste of Brahmins from the city of Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh. He has taken shelter with Gulabi, who earns a living by dancing in the Bavankhani area of Pune. According to Gulabi, he who was wandering around hungry, so she sheltered him. One day, as usual, while Gulabi's dance performance was going on before the Brahmins of Pune, Nana Phadnavis arrived to enjoy it. While dancing with Gulabi, Nana twists his foot. At that moment, Ghasiram gently lifts Nana's foot along with his sandal and massages it. Nana becomes extremely pleased by this and rewards him with a necklace. Gulabi snatches the necklace from Ghasiram's hand. Ghasiram pleads with her, saying that the necklace is his reward and asks her to return it. Instead, from that moment onward, Ghasiram was cast out and thrown onto the streets.

He leaves that place and approaches near Parvati, where the official ceremony of distributing alms to Brahmins takes place. However, even there, due to favouritism and corruption, he not only fails to receive any alms but is also suspected of theft. On mere suspicion, he is beaten again and imprisoned. These incidents deeply affect him, who inwardly resolves to teach the people of Pune a lesson for this. Later, a bhajan (devotional singing) was happening at one spot; however, Nana Phadnavis's attention was not on the bhajan but on the women attending it. For others, it was a devotional song, but for Nana, it resembled a lavani dance, such as Bavankhani. Nana became captivated by a beautiful young woman in the crowd. After the performance, he finds her alone and starts to court her. He becomes obsessed and eager to get close to her. The girl, frightened and confused, runs and finally escapes. At that exact moment, Ghasiram steps forward and meets Nana. Seeing Ghasiram standing there, he became terribly enraged and ordered him to bring that young girl. Ghasiram brings the girl and hands her over to Nana. The girl was Ghasiram's own daughter, Gauri. Nana becomes obsessed with Gauri. He demands her again and again, and in return, Ghasiram obtains the post of Kotwal of Pune.

At the end of the play, Ghasiram came to know that his daughter is dead and Nana is pursuing another young girl. He returns to the Kotwal's duties with renewed vigour to take revenge on the Pune residents who had earlier wronged him. Ghasiram begins to commit injustices. Even for the smallest matters, he makes a permit compulsory. The Brahmins came together and wanted a death sentence for Ghasiram. The politically shrewd Nana wants the same. He immediately permits them, and all the Brahmins of Pune beat Ghasiram Kotwal to death. He welcomes death with the saying:

*'Ghasiram Savaldas! Ghasiram Savaldas! I danced on your chests, but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull. Come on, come on. Look! I'm here. Oh, that's good. Very good.'*²

Thereafter, the people of Pune celebrated the incident as a festival. Nana ordered them to celebrate the happy occasion for three days:

“Let the corpse of sinful Ghashya rot. Let the wolves and dogs have it. Let the worms have it. Whoever attempts to take away this corpse will be punished. Whoever mourns for him will be hanged. All living relatives of Ghashya Savaldas will be found, bound, and expelled from the city. We have ordered that from this day forward, not a word, not a stone relating to the sinner shall survive. We have commanded that there be festivities for three days to mark this happy occasion.”³

Conclusion

In this way, Gauri became the victim of sexual abuse and violence in Vijay Tendulkar’s play Ghasiram Kotwal. It also reveals the social situation of the period. In short, although “Ghasiram Kotwal” gained great popularity, a closer look shows that the play draws attention to the lives of women and the social practices of that period.

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Indian Knowledge Systems and Indian English Drama

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Abstract

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) represent the traditional knowledge developed in India over thousands of years. This knowledge includes philosophy, art, literature, ethics, spirituality, and cultural practices. Theatre has always been an important part of Indian knowledge traditions. From ancient Sanskrit drama to folk performances, drama has been used not only for entertainment but also for teaching values and social awareness.

Indian English drama, though written in the English language, is deeply connected with Indian culture and traditions. Many Indian playwrights have used myths, epics, folk forms, and philosophical ideas taken from Indian Knowledge Systems. This chapter studies how Indian English drama reflects IKS through themes, characters, dramatic techniques, and performance styles. It also explains the relevance of this relationship in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which encourages the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems in higher education. The chapter shows that Indian English drama acts as a bridge between ancient Indian wisdom and modern literary expression.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems, Indian English Drama, Natya Shastra, Rasa Theory, Myth, NEP 2020

Introduction

Indian civilization has never underrated knowledge. In India, there was no book or formal education that restricted knowledge. It was related to daily life, moral values, culture and spirituality. This tradition of learning has become popularly referred to as Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

To a great extent, art and literature have contributed to the dissemination of this knowledge. Of all the arts, drama is of particular interest since it is a mixture of dialogue, music, movement, feelings, as well as visual expressiveness. The Natya Shastra states that drama was formed to teach the society, as well as, amuse people.

The Indian English drama was formed in the colonial era when English was taught in India. First, it was adhered to Western dramaturgical patterns. Nevertheless, on gaining independence, Indian playwrights started rediscovering their culture. They began incorporating Indian myths, folk-stories, rituals and philosophical concepts in their plays. Consequently, Indian English drama was very Indian in innuendo despite the fact that the language was English.

This chapter discusses the reflection of Indian Knowledge Systems in the Indian English drama. It tries to demonstrate that Indian English drama is never just the modern form of literature but it is rather a continuity of Indian traditional knowledge and culture.

Indian Knowledge Systems: Meaning and Scope

The Indian Knowledge Systems are the traditions of Indian knowledge which built in ancient India. The wisdom was acquired by observation, canon and experience. It was maintained in written documents, oral cultures, rituals, art and even in daily activities. Learning in the Indian tradition did not involve formal learning or books. The sharing of knowledge took place through dialogue between teacher and student, storytelling, performance and practical training. The practice of education was intertwined with the moral discipline, cultural values and inner development.

Indian Knowledge Systems do not separate knowledge into subjects and separate subjects unlike the Western systems of learning. They consider life as a whole. Philosophy and science, art, ethics, and spirituality are not considered to be separate areas; rather, they are rather linked paths towards the realization of truth. This combined vision enables knowledge to move freely in the various fields and pushes learners to find relationships between thinking, acting, and responsibility. One of the most important characteristics of Indian Knowledge Systems is their holistic perception of life. Human beings are viewed not as pure bodies of flesh or rational minds but as full persons who are made of bodies, minds, emotional, and consciousness. The knowledge should be meaningful so that it can assist an individual to live wisely and responsibly. Education is then directed towards the development of character, self-awareness, and balance as well as intellectual capacity.

Balance between material and spiritual life is also emphasized by Indian Knowledge Systems. Material success has not rejection but is supposed to operate within the limits of ethics. Moral responsibility makes wealth, desire and ambition acceptable. It is not that of extremist denial or unchecked consumption, but of balance between the worldly obligations and spirituality.

Indian thought puts ethics and values at the center. Dharma and karma are two concepts that help human beings in their behaviors and ensure that they are responsible to the society. Actions are judged based on the results as well as

intentions and awareness of the moral. Without values, the knowledge is not complete as learning must result in compassion, honesty, and social harmony. Experience is another important characteristic of Indian Knowledge Systems. The knowledge is not considered complete unless implemented and put to practice. The learning process involves observation, reflection, discipline as well as personal experience. This method promotes in-depth learning and not memorization.

The respect of nature and society is also a requirement. Nature is regarded as sacred and the human being is considered as a part of nature rather than the masters of it. This ideology encourages the balance of the ecology and sustainability. Collective welfare, cooperation, and social harmony are more appreciated than competition that concerns the individual.

Indian Knowledge Systems are highly interrelated covering many areas including philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, arts, and oral traditions. There are philosophical systems such as Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya that examine life and consciousness. Dharma and karma are ethical concepts used in guiding moral behaviour. Rasa is an aesthetics theory used to explain emotional experience in art. Music, dance and drama acts as knowledge traditions whereas folklore holds cultural memory. These places, united, have a powerful impact on Indian literature and theatre making it a very important channel of communication of culture.

Indian Theatre Tradition

The Indian theatre is a very long and rich history of India. Its roots may be traced to Natya Shastra by Bharata Muni, written almost two thousand years ago. This is an ancient text that is believed to be the background of Indian dramaturgy and performance tradition. The Natya Shastra is a good instructional guide on how plays are to be composed, enacted and performed. It describes the contributions of actors, dialogue, gestures, costumes, music and stage design. It also explains how emotions ought to be projected on the stage so that the viewers can perceive and relate with the performance. Bharata thought that drama was not only made to entertain, but also to educate and help a person to develop emotionally. To him the creation of rasa i.e. the aesthetic joy or the feeling of fulfillment is the main reason of the theatre. The audience gets pleasure, reflection and inner satisfaction when the play is done successfully in a way that it has rasa.

Rasa theory is the main part of Indian drama. It tells us how it is artistic to perform emotions of love, sorrow, anger, fear, courage and peace. These feelings are not directly displayed but are awakened by means of acting, dialogue and movement. Emotions of the audience are polished and harmonized when they experience rasa.

India also has a good tradition of folk theatre in addition to the classical theatre. Various forms like Yakshagana, Tamasha, Nautanki, Jatra and Bhavai evolved in various parts of the country. Such folk traditions are a mix of narration, music, dancing, humor, and social commentary. They mirror local cultures, beliefs and common day matters of people. Being living performance traditions, they have preserved the wisdom of the community and are still significant parts of Indian Knowledge Systems.

Growth of Indian English Drama

The start of Indian English drama was in the era of the British rule in India. During the initial years, the majority of the playwrights were heavily affected by the western theatre particularly Shakespeare and the contemporary European theatre. The themes, the structure, and the stage techniques were based on the English models, and Indian social life was not fully mirrored. The early plays were mostly experimental plays, and they were composed in order to learn the new form of dramatization that was brought about by colonial education.

Since the freedom movement and the independence, Indian playwrights were in a dire need to write about Indian experiences, culture and social realities. They understood that it was impossible to embody the Indian life by simply imitating the Western models. This slowly led to the establishment of the Indian English drama by itself. The writers began to incorporate Indian history, myths, legends, folk traditions as well as philosophical concepts yet they continued to write in the English language.

The Indian English drama may be explained in terms of various phases. This was followed by early experimental phase and the nationalist and cultural revival phase where writers sought Indian roots. The emergence of modern drama focused on social, political and psychological problems emerged in the post-independence period. The modern drama also explored new form, language and the performance styles. Indian English drama therefore got nearer to Indian Knowledge Systems through this gradual development and became a force of Indian thinking and culture.

Indian Knowledge Systems in Indian English Drama

Indian dramas written in English language are still firmly embedded in the cultural, philosophical and aesthetic roots of India. English as a literary language did not separate Indian playwrights of the knowledge systems of the indigenous people; rather it gave them more opportunities to reframe and impart traditional wisdom in new ways. A set of mythology, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, folk traditions and spiritual thought, known as Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) has continuously influenced the themes and the technical elements of the Indian drama. Therefore, Indian English drama did not develop as a type of imitation of

Western theatre, but it was a form of culture-based art which showed the civilizational awareness of India.

Traditionally, Indian theatre is viewed as a source of knowledge. Theatre in India, whether in folk and classical tradition of performance, or described in *Natya Shastra* by Bharata Muni, as the Panchama Veda, has always been useful morally, emotionally and spiritually. Contemporary Indian dramatists, who wrote in English, followed this tradition as they used mythic stories, *rasa* aesthetics, moral enquiry, ritual symbolism and native stage customs in the modern drama. With this synthesis, the Indian English drama acts as a living continuation on Indian Knowledge Systems.

Girish Karnad is one of the most important dramatists in modern theatre who intentionally restored the traditions of Indian knowledge in contemporary theatre. Karnad was also of the view that myths are not fixed narratives that existed in the past but a form of living cultural construct that assists societies to make sense of recurrent human predicaments. His plays are greatly based on *Mahabharata*, folk legends and other traditional performances like the *Yakshagana*. Karnad opens the play with Ganesha worship in *Hayavadana*, which is in keeping with classical Indian tradition that, art must be created by invoking the deity. The introductory prayer of the *Bhagavata*, where the *Bhagavata* says, May Lord Ganesha put no hindrance in our way (*Hayavadana* 1) makes it obvious that the play belongs to Indian tradition of theatrical performance.

Hayavadana has its main theme incompleteness, which was a concept highly embedded in Indian philosophy. The struggle between *Devadatta* and *Kapila* is a representation of the division of intellect and body and this portrays the Upanishadic concept that human sufferings are due to the fragmentation of self. The philosophical nature of the play is brought out by *Devadatta*, when he confessed that the issue was not about the body but the mind. Instead of providing a Western tragic end, Karnad does not enable the play to resolve to adopt the imperfection but lets it at least end in acceptance of imperfection, which is the Indian worldview of human fulfillment being in harmony and not perfection.

In *Yayati*, Karnad redefines one of the most famous moments of the *Mahabharata* to understand desire (*kama*), duty (*dharma*), and the responsibility towards the generations. The moral implications of selfish ambition are brought out by the statement of *Yayati* who admits that he is the slave of his desire. The Indian moral philosophy that the *dharma* must be broken and a person cannot help but suffer is reflected in the play. Equally, *Nagamandala* is an oral folk story which based on the folk tradition of telling stories as a form of traditional knowledge tells stories through the voice of women. In Karnad, the author illustrates the way in which Indian Knowledge Systems still help deal with contemporary psychological and social fears through myth and folklore.

The dramatic vision of Rabindranath Tagore is the spiritual and philosophic side of the Indian Knowledge Systems. Tagore was a stronghold of the Upanishads and the Vedantic thought and saw theatre as the inner awakening and not the outward display. His plays focus on the freedom of soul, harmony with nature and opposition to mechanical civilization. In *Chitra*, Tagore questions the traditional notions of beauty and identity, relying on one of the episodes of Mahabharata. The statement by Chitra “I am Chitra. No goddess to worship him” (Chitra 23) claims the Indian philosophical thought that truth is out there and it is not physical.

