

**Angst and Hope**  
**In Contemporary Indian English Drama**



# ANGST AND HOPE

## In Contemporary Indian English Drama

A.J. Sebastian SDB



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## ANGST AND HOPE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

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*ST. JOHN PAUL II*  
*the saint of peace & brotherhood*



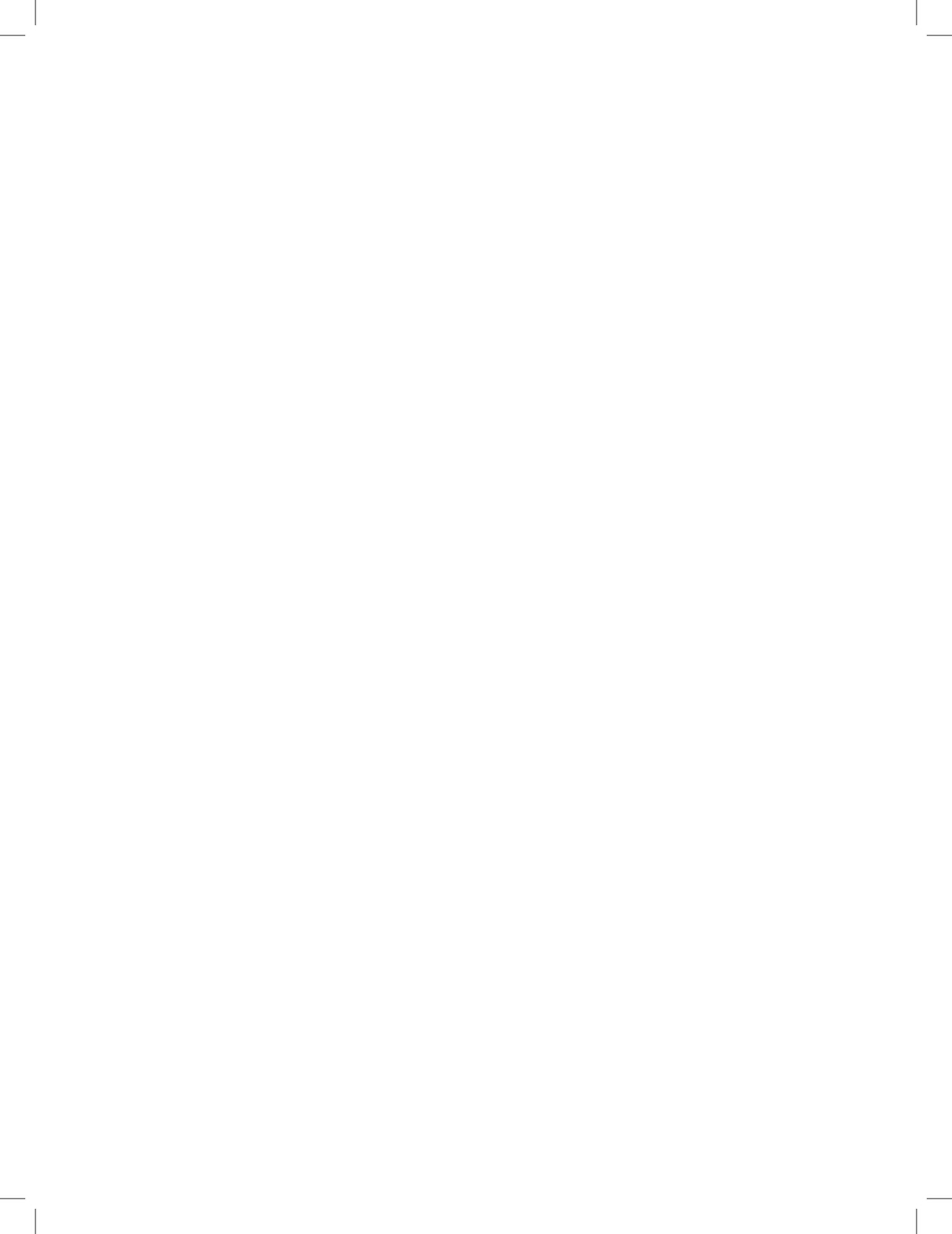


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Kohima  
1 January 2014

A.J. Sebastian SDB



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## Introduction

### I

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*Angst* or *anguish* is a Germanic word for fear or anxiety. Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* could be rendered as *Anxiety*, *uneasiness* or *malaise* suggesting our daily anxieties. For Kierkegaard *Angst* meant *dread* while for Sartre *anguish*. However, the word *Angst* does not have the same meaning for every existentialist writer (Macquarrie 164-5). Kierkegaard's *Angst* (*dread*) describes an innate spiritual state of insecurity and despair centering on his conception of original sin. According to him, "anxiety is a qualification of dreaming spirit, and as such it has its place in psychology... In anxiety it (innocence) is related to the forbidden and to the punishment. Innocence is not guilty, yet there is anxiety as though it were lost..." (Kierkegaard 41- 5).

The concept of *anxiety* further draws our attention to the origin and meaning of evil and temptation to sin. Virgilius Haufniensis's interpretation throws further light on it. In his view the origin of sinfulness is sheer possibility as it is neither 'absolute necessity' or 'arbitrary wilfulness.' 'Anxiety or apprehensiveness is an innocent sense of oneself as possibility rather than actuality.' (Chamberlain 178).

The concept of *dread* is further analysed by Friedman in his interpretation of Kierkegaard: as he rightly remarks, "Dread is the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs." (Friedman 369).

Hope, on the other hand, is at the very core of every religion with its transforming role: Christians hope in the second coming of Christ; Vaishnava Hindus await in hope of another avatar of Vishnu; Jews hope in the messiah; Islam speaks of a hidden imam (leader or exemplar); Buddhists refer to *Maitreya* as the Buddha to come.

