

From Roots to Roots: A Historical Perspective of Indian Theatre

Indian dramatic art is supposed to have a divine origin as it is “said to have its birth in the Devaloka, or in the region of the gods, and Mahadeva or Shiva – one of the great Hindu Trinity – was its originator.”¹ Deriving the recitational elements from the *Rigveda*, musical elements from the *Samveda*, art of mimicry from the *Yajurveda* and passions, emotions and sentiments from the *Atharvaveda*, this fifth *Veda* in the form of a dramatic treatise was produced. “The self-born Brahma learnt this fifth or Gandherva Veda from Shiva and then taught it to the sage Bharata, who learnt that art and introduced it into the world at the command of his instructor Brahma”.² Thus, *Natyashastra*, a detailed theatrical treatise on ancient Indian dramatic art and histrionics, was ascribed to sage Bharata existing roughly between 400 BC and 200 BC. Being regarded as the avant-garde of Indian dramatic art, the status of sage Bharata is like this that the “actors are all called Bharataputras or the sons of Bharata, and almost everything connected with drama, or the stage is named after him , and the oldest and most authoritative treatise on Indian Dramaturgy is named after him as Bharata Natyashastra.”³ According to Bharata, he was allowed by God Brahma to give his first dramatic performance on the eve of flag-staff festival. Thus, Gods’ victory over *Asuras* was the theme of the very first dramatic presentation.

In this way, Bharata’s *Natyashastra* is regarded as the very foundation of Indian dramatic tradition. This dramatic treatise comprises thirty six chapters containing six

¹ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 1. Print

² Ibid.,3

³ Ibid.,4

thousand *sutras* or verse stanzas all written in Sanskrit. For general comprehension, the title can be translated as 'A Manual of Dramatic Art or A Compendium of Theatre'.

Almost all the essential aspects of drama as plot construction, stage setting, characterization, dialogue, acting and music are highlighted in the *Natyashastra*. The opening of a Sanskrit play used to be with a prologue or *nandi* in the form of a benediction or invocation which sang the praises of a god or gods and asked for blessings for the dramatic performance. It also introduced the author, the title and the subject matter of the play. Most of the plays used to end with a prayer known as *Bharatvakyam*. So, the prologue and the epilogue serve as a link to connect the dramatic world to the real world. *Sutradhara*, who delivers the benediction, occupies an important place in Indian theatre. The literal meaning of *Sutradhara* is the holder of the string but his real status is that of the director, stage manager or the leader of the theatrical troupe. Often; all the three functions are attributed to the same person. All these conventions are still followed in both the traditional Indian performances – classical and folk, just with the change in *Sutradhara's* name in different forms.

Audience's presence is marked in the Sanskrit theatre. The actors used to address the audience directly in their monologues, soliloquies and asides. One another important figure in classical drama to maintain a link between the performers and the spectators is the *Vidushaka* or the Jester. Bharata's another significant gift to the Indian classical theatre is *rasa*. The term *rasa*, which colloquially means flavour, refers to the description of an aesthetic experience. Bharata proposed eight basic *rasas* such as – joy (humour), love, sadness, anger, fear, pride, wonder and aversion. All these eight

basic *rasas* try to get resolved in 'peace' which is considered the ninth holistic *rasa*. There is a co-relation between these nine *rasas* and *bhavas*. *Bhavas* suggest actors' imitation of emotions.

Many a times, a comparison has been made between Aristotle and Sage Bharata. Western dramatic theory deriving from Aristotle's *Poetics* is a theory of tragedy based on Greek concept. The Indian dramatic theory deriving from Bharata's *Natyashastra* is based on the theory of *Karma*. This theory suggests that man does not fall a prey to his fate but is able to construct his destiny. It is only his actions that determine his fate.

Therefore, the concept of similarity between the Western and the Indian drama with the borrowing or the imitation of the Western dramatic elements by the initial Indian dramatic art seems to be quite unfair. It can be observed in this way: "If we now look into the spirit and structure of the world-renowned dramas of Bhasa, Kalidas and others and compare them with those of the Greeks, we shall be absolutely convinced about the independent origin of the Indian drama."⁴

Thus, tragedy, the most prominent characteristic of the Greek drama, being absent from the Indian drama, marks the basic difference between the Western and the Indian dramatic art in the following manner:

The Greek dramas are predominantly tragic; but tragedy is totally absent in Sanskrit literature. The elaborate technicalities of Sanskrit Dramaturgy intervened, and the result is the total absence of every

⁴ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 50. Print

kind of tragedy from Sanskrit. It is idle to suppose that a supreme artist like Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti could not turn out a successful tragedy. Both Shakuntala and Uttararamacharita have carefully avoided being somber tragedies. Bhasa's dramas too are anything but tragic in spirit, except "Urubhanga" which ends with the death of Durjodhana. This too is no exception to the general character of Sanskrit drama, for the death of Durjodhana who was rightly served for his misdeeds does not produce any grief in the minds of the audience.⁵

