

HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Dr. Ambreen Kharbe

Head, Department of English
G.M. Momin Women's College, Bhiwandi,
Dist: Thane, Maharashtra

Abstract

India has a rich tradition of drama since ancient times. It has its roots in Sanskrit plays. Indian Traditions are preserved in the “Natyasastra”, the oldest text of the theory of drama as the western world is Aristotle’s “Poetics”. History of Indian drama elaborates majestically about Bharata setting out a detailed theory of drama. According to Bharata poetry, dance and mime in life’s play produce emotion but it is only drama which produced flavor (Rasa). The drama uses the eight basic emotions- love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy that generally inspire the audience. While in the western canon only two principle forms of drama - tragedy and comedy are recognized. Sanskrit theorists describe ten kinds of dramatic forms - Nataka, Prakarana Bhane, Vyayoga, Samavakara, Dima, Ihamriga, Anka, Vrithi and Prahasana.

The paper will trace the development of Indian Drama in English from pre-independence to contemporary time. Along with the playwrights the paper in short will focus on the various themes and aspects covered by different playwrights.

Keywords: Indian English Drama, Natyasastra, Pre-Independence, Post-Independence, Contemporary, Women Playwrights

India has a rich tradition of drama since ancient times. It has its roots in Sanskrit plays. There is no major record of drama by sixth century. Two plays- *Ratnavali* and *Nagananda*, both written by the King Sri Harsha belong to the first half of the seventh century. The theme of love, romance, and politics all were observed by the dramatist of this period. Bhavabhuti the important playwright of eight century is known for his western romance. His first play *Malati Madhava* is a Prakarena in ten acts. Some western critics have described it as the Indian *Romeo and Juliet* although like all Sanskrit plays it too ends in happiness. Indian Traditions are preserved in the “Natyasastra”, the oldest text of the theory of drama as the western world is Aristotle’s “Poetics”. History of Indian Drama beginning from the ancient Vedic Age moves from the classical theater traditions, influencing modern theater particularly the Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali theaters down the line.

History of Indian drama elaborates majestically about Bharata setting out a detailed theory of drama. According to Bharata poetry, dance and mime in life’s play produce emotion but it is only drama which produced flavor (Rasa). The drama uses the eight basic emotions- love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy that generally inspire the audience.

The play were also necessary to mix and amalgamate various Rasa, but however was to be dominated by only one. Thus, when the dramatic art was well comprehended the Natya Veda was performed on the occasion of the celebration of Lord Indra's victory over the 'asuras' and 'danavas'. In the *Natyashastra* there is a verse in its sixth chapter which can be quoted as Bharat Munis own summary of his dramatic theory: "The combination called 'Natya' is a mixture of 'rasa', 'bhavas', 'abhinayas', 'dharmis', 'vrittie', 'pravrittis', 'siddhi', 'svaras', 'instruments', 'song', and theater-house.

While in the western canon only two principle forms of drama - tragedy and comedy are recognized. Sanskrit theorists describe ten kinds of dramatic forms - Nataka, Prakarana Bhane, Vyayoga, Samavakara, Dima, Ihamriga, Anka, Vrithi and Prahasana. There are also detailed explanation for stage management and acting in *Natyashastra*. It has given a set of rules to guide the conduct of the factors involved in plot, characters, and emotions bringing out the far reaching significance of 'Rasa'.

The 15th century Sanskrit Dramas were out-and-out performed on stage in various states of our country such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. The most renowned and talented dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwaghosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidas, Harsha, Murari, Bhattanarayam and Rajeshkhora, who enriched Indian theater with their words like Madhya-Mavyaayoda, Urbhangham, Karnabharan, Mrichkatikam, Abhigyana Shakuntalam, Malankagnimitram, Uttar Ramacharitam, Mudrarak, Shasa, Bhagavadajjukam etc. The supreme achievement of Indian drama line is Kalidas who is often called the Shakespeare of India. After 15th century Indian drama was almost ceased due to foreign invasions of Indian. However the age had witnessed beginning of *Loknatya* (people's theater) which was noticed in every state of India from 17th century onwards. Several states innovated fresh and new styles of drama. Bengal adopted the style like yatrakirtaniya, paal, Gaan, Madhaya Pradesh went for Mach; in Kashmir Bhandya, in Gujrat the forms comprised of Bhavai in Northern India there existed Nautanki, and Bhand, Ramlila and Raslila, in Maharashtra Tamasha, in Rajasthan-Raas and Thoomer; in Punjab-Bhangra Ahiyanat and Ankinaat.