Tagore offers the spiritual liberation in *The Post Office* where the imagination of a dying child is innocent. The urge of Amal to move the borders of his room, which he describes as “I shall go out beyond these walls and know everything” reminds the Upanishadic desire to get rid of the material confines. The dance dramas by Tagore also incorporate music, rhythm, movement, and symbolism hence restoring the classical Indian performance traditions. Combining art and spirituality, Tagore supports the IKS idea that theatre is the way to self-realization and universalism of humanity.

Mahesh Dattani is the extension of Indian Knowledge Systems to the present urban settings. His plays have a strong Indian family, cultural practices, and moral problems although they focus on social issues that affect the society at the time. Dattani explores communal conflict in *Final Solutions* where it is a result of inherited memory and not personal hatred. The comment, which Hardika makes, “we brought our hatred with us just like our stuff”, shows how the prejudice can be inherited by generations, which serves as the reflection of the IKS focus on shared responsibility.

The figure of Hasmukh Mehta, an authoritarian character in *Where There is a Will*, is a character who still controls his family even after death. The devastating effects of ego and attachment are revealed in his statement, which is: “Even death will not set them free of my will”. The play is a critique of patriarchal dominance and a reenactment of Indian ethical concepts of balance, detachment and moral restraint. The Indian Knowledge Systems through the drama by Dattani adjust to the realities of today without the possibility of losing their morality.

Bharati Sarabhai, who was among the earliest Indian English dramatists, incorporated the philosophy of the Gandhi in the theatre, thereby bringing IKS to the nationalistic era. Among the key themes highlighted in her drama are truth, non-violence, compassion, and the common good. In *The Well of the people*, Sarabhai introduces a community in conflict over terror and ethical responsibility in the face of a health epidemic. The moral code of the play, as in the good of one is the good of all, is the Indian ethical ideology that the selfishness of an individual cannot be discussed outside of societal coexistence. The theatre is serving as moral education by Sarabhai, as it is fulfilling

the traditional Indian notion that arts should help bring change to society.

The contribution of Badal Sircar is rather in the performance practice than textual mythology. Sircar did not believe in commercial stage illusion and restored theatre to the people through his idea of Third Theatre. His plays like *Evam Indrajit* and *Procession* are staged in the open street with minimum props just like the folk performance style in India. The existential stagnation of the modern life is described by the lament of Indrajit, who says: “Every day is the same story, repetition without sense” (*Evam Indrajit* 39). The theatre of Sircar is founded on group experience, austerity and social interaction, which corresponds to the IKS principle of knowledge being a byproduct of lived experience and mutual participation.

An Indian Knowledge System is expressed in the Sri Aurobindo dramatic philosophy, which is the supreme spiritual vision. His heroic play *Savitri*, which is founded on a myth of the Mahabharata, turns theatre into the means of spiritual development. Based on the Vedantic and yogic philosophy, the play deals with the ascension of the human mind in the realm of death and restriction. The victory of divine consciousness over material determinism is represented by the affirmation of Savitri, where she says that her will has conquered fate. In the case of Aurobindo, drama does not emulate life but it is a spiritual path towards the truth.

Collectively, these playwrights show that Indian English drama does not represent a form of borrowed literature but a native one that follows Indian Knowledge Systems. The mythology is the structuring of symbols, the folk traditions, the performance power, the ethical philosophy, the uplifting drama of realism, the spiritual thought. The ancient wisdom is re-read through the works of ancient writers and is constantly recoded to fit the contemporary social, psychological, and even political issues.

Indian English drama therefore becomes a very strong place of culture continuity. It maintains the intellectual tradition of India and interacts with modern realities, demonstrating that the Indian Knowledge Systems are not the things of the past but still living traditions which can be used in the context of modern artistic manifestation.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the connection between Indian Knowledge Systems and Indian English drama, which has shown that a modern dramaturgical writing in English is strongly connected to the intellectual and cultural traditions of Indians. Despite the fact that English got into Indian literature due to the colonial contact, Indian playwrights succeeded in making it a tool that could convey the native philosophy, social values, and aesthetics. Consequently, Indian English drama was not a derivative form of imitating Western theater but a

culturally based literary form that has a long history of passing on knowledge through performance in India.

It has been demonstrated in the discussion that Indian Knowledge Systems offer the conceptual underpinning in which Indian drama perceives life, society, and human experience. The fundamentals of dharma, karma, rasa, mythic symbolism, folk wisdom and spiritual enquiry over the centuries have influenced the Indian theatre since the composition of Natya Shastra. These values never disappeared with the introduction of modern education but they were redefined in new literary genres. Epics, folklore, rituals and ethical philosophy helped Indian dramatists of English theater to relate the modern theater with memory of the civilization.

Indian Knowledge Systems are functioning at various periods in history and in various forms of drama as the analysis of great playwrights shows. Myth and folklore were recovered by Girish Karnad to address the issue of identity, desire, and moral responsibility. Rabindranath Tagore made theatre a sort of spiritual and philosophical domain based on Upanishadic humanism. Mahesh Dattani projected the indigenous ethical issues to the urban social existence proving the persistence of tradition in the contemporary life. Bharati Sarabhai used Gandhian principles as means of connecting drama and social conscience and Badal Sircar rediscovered performance practices of the community based on folk traditions. Sri Aurobindo put drama on a spiritual journey making theatre a path of consciousness. Although they differ in form and theme, these playwrights have a common interest in indigenous ways of knowing.

An important finding of this study is that Indian Knowledge Systems not only provide thematic sources for the development of dramatic forms, but also provide structural principles and philosophical underpinnings of dramatic form itself. The factors present (ritualistic invocation in dramatic writing, symbolic characterization, production of non-linear narratives, collective performance and emotional transcendence) reflect a distinctly different body of epistemology than that found in Western realism. Therefore, Indian English drama offers a new theatrical worldview valuing harmony rather than conflict, values ethical reflection rather than spectacle, and values inner transformation rather than tragic closure.

The consolidation of this integration of Indian Knowledge Systems is particularly significant at the current time marked by the Academic Climate built around NEP 2020. The National Education Policy 2020 highlights the importance of cultural rootedness, interdisciplinary learning, and the de-colonization of knowledge. These elements resonate and find expression in the study of literature through Indian English Drama. Through an Indian Knowledge Systems perspectives in studying Drama, the interpretation can provide literature as an artistic creation and as a knowledge tradition, bridging the gap between aesthetics/ethics, culture/consciousness, and creativity/responsibility.

To summarize, the Indian English Drama represents a dynamic intersection between the traditional and modern. By utilizing new contemporary forms to reinterpret indigenous wisdom, these authors have assured that the dramatic stage remains a living site of cultural continuity. Consequently, the assessment of Indian English Drama through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems demonstrates the rich history of the development and resilience of Indian English Theatre.

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Voices from the Margins: Feminist Consciousness and Female Resistance in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's drama occupies a significant position in Modern Indian English Theatre for its sustained engagement with marginalized voices and its critique of entrenched patriarchal structures. This paper examines feminist consciousness and female resistance in Dattani's plays, foregrounding how women characters negotiate oppression within familial, social, and cultural frameworks. By bringing private, domestic spaces into the public domain of theatre, Dattani exposes the subtle and overt mechanisms through which patriarchy regulates female bodies, desires, and identities.

The study offers a feminist reading of selected plays such as *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *Dance Like a Man*, where women emerge as complex subjects rather than passive victims. In *Tara*, gender discrimination is institutionalized through family and medical practices, revealing how patriarchy operates under the guise of care and tradition. *Bravely Fought the Queen* presents urban middle-class households as sites of domestic violence and emotional silencing, while simultaneously articulating women's resilience and latent resistance. In *Dance Like a Man*, gender norms and expectations restrict not only women but also those who challenge rigid constructions of femininity and masculinity.

The paper argues that Dattani's feminist vision does not rely on overt rebellion alone but emphasizes everyday acts of resistance, emotional endurance, and self-awareness as forms of empowerment. His realistic dramaturgy highlights the contradictions of urban modernity, where progressive self-images coexist with deeply conservative attitudes toward gender. Drawing on feminist and postcolonial theoretical perspectives, the study demonstrates that Dattani presents feminism as an evolving consciousness shaped by social experience, negotiation, and struggle.

By amplifying voices from the margins, Dattani's theatre challenges dominant narratives of gender, family, and morality, making a compelling case for theatre as a space of feminist intervention and social critique in contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, Feminism, Female Resistance, Patriarchy, Gender Discrimination, Indian English Drama Marginalized Voices, Urban Middle-Class Society, etc.

Introduction

Indian English drama witnessed a significant transformation in the post-independence period, particularly with the emergence of playwrights who began addressing contemporary social realities with unprecedented boldness. Among them, Mahesh Dattani occupies a unique position as one of the foremost dramatists who brought marginalized voices—especially women—into the foreground of theatrical discourse. His plays interrogate gender norms, patriarchal authority, and the silent suffering of women within ostensibly progressive urban spaces. Unlike earlier dramatists who often depicted women in symbolic or idealized forms, Dattani presents them as complex individuals caught between tradition and modernity, agency and oppression, resistance and submission.

Feminism in Indian literature does not merely revolve around the demand for equality but also involves the questioning of deeply entrenched social structures that normalize discrimination. Dattani's theatre becomes a space where such questioning is dramatized through realistic dialogue, domestic settings, and emotionally charged conflicts. His women characters confront issues such as gender violence, sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, silencing, and social hypocrisy. By foregrounding these experiences, Dattani challenges the patriarchal foundations of Indian society and exposes the contradictions inherent in its moral codes.

This chapter examines feminist concerns in selected plays of Mahesh Dattani, with special reference to *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *Thirty Days in September*. Through a close reading of these texts, the study highlights how Dattani critiques patriarchy, interrogates gendered power relations, and presents women's resistance—both vocal and silent—within oppressive frameworks. The chapter also situates Dattani within the broader feminist discourse in Indian English drama, emphasizing his contribution to gender-sensitive theatrical representation.

Feminist Theory and Indian English Drama

Feminist literary criticism seeks to uncover the ways in which literature reinforces or challenges gender hierarchies. In the Indian context, feminism has

evolved as a multifaceted movement shaped by colonial history, nationalism, caste dynamics, and cultural traditions. Indian feminism, therefore, differs significantly from its Western counterpart, as it addresses not only gender oppression but also intersecting factors such as family structures, social customs, and moral policing.

Indian English drama has historically been dominated by male voices and patriarchal narratives. Women characters were often confined to stereotypical roles of dutiful wives, sacrificing mothers, or morally fallen figures. However, with the advent of modern playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, and Mahesh Dattani, Indian theatre began to critically engage with issues of gender and power. Dattani's feminism is subtle yet forceful; he does not present overt ideological preaching but instead allows the lived experiences of women to speak for themselves.

Dattani's plays reflect what may be termed "experiential feminism," where the focus lies on personal trauma, emotional neglect, and social silencing rather than abstract theorization. His dramaturgy exposes how patriarchy operates not only through explicit violence but also through everyday practices—preference for the male child, emotional manipulation, denial of autonomy, and enforced silence. In doing so, Dattani aligns himself with contemporary feminist thought that emphasizes the politics of the personal (Tharu and Lalita 27).

Gender Discrimination and Female Identity in Tara

Tara is one of Dattani's most powerful plays dealing with gender discrimination and the denial of female identity. The play revolves around conjoined twins, Tara and Chandan, who are surgically separated in childhood. The ethical dilemma at the heart of the play is the parents' decision—driven by patriarchal bias—to allocate the stronger leg to the male child, Chandan, even though medical logic favored Tara. The character of Tara embodies the silent victim of patriarchal preference. Despite being intelligent, witty, and emotionally resilient, she is denied physical wholeness because of her gender. The mother, Bharati, herself becomes complicit in this injustice, revealing how patriarchy often operates through women who internalize its values. Bharati's guilt and subsequent mental breakdown highlight the psychological cost of sustaining gender bias. Dattani uses Tara's physical disability as a metaphor for the emotional and social mutilation of women in a male-dominated society. Tara's tragedy lies not merely in her bodily impairment but in the knowledge that she was deliberately deprived of equality. Chandan's survival and success, juxtaposed with Tara's decline, expose the moral hollowness of patriarchal privilege. From a feminist perspective, Tara critiques the cultural preference for sons and the systemic marginalization of daughters. The play compels the audience to confront uncomfortable questions about family, morality, and justice. Tara's death

becomes symbolic of the countless female lives sacrificed at the altar of social prejudice, making the play a poignant feminist indictment of gender-based discrimination (Dattani).

Patriarchy, Power, and Silence in *Bravely Fought the Queen*

Bravely Fought the Queen explores the lives of two sisters-in-law, Dolly and Alka, who are trapped in abusive marriages with the Trivedi brothers. Set in an upper-middle-class urban household, the play dismantles the myth that education and economic prosperity automatically ensure women's empowerment. Instead, Dattani exposes how patriarchy adapts itself to modern contexts while retaining its oppressive core.

The women in the play are subjected to physical violence, emotional humiliation, and psychological control. Their suffering is normalized within the family structure, and their silence is enforced through fear and dependency. Dolly and Alka represent women who have internalized their oppression, struggling to articulate their pain in a society that prioritizes male authority and family honour. The title of the play itself is ironic, suggesting bravery in battle while depicting women who are denied even the right to protest. Dattani critiques not only individual male aggressors but also the broader social system that condones domestic violence. The complicity of elders and the indifference of society further reinforce the feminist argument that patriarchy is a collective, not individual, phenomenon.

Through fragmented narratives and shifting perspectives, Dattani dramatizes the emotional fragmentation experienced by women in abusive relationships. The play ultimately questions whether silence can ever be a form of survival, or whether it merely perpetuates injustice. In doing so, *Bravely Fought the Queen* emerges as a powerful feminist text that exposes the hidden violence within respectable homes (Dattani).

