

## Drama: A Branch of Indian English Literature

**Dr. Piyushbala**

Assistant Professor

Dept. Of English,

Ranchi College,

Ranchi, India

### Abstract

Drama is a composite art where the written words of the playwright become the spoken words of actors on stage. Indian English drama came up as a lone plant in the field of literature. It had to go through many difficulties. Lack of stage, spectators, medium etc. but with the passage of time Indian English Drama started growing and found recognition. Many writers brought it on English literacy map of the world. For long Indian drama English had remained as the last choice of the research for academic scholars. But in recent years it has tried to draw attention of academic scholars. It is seen that after seventies that many research activities have been taken in Indian English Drama field. We can see how the Indian English drama, the last choice of readers became the attention among readers and gathered audience. The writers from different parts came out to contribute and made it flourish on world literary map. Indian English drama literary world has brilliant playwrights like Manjula Padmansghan and Mahesh Dattani.

**Keywords:** Indian, Theatre, Civilization, Movements, Aesthetic

### Introduction

Indian drama can be traced from Vedic period. It has a history of more than two thousand years. The grandeur and magnificence of Indian Drama started vanishing with several incursions and invasions. It came only to survive with the British Empire; Indian English drama started making its progress in the same time. It made its progress with the beginning of Krishna Mohan Banerji's *The Persecuted* in 1831 followed by Michal Madushudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilization*, which came on literary horizon in 1871. Drama is a composite art where the written words of the playwright become the spoken words of actors on stage. Indian English drama came up as a lone plant in the field of literature. It had to go through many difficulties. Lack of stage, spectators, medium etc. but with the passage of time Indian English Drama started growing and found recognition. Many writers brought it on English literacy map of the world. We can see how the Indian English drama, the last choice of readers became the attention among readers and gathered audience. The writers from different parts came out to contribute and made it flourish on world literary map.

# The Creative Launcher

An International Peer Reviewed & Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue V

. In 1920, a new drama in almost all the Indian languages came to force. It was influenced by movements like; Marxism, Psychoanalysis, symbolism and surrealism. The same was with Indian English drama. Literary giants like Ravindranath Tagore, Shri Aurobindo, T. P. Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharti Sarabhi tried to overcome these difficulties and opened up new vistas in the genre. As Iyenger writes, "Indo- Anglian Literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian Literature. It is a part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history, ever increasingly up to the present time of Tagore, Iqbal, and Aurobindo Ghose, and bids fair to expand with our humanity's expanding future."\*<sup>1</sup> Though some of the play writes like Asif Currimboy, Pratap Sharma and Gurucharan Das were successfully staged in Europe and United States of America, but did not try to establish regular school of English drama in India. One reason was the capture of regional languages in stage performance. As m. K. Naik says; "because the encouragement which drama received from several quarters immediately after independence was monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages, while Indian English Drama continued to feed on crumbs fallen from its rich cousins' tables."\*<sup>2</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore has been called the father of Indian stagecraft. Ravindranath Tagore tried to explore the Indian issues like philosophical, religious, political, social and also tried to exploit Indian myths and legends. He was against the practice of sacrifice of living animals in the names of god. His famous drama 'Visarjan or Sacrifice' is based on this practice. He comes of the view that it is a practice of ignorance of priest and the followers. The drama is of Tripura based temple of Kali where the sacrifice of a goat is to be made belonging to a poor teenage girl. She considered and loved the goat as her daughter. She literally cries out to nothing, seeing the condition of the girl the king declares an order that thenceforth no such practices of sacrifice will continue. The wife of the king admires the order saying, "Govinda Creatures blood is not the offering of Gods. And it is within the rights of the kings of the king and the peasant alike to maintain truth and righteousness."\*<sup>3</sup>

Some good plays are Malini, Asetic, Chitra. The play, 'Red Oleanders' is a criticism on the modern world. He is against the materialistic and mechanised practice which the Indians adopted by the Britishers. This kind of practice leads dehumanizing effects on the society. The play is set in a town name Yaksha named after the Hindu god of wealth called Kubera. The people out in the town dig out for gold day and night but they get nothing in return instead they lost connection of humanity and brotherhood. They even forgot the beauty of nature. Nature is an ultimate connection with God. As Nandini the woman character of the play speaks, "The living heart of the earth gives itself up in love and life and beauty, but when you rend its bosom and disturb the dead, you bring up with your booty the curse of its dark demon, blind and hard and cruel and envious."\*<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo is an eminent name in Indo Anglican Drama. He has several dramas written. Most of his plays are mythological or legendary. In his play 'Perseus the deliverer' is the only play that was published in Sri Aurobindo lifetime, in 1907, it has theme drawn from Greek mythology, based on Hellenic Perseus- Andromeda myth. The myths and the supernatural elements in the play are filled with rich imagination and humanism. He turned the old myths with modern elements and