Religious hope leads to liberation or salvation. This is expressed in different ways in various religions such as— belief in communion with God, resurrection of the dead, transmigration, reintegration, reincarnation, renunciation etc. Hope is an assurance of ultimate satisfaction. In recent times some have spoken in terms of revolution and reconstruction. In Christian thought *hope* is a theological virtue along with *faith* and *love* (Slater 459-61).

Hope becomes meaningful in the context of anxiety, dread or despair. The concept has puzzled philosophers as it may be differentiated as intentional or dispositional. Thomas Hobbes viewed it as an ‘appetite with an opinion of attaining’ while Rene Descartes interpreted it in terms of ‘confidence’ or ‘assurance.’ For Immanuel Kant the ultimate hope of man is to attain ‘*summum bonum*’ (highest good), however in his moral philosophy, hope and love presuppose faith. Ernst Bloch subscribed to an anthropological view of hope of an ideal human kingdom. According to Gabriel Marcel hope enables one to overcome the various trials of life (Stratton-Lake 507-8).

Some of the essays in this collection may be analysed in the background of the Christian understanding of *hope*. It is important to keep in mind that “the motive or formal object of hope is the real and objective foundation of one’s hope... that one will be able to attain what is hoped for... The chief motive and foundation of Christian hope is God, God alone... which is repeated throughout the Old and New Testaments.” (Ramirez 136). The concept of Christian hope is best developed in Pauline letters. It is through hope one is saved: “For in this hope we were saved... But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:24-25). And it is endurance that brings fulfilment in hope. The object of hope is most frequently eschatological with hope of glory in the eternal life (McKenzie 368-9).

Angst and hope are part and parcel of human existence. If life is to be lived purposefully, it calls for an integration of these two aspects in life. The sensibilities of the fictionists presented in these essays give the readers a peep into human predicament. Some have been very articulate in expressing their anguish, others more metaphorical; yet all of them have given realistic expression to their thoughts and feelings. Freud is said to have belittled creative writer comparing him/her to a child at play who creates a world of fantasy (Freud 1972:36). However, one cannot deny to art its “therapeutic effect in releasing mental tension; it serves the cultural purpose of acting as a ‘substitute gratification’ to reconcile men to the sacrifices they have made for culture’s sake; it promotes the social sharing of highly valued emotional experiences; and it recalls men to their cultural ideals” (Trilling 283).