Sexual Trauma and Female Voice in *Thirty Days in September*

Thirty Days in September deals with one of the most disturbing yet crucial feminist concerns—child sexual abuse and its long-term psychological impact. The play narrates the trauma of Mala, who was sexually abused by her uncle during childhood, and the emotional scars that continue to haunt her adult relationships.

Dattani boldly addresses a taboo subject that is often silenced in Indian society due to notions of shame and family honour. Mala's mother, Shanta, represents the tragic figure of a woman who chooses denial over confrontation, thereby perpetuating the cycle of abuse. The play critiques not only the male perpetrator but also the social culture that discourages women from speaking out.

From a feminist standpoint, the play emphasizes the importance of voice and

testimony. Mala's journey toward self-expression and emotional healing underscores the necessity of breaking silence as a form of resistance. Dattani portrays trauma not as an isolated event but as an ongoing struggle shaped by memory, fear, and societal neglect.

The play also highlights the gendered nature of sexual violence and the unequal burden placed on women to preserve familial stability at the cost of personal suffering. By giving dramatic space to Mala's pain, Dattani transforms theatre into a site of feminist intervention, urging audiences to confront uncomfortable realities and acknowledge women lived experiences (Dattani).

Mahesh Dattani's Contribution to Feminist Theatre

Mahesh Dattani's contribution to feminist discourse lies in his ability to integrate social critique with emotional realism. His plays do not offer simplistic resolutions; instead, they reflect the complexity of women's struggles within patriarchal systems. Dattani portrays women as neither passive victims nor idealized rebels but as individuals negotiating limited choices within oppressive circumstances.

His theatre challenges dominant narratives by foregrounding female subjectivity and exposing the structural nature of gender oppression. Dattani's feminist vision is inclusive, addressing issues across class, age, and social status. By situating women's experiences within domestic spaces, he underscores the political significance of the personal.

Moreover, Dattani's use of non-linear narratives, symbolism, and realistic dialogue enhances the impact of feminist themes. His plays encourage critical reflection rather than moral judgment, making them valuable texts for feminist literary study. In an Indian theatrical tradition that often marginalizes women's voices, Dattani stands out as a playwright who consistently engages with gender justice (Dattani).

Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani's plays represent a significant intervention in Indian English drama by foregrounding feminist concerns and challenging patriarchal norms. Through *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *Thirty Days in September*, Dattani exposes gender discrimination, domestic violence, and sexual trauma as systemic issues deeply embedded in social and familial structures. His portrayal of women's suffering and resistance compels audiences to question accepted values and confront uncomfortable truths.

Dattani's feminist theatre does not merely depict oppression; it demands empathy, awareness, and moral accountability. By giving voice to silenced women, he transforms drama into a powerful medium of social critique. This chapter has demonstrated that Dattani's work contributes meaningfully to

feminist discourse by highlighting the intersection of gender, power, and silence in contemporary Indian society. His plays remain relevant and essential for understanding the ongoing struggle for gender equality in both literature and life.

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Analyzing Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* through the Lens of the Theatre of the Absurd

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Abstract

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* (1963) stands as a watershed moment in Indian drama, marking a radical departure from traditional realism toward a profound exploration of existential crisis. This research paper examines the play as a definitive example of the "Theatre of the Absurd" within the Indian socio-cultural context. While Western absurdism, pioneered by figures like Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, emerged from the disillusionment of post-WWII Europe, Sircar's absurdism is uniquely rooted in the stagnation of the urban middle class and the repetitive, soul-crushing nature of bureaucratic life in post-independence India. This paper deconstructs the linear progression of time and the stability of identity through its protagonist, Indrajit, who struggles to find meaning in a "circular" existence. Through a fragmented narrative, the presence of an intrusive writer-persona, and the symbolic rejection of conventional social roles, Sircar mirrors the purposelessness of human endeavor. The research explores how the play utilizes linguistic repetition, the breakdown of communication, and the trope of the "unending road" to illustrate the Sisyphean struggle of the modern individual. By analyzing the structural and thematic elements, this paper argues that *Evam Indrajit* is not merely a play about boredom, but a philosophical inquiry into the futility of escaping "ordinariness."

Keywords: Absurdism, Existentialism, Badal Sircar, Post-colonial Drama, Sisyphean Myth, Urban Alienation, Modernism.

Introduction

The "Theatre of the Absurd" is a term coined by critic Martin Esslin to describe a body of work that expresses the belief that human existence has no inherent meaning and that communication is essentially futile. In the landscape of Indian literature, Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* is the most potent manifestation of this philosophy. Written in the 1960s, a period marked by both post-colonial hope and

subsequent disillusionment, the play captures the existential angst of the educated youth caught between the desire for individuality and the crushing weight of societal conformity.

Traditionally, Indian drama focused on social reform, mythology, or historical narratives. Sircar broke this mold by presenting a play where "nothing happens" or rather, the same things happen repeatedly. This research paper aims to dissect how Evam Indrajit utilizes the tropes of the Absurd to portray the psychological landscape of the modern Indian man, specifically focusing on the character of Indrajit as a symbol of the "outsider."

The Writer as the Orchestrator of Futility

The play opens with a Writer attempting to write a play. This meta-theatrical device is a staple of the Absurd; it draws attention to the artificiality of the performance. The Writer represents the creative mind trying to impose order on a chaotic, meaningless world. He calls out to the audience, searching for characters, only to find Amal, Vimal, and Kamal three archetypal "average" men who represent the unquestioning masses. However, Indrajit emerges as the "interruption." He is the element that cannot be easily categorized. The Writer's struggle to finish his play mirrors the human struggle to find a coherent "plot" for life. In the Absurd tradition, there is no resolution because life itself provides no closure.

The Dissolution of Identity and the "Amal-Vimal-Kamal" Syndrome

In absurd drama, characters often lose their individuality to become symbols or types. Sircar uses the rhythmic naming of Amal, Vimal, and Kamal to highlight the assembly-line nature of human existence. They represent the "ideal" citizens: they study, they get jobs, they marry, they have children, and they die. Indrajit's tragedy is his awareness. He initially tries to differentiate himself by claiming he is "Indrajit," not the "Nirmal" he pretends to be in polite society. Yet, by the end of the play, he realizes that even his rebellion is a cliché. He is forced to accept that he is just "and Indrajit" (Evam Indrajit), an addition to the list of ordinary men. This loss of selfhood is a primary theme of the Absurd, where the "I" is swallowed by the "They."

The Circularity of Time and Space

Linear time implies progress; circular time implies stagnation. Evam Indrajit is structured around the repetitive cycles of the characters' lives. We see them in school, then college, then applying for jobs, then sitting in offices. The dialogue in these scenes is often repetitive, mimicking the drone of a machine. This structure reinforces the Sisyphean Myth. Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to roll a boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back down for eternity. Sircar translates this into the urban Indian context: the boulder is the daily commute, the office

file, and the social obligation. The characters move through space Kolkata, Jamshedpur, London but their internal state remains unchanged. This geographical movement without psychological progression is a hallmark of the Absurd.

Language and the Failure of Communication

In the works of Beckett or Ionesco, language often breaks down into nonsense to show that humans cannot truly understand one another. Sircar uses a different approach: he uses "over-structured" language. The characters speak in lists, bureaucratic jargon, and polite platitudes. This "hollow talk" serves the same purpose it masks the void. When Indrajit speaks to Manasi, his love interest, their conversation is rarely about love. It is about the impossibility of marriage, the rules of society, and the passage of time. Manasi herself acts as a mirror to Indrajit's conscience; she is often a silent or repetitive participant, representing the societal norms that Indrajit loves but cannot live with.

One of the most defining passages in the play occurs in the final act, where the Writer and Indrajit confront their shared reality:

Indrajit: "I have no hope. I'm just an ordinary man."

Writer: "No, you're not ordinary. You're an Indrajit. You have to walk. There's no end to the road. The road is the end."

This dialogue encapsulates the existential resolution of the play. Indrajit's admission of being "ordinary" is his moment of ultimate defeat—the death of his ego. However, the Writer offers a "creed of the road." In the Theatre of the Absurd, since there is no destination (no heaven, no utopia, no ultimate meaning), the "road" itself becomes the only reality. The command to "keep walking" is an echo of the existentialist belief that one must create their own purpose through action, even if that action is ultimately futile. It is a rejection of suicide and a choice to endure the Absurd. This mirrors the ending of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: "I can't go on. I'll go on."

The play has been dissected by numerous scholars who seek to understand its impact on the Indian psyche:

Rustom Bharucha argues that Sircar's work is a "theatre of the middle class." He notes that the "absurdity" in *Evam Indrajit* is not a metaphysical void like in Europe, but a social and economic trap created by a stagnant post-colonial system.

Samik Bandyopadhyay points out that Sircar managed to capture the "shattering of the dreams" of the 1950s. The play reflects a generation that was told they were free but felt more imprisoned than ever by bureaucracy.

Dr. Lakshmi Subramanyam observes that the play's female lead, Manasi, is crucial to the absurd theme. She represents the "attainable" which is never attained, serving as a constant reminder of the protagonist's paralysis.

Aparna Dharwadker highlights that Sircar moved Indian theatre away from the "spectacle" and toward the "internal monologue," making the stage a laboratory for the human soul.

Conclusion

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* remains a towering achievement because it does not provide the audience with the comfort of a happy ending or a moral lesson. It is a mirror held up to the face of the modern individual, showing the cracks in their "ordered" life. By employing the techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd—circularity, fragmented identity, and the breakdown of logic—Sircar articulated a universal truth through a specifically Indian lens.

Indrajit is every person who has ever looked at their life and asked, "Is this all?" The play concludes that while the answer might be "Yes," there is a certain dignity in recognizing the absurdity and continuing to walk the "unending road." It transformed Indian drama from mere storytelling into a profound philosophical inquiry.

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Gender Inequality in Tara by Mahesh Dattani

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Abstract

The present paper offers a critical feminist reading of Tara, a significant contemporary Indian play by Mahesh Dattani. The play presents a powerful critique of gender inequality and patriarchal ideology operating within the seemingly progressive, urban Indian family. Through the tragic life of Tara, the female protagonist, Dattani exposes how deeply entrenched patriarchal values continue to shape family decisions, medical ethics, and social attitudes toward women. Although the play appears to focus on disability and medical intervention, its deeper concern lies in the systematic denial of female autonomy, opportunity, and identity. Tara's suffering is not the result of biological fate but of socially constructed gender discrimination. This paper argues that Tara foregrounds patriarchy as an internalized ideological system, sustained through family consent and emotional rationalization, and reveals how gender injustice destroys not only women's lives but also the moral and emotional fabric of families that uphold it.

Keywords: Gender inequality, patriarchy, feminism, bodily autonomy, internalized oppression

Introduction

Gender inequality has been a persistent and deeply rooted social reality in Indian society for centuries. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and social reform movements, women continue to experience discrimination in education, healthcare, employment, inheritance, and family life. Gender inequality is neither natural nor biologically determined; rather, it is socially constructed, ideologically sustained, and culturally normalized. Patriarchal systems have historically suppressed women's potential, talent, skills, and power by presenting inequality as tradition, destiny, or divine will. Feminist theory consistently challenges such assumptions, arguing that women's subordination is not rooted in nature but produced through social, cultural, political, and ideological institutions.

In Western societies, organized resistance to gender inequality gained momentum during the 1960s with the emergence of second-wave feminism. Feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Virginia Woolf, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler played a crucial role in exposing the political foundations of women's oppression. Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" dismantles the belief that femininity and subordination are natural conditions (Beauvoir 283). Kate Millett conceptualized patriarchy as a political system that controls women's sexuality and social roles (Millett 23), while Virginia Woolf emphasized that women's freedom depends on economic independence and intellectual space (Woolf 4). Later theorists such as Irigaray and Butler further expanded feminist discourse by interrogating language, identity, and power structures that regulate gendered bodies and subjectivities.

In India, feminist consciousness developed differently due to the complex intersections of caste, class, religion, and colonial history. Although social reformers such as Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar recognized gender inequality as a major social injustice, patriarchy remained deeply entrenched in everyday life. As Uma Chakravarti observes, the family functioned as the primary site where women learned obedience and internalized subordination (Chakravarti 33). Consequently, gender discrimination was often accepted as natural rather than ideological. In this context, literature and drama emerged as crucial spaces for feminist intervention, giving voice to women's silenced experiences.

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* occupies a significant place in Indian English drama for its sensitive yet uncompromising portrayal of gender inequality within the modern Indian family. The play exposes how patriarchy operates not only through overt domination but also through love, care, and "well-intentioned" decisions. Through *Tara*'s tragic life, Dattani reveals the subtle yet devastating consequences of gender bias.

In *Tara*, patriarchy does not appear as an external oppressive force imposed by society alone; instead, it functions as an internalized ideology governing family decision. The family does not consciously intend to harm *Tara*; rather, it acts within a belief system that privileges male existence over female autonomy. This ideological framework shapes ethical, medical, and emotional choices, ultimately producing irreversible injustice.

The most decisive example of patriarchal ideology in the play is the decision to give the shared leg to Chandan despite medical advice suggesting that *Tara* has a better chance of survival. Patel justifies this decision by claiming that it was taken "for the family's future" (Dattani 35). This justification exposes the patriarchal assumption that a male child represents continuity, economic security, and social legitimacy, while a female child's future is

considered flexible and sacrificial. Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but relative to him" is clearly reflected in this moment (Beauvoir 26).

Tara's body becomes the site upon which patriarchal ideology is materially enacted. The family's decision demonstrates that patriarchy is not merely a set of attitudes but a system capable of shaping bodies, destinies, and identities. Gender bias is thus transformed into permanent physical consequence.

One of the most disturbing aspects of *Tara* is the complete denial of Tara's bodily autonomy. Decisions regarding her body are taken without her consent, reflecting the deeply ingrained patriarchal belief that women's bodies belong to the family rather than to themselves. Tara's disability, therefore, is not a biological inevitability but a socially produced condition.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a crucial framework for understanding this injustice. Butler argues that "the body is not a passive medium but a site where social meanings are inscribed" (*Gender Trouble* 179). In *Tara*, medical science becomes the mechanism through which patriarchal norms are inscribed onto the female body. The surgical intervention, which should have been guided by ethical and medical principles, becomes a tool of gender hierarchy.

