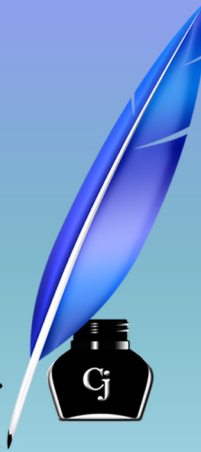


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Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Indian Drama in English

Amrita Sengar
Dhar (M.P.),
India

Abstract-

Drama is a mimetic representation of life combining in itself the real and the fictional, art and reality, presenting the events and characters within a dimension of space and time. It combines the qualities of narrative poetry with of visual arts. It is a narrative made visible. In this research paper, researcher probes into the glorious and pristine tradition of drama in India. The continued lack of the living theatre and a live audience has been the chief cause of the plight of Indian drama in English. Contemporary Indian Drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuositities.

Keywords -

Pristine, plight, contemporary, innovations, thematic concerns, virtuositities.

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright is concretized when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage. It involves the playwright, the actor, the audience, plot construction, characterization, dialogues, music, dance, posture, stage setting etc.

The genesis of Indian drama is traced to Sanskrit literature. Bharatmuni's 'Natvasastra', Ramchandra Gunchandra's 'Abhinaya Darpanat' and Abinav Gupta's 'Abhinaya Bharti' are the ancient treatises which describe the essentials of stage craft like plot construction, characterization, dialogues, music, dance, postures, stage-setting.

The golden age of Sanskrit drama could give equal impetus to social comedies like the Mricchakatika and melodramas like the Malathimadhava, romantic tragi-comedies like Shakuntala and the heroic plays like Venisamhara, historical plays like Mudrarakshasa and romantic comedies like Ratnavali, allegorical plays like Prabodhachandrodaya and satirical farces like Mattavilasaprahasana.

Bhasa is the oldest known dramatist. His masterpieces - Urubhanga and Dutavakya and Karna — are known for their tragic intensity and dramatic style. The supreme achievement of Indian drama is undoubtedly Kalidasa, who is often called Shakespeare of India. He has given the world profound spiritual vision of life. His magnum opus, Abhiianana Shakuntala, is said to be the richest and most completely satisfying romantic drama.

After the Sanskrit drama ceased to be acted and was read only as literature, the theatre of the people flourished for many centuries and catered to the Indian masses. The old splendour and fullness of drama was gone, but people still needed relaxation and entertainment. Thus arose folkforms like Jatra and Navtanki in Bengal, Bhand Jashn in Kashmir, Rasadhari plays in Mathura, Ramlila in Northern India, Bhavai in Gujarat; Lalita, Khele, Dashavtar and Tamasha in Maharashtra; Yakshagana, Bayalata, Attadata, Dooddata and Sonnata in Karnataka; Veedhi-natakam in Andhra Pradesh; and the Kutiyattam, Mohiniattam and Kathakali dance dramas in Kerala.

These variegated forms of entertainment had but little merit as literature, but they conveyed to the people the essentials of Indian culture.

It was only after the British set up their regime in India that the crippled Indian drama received new strength and witnessed a revival. Indian-English Drama made a humble beginning with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerji's 'The Persecuted' in 1831. However, the real journey of Indian English Drama began with Michael Madhusudhan Dutt's 'Is This Called Civilization' which appeared on the literary horizon in 1871, though it was not followed by a sustainable creative effort for decades together. Among the various forms of Indian writing in English, drama seems to lag far-behind poetry and fiction. After a long hiatus of few decades it was only by the early 20th century that Indian English Drama gathered momentum under the influence of British Drama. There are plausible reasons for the arrested growth of Indian English drama.

The continued lack of the living theatre and a live audience has been the chief cause of this plight of Indian drama in English. Language is another hurdle that hampers the development of Indian drama in English.