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## II

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The essays on Contemporary Indian English and Regional Drama translated and published by Sahitya Akademi, trace angst and hope that the various characters experience in their interpersonal relationships. These dramatists explore with great zest the postcolonial and postmodern with other emerging trends, mingling myth and absurdities of life and existence. The essays in this volume dwell on angst and hope in the midst of multiple interactions. Some of the papers that have appeared earlier in journals and anthologies, have been updated and enlarged.

**Vijay Tendulkar's** *Gidhade (The Vultures)* portrays familial degradation and man's savage nature when avarice can lead to tearing one another, breaking even blood ties. Tendulkar has recourse to realism in the play as he delves into observing facts of life, attempting to describe human behaviour and surroundings as they are. Tendulkar has successfully exposed a menace plaguing contemporary middle class society, bringing about familial degeneration. Known to be a social activist, he explores angst of victim of sexual exploitation in *Kamala*.

**Mahesh Dattani** made his entry into Indian theatre with his first full length play *Where There's a Will* in 1986, drawing attention on intricacies of exorcising patriarchy that continues to wreck bliss in family life. He has deftly drawn attention to issues seldom discussed, with humour and irony, calling for social introspection. Kiran's assessment of extreme patriarchal control in Hasmukh as a substitute for his inadequacy as a man, finally resolves the conflict among the characters and brings them together to derive benefit from the Hasmukh will. Dattani's social concern has impelled him to probe deeply into the taboo issue of child sexual abuse in *Thirty Days in September*, which is a saga of incest, betrayal and demonic subjugation in the name of blood relationship. The dramatist attempts to liberate the women from perpetration of sexual exploitation through sincere men like Deepak who dares to expose sexual oppression and offering emotional support in trauma.

In *Pidhijat (Dynasts)*, **Satish Alekar** depicts a superb satire on rampant corruption perpetrated by political parties in the country. The play is a mingling of realism with absurd mode of expression. Though the play is absurd, it has its message on the way of the world of corruption perpetrated by power wielding politicians who establish their dynastic power through Machiavellian politics. The grandfather is helpless in establishing right living in his household, as corruption looms large. The dark comedy is a superb satire on contemporary political corruption in India. Alekar's *Mickey and Memsahib* throws light on the irony of life that a hen-pecked professor who lives under his young and beautiful wife, depicting sexual oppression.

As a dramatist, **Mahesh Elkunchwar** has been successful in portraying human predicament in the face of death, loneliness and illusions of all kinds, leading to apparent purposelessness of life. In *Garbo*, he has probed into the meaningless lives young people live in our contemporary society, devoid of social and ethical values, bringing with it angst and despair.

Mahesh Elkunchwar presents a wide range of dramatic situations, theatrical devices, and speech rhythms in his plays which portray preoccupation with death, loneliness, creativity, the illusion of wealth, and the apparent purposelessness of choice or action while the ultimate goal of life remained unknown. Elkunchwar has very successfully probed into the absurdities of human predicament and the angst people suffer, which is portrayed through the protagonist's loss of identity, in *Reflection*. The play is a superb study in subconscious and the hidden regions of human mind.

In *Wedding Album* **Girish Karnad** has been very innovative in depicting absurd situations and strange sequences in a passing manner, raising too many passing questions and issues that plague contemporary Indian society. The story is replete with abrupt situations and episodes like in an absurd drama. Though hilarious, the story exposes suppressed frustrations and sexual games people play under the cover of maintaining traditional values.

Kannada playwright, **Sriranga**, being a bitter critic of the hypocrisies of his society, has been realistically portraying social maladies through his plays. *Agnisakshi* is a powerful examination of a social concern that plagues the Indian society with the ever increasing cases of bride burning. The dramatist has very powerfully examined the social malady, calling attention to empowerment of women

Malayalam playwright **C.G. Pai** in his "Playing at Trains" delves into a young man's struggle to establish his identity due to his confrontation with his Gandhian father. The story line is replete with superimposing of the past and the present employing stream of consciousness to bring out powerfully the mental tension in the protagonist as he grapples with his adjustment problems at home and at his work place in the Middle-east.