Tara's own awareness of this injustice is expressed in her poignant remark: "I don't mind being crippled... I mind being treated as one" (Dattani 56). This statement clearly distinguishes between physical impairment and social degradation. Tara's suffering arises not from her body but from the meanings imposed upon it by patriarchal ideology. Gender inequality thus operates not only at the level of opportunity but also at the level of dignity and identity.

A central feminist concern in *Tara* is the role of Bharati, the mother, who embodies internalized patriarchy. Bharati is portrayed as emotionally attached to Tara and deeply affected by her suffering. Yet she actively participates in the decision that permanently damages her daughter's future. Her confession—"I paid for it... I bought my son a future" (Dattani 48)—reveals how patriarchal ideology distorts maternal love into gendered sacrifice.

Nivedita Menon observes that "patriarchy survives most effectively when women themselves become its carriers within the family" (Menon 42). Bharati's actions illustrate this insight with painful clarity. She does not consciously reject her daughter; rather, she acts under the influence of deeply internalized beliefs about male priority and female adjustability. Her subsequent guilt, anxiety, and psychological breakdown demonstrate that patriarchy extracts an emotional and moral cost even from those who enforce it.

Bharati's character complicates simplistic feminist binaries of oppressor and oppressed. She is both a participant in Tara's victimization and a victim of patriarchal conditioning herself. Through Bharati, Dattani exposes how

patriarchy sustains itself not only through male authority but also through women's internalization of gender norms.

While Tara remains the primary and irreparable victim of patriarchy, the play also depicts the family's gradual realization of its moral failure. This realization, however, arrives too late to undo the damage. Bharati's mental breakdown, Patel's emotional withdrawal, and Chandan's lifelong guilt reveal the devastating psychological consequences of patriarchal decisions.

Uma Chakravarti's observation that the family is the site where women learn obedience and men inherit privilege helps explain this dynamic (Chakravarti 33). The same family structure that privileges Chandan ultimately traps him in guilt and displacement. Chandan's exile and his attempt to reconstruct Tara's story indicate his inability to reconcile with the injustice done to her. Patriarchy thus distributes privilege and pain unevenly—protecting male bodies while burdening male conscience.

The family's realization underscores a crucial feminist insight: awareness without timely resistance cannot undo structural harm. The tragedy of Tara lies not only in the injustice itself but also in the belated recognition of its consequences.

Tara's victimhood is particularly tragic because she is denied resistance even before she can fully articulate her identity. Unlike feminist protagonists who challenge patriarchy through rebellion or self-assertion, Tara is victimized at the level of the body itself. Her intelligence, humour, and emotional resilience remain unsupported, revealing how gender stereotypes restrict not only physical mobility but also ambition and selfhood.

Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" resonates profoundly in Tara's case (Beauvoir 283). Tara is "made" into a lesser being through social decisions rooted in gender ideology rather than natural limitation. Her disability becomes symbolic of the ways in which patriarchy systematically diminishes female potential.

Tara's tragedy exposes the silent violence of gender stereotyping. She is not denied life outright but is denied fullness, autonomy, and equal recognition. The play suggests that such partial denial can be as devastating as overt oppression.

Tara occupies a crucial position in Indian feminist drama because it shifts the focus of gender critique from public institutions to the private sphere of the family. Dattani demonstrates that patriarchy often operates through affection, obligation, and rationalization rather than explicit coercion. The play validates feminist theories that identify the family as a key site of ideological reproduction. By dramatizing the irreversible consequences of a single patriarchal decision, Tara transforms gender inequality from an abstract concept into a lived reality. The play compels readers and audiences to confront the ethical implications of

everyday choices shaped by gender ideology.

Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* offers a profound feminist critique of gender inequality rooted in patriarchal ideology. By portraying Tara as the primary victim and the family as both agents and secondary victims of patriarchy, the play exposes the destructive reach of gender bias within the modern Indian household. *Tara* ultimately reminds us that gender justice must begin within the family; otherwise, recognition arrives too late to prevent irreversible loss. Through its emotional depth and ideological clarity, the play stands as a powerful indictment of a society that sacrifices female lives and futures in the name of tradition and male privilege.

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Girish Karnad's Plays as a Critique of Power and Authority

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Abstract

Indian English drama has played a significant role in interrogating socio-political realities, and Girish Karnad emerges as one of its most influential voices. His plays consistently critique structures of power and authority by reworking myths, history, and folklore. Rather than presenting power as heroic or divinely sanctioned, Karnad exposes its moral ambiguity, violence, and psychological consequences. This research paper examines how Karnad's major plays—Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Nagamandala, Yayati, and The Dreams of Tipu Sultan—function as critiques of political, patriarchal, and ideological authority. Using historical revisionism, mythological symbolism, and Brechtian theatrical techniques, Karnad transforms drama into a medium of political interrogation. The study argues that Karnad's theatre challenges centralized authority, exposes the fragility of power, and foregrounds marginalized voices, making his drama a vital instrument of political critique in postcolonial India.

Keywords: Girish Karnad, Power, Authority, Political Drama, Indian English Theatre, Myth, History

Introduction

Drama has historically functioned as a powerful medium of political critique. From Greek tragedies to modern political theatre, playwrights have used the stage to question authority, expose injustice, and reflect societal contradictions. In the Indian context, Girish Karnad occupies a central position in redefining drama as a space for political and ideological interrogation. Writing during a period of post-independence disillusionment, Karnad's plays critically engage with issues of power, legitimacy, leadership, and authority.

Karnad does not critique power directly through contemporary realism alone; instead, he strategically employs myth, folklore, and history to comment on modern political realities. His drama resists simplistic binaries of good and evil, portraying authority as complex, unstable, and often self-destructive. This paper explores how Karnad's plays serve as sustained critiques of political power,

patriarchal dominance, and moral absolutism.

Conceptual Framework: Power and Authority in Drama

Power and authority are central concerns in political theory and literary studies. Michel Foucault defines power as dispersed and embedded in social relations rather than centralized alone. Authority, on the other hand, often claims legitimacy through tradition, law, or charisma (Max Weber). Drama, as a performative medium, provides a unique space to examine how power operates—through language, spectacle, silence, and violence.

Political drama exposes the mechanisms through which authority is constructed and contested. Karnad's theatre aligns with this tradition by dismantling the myth of benevolent leadership and exposing the contradictions within systems of power. His plays reveal how authority is sustained through fear, ideology, gender hierarchies, and historical narratives.

Girish Karnad: A Playwright of Political Consciousness

Girish Karnad (1938–2019) was not only a playwright but also an actor, director, and public intellectual. Writing primarily in Kannada and later translated into English, Karnad bridged regional theatre and global political concerns. Influenced by Indian folk theatre, Yakshagana, and Western dramatists like Brecht and Sartre, Karnad developed a hybrid theatrical form.

His plays often revisit the past to interrogate the present. By setting his narratives in mythological or historical contexts, Karnad creates a critical distance that allows audiences to reflect on contemporary power structures without direct didacticism.

Tughlaq: Political Idealism and the Failure of Authority

Tughlaq (1964) is perhaps Karnad's most overtly political play. Set during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the play examines the tragic collapse of a visionary ruler whose idealism turns into tyranny. Initially portrayed as rational, progressive, and secular, Tughlaq gradually becomes authoritarian, paranoid, and violent.

The play critiques centralized political power by exposing how idealism divorced from ground realities leads to chaos.

Tughlaq's decisions—such as shifting the capital and introducing token currency—mirror the failures of modern political leadership. Karnad uses historical allegory to comment on post-independence Indian politics, highlighting the gap between promises and practice.

Tughlaq's authority ultimately collapses due to his inability to reconcile moral ideals with human limitations. The play suggests that absolute power, even when motivated by reformist intentions, results in alienation and moral decay.

Yayati: Desire, Patriarchy, and Moral Authority

In *Yayati* (1961), Karnad reinterprets a myth from the Mahabharata to critique patriarchal and generational authority. King Yayati exchanges his old age with his son Puru's youth to continue enjoying worldly pleasures. This act symbolizes the exploitation inherent in patriarchal power structures. Yayati's authority as king and father allows him to justify moral transgression. Karnad exposes how power legitimizes selfishness and suppresses ethical responsibility. Unlike the traditional myth, Karnad's *Yayati* is not glorified; he is portrayed as weak, insecure, and morally bankrupt. The play critiques authority rooted in age, gender, and lineage, revealing how such power perpetuates suffering and injustice, particularly for the younger generation and women.

Hayavadana: Cultural Authority and Identity Politics

Hayavadana (1971) critiques cultural and intellectual authority through the theme of identity. The play explores the conflict between intellect and physicality through the characters of Devadatta and Kapila. Their exchange of heads leads to confusion about identity, raising questions about socially imposed norms. Authority in *Hayavadana* operates through cultural ideals—what constitutes completeness, perfection, and masculinity. Karnad challenges the dominance of intellectual elitism by revealing its limitations. The play also critiques patriarchal control over female desire through the character of Padmini, whose autonomy is constrained by societal norms. Using folk theatre techniques and metafictional elements, Karnad destabilizes authoritative narratives of identity, suggesting that power seeks uniformity while human experience remains fragmented.

Nagamandala: Patriarchal Power and Female Resistance

Nagamandala (1988) offers a powerful critique of patriarchal authority within marriage and society. The play tells the story of Rani, a neglected wife, and her relationship with a cobra that assumes her husband's form. Through myth and folklore, Karnad exposes the violence and hypocrisy of male dominance. Rani's husband represents institutional authority—cold, authoritarian, and emotionally distant. Ironically, it is the mythical snake who offers love and recognition. The play challenges patriarchal definitions of chastity, fidelity, and female virtue. The public trial scene reveals how authority is upheld through rituals that silence women's experiences. Karnad subverts this by allowing Rani to gain agency, transforming myth into a medium of resistance against gendered power.

The Dreams of Tipu Sultan: Colonial Power and Historical Authority

In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997), Karnad critiques colonial authority and historiography. By presenting Tipu Sultan through his dreams rather than colonial records, Karnad challenges imperial narratives that depict Tipu as a tyrant. The play interrogates who controls history and how authority is legitimized

through documentation. Colonial power is shown as violent and exploitative, while indigenous resistance is marginalized. Karnad reclaims historical voice, exposing how authority manipulates memory and identity. This play highlights drama's potential to contest dominant historical discourses and restore silenced perspectives.

Dramatic Techniques as Political Tools

Karnad employs various theatrical strategies to critique authority

- **Myth and History:** Creating distance to reflect on contemporary politics
- **Folk Theatre Forms:** Democratizing theatre and resisting elite aesthetics
- **Brechtian Alienation:** Preventing emotional absorption and encouraging critical thinking
- **Symbolism and Metaphor:** Representing abstract power structures

These techniques transform drama into an active political space rather than mere entertainment.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad's plays function as profound critiques of power and authority across political, cultural, and personal domains. By interrogating kingship, patriarchy, colonialism, and ideological dominance, Karnad reveals the fragility and contradictions inherent in authority. His theatre refuses to glorify power; instead, it exposes its moral costs and human consequences.

Through innovative dramatic forms and layered narratives, Karnad redefines Indian theatre as a site of resistance and reflection. His work remains deeply relevant in contemporary times, where questions of leadership, legitimacy, and justice continue to shape public discourse. Drama, in Karnad's hands, becomes a powerful medium for political critique and democratic imagination.

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Representing the Economically Marginalized: Badal Sircar, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Asif Currimbhoy in Modern Indian English Drama

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Abstract

This chapter examines the representation of economically marginalised and subaltern classes in Modern Indian English drama through a critical study of three significant plays: *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar, *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan, and *Refugee* by Asif Currimbhoy. Indian English drama, especially in the post-independence period, has emerged as a powerful medium to articulate the lived realities of those pushed to the margins by economic deprivation, political displacement, and global capitalist forces. These plays foreground voices that are often ignored in mainstream historical and literary narratives—urban individuals trapped in economic monotony, impoverished bodies exploited by transnational markets, and refugees rendered voiceless by political upheavals.

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* presents a nuanced portrayal of the urban middle-class individual who, despite apparent material stability, remains economically and psychologically marginalised within a mechanised capitalist system. Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* exposes the brutal commodification of the poor under global capitalism, where human bodies become marketable resources for the affluent First World. Asif Currimbhoy's *Refugee* dramatizes the economic and existential suffering of displaced populations, particularly refugees whose lives are shattered by political decisions beyond their control.

Through close textual analysis and a socio-economic lens, this chapter argues that Modern Indian English drama redefines the concept of subalternity by extending it beyond traditional notions of poverty to include alienation, displacement, and exploitation. The selected plays collectively challenge dominant power structures and compel readers to confront uncomfortable truths about inequality, dehumanisation, and social injustice. By foregrounding marginalised experiences,

these dramatists transform the stage into a site of resistance and social critique, thereby contributing significantly to postcolonial and subaltern literary discourse.

Keywords: Economic marginalisation, Subaltern studies, Indian English drama, Capitalism, Displacement

Introduction

Modern Indian English drama has evolved as a potent literary form that reflects the complex socio-economic realities of Indian society. Unlike early Indian drama in English, which often imitated Western theatrical traditions and catered to elite audiences, post-independence Indian dramatists began to engage deeply with indigenous concerns. One of the most significant developments in this phase is the conscious representation of marginalised and subaltern classes—individuals and communities silenced by economic deprivation, political power, and social structures.

The term "subaltern," popularised by Antonio Gramsci and later expanded by Subaltern Studies scholars, refers to groups that exist outside hegemonic power structures. In the Indian context, subalternity encompasses not only caste-oppressed communities but also the economically disadvantaged, refugees, urban unemployed, and victims of global capitalism. Drama, with its immediacy and performative power, becomes an effective medium to give voice to these silenced lives.