Of all forms of literature, drama is perhaps best suited for effecting man and society most immediately. Hence it is important for a playwright must take risks but cannot take as many as the novelist. A novelist can frame a character, can write around the character, make comments on and explain the character to the reader. A playwright cannot do this but has to convey everything through the spoken dialogue and then depend on the understanding and competence of the director, actor and audience. The playwright has to make the language seem natural to the character portrayed.

The beginning of the 18th century gave rise to the modern drama when the British Empire made its firm foot and its power in India. With the impact of western civilization on Indian life, a new renaissance dawned on Indian arts including drama.

Furthermore, English education gave an impetus and a momentum to the critical study of not only western drama, but classical Indian drama. English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and gave and outstanding performances, mainly the plays of Shakespeare in cities like Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai). The Portuguese brought a form of dance drama to the west coast. A Russian music director Rebecloff, is said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta (Kolkata) towards the end of 18th century. Thus the western impact awakened "The dormant critical impulse in the country to bring Indians face to face with new forms of life and literature and to open the way for a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and forms of expression". (Gupta:1994)

Plays written in regional languages dominated the Indian theater as they were easily understood by the audiences. Early Indian English playwrights could not enjoy the patronage of an English knowing, elitist audience and hence, the growth of Indian English drama remained, for a while lethargic. English being, a foreign language was not known intelligibly by the masses, and the playwright, too found it difficult to write crisp and natural dialogue in English as they did not grow up in English environment. They got acquainted with the language at an advanced stage of their life, hence the dialogue they wrote proved to be somewhat unrealistic and artificial.

Despite of the above limitations, some Indian English playwrights took endless efforts to write plays in English. The earliest Indian English play was written in 1831 by Krishna Mohan Banerji- *The persecuted or dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta*. It is a social play which depicts the conflict between Indian orthodox family (Bengali Hindu) and the new ideas which came from the west. It is the earliest play with the theme of east-west encounter. This play was written after the establishment of Hindu college in Calcutta, after nearly a generation had been educated in English and been influenced by western ideas. The wave of reformation can be seen through this play.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the pioneer and innovator of English language translated his play *Ratnavali* (1859), and *Sermista* (1859), originally written in Bengali, into English. His play *Is This Called Civilization?* appeared in 1871. Another play of his nation builders, was published posthumously in 1922. In fact one more play, Ramkinoo Dutt's *Manipura Tragedy* (1893) completes the list of. Indian English plays from Bengal in the 19th century, writing about the early phase of Indian English drama especially from Bengal. M.K. Naik comment:

“in fact, even in Bengal – the fountainhead of most forms of Indian English literature – drama in English failed to secure a local theater habitation, in sharp contrast to plays in the mother tongue (both original and in the form of adaptations from foreign languages): and the appetite for plays in English could more convently beefed on performances of established dramatic success in English by foreign others.” (Pg. 103)

M.K. Naik further observes:

“Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theater. Early Indian English drama in Bengal as elsewhere in India grew sporadically as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harirdranath Chattopadhaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing.” (Pg. 103)

In Bombay (Mumbai) the first theater, The Bombay Armature Theater, was built in 1776, but was exclusively for performances by visiting European companies. The recorded play in English from Mumbai is a verse play by C.S Nazir – *The First Parsi Baronet* (1886). The only other plays that have, survived form this early period are D.M. Wadia's *The Indian Heroine* (1877), which is based on the events of the First War of Independence (1857), and P.P. Meherjee's *Dolly Parsen*. (1981).

In Madras the oriental drama club was established in 1882, and Sarasa Vinodidini Sabha, an amateur dramatic society, was founded by Krishnamachary in 1895. The Madras theatrical

scene was very active and enthusiastic. A number of playwrights came forward with their outstanding talent. These playwrights wrote on social as well as historical and mythological themes. Some of the plays which need to be mention are *Urjoon Singh or the Princess Regained* (1875), P.V.R. Raju's *Dasaratha or the Fatal Promise* (1901), Krishnamachary's *Harischandra or the Martyr to Truth* (1912), A. Srinivasacharya's *Lord Clive* (1913), Krishna Iyer's *Nur Jalan*, K.S. Ramswami's *Sastri*. But the most productive among these playwrights was V.V Srinivasa Iyengar. Two volumes of his plays entitled *Dramatic Divertissements* appeared in 1921. These plays expose the behavioral patterns of the middle class. They seem to have been written as light entertainment or forces.