There is definitely a huge difference between Aristotle and sage Bharata having entirely different approaches to drama which are particularly Western and particularly Indian respectively. Sanskrit drama is regarded to be the earliest form of Indian drama. With the passage of time, Sanskrit drama, confronting all the barriers coming on its way, tried to conform the classical norms which Bharata prescribed in his *Natyashastra*. Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka, Vishakadatta and Harsha are the most distinguished Sanskrit playwrights with their highly creative works which are full of vigour and technical excellence. In this way:

The dramatic genius of the Hindu reached its perfection between the second century B. C. and the ninth century A. D. Various dramas rich in poetry, and perfect in execution have been traced to this period. Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Shudraka, Shri Harsha all

⁵ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 50. Print

belong to this august period of the Sanskrit Drama; their very structures differ from that of the Greek drama.⁶

The time period of Bhasa, the oldest known Sanskrit dramatist, is estimated between 500 BC to 50 BC. Thirty five plays are said to have been written by him out of which only thirteen plays are available at present as:

It was only in the year 1912 appeared, the first of the series under the editorship of Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Ganpati Shastri, who by his most laborious and erudite research had succeeded in unearthing the invaluable dramas of Bhasa in the Southern part of the Travancore State. As the superintendent in charge of the publication of ancient Sanskrit works, he used to visit many places in connection with his work; and in 1910 found to his great ashtonishment, ten menuscrypt dramas hitherto unknown and written on palm leaves...⁷

Later three more plays were discovered to his credit making the number of plays as thirteen.

Bhasa seems to avoid some dictates of the *Natyashastra*. This confirms his state of antiquity as all the post-Kalidasan plays have followed the rules prescribed by the *Natyashastra*. The signs of physical violence, which are strictly prohibited by the *Natyashastra*, are evident in Bhasa's plays *Uru-Bhanga* and *Karna-Bhara*. These plays

⁶ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 52. Print

⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

are the only instances of tragedy belonging to ancient Indian Sanskrit drama. Duryodhana, a villainous character from the *Mahabharata*, is the real hero of *Uru-Bhanga* who repents his past lying with his thighs crushed awaiting death. A great pathos is marked in the display of his relation with his family; though the *Mahabharata* does not refer to any such repentance. *Karna-Bhara*'s hero, Karna, is also a character from the *Mahabharata* and this play ends with the presentiment of the tragic end of Karna. Ancient Indian dramatic creations being inspired by the *Natyashastra* avoided the sad endings. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the great Indian epics had been the easiest sources of such plays. Lengthwise, generally, these plays used to be short in comparison to the plays of later playwrights. Bhasa, despite favouring the heroes of his plays, treats their enemies too with enough sympathy. To get this end achieved, he is seen taking a lot of liberties with the actual story. For instance; his play *Pratima-Nataka* presents Kaikeyi as a character who endures the calumny of all despite being responsible for the tragic events in the *Ramayana*. With such an alteration and transformation of the story, Bhasa is found achieving a noble end to his plays.

Kalidasa was the most renowned classical Sanskrit dramatist and poet. His world-wide fame is remarkable with such statements:

Kalidasa, an imperishable name in the world's literature, is yet chiefly known to the foreigners by his immortal drama – "Shakuntala." This famous comedy is in seven acts, its plot being taken from the 1st book of the Mahabharata. It is a dramatic romance of the surpassing beauty and surely one of the master-

pieces in world's literature. Kalidasa has been justly called the Shakespeare of India and his wonderful knowledge of human nature in all its varied and profound phases is quite Shakespearean. His imagination was not only a realizing faculty, but it could easily grasp the past, the present, and the future. He was a profound artist as well. The activity and universality of his genius pervaded every subject he touched, and clothed it in the most attractive garb and everything in his hands became instinct with new life and redolent with poetical beauty.⁸

Except his widely known creations, hardly any information is found about his whereabouts. Only a little is known about his life with no definite period of his existence, as:

Of the early history and antecedents of Kalidasa, little or nothing is known. According to legendary account he was destitute of all education and even of common sense so much so that he was found, on one occasion cutting down the very branch of a tree on which he was seated! He was afterwards blessed and inspired by Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning and he then wrote under her inspiration the three dramas of fame Vikramorvasi, Shakuntala and Malavikagni-Mitra, all of them remarkable for their elegance, poetry and delicacy of subtle dramatic art. They all exhibit a deep

⁸ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 53. Print

acquaintance with the mechanism of the human heart, as well with nature. They are full of interesting incidents that move forward with a spontaneous ease and there the characters act and speak just as they might do in real life.⁹