Badal Sircar, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Asif Currimbhoy are among the most influential playwrights who address economic marginalisation in distinct yet interconnected ways. Sircar explores the alienation of the urban individual within a monotonous economic system; Padmanabhan critiques neo-colonial exploitation driven by global markets; and Currimbhoy highlights the plight of refugees displaced by political conflicts. Together, these playwrights broaden the understanding of economic marginalisation in Modern Indian English drama.

This chapter undertakes a detailed study of *Evam Indrajit*, *Harvest*, and *Refugee* to analyse how economically marginalised and subaltern classes are represented and how these representations challenge dominant socio-economic narratives.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is undertaken with the following objectives:

- To examine the representation of economically marginalised and subaltern classes in selected Modern Indian English plays.
- To analyse how economic systems, capitalism, and political forces contribute to marginalisation in the selected texts.
- To explore the thematic and dramatic techniques used by the playwrights to articulate subaltern voices.

- To compare different forms of economic marginalisation such as alienation, exploitation, and displacement.
- To assess the contribution of Modern Indian English drama to subaltern and postcolonial discourse.

Data and Methodology

The study is based on qualitative textual analysis of three primary texts: Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, and Asif Currimbhoy's *Refugee*. These plays have been selected because of their explicit engagement with issues of economic inequality and marginalisation.

Secondary sources such as critical essays, books on Indian English drama, subaltern studies, and postcolonial theory have been consulted to provide a theoretical framework. The methodology adopted includes close reading, thematic analysis, and socio-economic interpretation. The study does not rely on quantitative data but instead focuses on interpretative and analytical approaches to understand how drama represents and critiques economic marginalisation.

Results and Discussion

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*: Urban Alienation and Economic Monotony

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* occupies a seminal position in Modern Indian English drama for its exploration of existential anxiety and its departure from conventional theatrical forms. The play centres on Indrajit, a character who consciously refuses to conform to the repetitive life cycle embodied by Amal, Vimal, and Kamal. These three figures symbolise the mechanised rhythm of middle-class urban life—education leading to employment, employment leading to marriage, and marriage culminating in a life of routine followed by death. Against this predictable pattern, Indrajit emerges as a questioning consciousness, unsettled by the monotony and purposelessness of such existence.

Although Indrajit does not belong to the economically destitute class, Sircar presents him as a victim of a different but equally debilitating form of economic marginalisation. His alienation arises from the pressures of urban capitalism, which prioritises productivity, efficiency, and conformity over individuality and creative expression. Employment, instead of providing fulfilment or security, becomes a source of anxiety and entrapment. Indrajit's discomfort reflects the condition of countless urban individuals who are economically functional yet emotionally and psychologically displaced within the system.

Sircar's critique of capitalism lies in his depiction of human beings as interchangeable units within an impersonal economic order. Amal, Vimal, and Kamal are almost indistinguishable from one another, reinforcing the idea that capitalist urban life erases personal identity. In contrast, Indrajit's refusal to conform marks him as an outsider, rendering him marginal within the very

society he inhabits. His inability to fit into prescribed social roles highlights how resistance itself becomes a form of exclusion.

Indrajit's subalternity is therefore subtle but deeply significant. He is silenced not through direct coercion or material deprivation but through a system that suppresses dissent by normalising conformity. His voice remains unheard because questioning the system offers no tangible economic reward or social recognition. Sircar thus expands the concept of economic marginalisation to include psychological isolation and existential despair, drawing attention to the invisible suffering of the urban middle class.

Through *Evam Indrajit*, Sircar challenges conventional understandings of subalternity by revealing how modern economic structures can marginalise individuals even in the absence of extreme poverty. The play underscores that alienation, loss of agency, and erosion of individuality are integral aspects of economic subalternity in urban capitalist societies, making *Indrajit* a powerful representative of modern marginalised subjectivity.

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: Global Capitalism and Commodification of the Poor

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* presents a disturbing dystopian vision that closely reflects the realities of contemporary global inequality. Set in a near-future society, the play dramatizes the lives of a poor Indian family that enters into a contract to sell the organs of its members to wealthy Western recipients. At the centre of this narrative is Om Prakash, an unemployed urban youth whose economic vulnerability makes him an easy target for exploitative global systems. Om represents millions of economically marginalised individuals for whom survival itself becomes a negotiation with dehumanising forces.

In *Harvest*, economic marginalisation is portrayed in its most extreme and visible form. Poverty strips individuals of choice, dignity, and autonomy, reducing them to biological resources within a global market. The poor are no longer valued as human beings but as repositories of healthy organs, fit for consumption by affluent bodies in the First World. Padmanabhan's depiction of this transactional relationship exposes the unequal power dynamics inherent in global capitalism, where wealth flows in one direction while human suffering remains concentrated in the other.

The play offers a powerful critique of neo-colonial exploitation, suggesting that contemporary forms of domination no longer rely on territorial control but on economic dependency and technological surveillance. Advanced technology in *Harvest* facilitates this exploitation by maintaining constant monitoring of the donor family, thereby erasing privacy and personal freedom. What appears as medical progress is revealed as a tool of control, reinforcing the idea that

technological advancement, when aligned with capitalist interests, can intensify rather than alleviate human suffering.

Characters such as Jeeta, who ultimately sacrifices her life as an organ donor, embody the ultimate silencing of the subaltern. Jeeta's body becomes the site upon which global inequality is inscribed, her death symbolising the expendability of the poor in a profit-driven world. Her silence is not merely personal but systemic, reflecting how marginalised individuals are denied voice, agency, and moral consideration. Even Jaya, who initially attempts to resist the arrangement, is gradually overwhelmed by the economic logic that governs the household.

Padmanabhan also interrogates the illusion of choice offered to the economically marginalised. Although the contract appears voluntary, it is shaped by desperation and lack of alternatives, revealing how freedom becomes meaningless in conditions of extreme inequality. Harvest thus demonstrates that economic marginalisation in a globalised world is both physical and moral, involving the exploitation of bodies as well as the erosion of ethical values. Through this unsettling narrative, Padmanabhan compels audiences to confront the inhuman consequences of global capitalism and to question the moral cost of economic progress.

Asif Currimbhoy's Refugee: Displacement and Economic Insecurity

Asif Currimbhoy's *Refugee* offers a poignant and deeply human portrayal of displacement and its devastating economic consequences. The play focuses on refugees created by political conflicts, wars, and arbitrary national divisions, foregrounding the lived experiences of individuals who are forced to abandon their homes, occupations, and social identities. For these displaced populations, marginalisation is not a temporary condition but a prolonged state of existence marked by uncertainty, deprivation, and social exclusion.

Currimbhoy presents refugees as one of the most vulnerable subaltern groups, whose lives are irrevocably altered by decisions taken by powerful political authorities. These individuals have little control over the circumstances that uproot them, yet they are compelled to bear the economic and emotional costs of such decisions. The loss of homeland simultaneously entails the loss of livelihood, severing refugees from the economic structures that once sustained them. As a result, survival becomes their primary concern, often forcing them into menial labour, dependence on aid, or perpetual unemployment.

The economic marginalisation depicted in *Refugee* is inseparable from political and social exclusion. Refugees exist on the margins of the nation-state, denied full citizenship, legal protection, and social acceptance. This lack of recognition further deepens their economic insecurity, as access to employment, housing, and basic resources remains limited or entirely absent. Currimbhoy's portrayal

underscores how displacement produces a cycle of marginalisation in which poverty, insecurity, and invisibility reinforce one another.

Significantly, refugee challenges nationalist and historical narratives that often glorify political struggles while ignoring their human cost. By foregrounding refugee voices, *Currimbhoy* exposes the suffering concealed beneath ideological rhetoric and national pride. The refugees' experiences reveal the ethical failure of political systems that prioritise territorial integrity and ideological dominance over human welfare. Their silencing within official histories mirrors their marginal position within society.

Currimbhoy's drama thus functions as a powerful critique of political power and its disregard for vulnerable populations. Refugee demonstrates that displacement is not merely a geographical rupture but an economic and existential crisis that reshapes identity, dignity, and survival. By portraying refugees as subaltern subjects trapped between borders and deprived of economic security, *Currimbhoy* compels audiences to confront the long-term consequences of political violence and to reconsider the moral responsibilities of the modern nation-state.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative reading of *Evam Indrajit*, *Harvest*, and *Refugee* reveals that although the plays emerge from different historical moments and socio-political contexts, they collectively map the complex and layered nature of economic marginalisation in modern society. Rather than presenting poverty as a singular or static condition, these dramatists expose economic subalternity as a dynamic process shaped by capitalism, political authority, and global power relations.

In *Evam Indrajit*, Badal Sircar foregrounds a subtle but deeply pervasive form of marginalisation. *Indrajit* is not economically deprived in a material sense, yet he remains excluded from meaningful participation in a system that values conformity over individuality. His alienation stems from an urban capitalist structure that reduces human life to repetitive cycles of education, employment, marriage, and death. Sircar thus draws attention to the psychological and existential dimensions of economic marginalisation, suggesting that even those who appear socially stable can be rendered subaltern through monotony, insecurity, and loss of agency. This representation complicates traditional notions of subalternity by including the urban middle class within its ambit.

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, on the other hand, presents economic marginalisation in its most extreme and visible form. The play situates poverty within a global framework, where the economically powerful First World exploits the bodies of the Third World poor. Unlike *Indrajit's* internalised alienation, the marginalisation in *Harvest* is overt, violent, and physical. Characters such as Om Prakash and Jeeta are denied dignity and autonomy as their bodies become commodities in an international market. Padmanabhan's

play exposes how global capitalism transforms economic inequality into a form of neo-colonial domination, reinforcing the idea that subalternity in the contemporary world is transnational in nature.

Asif Currimbhoy's *Refugee* introduces yet another dimension by linking economic marginalisation to political displacement. Refugees in the play are victims of state policies and ideological conflicts that strip them of home, livelihood, and identity. Their poverty is not the result of personal failure but of forced migration and political violence. Currimbhoy highlights how refugees are doubly marginalised—economically deprived and socially invisible—existing on the fringes of national consciousness.

Together, these plays demonstrate that economic marginalisation transcends simplistic definitions of poverty. It encompasses alienation within urban economies, exploitation under global capitalism, and displacement caused by political power. By presenting diverse subaltern experiences, Sircar, Padmanabhan, and Currimbhoy collectively challenge dominant narratives of progress and development, revealing the hidden human costs underlying modern socio-economic systems.

Conclusion

The representation of economically marginalised and subaltern classes in Modern Indian English drama reflects a sustained and ethically grounded concern for social justice, human dignity, and the lived realities of those pushed to the edges of society. Through *Evam Indrajit*, *Harvest*, and *Refugee*, Badal Sircar, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Asif Currimbhoy interrogate dominant narratives of progress, development, and modernity, exposing the systemic forces that silence marginalised voices. Their plays reveal that economic marginalisation is neither accidental nor isolated but deeply embedded in socio-economic, political, and global power structures.

These dramatists redefine the concept of subalternity by expanding it beyond the conventional image of the visibly poor. Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* draws attention to the alienated urban individual whose marginalisation is psychological and existential, rooted in the monotony and dehumanisation of capitalist urban life. *Indrajit*'s struggle highlights how economic systems can suppress individuality and agency even in the absence of extreme poverty. This subtle form of marginalisation underscores the pervasive reach of economic power and its capacity to silence dissent through conformity rather than coercion.

In contrast, Padmanabhan's *Harvest* presents a stark and disturbing vision of economic exploitation in a globalised world. By portraying the commodification of human bodies, the play foregrounds the ethical bankruptcy of global capitalism, where the survival of the affluent depends upon the systematic exploitation of the poor. The subaltern figures in *Harvest* are denied not only

economic security but also bodily autonomy and moral agency, reducing human life to a transactional resource. This representation compels audiences to confront the dehumanising consequences of unchecked technological and economic advancement.

Currimbhoy's *Refugee* further extends the discourse on marginalisation by linking economic deprivation to political displacement. Refugees emerge as the most vulnerable subaltern subjects, rendered homeless and invisible by state policies and ideological conflicts. Their economic suffering is inseparable from their loss of identity, belonging, and social recognition. By foregrounding refugee experiences, Currimbhoy challenges nationalist narratives that often erase the human cost of political decisions.

Collectively, these plays position Modern Indian English drama as a critical space of resistance and social reflection. They compel audiences to engage with uncomfortable realities and to question the moral foundations of modern society. In doing so, Sircar, Padmanabhan, and Currimbhoy make a significant contribution to postcolonial and subaltern literary discourse, reaffirming drama's power to articulate suppressed voices and to advocate for a more just and humane social order.

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Kaleidoscope of Diaspora: ‘Orienting an India in Japan’

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Abstract

‘Diaspora’ is a Greek word which means to scatter or to move or to disperse. It is the term of greater importance from the origin of human civilizations. People had been moving around from one place to another, from one country to another, from one region to another in same country, from one continent to another. The three notable mass migrations in the history are The Jewish, the Armenian, and the African. Diaspora Writing, a special genre of literature explaining the activity of Diasporas, emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. It depicted the experiences of Diasporas in the short stories, the novels and the poems. Pallavi Aiyar’s travelogue *Orienting: An India in Japan* published in August 2021 is the recent example of the Diaspora writing. It depicts contrasting features of the host land Japan to her homeland India. The present article briefly presents different aspects of the Diaspora and cultural identity of an immigrant in Japan.

Keywords: Diaspora, migration, homeland, host land

Introduction

Pallavi Aiyer, who is a world-famous globe-trotting journalist, moves to Japan with her husband Julio in 2016 and resides there until August 2020. At present she lives in Madrid and before going to Japan she lived in the UK, China, Belgium, and Indonesia. ‘Orienting An India in Japan’ is an autobiographical record about the author and her family’s stay in Tokyo. She dislocated from her homeland India to many other countries and had fluency in many languages. Though she has an elite background due to her husband’s diplomatic position in the office of the European Union Delegation in Tokyo and also resided in a very posh area between the south Asian and the Korean embassies at Tokyo, she describes very keenly about Indian Diaspora and the cultural differences as well as some similarities based on her memory of her motherland India.