The contribution of the three major playwrights popularly known as the big three is remarkable. It is important to know that Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and H.N. Chattopashaya gave their marvelous output during the pre-independence scenario. These three English knowing Indian audiences, made an epoch making and abiding contribution to the development of Indian English drama.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali but almost all his Bengali plays are available to us in English renderings. His prominent plays are *Chitra*, *The Post Office*, *Sacrifice*, *Red Oleanders*, *Chandalika*, *Muktadhara*, *Natir Puja*, *The king of the Dark Chamber*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Sanyasi and the Mother Prayer*. His play *Visarjan (Sacrifice)* has been regarded as his finest drama. In the original Bengali language, such works included intricate subplots and extended monologues. Later Tagore dramas were more of philosophical and allegorical themes. Tagore's *Chandalika* is modeled on an ancient Buddha's discipline Ananada asks water from an Adivasi Girl. *Red Oleanders* tells us about a king who lives behind an iron curtain while his subjects have cruelty and death delivered upon them at the slightest pretext. People are forced to work in the mines so that the brutal king and his cronies may render themselves even wealthier. The play follows the heroines Nandini, who leads the people and finally the king himself towards the destruction of his artifact of subjugation. M.K. Naik in the praise of *Red Oleanders* comments: "*Red Oleanders* is a symbolic presentation of the triumph of humanistic values over soul-billing Maunonism. Nandini, the spirit of joy, love and beauty destroys the tyrannical regime in Yaksha Town, which has reduced its citizens to gold digging slaves, though she herself dies in the process"(Pg. 108). In *Citra*, Tagore incarnates the evolution of human love from the physical to the spiritual.

Sri Aurobindo was a versatile genius who was not only well versed in the great classics of Greece, Rome, Germany, France, Spain and Italy, but fully acquainted with our rich Sanskrit text also. He wrote five incomplete blank verse plays besides his six incomplete plays. His complete plays are *Pereseus the Deliveror*, *Vasavaduta*, *Radogunna*, *the Viziers of Bassora*, and *Eric*. These plays are written in five acts. His incomplete plays are *The Witch of Ilni*, *Achab and Esarhaddon*, *The Maid and the Mill*, *The House of Brut*, *The Birth of Sinband Prince of Edur*. His plays are modeled exclusively drama and his characters look like Elizabethan personages in Indian grab. *Oerseus* is based on a myth of ancient India; *Rodogune* is a Syrian romance, *The Vizier* reminds us of great Haroun al Rashid, while *Eric* is a romance of Scandinavia. Sri Aurobindo keenly carves his heroines. Srinivas. Iyengar says, "the Heroines of all these plays have beauty for their birthmark, and their beauty is also their fate; their beauty and their capacity for love enable them to defy and master their fate."(Pg. 153)

Aurobindo is much influenced by Elizabethan drama in matters of plot construction and characterization. The use of the English blank verse is flawless in Aurobindo and in the right tune with the characters and situations. Sometimes there arouse tension with the characterization

as they seem to be less authentic Indians than like Elizabethan personages caught in Indian grab. In this connection M.K. Naik observes:

“In spite of some scenes of dramatic tension, stray passages of poetic beauty and a few moments of bright wit and humor in the comedies, the drama of Sri Aurobindo is perhaps hardly in the same class as his major poetry and prose.” (Pg. 105)

Last of the Indian Trio Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, has been more eminent as a poet than a playwright. He has many plays to his credit beginning with *Abu Hassan* (1918), a light fantasy. He has seven verse plays to his credit on the lives of Indian saints: *Pundalik*, *Saku Bai*, *Jayandeva*, *Chokla Mela*, *Eknath*, *Ramdas*, and *Tukaram*. These were included in his *Poems and Plays* (1927). He presents episodes to highlight the individual’s search and fulfillment as opposed to societal curbs and hierarchies.