**Kikkeri Narayana's** "Wild Fowl and a Pair of Peacocks" draws attention to the deterioration of human values and the loss of the sense of the sacred in man's reckless pursuit of wealth in a consumer society, spiralling unethical exploitation of nature. In the midst of present environmental crisis, the eco-philosophy propounded by the dramatist is a clarion call to respect all things animate and inanimate. Such inspiring literary creations certainly help us to introspect on our bounden duty to safeguard creation as responsible stewards.

Himachali playwright, **Himesh Rattan's** "Faisla Kal Hoga" probes into the true weapons of destruction in a society that follows traditions of faiths devoid of the true spirit of humanity. The play exposes in a satirical manner how social maladies continue to germinate and grow due to certain traditional beliefs and practices to which people cling blindly. The playwright also pinpoints the growing walls of hatred built between people on the basis of religions, which in the final analysis is the real weapon of destruction in society.

In "Fate," eminent Punjabi playwright **Sant Singh Sekhom** has attempted to portray how love and jealousy lead to fatal consequences, if not dealt with prudence. The revenge tragedy revolves around love intrigues built on mutual jealousies. The play also proves that passion when roused through evil machinations of a lover can make one forget everything, including familial ties.

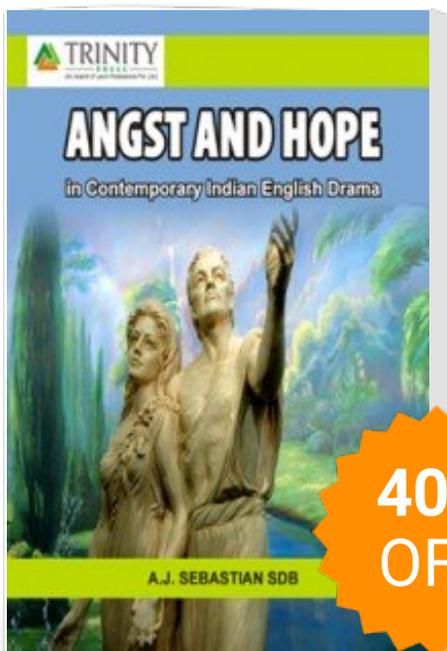
In *Janardan-Joseph*, Gujarati playwright, **Hasmukh Baradi**, presents an absurd drama steeped in magic realism. It is the story of a scientist who is manipulated by his non-scientific managers. He is fated to suffer in their hands even after death when they call him to become a statue, erected in his memory. The story is a satire on human suffering.

Oriya writer, **Hrusikesh Panda**, in his *God-Demon*, has very aptly mingled human and non-human elements to bring out powerfully the idea of moral integrity in governance and protection of all forms of life on earth. Though the play is written in the absurd tradition, it is an indictment of social evils perpetrated by politicians and intellectuals.

Rajasthani playwright and poet **Arjun Deo Charan** in his play, "Jatra" makes a reflection on the various dimensions of humanism with personification of values, prompting man to keep alive the flames of humanism for survival. The play ending with the scene of shadow pleading for the survival of humanism brings to focus the central theme of "Yatra" as one of honest search for truth and justice. It could be analysed from the tradition of the morality plays, where the playwright attempts to churn out instructions for better moral living. "Yatra" remains an allegorical portrayal of humanism with its various forms being thwarted by the inhumanity of mankind.

**Meera Kant**, Hindi fiction writer and playwright has very poignantly examined the age old male domination over women, through Khana's story in "Nepathya Raag in the Wings." The playwright has very powerfully depicted the characters in search of defining their identity in a world ruled by men. Juxtaposing the past and the present through the story of Khana and Medha, Meera Kant articulates her angst in establishing true empowerment of women in a male dominated society.

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