What is Diaspora?

The 'Diaspora' actually refers to a scattered population whose original geographical location is somewhere else. Basically, there are two types of Diaspora: The Classical and the Ethnoscopic. The Classical Diaspora means the scattering of a mass population from their indigenous places due to some historical causality like the Jews, the Armenians, and the Africans. The Ethnoscopic Diaspora means the dispersal of people due to capitalism in the Middle East associated with the idea of margin, displacement, and borders. The term 'Diaspora' was referred to in the beginning only with reference to the Jews who are homeless since biblical time. The activity of European colonization popularized it all over the world. A very large number of people from different colonies were forcefully dislocated as they were sent to other countries or the islands as slaves. Due to globalization, the spreading of free trade and increasing capital flows accelerated the movement across the countries in the world and their cultures. Some are voluntary, while some are forceful migrations. Here forced means, not due to power, but some people are victims of circumstances. They don't have any other option than going out of their motherland for survival. Decolonization and the cold war are other triggering reasons for the mass migrations in modern times.

The Indians who are living outside India for any reason are the part of Indian Diaspora. Diaspora feeling among Indians is observed in long ago our culture. It is also evident in the greatest epic the Ramayana, but accelerated from pre-independence time. Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, V. S. Naipul, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Hari Kunjaru, Pallavi Aiyer etc are the main writers of Indian Diaspora.

The Diaspora Features in the Travelogue 'Orienting an India in Japan'

Dislocation or the relocation is the very common as well as an important term used in relation to the Diaspora literature. This distancing may be due to political or economic reason. Pallavi Aiyer has made it clear in the travelogue that she was brought up in a 'middle-class, urban home' in her hometown Delhi. She travelled to Mumbai with her father and after completion of her degree she joined to some famous media intuitions abroad. She worked in about four countries from 2000 and in 2016 shifted to Tokyo with her diplomatic husband. She published five other books before this book, but she had a clear picture of her hometown somewhere in her mind and mentions it frequently in travelogue in a comparative way. In the very first chapter 'Lost and Found' she compares her child's newly acquired skill of commuting alone to his school in a very populated metropolitan city Tokyo to the children in Delhi. It depicts her strong sense of nostalgia for her mother land. Nostalgia for the Past: Remembering lost childhood days spent in homeland, missing family and others are very important

features of the Diaspora literature. Pallavi Aiyer mentions in the very first chapter 'Lost and Fond' that during her childhood in Delhi she observed how the elementary school children go to school in groups.

In the sixth chapter, 'Massaging the Octopus', the author depicted her memories about her home town Delhi, which a fish free and mostly favored 'butter chicken/daal makhani-central'. Whereas her stay with her father in Mumbai for few years in 1990 for the summer vacations describe her father's residence which was very close to the 'Sasoon Docks' and it also describes her memory of giant scary rats. She relates her childhood memory in Mumbai to her visit to fish market in Japan in the Kanmon straits where she gets the very similar salty smell of her memory about Sasoon Docks, but here he missed the giant rats.

She compares another memory of her childhood to cultural independence and superiority of Japanese in every work. She has narrated an incident about her visit to the central Tokyo's Komyoji temple in 2018. She visited the temple to see the difference between as spiritual and secular Japan, where she relates her own childhood memory and the present Indian Buddhism to the Japanese Zen Buddhism. Here she gets a very clear difference that Indian monks are depending on 'alms' from society and focusing on meditation and spirituality, whereas the Japanese Zen monks make no difference between the work and meditation. The Japanese Zen Buddhist monks performed different works like 'raking leaves, dusting the altar sand even scrubbing the toilets.

In 'Komyoji' temple she saw some:

Salary men in full suit-and-tie regalia a fashionista sporting a silver tote, and an elderly gentleman in scuffed leather shoes. As the clock struck 7.30, they shook off jackets, put down bags and grabbed brooms, dustpans and buckets. For next thirty minutes they cleaned in silence. Every inch of temple's cemetery, veranda, and yard methodically swept and polished. All errant leaves were chased down and bagged. The fashionista spent the entirety of the half an hour on her knees with a washcloth, looking for stains that might have camouflaged themselves as part of the floor tiles (Aiyer, 80).

Conclusion

After this incident she explains to one of the salary man about her childhood memories. Her apologies for not helping them to clean the temple as she is not good at cleaning. She further explains that she was 'brought up by a single mom' and her mother worked as sales executive in a five-star hotel in Delhi. She grew as a youth without any contribution to manual work in the daily household tasks. She further explains that in her further study days a maid had swept her rooms and a cook prepared meals as well as cleaned the dishes for her. There was a separate person to clean the toilets. She also described how the floor cleaning maid didn't perform the toilet cleanings. There was a requirement of a separate toilet cleaning-caste lady for this particular task. Here the author accepts the Indian mentality to prefer 'ritual purity' and 'personal hygiene' and lacking the

responsibility to public spaces cleanliness. Most of the comparisons of the Indian and the Japanese culture are done by the author on the basis of her memory of her motherland India. Pallavi Ayer as depicted the cleanliness of Japanese culture as an important aspect of Japanese patriotism.

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Representation of History in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq

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As quoted by an English historian C. V. Wedgwood “Without the imaginative insight which goes with creative literature, history cannot be intelligibly written”, literature and historical records have a very close correlation. Intervention of history in literature is quite natural. The twin ideas of fact and entertainment entwine often within literature and history to produce historical literary output. However, historical fiction is a popular form of literature. This form of literature shows the deep connections between history and literature by having the author study a particular age or a specific figure and a discourse to a greater extent. These stories may be wholly fictional or they might be fictionalized accounts of real people and real events.

Literature takes many forms. They range from personal notes to poems and non-fiction articles. Literature can be presented in a number of mediums including online content, magazine and newspaper articles and in book form. For a work to be considered literary, it usually requires artistic merit and quality. What constitutes as literary is a subjective matter and rarely agreed upon. Historical fiction is a popular form of literature. It shows the deep connections between history and literature by having the writer study a particular era from the past in order to write a story. These stories may be wholly fictional or they might be fictionalized accounts of real people and real events. It must also be noted that literature can affect history in its own way. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* caused great debate regarding science and religion in Victorian society and beyond, while Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* helped promote better conditions at meat packaging plants. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a huge bestseller in its day and helped to promote social change by championing abolitionism. Religious texts such as the Bible or the Bhagavad Gita have influenced individuals of many faiths throughout the ages. So, it would be best to say that both literature and history have a keen relationship, one influencing the other.

The present paper is an attempt to trace out deeper correlation between history and literature as reflected in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq. Karnad's plays like Tughlaq, Naga-Mandala and The Fire and the Rain, reflect on the nature of art and literature. All the leading characters in these plays talk overtly and at times covertly, about art, history, and literature. Therefore, these plays can be read not only as literature but also as inquiries into the nature of literature itself. Karnad's second attempt, Tughlaq is certainly a historical play which deals in depth with the last five years of chequered reign of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq.

This play was originally written in Kannada in 1964 and was translated into English in 1976 by Alyque Padamsee. Tughlaq brought the author name and fame at once. U. R. AnanthaMurthy stated: "It is not hard to account for the immediate response the play has received from Kannada as well as other audiences. One can enjoy the play, on the stage without paying much attention to its rich and complex symbolism and the subtle weaving of its different motifs. The play has an interesting story, an intricate plot, scope for spectacle and dramatic conventions like the comic pair, Aziz and Azam, to which theatre audiences responded readily." (Anantha Murthy, 1976: 52)

Tughlaq, the monarch ruled India in the 14th century. His life was full of, as created by Karnad, mutual distrust, frustrated idealism, convention ridden faith, religious bigotry, and rampant corruption. Karnad has closely followed all the historical records to analyse the character of Tughlaq that fascinated him to a greater extent. As regards Tughlaq's idealism, scholarship, religious tolerance and his feelings of Hindu-Muslim unity, Karnad closely follows historical sources. The author presents this historical figure as generous and charitable in the first scene. He accepts the Kazi's verdict smoothly and graciously in which he himself is held guilty of misappropriating the land that belonged to Vishnu Prasad and he also sanctions him a grant of five hundred silver dinars and also offers a lot of other benefits.

The monarch-Tughlaq, in this play, is represented in very unique manner. Of all other Sultans, Tughlaq was most learned and an intelligent strategy maker. He loved art and culture. Maslik, an author, writes about Tughlaq, the monarch: "The Sultan is highly learned. He has mastered philosophy and logic and is a very excellent calligraphist. Himself no mean poet, he appreciates the excellence of poetry and holds converse with Persian poets and criticizes their production". (Maslik, 1971:28). He was a keen student of religion and philosophy. He had profound knowledge of various forms of religious attitudes; nevertheless, he was a rationalist. His liberal attitude is evident when one comes across the fact that he frequently would invite non-Muslim scholars for discussion on various contemporary issues and other philosophical discourses.

Karnad projects the humanism and idealism of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq excellently in this play. In the opening scene, Tughlaq,

who is portrayed as a man totally estranged from the society, is not understood in the proper perspective, because his ideas were far above the reach and comprehension of the common people. There was devoid of religious tolerance in the age of Tughlaq. The Hindus and Muslims looked at suspiciously. They were unable to understand the broad-minded religious tolerance of Tughlaq. His confidence building measures were not appreciated. All his attempts to bring about an understanding between the two varying communities brought distrust. The changes brought about by Tughlaq post a great threat to the time-honoured conventions. Tughlaq's frustration at the people's non-comprehension is convincing. Tughlaq is frustrated because his idealistic dreams could never reach their destination, because they lacked the firm support of the people. He is fully aware of his mental predicament when he says: "But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't opened their eyes to the light of today?" (Karnad, 1964:39) The play can be seen as historical only in a very special sense, that is, it could be seen embodying the Muslim idea of history as biography. Like Babemama and Akbamama, the serial enactment of the twenty-year reign of Tughlaq could be seen as Tughlaqnama. To reinforce the sense of the mirror of history, a character has also been introduced by Karnad. The past viewed as a projection of the presence. The tremendous popularity of Tughlaq and its reception as a classic in Kannada Literature is mainly due to the contemporary sensitivity. The present play, in fact, enacts an Indian situation of an alien emperor, a dream of cities and empires, subjecting the culture of the people to colonial strain.

Karnad uses the Sultan only as a background to make the people understand, judge and interpret contemporary realities. Tughlaq should be studied to find parallelism between the realities of the century India, ruled by a Sultan and the 20th century democratic country governed by a Prime Minister and his colleagues in the Cabinet. Karnad's own statement which is quoted by U. R. Anantha Murthy in his introduction to Tughlaq: "What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failures also. And within the span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the short-comings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty his feeling that he had the only correct answer". (Anantha Murthy, 1976: 81)

Karnad makes Tughlaq an idealist, and establishes that in politics idealism does not pay. It is bound to fail, especially when the idealist is impulsive. Tughlaq is an intelligent man and works meticulously for the people, Karnad shrewdly depicts the predicament of Muhammad Bin-Tughlaq. The idealism of Tughlaq and the subsequent political disillusionment of the period are often compared to those of Nehru era. Karnad himself suggests this parallel in an interview quoted

in his introduction to Tughlaq, “And I felt early in the sixties India had also come very far in the same direction- the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel” (AnanthaMurthy, 1976: 21). Jawaharlal Nehru indeed shared with Tughlaq an over ambitious dream to build a glorious India. Tughlaq forsook his rest and sleep to fulfil his dreams but his idealism and vision were probably ahead of times and his subjects could not fit into his scheme of things, resulting in widespread social, economic and political upheaval and chaos. Tughlaq paradoxically restored to violence and cruelty for the implementation of his idealistic plans meant for public welfare.

Tughlaq tries to bring about religious equality but fanatics, like Imam-ud-Din, oppose him. The decision to move the capital from Delhi to Daultabad was a step in the same direction but the impracticability of the decision put off the people and they vehemently opposed the Sultan. Faced with opposition from his own subjects, Tughlaq declared, I was too soft, I can see that now. They’ll only understand the whip”. (Karnad, 1964:44). He became ruthless after this experience and ordered everyone to move to Daultabad. He killed all opponents of his project mercilessly but soon hound by a profound sense of guilt, and turned to God: “God! God, in Heaven, please help me. Please don’t let go of my hand...I started in your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? (Karnad, 1964: 67). His words reveal his utter disillusionment and spiritual agony. He started on the path of benevolence but his was, being tragically ahead of his times, made him a tyrant against his will. Similarly, his vision of starting copper currency also ends in a fiasco. His over idealism brings about his downfall and his own people call him a mad man and tyrant.

The playwright thus depicts Tughlaq as a divided subject who has acted cruelly, but is not happy with the acts like Alexander, the great. History repeats itself; Tughlaq is a historical figure, but he is a symbol of the recent Indian leadership. Indeed, the most important issue is how subjectivity and history crisscross. Subjectivity can only be understood by grounding it in history. The relationship between subjective consciousness and history is complex and dialectical. Historical circumstances in which Tughlaq’s thinking is embedded should be viewed. His subjective consciousness and the circumstances of history are inextricably interconnected. Perhaps, it is the problematic relation between the two, that what he thinks and where he finds himself not matching. And probably this is the genesis of his tragedy. The issue that the play brings up is that subjectivity is as much a matter of consciousness as the historicity of consciousness. Critics have noted that characters like Aziz, Barani, Najib and Sheik Imam-ud din are just various facets of Tughlaq’s persona.