The pre-independence era saw some stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore, Sir Aurobindo. T.P. Kailasam, A.S.P. Ayyar, Loba-Prabhu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharathi Sarabhai who contributed substantially to the growth and development of Indian English drama.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) has been called the father of modern Indian stagecraft. His dramatic achievements include Sanyasi or the Ascetic (1884), The King and the Queen (1889), Chitra (1892), Malini (1895), Sacrifice (1895), Gandhari's Prayer and Karna and Kunti (1897), The King of the Dark Chamber (1910), The Post Office (1912), The Cycle of Spring (1916), Mukta Dhara (1922), Red Oleanders (1924), Natir Pula (1926) and Chandalika (1933). In these plays Tagore has dealt with philosophical, religious, political, social issues; and in some of them presented Indian myths and legends.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is an uncontestably outstanding figure in Indo-Anglain literature. To his credit he has eleven verse dramas, five of them — Perseus the Deliverer (1955), Vasavadutta (1957), Rodogune (1958), The Viziers of Bassora (1959) and Eric (1960) — are complete five act plays. The Witch of Ilni, Achab and Esarhaddon, The Maid in the Mill, The House of Brut, The Birth of Sin and Prince of Edur are incomplete.

Most of Sri Aurobindo's plays are mythological or legendary. As regards the theme and its setting, Perseus the Deliverer has a theme drawn from Greek mythology, The Viziers of Bassora from the stories of the Arabian Nights. Only Vasavadutta has a genuinely Indian theme and setting.

According to Sri Aurobindo the superiority of Indian Drama lies in its civilized approach to the main issues of life and in its equally civilized way of presenting characters. This is the view of one who has mastered the Western as well as Indian drama.

Tyagraja Parmasiva Kailasam (1885-1946), popularly known as T.P. Kailsam was both a great playwright and a talented actor. T.P. Kailasam has very intelligently taken up his themes and characters from the Ramavana and the Mahabharatha, two great epics of ancient India.

Kailasam's English plays include *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *The Curse or Karna* (1946), *Kechaka* (1949). Although all his themes and characters are mythological yet their treatment and delineation are strictly according to his vision, mission and imagination.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya added a new dimension to Indian English drama with its leftist leanings and revolutionary zeal. He has written plays on social and hagiological themes. His social plays — *The Window The Parrot*, *The Coffin*, *Evening Lamps* and *The Sentry's Lantern* abound in seeds of social protest and thought of revolution. His devotional plays *Raidas*, *Chokha Mela*, *Pundalik*, *Saku Bai*, *Javadeva* and *Tuka Ram* deal with the lives of saints in his own characteristic way.

Bharati Sarabhai is the first, most distinguished woman dramatist, who gave a Gandhian touch to Indian English drama. Her first play, *The Well of the People* (1949) upholds Gandhi's well-known doctrine 'Daridra Naravana' (worship of the poor as God). The plot of the play is based on a real story published in *Hari* "an.

Sarabhai's *Two Women* is in prose. It highlights the conflict and tension caused by East-West encounter, by the conflict between tradition and modernity.

A.S. Panchapakesa Ayyar is another playwright of distinction whose contribution to Indian drama cannot be ignored. The very titles of Ayyar's plays — *In the Clutch of the Devil*, *Sita's Choice*, *The Slave of Ideas* *A Mother's Sacrifice* and *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity*, shows that they are written with reformist zeal.

J.N. Lobo-Prabhu is a prolific playwright. He has written over a dozen plays. *Mother of New India* (1944), a play in three acts and *Death Abdicates* (1945) appeared before Independence and *Collected Plays* (1955) contains six plays — *Apes in the Parlour*, *The Family Cage*, *Flags of the Heart*, *Winding Ways*, *Loves Becomes light* and *Dog's Ghost*, *Apes in the Parlour* is a trenchant critique of sophisticated life.

Very few Indian dramatists so far had shown great interest in producing drama for the stage. One singular exception to this phenomenon was Asif Currimbhoy who is rightly hailed as "India's first authentic voice in the theatre." His plays are essentially pieces of theatre.