The most significant of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya social plays are to be found in his collection *Five Plays* (1937). These are *The Window*, *The Parrot*, *The Sentry’s Lantern*, *The Coffin*, and *The Evening Lamp*. *The Window* is dedicated to “The Brave Textile Workers of Parel, Bombay” and is about the exploitation of poor labors by industrialist. *The Parrot* examines morality and the bondage of customs. *The Sentry’s Lantern* is about the evils of imperialism and is dedicated “To all the victims of imperialist Gallows”. The three characters in the play, a merchant, a bourgeois poet, and a worker, give us their thoughts before they are hanged. It is the workers who face death boldly. Three characters in the play, a merchant, a bourgeois poet, and a worker, give us their thoughts before they are hanged. It is the workers who face death boldly. *The coffin* which is “Dedicated to the progressive writers of India” satirizes a bourgeois artist and shows us the responsibilities of writers. *The Evening Lamp* is an ironic sketch of a young romantic. He is praised for exposing social evil and achievements of the lowly and the downtrodden. He is good at writing crisp dialogue and his plays impress the modern reader.

Another dramatic voice which needs attention is that of T.P. Kailasam. He is a bilingual writer. He wrote both in English and Kannada. Though Kailasam is regarded as the father of modern Kannada drama, his genius can be seen in his English plays such as *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna* (1946), and *Kechaka* (1949). His real genius and love for drama is praised by G.S Amur who remarks:

“A talented actor who appeared on the amateur as well as the professional stage, he brought to the writing of drama an intimate knowledge of the theater. It is for this reason that his plays whether in Kannada or English have a uniform technical excellence.” (Pg. 186)

Kailasam has chosen most of his main characters and dramatic episodes from Indian epics. *The Burden* is based on the Ramayana, and depicts Bharata’s feelings on hearing about his father’s death. *Fulfillment* is based on the Eklavya story from the Mahabharata, which supplies the story for Karna and Keechaka as well Kailasam is best known for blending the best of both the Indian and Western traditions.

Bharti Sarabai's two plays. *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Woman* (1952), show the impact of Gandhi. The Harijan, and depicts an old woman who is unable to go to Kashi and Haridwar decides to build a well for the so called untouchables instead. The second play *Two Woman* depicts two women, Anuradha the wife of the Anglicised Kanakaraya, and Urvashi, a widowed girl who has become a devotional singer. The play seems to advocate that spiritual peace can be found in one's own fulfillment and giving up the world and material ties. Both the plays show a society in transition.

J.M. Lobo Prabhu is the last great name of playwrights in pre-Independence Indian English drama. His plays revolve around reformist themes like inter-caste marriage, martial incompatibility, and the education of woman. He has written over a dozen plays but only *Mother Of New India: A Play Of The Indian Village In The Acts* (1944) and *Death Abdicate* (1845) appear before independence. His *Collected Plays* was published in 1956. *Apes in the Parlour* deals with the theft of a precious stone from temple by a cinema actress who is then murdered. *The Family Cage* depicts the plight of a widowed sister in a joint family, but it is actually worked out in terms of melodrama. *Flag of the Hearts* is about a sentimental love, K.R.S Iyengar commenting on his art says: "Lobo Prabhu's energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise, and his documents are seldom wholly convening." (Pg. 242)

More than three hundred Indian English plays were written before independence. Though Indian English plays flourished after independence, Indian English drama is notable for its poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical virtuosity, symbolic significance and its commitment to human and moral values.

The post-independence Indian English drama scenario was entirely different from plan of independence period. The first five year plan of independence encouraged the performing arts as an effective means of public alignment. The "National School of drama" was established in Delhi. Training institutions in drama were founded in big cities. Drama departments were established in some universities and the National Drama Festival was started in Delhi by the Sangeet Natak Academy in 1954.

The Tagore-Aurobindo -Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continued, but with a difference, in the hands of Manjeri Isvarama, Lakhan Deb and Pretish Nandy. The few Indian English dramatists who achieved some success were actually staged abroad. The major Indian English dramatist after independence were G.V Desani, Pratap Sharma and Asif Currimbhoy. Isvaran's *Yama and Yami* is a dialogue in poetic prose, with a prologue and an epilogue, dealing with the incestuous love of Yami for her Brother. Lakhan Deb's *Tiger claw* (1976) is a historical drama in blank verse deals with the encounter between Shivaji and Afzal Khan. The other two blank verse plays *Vivekananda and Murder at the Prayer Meeting* are chronicle plays, the later dealing with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. Nandy's *Rites for a Plebeian Statue* is a free verse play with a knit of symbolic plot.

