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INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD LITERATURE: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Drama is important performance as a cultural activity in Indian society. Drama depicts the changes in social, political or cultural scenario. The study of drama would enable us to reconstruct our history and understand the society to which we belong. India has the richest tradition in drama. The drama was performed in a very simple way in Vedic Aryans. Different acts from Bhagavat-Gita, Mahabharata and Ramayana were enacted in front of the people. It depicts the situations which are intimately related to the good people and bad people. They also give courage, amusement, happiness and advice the people who are in need of them. The contribution of Indian drama in English literature is significant. Indian play wrights gained strength, popularity and interest. Indian English drama got a special place in English literature: it has given a great contribution to the world English literature. After the World War I, a new drama in almost in all the regional Indian languages came in front. It was mostly influenced by the movements like Marxism, symbolism, Psychoanalysis and surrealism. Because of certain reasons and difficulties, the Indian English drama could not keep pace with poetry and fiction. Some of the great dramatists like: Rabindranath Tagore, Shri Aurbindo, Bharathi Sarabhai tried their best to overcome these difficulties and started up a new trend in the genre. Their efforts of keeping pace with the poetry and fiction had not been given enough weight-age to the acceptability of their plays. Indian English drama represents the development and the changes in the society according to the time.

Key words: Indian English Drama, Natyashastra, Vedic Aryans, Indianism etc.

Introduction

Drama is a very powerful and influential medium in the literature of English, because it has the audiovisual medium of expression. Drama is a truthful and mimetic representation of human life with the combination of real, fictional, art and reality and represents the pictures and characters within the dimension of space and time. It also combines the good qualities of visual arts and the

narrative poetry. It is a kind of narrative which made visible to the audience.

Indian English Literature refers to the work of art written by the writers in India who write in the English language and whose native language is one of the Indian languages. The early history of Indian English Literature began with the work of art by Michel Madhusudan Dutt followed by R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, who contributed to

Indian fiction in the decade of 1930. It is also related to the literary work of members of the Indian diaspora i.e. V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Kovid Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Agha Shahid and Salman Rushdie who are from Indian origin.

The Indian English Literature is referred as an 'Indo-Anglican literature'. This type of literature comes from the broader realm of postcolonial literature: the work of art from the previously called colonized countries for ex. India.

Indian English literature relatively has two centuries history. Sake Dean Mahomet published first book, *Travels of Dean Mahomet*, a travel narrative in English in England (1793). Indian English literature was influenced by the western novels. Early Indian writers used to write in Indian style of expressions: they used Indian words to convey their feelings and thoughts. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) wrote *Rajmohan's Wife*, published in 1864. It is the Indian novel written in English. Raja Rao (1908-2006), Indian writer and philosopher wrote *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* which are truly Indian in terms of the tone of storytelling qualities. Kisari Mohan Ganguli translated Mahabharat first time into English language. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) used to write in Bengali and English. He translated his own literary work into English language. Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1890-2010) was the first who got a literary award in United States. Nirad C. Chaudhari (1897-1999), non-fiction writer, is well known of his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951). These and many more writers of India emerged slowly and gradually. They not only contributed to the Indian English literature but they also have given their contribution to the world literature. The writers and the dramatists are representing Indian English literature on the world platform of literature.

A Short History of Indian Drama

Indian drama has long history from the ancient times. It starts from the Sanskrit plays. The Indian theory of drama preserved in *Natyashastra*, the oldest texts of the theory of drama. It says that the drama is a divine origin, and is connected to the sacred Vedas. Thus the starting of Indian drama is found in the Vedic period. The well-known ancient dramatists are Ashwagosh, Shudraka, Bhasa,

Kalidasa, Bhavbhut, Harsha, Vishakhadatta etc. The tragedies i.e. *Urubhanga*, romances i.e. *Abhijnana-sakuntalam* and historical plays i.e. *Mudrarakshas* are the well-known plays of the Vedic period. The Sanskrit literature can be classified into two categories: *Drishya* (that can be seen) and the *Sravya* (that can be heard). Drama comes in the category of *Drishya*. Drama is considered under broad concept of 'Rupaka' in Sanskrit which stands for the depiction of human life in different aspects and represented by the actors in the form of drama.

The Indian English Drama began in the 18th century when British Empire came and strengthened its political power in India. It is started with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted* in 1813. It is a social play in which the author tries to present the conflict between the East and the West. The real development of Indian English Drama is started with the publication of Madhusudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilization* in 1871. He also translated *Ratnavali* (1859) and *Sermista* (1859) into English, originally written in Bangla. Indian English Drama exhibited its maturity and genius after a long period in the twentieth century. The pre-independence period witnessed the emergence of many significant and influential playwrights i.e. Rabindranath Tagore, T. P. Kailasam, Aurobindo Ghosh, A.S.P. Ayyar, Bharati Sarabhai, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, who made a significant contribution to the development of Indian English Drama. Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Aurobindo Ghosh are poets and the first Indian dramatists who gained reputation in literature. With the name of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, all these three persons are known as 'big three' by their valuable contribution to the Indian English Drama.

Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, he was considered as 'the epitome of Indian Spiritual Heritage'. Primarily, he wrote his plays in Bengali language but his plays were translated into English. Some of his plays were translated by himself and others by the Indians and English translators. His well-known plays are *Chitra*, *Sacrifice*, *The Post Office*, *Muktadhara*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *The King of the Dark Chambers*; all these plays are the best examples of Indian Philosophy. Tagore is among them who used symbolism and

allegorical significance as the important techniques in their plays. Diana Devlin rightly says, "The philosopher, writer and teacher Rabindranath Tagore unifies Indian and western traditions creating plays which are the mixture of Bengali folk drama and Western medieval mystery plays".

Sir Aurobindo (1872-1950) was also one of the major Indian English Playwright. He wrote five complete and six incomplete poetic plays during 1891-1916. The variety of periods ranging from ancient Greece to medieval India and the places divers lands including Iraq, India, Syria, Britain, Spain and Norway. All his plays are revolve around poetry and romance. His famous plays are: *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Price of Edur*, *Eric Savitri* and *Vavadutta*. Sir Aurobindo used the ancient legends to highlight the contemporary urge for freedom relation and then heighten the elements of heroism, mystery and adventure in the actions of his characters in his plays. All his plays are imbued with a strong romantic impulse which is the driving force of his plays. He has shown his ability to write his dialogues in colloquial English. He does not confine himself only to one particular country and location.

Last but not the least the great Indian playwright is Harindranath Chattopadhyaya who added a new dimensions to Indian English drama. He influenced greatly by the progressive writers' movement. He sympathizes with the underdogs same like Mulk Raj Anand. He is more eminent as a poet than the playwright. His plays related to society highlight social protest and the ideas related to revolution. His plays can be divided into four categories: Social, Devotional, Historical and Miscellaneous. His collection of social plays is *Five Plays* (1937): *The Windows*, *The Parrots*, *The Santry Lantern*, *The Coffin* and *The Evening Lamps*. These plays have a didactic purpose and marked by realism.

The Contemporary Indian English Drama

The dramatic and the theatrical text do not follow the instructions of ancient Sanskrit drama, but still the genre of drama belongs to India. This hybrid and unique identity is carried by this genre of Indian English Literature. This genre gradually developed on the hybridity lines to this present form

of drama which takes its identity along with the cultural identity of that society to which it belongs.

Contemporary Indian English drama presents the issues related to the urban middle class, English speaking society which is now undergoing a noticeable cultural change. Issues like homosexuality licentiousness, marital infidelity are common subjects of plays for example: *Do the Needful*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *The Harvest* etc. Socio-cultural scenario of India was totally affected to a great extent by the colonial rules. Traditional Indian was inherently having hierarchy was further changed into the master and servant paradigm of colonial rule. This resulted in new personality types identified by the clusters of characteristic traits for example: submissiveness, psych-fancy, dependence and lack of self-confidence. Therefore in post-independent India, a person is caught in complicated situation that is a result of the mixture of traditional Indian culture and the culture of the British. In terms of values of urban Indian individuals are highly influenced by the money power. Guru Charan Das in *India Unbound* writes:

"The Indian people have no clear ethos other than money. They have no heroes except cricketers and Bollywood stars. The old merits are gone from the middle class society in India and the aggressive capitalism has taken the place of idealism of the youth".

Issues related to the above become the themes of the plays in post-colonial India. The plot and construction of the text of drama follow modern western drama and not the ancient Indian drama. The characters are the representatives of the society to which these plays are meant for. They are: ordinary middle class urban Indian people. Their body language, emotions in terms of values, ideas and ideals are showing the cultural changes. The stage setting of Indian English drama is now changing and developing. The technological advances have affected the stage setting. Other than lighting techniques, stylish setting and other developments can be seen on the stage; typical urban middle class and their homes on the stage

would focus on the influence of the western culture in house-keeping.

The background music also shows us the blend of Indian and western culture's presence. The studies of all these shows which have the various architectonics of these plays are not Indian and not even western completely. The traditional Indian culture which is under the strong western influence is manifesting the uniqueness of post-colonial culture in India. The influence of the western modernism seems to dissolve the traditional Indianism. The peculiar urban culture cannot be called as western modernism. But it is Indian modernism which may lead towards western modernism.

Therefore the changes that took place in Indian Society shaped the present form of Indian drama, particularly English drama, which does not have any similarity with its predecessor. The contemporary Indian English drama is post-colonial in the context of its cultural identity. This genre follows the modern western culture and it makes the significant change in Indian English drama. The changes in society can change the art and its features.

Conclusion

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.

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