# The Creative Launcher

An International Peer Reviewed & Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue V

values. The play is enacted upon the quarrel between Pallas Athene symbol of power and grace and the king of darkness of the sea represented by monsters and the priest. Andromeda is an epitome of compassion and womanhood; she is a feminine spirit with sympathy for humanism. As Iyenger writes; 'In Perseus the Deliverer the kernel of the action lies not in Andromeda's passive sufferance as in the earlier renderings of the myth, but in her active defiance of the powers of evil. And, in a way, she was the beginning of the road that was to take Sri Aurobindo ultimately to Savitri,'\*<sup>5</sup> He laid his approach in his drama, as he said that the superiority of Indo-Anglican drama lies in its civilised approach to main issues of life and also the way characters are presented. He laid emphasis on equality.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya gave a new element to Indian English drama. He came with the influence of leftist approach and revolutionary zeal. He has written plays on sociological and hagiological themes such as: *The Window*, *The Parrot*, *The Coffin* etc. Some of his plays revolve round social protest with revolution. His contribution lays in his religious plays such as; *Raidas*, *Pandalik*, *Saku Bai* etc.

A.S. Panchapakesa Ayyar is another important dramatist to contribution to Indian English Drama. He acted like a reformist in his plays. Plays like: *In The Clutch of Devils*\*, *Sita's Choice*, *A Mother's Sacrifice* etc.

J.N. Lobo Prabhu is a prolific playwright of distinction whose contribution to Indian English Drama cannot be ignored. The prominent name exist of woman dramatist is Bharati Sarabhai. She believed in Gandhian Philosophy. The same reflection could be seen in her drama. Her first play is, *The Well of People*. It is completely based on Gandhian doctrine; worship the poor as God. Next work *Two Women*, of her is about east and west conflict that is of tradition and modernity.

Indian English Drama never gained a proper place in English Literary field of Drama. The one reason was that they never produced plays for the stage as the British writers. They wrote plays for the readers. But one name can never be left out of credit. Asif Currimboy, hailed as "India's first authentic voice in Theatre". His plays are meant for theatre. His plays have well defined philosophical basis. As seen; *The Hungry Ones*, *The Captives*, *The Doldrums*, *This Alien.... Native Land* etc.

But the things started changing with the establishment of National School of Drama with Sangeet Natak Academy in 1959. Various styles, techniques from Sanskrit and western literature were adopted and brought to practices in Indian English Drama. 1972 is regarded as a landmark in Indian drama with writes like; Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sarcar. Their writings were innovative with new styles and techniques which could be used for theatres. They came out of the shell of regionalism. They infact contributed on national level. They dramatize universal aspects of human life. They used myths legends, folklore history in a distinguished way. With the independence these writers of drama gave a new shape to national dramatic tradition. This dramatist started to question the socio-political complexities of the nascent Indian nation. These dramatists initially contributed in their regional language and later on contributed to English literature of drama.

They made contribution in different ways. Mohan Rakesh wrote about history to high light the problems of real life. Badal Sarkar has brought new literature like BERNARD Shaw. He writes about new society by giving a real way of life, where a man can live without exploiting the other. And

# The Creative Launcher

An International Peer Reviewed & Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue V

the being can resist exploitation. He is well known for his anti-establishment plays during naxalite movement in 1970s. He founded his own company called Shatabdi, to drama in public arena. He is also well known as the maker of Indian theatre named as 'third theatre'. He is seen with his existential attitude of modern man. His popular plays are: *Ebang Indrajit*, *Basi Khbar*, *Pagla Ghoda* etc.

Vijay Tendulkar resides from Marathi literature. He is seen talking about the hostile nature of surroundings. Man is seen in isolation. It is very real about modern society. His plays; *The Court Is in Session*, *Sakharam*, *Ghasiram* is about the middle class people fight against the system, circumstances and situation. His plays are based on love, sex, marriage and moral values prevailing in the society. To make plays stand he used irony, satire, pathos and mock elements. He avoided the act plays. Rather he came to set a new tradition and filled the gap of modern and traditional theatre. His some of the plays have feminist angle. In such plays he tries to reveal the condition of Indian women, their helplessness towards the male dominated society. The society, where males act like hypocrites, again we find the society which is completely taken over by male chauvinism and selfishness. These facts are very intelligently covered in his plays like; "The Court is in Session" and 'Kamala'. How the private life of a female is made public and scrutinized. The female character in the play "The Court is in Session" is shown with courage to condemn the blame imposed on her by the males. The writer tries to expose and criticise the false patriarchal society in which we live and woman like Benare, the character in the play finds difficult to stand and struggles to fight with it. Benare had bitter experiences about her body which she realised had brought her pain and torture. Her agony is revealed in the words,

'This body is a traitor! Desire this, Body and I love it! I hate it but- it was your body that once burnt and gave you a moment so beautiful, so blissful....'\*<sup>6</sup>Tendulkar tries to bring out all the ill practices against women in the society. He wanted to bring change in the mind set of the people related to women like Bernard Shaw. In the play 'Kamala' ill treatment of women is reflected. Kamala, a prostitute is purchased by selfish journalist; Jaisingh Jadhav treats her like a commodity. It is the cruel practice of the women.

Thus the dehumanization and exploitation of women are features of Indian society for centuries.

Vijay Tendulkar has received many awards like Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya award. Sangeet Natak akedemi Award. And Kalidas Samman award.