G.V. Desani, the author of the hilarious novel *All About H Hatter*, has one play *Hali* (1950) to his credit. *Hali* is described as a poem play though it was originally a work of 300 pages and written and planned as an epic. The play is allegorical about human longing and fulfillment named after a Muslim Saint, wears long hair and bangles and anklets and is also named a very feminine Hindu Griya. *Hali* thus stands for all humanity. In the words of K.R.S Iyengar *Hali*, "Is a short poetically, *Hali* is an attempt to project the story of a 'passion': in other words, *Hail's* confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communion with love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place." (Pg. 143)

Pratap Sharma wrote two prose plays – *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The professor Has a War Cry* (1970) were staged in the country. His plays were staged abroad successfully but failed to be staged in a country. *A Touch of Brightness* was actually banned for sometime in Mumbai. The play is commendable for its thematic boldness in presenting a picture of the red light district in Bombay. The play presents the going on in a brothel in a straight forward manner. *The Professor Has a War Cry* is again interesting in terms of stagecraft and dialogue. In this, a young man, Virendra comes to know that he is the ‘illegitimate’ child of a mother who successively raped by a Muslim and an Englishman after having been deserted by her lover, a Hindu professor. Finally Virendra and the professor kill each other off. In an interesting technical innovation, Pratap Sharma uses the demon from kathakali to represent Veranda’s inner state.

Asif Currimbhoy too, achieved name in Mumbai. Currimbhoy’s plays deals with contemporary political events and social issues. He is a prolific playwright and has twenty-nine plays to his credit. Shanta Gokhle opines that his plays “are substantial in content and rich in theatrical devices, he uses monologues, sound effects, mime, anything infact that further the dramatic purpose”.(Pg. 340) *The Doldrums* (1960), was banned for a while, is about the hippie culture and Anglo-Indians. The play depicts the extent to which youth can feel eliminated and the resultant mess they can land up in. *The Captives* (1963) is about the Sino-Indian conflict. *Monsoon* (1965) is about colonization, while *An Experiment with Truth* (1969) is about the freedom struggle and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. *The Miracle Seed* (1973) is in a famine situation in Maharashtra. *The Tourist Mecca* (1959), *The Hungry Ones* (1965), and *Darjeeling Tea* (1971) are about the east-west encounter. *The Clock* (1959) is a psychological play. It projects the frustrations of a failed, middle-aged salesman. *The Dumb Dancer* (1961) is another psychological play. The story is about Kathakali dancer. The women psychiatrist who deal with the problem of Bhima (Kathakali dancer) becomes so strongly involved emotionally, that in the end instead curing him, she herself becomes insane.

In praise of Asif Currimbhoy R.N. Rai comments, “Like Arnold weaker he is a social realist and reminds us of Strindberg and Tennessee Williams in the use of his theatrical techniques and stage directions. He is capable of creating proper atmosphere, interesting situations, powerful and animating characters this plays are poetic, symbolic, passionate even melodramatic. Sometimes he seems to be interested in creating existing situation and thrilling incidents rather than delving deep into the ideological and dialectical conflict. Though his play sometimes suffer from loose plots, sketchy characters, lack of wit and humor and excessive us the final impression that Currimbhoy is a distinguished playwright and his achievements is both distinctive and impressive.”

Nissim Ezekiel, the well known poet has a rare dramatic sensibility. He displays his ears with the language as spoken in an urban middle and upper class milieu. He falls short in his handling of plot or dramatic structure. Nissim Ezekiel three plays 1969 – *Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy*, *Nalini: A Comedy*, *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo American Force* deals with social issue and personal relationships but fail to grip in spite of their accessible language. *Nalini* exposes the contrast between the real Nalini and the phantom Nalini of a drama to serve to expose the philistinism of the two young and successful business executive, Raj and Bharat. *Marriage-Poem* is excellent in its art. The play explores on upper middle class marriage in which a house wife desires for the love and attention of her husband. *The Sleep Walker* is a one act satire. According to M.K. Naik *The Sleep Walker* is a diverting take off on national preconception and prejudices. An Ezekiel play is appreciated for symmetrical construction with abundance crony. They unveil his sharp observation of the additives of human life and behavior.

Ezekiel's poetic self swayed his dramatic creed but his plays make a 'pleasant reading'. It is attributed "In his satire of current fashion, in his exposure of prose and presence, Ezekiel comes very close to the spirit of some English social satirist in theater." (Pg. 174)

On the other hand we have other acclaimed dramatist Gurcharan Das. Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1970) is a much performed and appreciated play. A play in three acts is based on historical events in Punjab 150 years ago. In this play Das delineates the life of Henry Lawrence, a British residence in the court of Dalip Singh in Punjab in 1846-47, who progresses from enlightened liberalism to authoritarianism. Though, being a historical play. The author has reconstructed the events from documents and letters exchanged by the principle characters. Das's *Mira* is an attempt to present the theme of Mira's immaculate God Love with all the sophistication of the contemporary theater. His other plays are *Jokhoo Villa and Karna*.