In his plays, one can discern a definite philosophical basis that can be recognized in the very titles of his plays — *The Hungry Ones*, *The Captives*, *The Doldrummers*, *An Experiment with Truth*, *Goa This Alien ... Native Land*, and *Om Mane Padma Hun!*

Quite a few contemporary playwrights have made a significant contribution to the development of Indian English drama. The foremost among them is Nissim Ezekiel, who enriched Indian English drama in his own characteristic way. His *Three Plays* (1969) consists of *Nalini A Marriage Poem* and *The Sleep-Walkers*, and another play, *Song of Deprivation*. The expose the hollowness of the urban middle-class life, fickleness of modern lovers, greedy fascination for American life and the hypocrisy and inhibitive nature of contemporary Indian society.

Besides the plays confessing on the social structure, prevalent system and the emergent problems, some historical plays were also written by playwrights like Lakhan Deb and Gurucharan Das. Lakhan Deb's *Tiger's Claw* (1967) and *Murder At The Prayer Meeting* (1976) are remarkable contribution to historical play. Deb deftly uses blank verse in these plays. 'Tiger's Claw' is a verse play in three acts, which dramatises vividly the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji.

Deb's 'Murder At The Prayer Meeting' deals with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi and is full of the echoes of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1970) is a historical play in which the playwright succeeds admirably in evoking the nineteenth century colonial Indian background.

Gieve Patel is another contemporary dramatist who has distinguished himself. His *Princes* (1970) is the first Parsi play, set in the semi-urban Parsi sub-culture of the Sanjan-Nargol area of the South Gujarat, focusing on two Parsi families and their savage conflict for the possession of a sole male child.

Pratap Sharma has carved out a niche for himself among contemporary playwrights by handling the theme of sex in his two plays *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970) and *A Touch of Brightness* (1973).

Contemporary Indian drama in English translation has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuositities. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with splendid results. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad have remained the most representative of contemporary Indian dramatists not only in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada respectively but also at the pan-Indian level.

Greatly influenced by Marxism, Mohan Rakesh waged a relentless fights against the traditional stranglehold of Hindi drama, and always endeavoured to project something new and challenging. His plays dramatize the sufferings of men and women who fall victims to socio-economic hierarchy and cultural hegemony. Particularly in plays like *One day in Ashadha* and *The Great Swans of Waves*.

While Rakesh uses historical characters to project the breakdown of communication in contemporary life, Badal Sircar, a great Bengali playwright, uses contemporary situations to project the existential attitude of modern life.

Evam Indraiit (1965), is a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama. *Evam Indraiit* is about the residue that consists of those who have failed to adjust, align and ceased to aspire and also those who are enmeshed in the day-to-day struggle for survival.

Vijay Tendulkar is a significant name among the contemporary Marathi playwrights. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. The plays 'Shantana Court Chalho Aahe' (Silence ! The Court is in Session), 'Giddh' (Vultures), 'Sakharam Binder' and 'Ghasiram Kotwal', which made Tendulkar a popular playwright, are experiments of an intesnse and deeper impulse and not just a matter of superficial innovation.

Ghasiram Kotwal is based on a historical incident taken from the life of Balaji Janardan Banu Peshwas Phadnavis of Pune. The abiding popularity of Ghasiram Kotwal is for two reasons. First it deals with politics as a game of power. Secondly it deals with the evils related to power politics, the play has attracted a large number of spectators the world over. Unlike Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar who delve into the problems of middle-class society, Girish Kamad, the well-known Kannada playwright, goes back to myths and legends with a view to making them a vehicle of a new vision. In his plays, Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Tale Danda, Fire and the Rain and Naga Mandala, he tries to evolve a symbolic form out of a tension between the archetypal and mythic experience and to a living response to life and its values in his attempt to give new meaning to the past from the vantage point of the present.

Very recently Indian English drama has shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing. He has published forceful plays like Where There is a Will, Final Solutions and Tara. He writes about mean, ugly, unhappy things of life. Padmanabhan projects a dehumanized, terrifying world in which mothers sell their sons for the price of rice.

Drama in various languages has shown a marked development — it has not done so in Indian English. A study of Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad clearly shows that they are the symbols of the new resurgence in their own areas and have made bold innovations, fruitful experiments and given new directions, which go in the history of Indian drama as significant marks of achievement.

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