The new phases of Indian theatrical development happily coincide with the personal development of Grish Kannad as a dramatist. He is also a well-known T.V. artist, a film producer, and an actor. His contribution beyond theatre he has directed films, documentaries and television serials. He represented India and Indian on world literary as an emissary of art and culture. He has experimented with fusion of the traditional and modern dramatic forms and content. The purpose of using traditional forms is to achieve a rare insight into the contemporary reality because Kannad believes that complexities of post colonialism are inherited from that the colonial and pre- colonial times. The pre- colonial and past colonial experiments cannot be compartmentalised in literature in true sense.

Girish Kannad is a well-know versatile personality and one of the foremost prolific writers in Indian Literature. He is the most distinguished persona among the living Indian dramatists. Out of

# The Creative Launcher

An International Peer Reviewed & Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue V

many, some of his most famous plays are *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadan*, *Naga- Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* and so on. "His dramatic genius has employed the remote and forgotten particles (episodes) of Indian history, myths and folk-tales.... But unlike his predecessors, Karnad's plays are not mere costume plays or masks, but they are invested with contemporary relevance".\*<sup>7</sup> Girish Karnad through his play has tried to bring the contemporary reality of the independent India relating with legendary history. The stories of his plays are from history or based on myths but are equally important for the modern society. His plays have folk, classical as well as modern touch with it we can find symbolism, irony and humour throughout the play. *Tughlaq* is the play which brought name and fame to Karnad. It was written in 1964, in Kannada language and has been translated by Karnad in 1970. Alyque Padamsee requested Karnad to translate into English and it was staged by Theatre Group, Bombay and had seen great success. National School of Drama (NSD) got it translated into Hindi and later it was produced in Bengali and Marathi. Vijay Tendulkar has translated *Tughlaq* into Marathi. *Tughlaq* is based on the historical character of Muhammad -Bin-Tughlaq who ruled India in the 14th century and he was called mad Tughlaq. Muhammad bin Tughlaq was the Turkic sultan of Delhi from 1325 to 1351. He was born in Kotla Tolay Khan in Multan, Pakistan and was the eldest son of Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq. The drama *Tughlaq* is completely based on social, psychological, political and religious motif of the emperor the Sultan – Muhammad Tughlaq. It is the best play in the New Drama in India with a long lasting gift to modern Indian English drama. Muhammad Tughlaq, is the central figure of the play who wants organisational transformation based on Hindu – Muslim harmony, peace and equality etc. It is he who cherishes impossible dreams to be fulfilled. The play, 'Tughlaq' shows how man of idealist approach deviates and brings religion into politics to fulfil his ambition and dream. This play presents the story of a monarch who came to throne by murdering his father and brother and ruled over India for about twenty years. In the play he is depicted as a wise and foolish, kind and cruel, impulsive and farsighted emperor. His two major decisions- shifting of his capital from Delhi to Daultabad and change of currency- boomerang and leave him and his subjects dispossessed. In order to prove himself a just and kind emperor sometimes he behaves in an unjust way. His play *Thuqlag* was a reflection of times the narrowing the divide between the rulers and ruled. Indian English drama literary world has brilliant playwrights like Manjula Padmansghan and Mahesh Dattani. Manjula earned international fame with her "Harvest", a futurist play that deals with the exploitation of human body in 21<sup>st</sup> century. He projects a dehumanised, terrifying world in which mothers sell their sons for the price of rice.

Mahesh Dattani is considered as a true successor of Karnad and made a revolutionary progression in English drama. As a stage director, as a sociologist explaining various complexities of life and society. He emerges as a compelling playwright who projects the postcolonial dichotomy at various levels. He keeps women at the centre of his play. He may be called avant-grade feminist. Dattani is first Indian playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. He wants to use theatre to bring powerful change in the society. He has array of themes to offer to us. The plays and issues he chooses to project are the most topical but also the most controversial. His subjects are always complicated. The characters are seen struggling for freedom and happiness which is suppressed in the name of traditions, cultures and values. Which is seen as the 'invisible issues' of Indian society. For

# The Creative Launcher

An International Peer Reviewed & Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue V

long Indian drama English had remained as the last choice of the research for academic scholars. But in recent years it has tried to draw attention of academic scholars. It is seen that after seventies that many research activities have been taken in Indian English Drama field.

## References

1. Iyenger, K. R. S. *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publishing Private Limited, New Delhi, 2006.
2. Naik, M. K. *A history of Indian English Literature*, Shahitya Akademi Publication, Delhi.
3. Tagore, Rabindranath. 'Sacrifice', *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Shahitya Acadami, Delhi, vol-2. 2004.
4. Tagore, Rabindranath. *Red Oleanders*, Rupa & Co, Delhi, 2002.
5. Iyengar, K.R.S. *Sri Aurobindo a Biography and History*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1985.
6. Tendulkar, Vijay. *Silence! The court is in Session* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1978.
7. Bedre, R.T. "The Portrait of a Visionary: Karnad's The Dreams of Tipu Sultan." *The Quest*, Vol. 19, No.2. Dec. 2005.