Dina Mehta's *The Myth Makers* an award winner (Sultan Padamsee Award) play is a three act play about the violent demonstrations in Bombay against migrants from other states, especially from the south. Mehta's *Brides Are Not For Burning* (1971) bagged the best play in a worldwide competition held by the BBC. The play is based on the grim social reality of violence against women by those who are in power or by the powerless in retaliation against coercion by others, to deny their powerlessness.

Like Ezekiel, Gieve Patel was attached to theater by Ebrahim Alkazi. Patel has written three Full length plays. The plays are set in south Gujarat, the place where his parents belong and where his own life too is centered. The chief protagonists are Parsis, Iranian – Zoroastrian refugees who settled in the west coast of India 1200 years ago, fleeing Islamic persecution. Patel's *Princess* (1970) is a story of Parsi land owning families about the period of after independence, caught in the conflict of Land Ceiling Act and Prohibition which began to erode their sources of income. In *Princess*, syntax and grammar are modified to create rhythms of speech that approximate. *Savaska* by Patel is a play set in a large village which is working towards becoming a small town, *Savaska* deals with the story of Savaksa, a sixty years, wealthy provincial landowner and political leader who falls in love and aspires to marry an eighteen year old girl from an impoverished Bombay family.

Mister Bheram (1988), Patel's third plays is a story of Bherman, a brilliant lawyer and reformist in nineteenth century Gujarat, who adopts an orphaned tribal boy, educates him and makes him a lawyer like himself, Bherman later consents Naval to his Marriage with his Daughter. Actually the Play depicts the hold of Bherman on Naval's life and destroys the positive value he has gifted by.

Cyrus Mistry's *Doongaji House* won him the second Sultan Padamsee Award in 1978. The play is about the specific Parsi Community. The Play Addressed the Situation of the Parsi community in terms of Hindu and Muslims. The play shows the disintegration of the family and the emotional trauma of newly reduced circumstances. *Doongaji House* keeps into the time when India was divided on the basis of language, religion, community and class even as it searches for a common heritage. Mystery's plays focuses on themes that are universal and existential.

Contemporary Indian drama, deviating from classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It has laid the foundation of distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend myth, religion, and folk love with content to contemporary socio-political issue. A dynamic theatrical tradition evolved by Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad prepared the background of contemporary Indian English Theater.

Girish Karnad theatrical experiments made a tremendous progress in the realistic tradition. He is the most important dramatist of the contemporary Indian stage. He has enriched this genre with his talent as an actor, director, writer and producer. Karnad's plays have received an international recognition. His plays have been widely performed in Europe and America. His well known plays are *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlag* (1962), *Hayavadana* (1970), *Nagmandala* (1972). He borrowed his plot from history, mythology and old legends with intricate symbolism, and tried to establish their relevance in contemporary socio-political conditions.

The play *Yayati* reinterprets an ancient myth from Mahabharata in modern concept. A carefully constructed play in four acts and a prologue in the Aristotelian vein, it possesses a balanced beginning, middle and end, follows the unities, has a lofty theme and an exalted hero, and achieves a catharsis of sublimated emotions. *Tughlag* is a historical play. It depicts the reign of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlag in 14th century India. The entire play focuses on the dynamic character of king who at time was a good man but at the passage of time becomes cruel. The action focuses on the protagonist's personality and the unique position he held. He is shown as monarchs who not only dreams but bring it into action. *Tughlag* a play in scenes is marked by a progressive degeneration of the political order. The play focuses the moderns Nehru's vision of modern Indian nation which was at time challenge by counter political forces.

Hayavadana deals with the problem of identity and search for completeness in life. The story is taken from two sources, one from Vidyasagar's *Kathasarit Sagar* and Thomas Mann's *Transposed Heads*. Karnad has used the mask technique reflecting O' Neill's "Memoranda on Masks". He has also used the concept of folklore in the form of dolls which reveals the psychology on heroine Padmini. *Hayavadana* is the story of a woman Padmini who gets married to a learned Brahmin, Devadutta, but gradually falls in love with his friend, Kapila, knowing the reality about his wife, Devadutta ends his head off at the shrine of goddess Kali. When Kapila discovers it, he too cuts off his head. Padmini discovers the tragedy and make goddess Kali grant the life of Devadutta and Kapila. Padmini by mistake, mixes the heads and torsos. As a result, Devadutta's head gets Kapila's torso while Kapila's head get Devadutta's torso. Further the story depicts the inner dilemma of Padmini.