Nevertheless, to be fair to Karnad’s characterization, each of the character has an independent existence and is not merely an aspect of Tughlaq. Sheikh Imam-ud-din is an orthodox, the- logician and fanatic who tries to

undermine Tughlaq's vision of secularism and communal harmony. Tughlaq invites him to address a meeting and offers some observations on his administration, but forbids his subjects to attend the meeting. The meeting thus becomes only a trap to capture Imam-ud-Din. The Sheikh resembles the Sultan and taking advantage of this fact, he is sent as a peace emissary to Ain-ul-Mulk who, in turn, kills the Sheikh, mistaking him to be the Sultan himself. Sheikh thus, appears to be the fanatic self of Tughlaq and he is killed, so that Tughlaq could be a generous, secular politician. One can see shades of Kautilya and Niccolo Machiavelli in Tughlaq, politically cunning. Without explicitly acknowledging it, Karnad has brought a politician and political philosopher of the golden period of ancient India into his exploration of the history of medieval India. Kautilya and Tughlaq merge, creating a kind of fictional subjectivity which is nevertheless grounded in history.

In Tughlaq, Karnad grappled with fundamental human motives with a distinctive masterly control. The playwright, through the play Tughlaq critically explored the psychic structure of the characters. The moral and manners of political world have been sensitively and intelligently dealt with. The straggles of the Sultan Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq were vigorously brought out. Commenting on the thematic concerns of the play, A. K. Sinha remarks: "Tughlaq presents a rich orchestration of themes subtly interlocked with one another, with a rapid progression of events". (Sinha,1999: 62). Thus, it can be concluded that the history has always been serving as a source for many writers to explore new horizons by presenting history with an angle that is diversified in nature blended with artistic craft.

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Theatre of the Absurd and Modern Indian Drama: A Study of Kiran Nagarkar's Bedtime Story

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Abstract

Modern Indian drama has frequently drawn upon Western dramatic modes while reshaping them to reflect indigenous social and political realities. The Theatre of the Absurd, with its emphasis on meaninglessness, fragmentation, and human alienation, finds a distinct yet modified expression in Indian theatre. This paper examines Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story* as a significant example of modern Indian drama that incorporates elements of the Theatre of the Absurd. By analyzing its narrative structure, dramatic techniques, characterization, and thematic concerns, the study argues that Nagarkar employs absurdist strategies not to promote existential nihilism but to critique social apathy, political silence, and moral paralysis. The paper concludes that *Bedtime Story* represents an Indian adaptation of Absurd theatre, blending myth, satire, and modern sensibility to expose contemporary socio-political realities.

Keywords: Theatre of the Absurd, Modern Indian Drama, Kiran Nagarkar, *Bedtime Story*, Myth, Absurdity

Introduction

The emergence of modern Indian drama in English is closely connected with experimentation in form, theme, and ideology. Playwrights such as Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, and Kiran Nagarkar moved away from conventional realism to explore myth, history, and contemporary social issues through innovative dramatic techniques. Among the various Western influences on modern Indian drama, the Theatre of the Absurd occupies a crucial place. The Theatre of the Absurd, associated with dramatists like Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and Jean Genet, reflects the existential condition of humanity in a meaningless and irrational universe. While Indian playwrights do not replicate Absurd theatre in its pure European form, they adapt its techniques to address local political, cultural, and ethical concerns. Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story* (1977), stands as a powerful example of such adaptation. This paper explores

how *Bedtime Story* incorporates absurd elements while remaining firmly rooted in the context of modern Indian drama.

Theatre of the Absurd: A Brief Overview

The term "Theatre of the Absurd," popularized by Martin Esslin, refers to a form of drama that rejects logical plot development, coherent dialogue, and traditional characterization. Absurd drama portrays a world where human existence appears purposeless, communication breaks down, and individuals experience alienation and despair. The Theatre of the Absurd is fundamentally defined by its departure from traditional theatrical realism, opting instead for a fragmented and non-linear structure that mirrors the chaotic nature of human existence. This style frequently employs repetition and circularity, where dialogue and actions loop to suggest that progress is an illusion and that human effort is often futile. Accompanying this is a pervasive use of dark humor and irony, which allows the playwright to address tragic or horrific situations through a lens of grim comedy. By enforcing a breakdown of cause-and-effect logic, Absurdist works strip away the comfort of a predictable world, leaving the characters and the audience to face existential questioning without clear resolution. While European Absurd drama, born from the disillusionment of the post-World War II era, tends to emphasize a universal or metaphysical meaninglessness, Indian dramatists have uniquely repurposed these techniques for a more grounded, civic mission. In the Indian context, the "Absurd" is not just a philosophical statement about the universe, but a sharp tool used to critique social injustice, political oppression, and moral indifference. For a writer like Kiran Nagarkar, the absurdity lies in the jarring contrast between a nation's high-minded spiritual myths and its grim reality of systemic cruelty. By using absurdist elements, Indian drama forces the audience to confront the irrationality of their own social hierarchies and the silence of their own consciences.

Modern Indian Drama and Absurdism

Modern Indian drama does not embrace absurdity as an end in itself. Instead, absurd techniques are used as tools of protest and exposure. Indian playwrights blend myth, folklore, and history with modern theatrical forms to communicate contemporary anxieties. In the hands of Kiran Nagarkar, absurdity transcends mere philosophical posturing to become a radical instrument of social and political interrogation. In this context, the absurd serves as a potent means of questioning authority and tradition, stripping away the "divine" veneer of mythic figures to expose the power structures hidden beneath by disrupting the audience's expectations, Nagarkar succeeds in highlighting societal silence and complicity, forcing the viewer to confront the uncomfortable reality that their own passivity facilitates injustice. Furthermore, these absurdist devices act as a

scathing vehicle for criticizing political systems and moral decay, suggesting that the breakdown of logic on stage is merely a reflection of the fractured ethics within the state. *Bedtime Story* perfectly exemplifies this approach, seamlessly weaving epic narrative with modern absurdist techniques to prove that the most "absurd" element of our existence is not the universe itself, but our willingness to tolerate the intolerable.

Bedtime Story: Overview of the Play

Bedtime Story is a dramatic retelling of selected episodes from the Mahabharata, focusing on characters such as Draupadi, Eklavya, and Karna. Rather than glorifying epic heroism, Nagarkar presents a detached and ironic narration of violence, injustice, and suffering. The play was written during a period of political turbulence in India and was initially banned, indicating its strong ideological challenge to authority and social complacency. The title itself is ironic: instead of offering comfort or moral clarity, the "bedtime story" exposes brutality and moral failure, unsettling the audience.

Absurd Elements in Bedtime Story

Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story* effectively utilizes a fragmented narrative structure, abandoning linear progression in favor of an episodic presentation. These abrupt shifts in tone and perspective mirror the absurdist rejection of conventional plotting, intentionally disorienting the audience to prevent them from settling into a comfortable, predictable rhythm. This structural chaos is reinforced by a sense of repetition and futility; the repeated narration of core injustices most notably the humiliation of Draupadi creates a circular pattern where suffering is perpetually retold but never resolved. Such repetition serves as a stark reflection of the absurd notion that human actions often fail to catalyze meaningful change, trapped instead in a loop of historical and moral stagnation. The emotional landscape of the play is further defined by its pervasive use of irony and dark humour. Grave, often horrific events are delivered with a sense of ironic detachment, where the jarring contrast between the gravity of the scene and the casual, almost nonchalant tone of the narration generates a grim comedy. This hallmark of Absurd theatre provokes an "uneasy" laughter, which functions as a psychological trap that forces the audience to confront their own deep-seated moral indifference. This process of self-reflection is facilitated by alienation and detachment, as characters frequently function more as narrators or archetypes than psychologically developed individuals. By utilizing these Brechtian distancing effects, Nagarkar prevents emotional immersion, ensuring that the audience remains critical observers rather than passive sympathizers. Ultimately, these techniques culminate in profound existential questioning. Although the play is deeply rooted in the specificities of Hindu myth, it raises universal inquiries

regarding justice, individual responsibility, and the weight of silence. In true absurdist fashion, however, these questions remain unanswered. The play offers no catharsis or divine resolution, instead reinforcing a modern sense of uncertainty and moral paralysis that leaves the burden of interpretation and action entirely on the viewer.

Absurdity as Social and Political Critique

In a departure from classical European Absurd drama, which often retreats into a purely metaphysical exploration of a void, Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story* is fundamentally and aggressively political. Nagarkar repurposes absurd elements to launch a scathing critique of social apathy toward injustice, highlighting how the normalization of cruelty becomes a bizarre, everyday occurrence. Central to this critique is the play's focus on the silence of spectators and bystanders; by portraying this passivity through an absurdist lens, Nagarkar makes the "quiet" of the witness feel irrational and monstrous. This serves to expose the cyclical nature of violence and power, where the repetition of mythic tragedies in modern settings suggests that history is a loop of senseless oppression. Ultimately, absurdity in *Bedtime Story* functions as a deliberate strategy of resistance. Rather than concluding that human existence itself is inherently meaningless, Nagarkar uses the "absurd" to strip away the logic of existing social and political systems. By making the status quo appear illogical and grotesque, the play challenges the audience to reject the irrationality of their own political reality. Absurdity here does not lead to despair, but to a jarring realization: the "meaninglessness" isn't in the universe it is in the calculated silence of a society that watches an epic tragedy unfold in its own backyard.

Bedtime Story as Modern Indian Absurd Drama

In the landscape of post-independence literature, Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story* serves as a seminal text that demonstrates the radical reinterpretation of the Theatre of the Absurd within the Indian socio-cultural and political milieu. While European absurdist traditions, pioneered by figures like Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco, primarily grapple with metaphysical void and existential despair in a post-theistic world, Nagarkar pivots this aesthetic toward a moral and political imperative. He effectively strips the "Absurd" of its nihilistic connotations and instead weaponizes it as a tool for civic accountability. The play's structural dissonance achieved through its jarring juxtaposition of the mythic past with the visceral present serves to challenge the audience's complicity in systemic injustice by de-familiarizing the Mahabharata, Nagarkar compels the viewer to confront the "absurdity" of their own moral somnambulism. The traditional "heroism" of figures like the Pandavas is deconstructed, revealing it to be a veneer for political convenience and

patriarchal violence. Consequently, the audience is forced to question inherited narratives of heroism and duty (Dharma), recognizing that these sacred concepts are often manipulated to justify the silence of the bystander. Furthermore, Nagarkar's dramaturgy rejects the catharsis typical of classical drama, opting instead for a "theatre of discomfort." This refusal to provide a neat resolution ensures that the play functions as an interrogative space rather than a celebratory one by removing divine intervention the *deus ex machine* Nagarkar places the entire weight of moral responsibility upon human shoulders. Thus, *Bedtime Story* occupies a unique and formidable position in modern Indian drama; it stands as a work that is simultaneously avant-garde in its experimental form and deeply, unflinchingly committed to social reform. It proves that the "Absurd" can be more than a philosophical statement it can be a scathing indictment of the status quo and a call for political awakening.

Conclusion

Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story* incorporates significant elements of the Theatre of the Absurd, including fragmented structure, repetition, irony, and existential questioning. However, the play diverges from classical Absurd drama by using these techniques to critique social indifference and political oppression. As a work of modern Indian drama, *Bedtime Story* represents an innovative fusion of myth and absurdity, demonstrating how Western dramatic forms can be adapted to express indigenous concerns. The play ultimately affirms that absurdity in Indian theatre functions not as an escape from meaning but as a powerful mode of social and moral interrogation.

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Identity and Oppression in Mahesh Dattani's Plays: A Study of Final Solutions, Tara, and Dance Like a Man

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a pioneering voice in Indian English drama who brings marginalized experiences to the centre of theatrical discourse. His plays interrogate the construction of identity within rigid social systems shaped by communalism, patriarchy, and cultural tradition. This paper examines Final Solutions, Tara, and Dance Like a Man through a common thematic lens of identity formation and systemic oppression. While Final Solutions explores communal prejudice and inherited hatred, Tara exposes gender discrimination and ethical violence within the family, and Dance Like a Man interrogates masculinity and artistic freedom under patriarchal norms. Collectively, these plays reveal how society suppresses individual identity through ideology, tradition, and power structures. The study argues that Dattani's theatre functions as a moral critique of Indian middle-class society, compelling audiences to confront uncomfortable social truths.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, Identity, Patriarchy, Communalism, Indian English Drama, Marginalization

Introduction

Indian English drama in the post-independence period has evolved from myth-based narratives to socially engaged realism. Among contemporary dramatists, Mahesh Dattani occupies a distinctive position for addressing issues that are often silenced in public discourse. His plays focus on urban middle-class families and communities, exposing the contradictions between social respectability and hidden violence.

Final Solutions, Tara, and Dance Like a Man may appear thematically diverse but they are united by a deeper concern: the denial of individual identity by oppressive social systems. Dattani portrays how prejudice is internalized, how power operates within families, and how tradition becomes a tool of control. This paper studies these three plays together to highlight Dattani's sustained critique of identity suppression in modern Indian society.

Communal Identity and Prejudice in Final Solutions

Final Solutions is a powerful exploration of communalism and inherited hatred. The play demonstrates how communal identity is socially constructed and transmitted across generations. Dattani uses masks and chorus-like mobs to represent collective prejudice, suggesting that communal hatred is faceless yet omnipresent.

Characters such as Ramnik Gandhi embody moral hypocrisy. Though outwardly liberal, Ramnik benefits from historical injustice against Muslims, revealing how guilt and denial shape identity. Javed and Bobby, young Muslim boys, are treated not as individuals but as representatives of a community, reinforcing stereotypes. The play argues that communal identity overrides human individuality. Personal relationships are sacrificed at the altar of religious loyalty, and fear becomes the dominant mode of interaction. Dattani thus exposes communalism as a psychological and social prison that dehumanizes both victim and perpetrator.

Gender Discrimination and Bioethical Violence in Tara

Tara shifts the focus from public conflict to private violence within the family. The play centers on Tara, a conjoined twin who is denied a fair chance at life due to patriarchal preferences favoring the male child, Chandan. The decision to allocate the shared leg to the boy is both a medical and moral crime.