Nagmandala is a play with a prologue and two acts. *Nagmandala* exposes the conflict between Patriarchal and matriarchal views of society. The play is about a typical Indian woman, Rani who on sexual involved with Naag ultimately becomes pregnant. Like his other female protagonist, she is encouraged to pass through chastity ordeal.

Badal Sircar is a major Bengali playwright. Badal Sircar is a landmark in the history of Indian theater in a period when Indian playwrights were writing in a conventional mode. He hailed the stage in revolutionary style and structure. He has created a genuine people's theater known as third theater. A theater supported and created by the people and not merely preformed by the people. His later plays, *Procession*, *Bhome and State News* are based on the concept of the third theater. These three typical street plays exposes Sircar's philosophy and vision of making people aware of their social responsibilities. Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* is an experimental play, which follows the conventions of the theater of the absurd in both its structure and the ideas it conveys.

The theatrical scene in Hindi theater is demanded by Mohan Rakesh. His first major play *Asadh Ka EkK Din* appeared in 1958 which was followed by another full-length play *Lahron ka Rajhans* in 1963 heralded the theater. His best play *Aadhe Adhure* stage in 1969 is his first play to be located in contemporary life. It dramatized the incompleteness of man at multiple levels through the gap between the desired and the actual. Characters do not have names or identifiable

tags to begin with. They live in their roles and are known by their clothes, gender or age the man in the black suite; woman, girls, and other similar descriptions like Man One, Man Two, Man Three and Man Four.

Vijay Tendulkar is a leading contemporary Indian playwright. He has contributed thirty full length and twenty three one act plays to modern Indian theatre. His themes include fight against injustice, gender role, class system, social consciousness, cultural freedom and so on . He was awarded with Pudmabhushan (1984), The Maharashtra Gaurav Puraska r(1990), The Kalidas Sanman (1992) The Pandit Mahadev Shastri Joshi Award (1999) The Dinanath Mangeshkar Award (1998) , he was also fortunate to receive Nehru Fellowship (1973) and Life Time Fellowship from the National Academy of the Performing Art, New Delhi (1998) . Vijay Tendulkar 's *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Vultures*, and *Silence ! The Court is In Session* (1968) are his four successful experiments on the Marathi theatre. *Ghashiram Kotwal* explores the life of morally decadent Peshwa ruler Nana Phadnavis and the corrupt Brahmins of Pune , the play has the element of Dashavatara form with music and dance which sharpen the irony of the situation. *Vultures* is based on negative aspect of human life as man aspires for sex , which leads to violence, and evil. The play focuses on the degeneration of a family with compassion and cruelty. *Sakharam Binder* is a naturalistic play which focus on complication of human nature formation of physical lust and violence in human being . The brutal objectivity and is presented through triangular relationship between Sakharam and two mistress Laxmi and Champa. *Kanyadaan* highlights about a dalit writer as a drunkard, wife abuser, and as a tyrant husband. *Silence! The Court is in Session* deals with patriarchal value on woman. Vijay Tendulkar is known for stage craft by presenting the pictures of various problems of Maharashtra, the deep rooted taboos and cultural rituals. The plays include music, theatre, religion and philosophy. The theatrical craft is so systematic that production is assured by following his stage direction. The characters of his plays are from middle class who struggle for achievement in the outer world; the woman and their position in the contemporary society.