Dattani presents patriarchy not merely as male dominance but as a system sustained by women themselves. Bharati's complicity reflects how internalized patriarchy distorts maternal instincts. Tara's identity is shaped by the absence of bodily completeness, fairness, and recognition.

The play raises crucial bioethical questions about medical authority, parental choice, and gender justice. Tara's physical disability becomes a metaphor for social mutilation inflicted on women. Her tragedy lies not only in her death but in the systematic denial of her right to an equal identity.

Gender Roles and Artistic Identity in Dance Like a Man

In Dance Like a Man, Dattani interrogates masculinity and the conflict between tradition and self-expression. Jairaj's desire to pursue Bharatanatyam challenges patriarchal expectations that define dance as feminine and unworthy of male respect.

Amritlal Parekh, the authoritarian father, represents nationalist patriarchy, equating masculinity with political power and discipline. Jairaj's failure as a dancer is less a result of a lack of talent and more a consequence of emotional suppression and constant humiliation.

The play also critiques rigid tradition within art itself. While Bharatanatyam is celebrated as a classical form, its practice becomes exclusionary and hierarchical. Dattani thus exposes how both society and tradition collaborate to suffocate

creative identity.

- **Suppression of Identity**

A central concern in all three plays is the denial of an individual's right to define their own identity. Dattani presents identity not as a personal choice but as a construct imposed by dominant social forces such as religion, gender norms, and cultural tradition.

In *Final Solutions*, religious identity becomes a rigid label that overrides human individuality. Characters like Javed and Bobby are not perceived as individuals but as representatives of the Muslim community. Their actions are interpreted through the lens of communal suspicion, making genuine human interaction impossible. The play demonstrates how communalism reduces identity to a single dimension, forcing individuals to carry the burden of historical hatred they did not create.

In *Tara*, identity is biologically and socially manipulated. Tara's gender determines her fate even before she can articulate a sense of self. The medical decision to privilege the male child reveals how patriarchy operates at the most intimate level, denying Tara not only physical wholeness but also emotional and social recognition. Her identity as a girl becomes synonymous with sacrifice and loss.

Similarly, *Dance Like a Man* explores the suppression of artistic identity through gender norms. Jairaj's passion for classical dance conflicts with conventional notions of masculinity. Society dictates what a "real man" should desire, and Jairaj's identity as a dancer is constantly undermined. Dattani shows how even cultural art forms, which are meant to express freedom, can become instruments of repression.

Across all three plays, identity is assigned, controlled, and policed, leaving little space for personal agency.

- **Power within the Family**

Dattani repeatedly presents the family as a microcosm of society, where larger ideological forces operate in subtle and intimate ways. The family, traditionally viewed as a space of protection and nurture, becomes a site of control, manipulation, and ideological enforcement.

In *Final Solutions*, the Gandhi household reflects the contradictions of liberal secularism. Ramnik Gandhi's outward tolerance masks deep-seated guilt and moral compromise rooted in communal history. The family's response to communal tension mirrors societal behavior—professing harmony while quietly sustaining prejudice.

In *Tara*, the family is the primary agent of injustice. The parents' decision regarding the surgery is not merely a personal choice but a reflection of

patriarchal values embedded in society. The father's silence and the mother's complicity demonstrate how power operates through consent and emotional manipulation rather than overt violence. The home becomes the space where discrimination is normalized and justified.

In *Dance Like a Man*, authoritarian parental control dominates the narrative. Amritlal Parekh exercises ideological power over his son by defining masculinity, success, and respectability. His dominance suppresses Jairaj's individuality and damages familial relationships. The family thus enforces social discipline under the guise of moral guidance.

Through these portrayals, Dattani challenges the romanticized notion of the family, revealing it as a powerful institution that perpetuates social hierarchies.

• **Internalization of Oppression**

One of Dattani's most striking insights is that oppression often survives not through force alone but through internalization by its victims. Characters absorb the values that harm them, leading to guilt, silence, and psychological fragmentation.

In *Tara*, Bharati embodies internalized patriarchy. Despite being a woman, she participates in an act that destroys her daughter's future. Her guilt manifests as overprotection and emotional instability, showing how internalized oppression corrodes moral clarity. Tara herself gradually internalizes her perceived inadequacy, accepting loss as destiny.

In *Final Solutions*, Smita struggles between inherited communal loyalty and moral responsibility. Her silence and hesitation reflect how deeply communal ideology is ingrained. She is aware of injustice but lacks the courage to fully resist it, illustrating how internal conflict sustains social prejudice.

In *Dance Like a Man*, Jairaj internalizes failure imposed upon him by patriarchal judgment. Constant humiliation erodes his confidence, leading to artistic stagnation. He begins to doubt his own talent, demonstrating how systemic oppression transforms into self-doubt.

Dattani suggests that the most damaging form of oppression is psychological, as it disables resistance from within.

• **Moral Responsibility of Society**

Rather than portraying clear-cut villains, Dattani emphasizes collective moral failure. His plays suggest that injustice persists not only because of aggressors but also due to the silence and complicity of ordinary people.

In *Final Solutions*, communal violence is sustained by passive acceptance and historical denial. Characters justify prejudice as tradition or self-defense, revealing how moral responsibility is deflected. The play indicts society for choosing comfort over conscience.

In *Tara*, the medical establishment, family members, and social norms collectively enable injustice. No single character is solely responsible, yet everyone is implicated. This diffusion of responsibility highlights society's role in normalizing ethical violations.

In *Dance Like a Man*, societal expectations about gender and success discourage artistic risk and individuality. Even well-meaning characters reinforce norms that limit freedom. Dattani shows that conformity itself is a moral choice—with consequences.

Through these narratives, Dattani urges audiences to examine their own role in sustaining injustice. His theatre becomes a space for ethical introspection rather than moral judgment.

Dramatic Technique and Social Critique

Dattani employs innovative dramatic techniques such as non-linear narration, symbolic staging, masks, and split spaces to externalize psychological conflict. His realistic dialogue makes the plays accessible, while symbolic elements deepen their ethical impact.

The plays avoid moral preaching; instead, they invite audiences to reflect on their own complicity. This participatory ethical engagement is central to Dattani's dramatic vision.

Conclusion

Final Solutions, *Tara*, and *Dance Like a Man* collectively form a compelling critique of Indian society's failure to accommodate difference. Through communal hatred, gender bias, and artistic repression, Dattani reveals how identity is systematically constrained by power structures disguised as tradition, morality, and duty.

By foregrounding marginalized voices, Dattani transforms theatre into a space of resistance and reflection. His plays urge audiences to move beyond inherited prejudices and recognize the human cost of social conformity. Ultimately, Dattani's drama affirms that true freedom lies in acknowledging and respecting individual identity.

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Women’s Education and Mental Health: Search for Purpose in a Fragmented World with Special Reference to Umbartha and Mardaani Movie

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Introduction

It has long been believed that education is a transformative force that can rebuild social structures and change the course of individual lives. The social reformers Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve saw women's education as a transformative tool for equality, social justice, and the advancement of the country. They saw women's education as a contest against caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and social exclusion rather than just a means of increasing literacy. Even with constitutional protections and greater educational opportunities, women's lived experiences continue to highlight a recurring conflict between real liberation and educational progress. Education has certainly made it easier to pursue careers, but it hasn't completely eliminated emotional strains or patriarchal expectations. Umbartha (1982) in Marathi and Mardaani (2014) in Hindi both effectively depict this paradox. The films show well-educated women navigating the profession.

Women’s Education and the Paradox of Empowerment

Women’s education has been widely celebrated as a catalyst for empowerment. Increased literacy, economic independence, and professional representation have reshaped women’s public identities. However, empowerment extends beyond access to employment; it includes autonomy, mental peace, dignity, and emotional well-being.

In Umbartha, Sulabha Mahajan embodies this paradox. As an educated woman who chooses to work as the superintendent of a women’s reform home, she steps beyond the domestic threshold—the symbolic “umbartha.” Her education empowers her to engage in social reform, yet her professional dedication disrupts her marital relationship. She faces emotional isolation, criticism, and subtle resistance from her husband, who struggles to accept her independent identity.

Similarly, in Mardaani, Shivani Shivaji Roy, a highly trained police officer, represents modern professional competence. Her education and training equip her with authority and courage to combat human trafficking. Yet her journey reveals another dimension of empowerment the psychological resilience required to operate in a male dominated and violent environment.

Both films suggest that while education broadens women's opportunities, it simultaneously heightens societal expectations. Women are expected not only to excel in their professional roles but also to maintain domestic harmony and emotional balance within the family. This underlying assumption reinforces the belief that a woman's primary responsibility lies at home, with her career positioned as secondary. Rather than being encouraged to choose freely based on personal aspiration, she is often guided implicitly or explicitly by socially constructed priorities that bind her to caregiving and service.

Mental Health of Working Women: Cinematic and Social Realities

The mental health challenges faced by working women are increasingly recognized in academic and organizational research. Anxiety, burnout, work-life imbalance, and emotional exhaustion have emerged as pressing concerns. These psychological realities find poignant cinematic expression in *Umbartha*.

The song "Sunya Sunya Maifilit Mazya" powerfully captures Sulabha's inner loneliness. Despite being surrounded by people, she experiences an intense emotional longing to be comforted, embraced, and understood by her family and loved ones. However, because she has chosen her professional path independently and remains committed to her responsibilities, she endures isolation as an emotional consequence of that choice.

The scene reflects how marginalization can occur even within intimate relationships. When emotional companionship is denied, loneliness itself becomes a form of psychological disturbance. The film thus portrays how dedication to purpose, in the absence of support and belongingness, can deepen mental strain and intensify feelings of isolation.

Sulabha's psychological struggle is internal and relational. Her commitment to reforming the institution comes at the cost of personal relationships. The tension between professional purpose and marital expectations generates guilt, loneliness, and emotional fragmentation. Her mental health is strained not because of professional incompetence but because society is unprepared to accept her autonomy.

In contrast, *Mardaani* presents mental health within the context of external conflict. Shivani confronts crime, violence, and systemic corruption. The psychological burden here arises from constant exposure to danger and injustice. Yet her character displays remarkable emotional regulation and moral clarity.

Unlike Sulabha, she is not confined by domestic resistance; rather, her struggle is against social evil.

Together, these films highlight two forms of psychological strain:

Internal fragmentation (family versus self)

External fragmentation (justice versus exploitation)

Social, Biological, and Organizational Stressors in Context

Women's mental health challenges arise from a complex interplay of societal expectations, biological realities, and organizational pressures.

In *Umbartha*, social stressors dominate. Sulabha's identity as a wife and mother conflicts with her professional ambition. The expectation that she must prioritize domestic responsibilities reflects deeply embedded gender norms. Her emotional labour remains invisible and undervalued.

In *Mardaani*, organizational stressors are more prominent. Shivani operates within a high-pressure institutional framework. She faces criminal intimidation, bureaucratic obstacles, and systemic resistance. Her role demands constant vigilance and emotional control.

Biological and emotional vulnerabilities are seldom acknowledged in either environment. Whether within the home or workplace, structural systems rarely adapt to women's psychological needs. Instead, women are expected to adapt themselves to rigid frameworks.

Emotional Intelligence: Strength or Silent Burden?

Women are often praised for emotional intelligence the ability to empathize, manage relationships, and maintain harmony. However, emotional intelligence can become a silent burden when combined with excessive responsibility.

Sulabha's emotional sensitivity intensifies her internal conflict. She understands the suffering of institutionalized women, yet she also feels the pain of marital disconnection. Her empathy deepens her psychological struggle.

Shivani, on the other hand, channels her emotional intelligence into strategic action. Her empathy toward trafficked girls fuels her determination rather than destabilizing her. However, the expectation that she must remain composed under extreme stress reflects society's demand for unwavering resilience from women.

Thus, emotional intelligence alone cannot guarantee mental well-being. Without structural support, it may transform into emotional exhaustion.

Liberation through Education: Symbolic or Experiential?

The history of women's education in Maharashtra demonstrates significant institutional progress. Yet the lived experiences depicted in *Umbartha* suggest that liberation often remains symbolic. Sulabha is educated and professionally capable, but her autonomy comes at personal cost.

Mardaani, produced decades later, reflects a relatively evolved societal mindset.

Shivani's authority is more visibly accepted, suggesting incremental progress in gender perceptions. However, the psychological risks associated with her profession highlight that structural challenges persist.

Education, therefore, must be evaluated not merely as access to opportunity but as the ability to live without constant emotional negotiation. True liberation involves integration—where professional identity, personal relationships, and mental well-being coexist harmoniously.

Workplace and Home: Between Empowerment and Emotional Hardship

Both films question whether professional spaces truly function as empowering environments.

In *Umbartha*, the home becomes a site of emotional hardship, while the workplace provides purpose. In *Mardaani*, the workplace is both a battlefield and a platform for justice. The contrast underscores that fragmentation does not lie solely in institutions but in societal attitudes.

At a deeper level, both protagonists reflect a shared longing to act with purpose without being psychologically burdened. The search for meaning becomes central to their identity. Education gives them direction, but sustaining that direction demands emotional courage.

Conclusion

Toward Integrated Empowerment in a Fragmented World

Women's education remains one of the most powerful tools for social transformation. Yet, as illustrated in *Umbartha* and *Mardaani*, empowerment is incomplete without psychological well-being and supportive social structures.

Sulabha represents the painful crossing of traditional thresholds, highlighting internal fragmentation. *Shivani* represents assertive modern womanhood confronting external fragmentation. Together, they symbolize the evolving journey of educated women in India.

In a fragmented world, the search for purpose is not merely professional it is existential. True empowerment requires not only educational access but emotional safety, structural equity, and societal acceptance. When women are enabled to integrate ambition with mental peace, education fulfills its transformative promise.

Both films reveal a deeply human dimension of womanhood—the desire, at least for once, to simply be ordinary. Beyond strength, responsibility, and resilience, she longs not to constantly care for others but to be cared for herself. This portrayal underscores an urgent societal need to recognize her emotional needs and to respond with genuine affection, understanding, and support.

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