Mahesh Dattani is director, a writer, and one of the few dramatists who writes play in English and does not follow western dramatic canon. The dramatist intends to develop theatre meant for both national and international audience. His plays are rooted in urban milieu of India, and reflection on concerns and constraints of the commoner. His *Final Solutions* (1992-93) deals with communal tension bagged with Sahitya Academy Award in 1998. *Where There's a Will* (1988), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Dance Like a Man* (1989) , *Tara* (1990) are the plays depicting the battles being fought among the members of same family at home. The Play *Tara* deals with the major problem of female feticide, parents favoring boy in comparison to girl child. The purpose of the play is to create awareness among the people to protect girl child. *Dance Like a Man* deals with conflict between tradition and modern, The play *Seven Step Around the Fire* deals with life of Kamala , a eunuch, is killed , the police investigates the case , the play reveals the attitude and brutality of society towards eunuch. *Ek Alag Mausam* is an interesting play, presents the voice of the marginalized being who is HIV positive. Through this play the dramatist seeks to focus on the grave issue of HIV positive inflicted person. He urges for love and understanding for the HIV afflicted. Other two important plays are- *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) *Thirty Days in September* (2001) Dattani has written various radio plays and the screen plays such as- *Do The Needful* (1997), *Seven Steps Around The Fire* (1998) , *The Swami and Winston* (2000), *A Tale of A Mother Feeding Her Child*(2000), *Clearing The Rubble* (2000), *Uma and The Fairy Queen* (2003). He has also contributed to screen Plays - *Mango Souffle*

(2002), *Morning Raga* (2004), *Ek Alag Mausam* (2005). The main focus of Dattani's plays is social and political realities.

A powerful renowned Indian woman English Dramatist is Manjula Padmanabhan. Her much applauded play 'Harvest' won the Onassis International Cultural competition prize for theatrical plays in 1997 in Greece. Manjula was the first Indian English playwright to earn International recognition. Harvest deals with the exploitation of human body in the 21st century. Her *Lights Out* is another powerful play based on an incident of gang-rape that occurred in the compound within a middle-class community in Santa Cruz, Mumbai 1982.

Annie Zaidi is a young contemporary Indian- English playwright, who is known for her *So Many Socks* which was nominated for the best script for META awards. The play is about the sense of rejection where you can reject others but not your own identity. The story revolves around three generations of a Tibetan family living in exile in India. Her full length script 'Name Place Animal Thing' was shortlisted for the Hindu Metro Plus playwright award. Her play 'Jam' won the BBC International radio award.

Swar Thounaojam, Playwright and Theatre Director is known for her play *Finding the Voices*. The play encourages and spread positivity, hope, inspiring, happy and entertaining story in the midst of all the disturbing news about Manipur. Manjima Chatterjee who teaches at NSD has written *The Mountain of Bones* is a distressing depiction of India's new development model and the domination of the neo-liberal agenda.

On the whole, the prospect of Indian English drama is not bleak. Playwrights like Dattani, Karnad, Tendulkar, Sircar and many others are willing to experiment, with a strong sense of a living theatre, have opened up a new horizon of dramatic achievement. India has a tradition of drama from ancient time and immensely contributed to the world literature. The Indian English drama has been changed its characteristics according to the time and its various dimensions. The variety of drama given by the Indian dramatists are considerable on the global level because it has the uniqueness and identically Indian which represent the Indian society and the changes occurred according the trends of time. Indian English woman playwrights are totally expressive and have definitely fallen out of the silent mode with their multiple points of views and narratives. As women are more vocal and are aware of their rights and space they have succeeded in stressing on freedom of mind and body from suppression of men and have begun to expose exploitation and domination bore on them by the hands of man through their plays. They have even gone to the extent to question the power of patriarchy and have ventured into subjects which have been censored for women.

References

- A. B. Keith. 1992. *The Sanskrit Drama*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi,
- Bharat Gupta. 1994. *Dramatic Concepts: Greek and Indian – A Study of Poetics and Natya Shastra*. D. K. Print Worlds, New Delhi.
- Ghokale Shanta : *The Dramatist in a History of Indian Literature in English*, ed – Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., India, 2003.
- G. S. Amur – Kailasam's Onest for Greatness – *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*, Macmillam, Madras, 1977. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1995.
- K. R. Srinivas Iyengar. 1995. *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- Kumar, Satish. 1993. *A Survey of Indian English Drama* Barielly; Prakash Book Depot.

- M. K. Naik. 2009. *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi Ibid 103.
- Mukhejee, Tutun. 2005. *Staging Resistance Plays by Women in Translation*. New Delhi. Oxford University Press.
- Rai R. N. : Perspectives and Challenges In Indian English Drama in *Perspectives in Indian English Drama*, ed – Neeru Tendon, Atlantic Publishers & Distrubuter (p) Ltd., New Delhi, 2006.
- Sridhar Rajeshwaran : Girish Karnad Tying Beginnings to Ends in *Contemporary Indian Drama Astride Two Traditions*, ed – Urmil Talwar and Bandana Chakraborty, Rawat Publications, 2005, New Delhi.