In this way, the time period of Kalidasa has been an issue of great ambiguity with no exactness. A Sanskrit scholar from Bhopal named Ramchadra Tiwari claimed in 1986 that Kalidasa's period of existence was 370-450 AD, on the basis of his thorough research on Kalidasa with the analysis of six hundred and twenty seven archeological evidences including thirty pictures, one hundred and four sculptures and four hundred and ninety three scriptural words. Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* is considered as a masterpiece among his all the three plays. It was also one of the first Sanskrit works which were translated into English. This play narrates the story of union and reunion of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Dushyanta, a king, comes across Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of a sage, during his hunting trip. He gets attracted towards her and consequently marries her. Then king Dushyanta, being summoned, leaves to the court. Now a mishap befalls the pregnant Shakuntala as she unintentionally offends a visiting saint who curses her of being completely forgotten by Dushyanta until he sees her with the royal ring which he had given her. Being in the advanced stage of pregnancy, Shakuntala leaves to Dushyanta's court but on the way her ring is lost. Thus, the king refuses to recognize her due to the effect of the curse. Shakuntala, in her predicament, sees no option but to come back. A fisherman finds the lost ring which he returns to the king recognizing the

⁹ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 54. Print

royal seal on it. Now looking at the ring, Dushyanta gets reminded of the whole of the event and he sets out to find Shakuntala. Ultimately, they are happily reunited.

His another play *Vikramorvasi* deals with the love story of the king Pururavas, a mortal being and Urvashi, a celestial nymph. As an immortal being, Urvashi was bound to get back to her heavenly abode where she comes across an unfortunate incident causing her to come back on the earth as a mortal with a curse. The moment her lover looks at their child, she will die and return to heaven. After undergoing a number of mishaps, the curse is removed and the lovers get the opportunity of staying together happily on the earth. Kalidasa's play *Malvikagnimitra* narrates the love story of the King Agnimitra and Malavika, a maid of honour to his queen leading to many love-intrigues in the harem but finally ending with the happy union of these two lovers.

With the production of these three remarkable Sanskrit plays, Kalidasa achieved the world-wide fame. Though he lacks the great variety and range of Shakespeare yet with a profound spiritual vision of life prevailing in his plays, he has been called the Shakespeare of India, a prominent name in the dramatic field.

Bhavabhuti belonging to the eighth century India was a noted Sanskrit dramatist and poet. His dramas are regarded as being of the grade of Kalidasa's works. The real name of Bhavabhuti is said to be Srikantha Nilakantha. He is supposed to be the court poet of the King of Kannauj named Yashovarman. Like the plays of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti's plays too are just three in number titled as *Mahaviracharita*, *Uttaramacharita* and *Maltimadhava*, getting to a great height of dramatic excellence. The two dramas of Bhavabhuti, *Mahaviracharita* and *Uttaramacharita* are based on

the life of Rama, a great epical character from the *Ramayana*. In *Mahairacharita*, Bhavabhuti gives the whole description of the life of Rama from the days of his boyhood upto his return to Ayodhya after the conquest of Lanka. While in *Uttararamacharita*, Bhavabhuti narrates the important events taking place during the later life of Rama ranging from his coronation to Sita's abandonment and then the reunion of both of them after a twelve years' long period of Sita's exile in great misery and suffering.

Bhavabhuti's play *Maltimadhava* depicts the love story of two couples of the city Padmavati. Malti, the daughter of a minister, falls in love with a young scholar named Madhava. The king wishes his minister's daughter to get married to a youth named Nandana being his favourite. Malti, fallen in love with Madhava, draws his portrait and does not wish to marry anyone except him. Madhava also reciprocates her feelings of love towards him and in turn he too draws a portrait of her. The sub-plot of the play narrates another love story about the friends of these lovers named Makaranda and Madayantika. Madayantika, while attacked by a tiger, is rescued by Makaranda. He stakes his life at risk and gets wounded while doing so. After a series of unpleasant events, the play ends with the union of the two couples. Thus, this Sanskrit drama presents the "Indian Romeo Juliet with a happy ending."¹⁰ There is a fine demonstration of love in the play and it is "full of incidents, showing that the course of true love never runs smooth, but the denouement results as usual in the marriage of the lovers."¹¹

Sudraka, one another notable Sanskrit playwright is widely known for his monumental drama *Mrichchhakatika* or *The Little Clay Cart*. He is believed to be an

¹⁰ Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das. *The Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009. 67. Print

¹¹ Ibid., 68

Abhira King named Indragupta carrying the pen name 'Sudraka'. *Mrichchhakatika*, an outstanding Sanskrit dramatic creation presenting a love story in ten acts, was produced in second century BC. The play presents a prominent but poor inhabitant of Ujjayini named Charudatta falling in love with an extremely beautiful and pure-hearted courtesan of the city or nagarvadhu named Vasantsena. A royal courtier also gets attracted towards Vasantsena making the love affair quite complicated. The further complications in the plot are added by the thieves and the mistaken identities culminating the play into a package of entertaining and hilarious events. Having a number of twists and turns, the story of the play displays several instances of comedy, court intrigues and romance. Along with presenting the portrayal of personal emotions, the play gives a true description of the political and social conditions of the time it belongs to. The play is full of humour, wit and satire with women and minor characters speaking various dialects of Prakrit language.

There are also a few other Sanskrit playwrights who have made their significant contribution to the enrichment of Indian dramatic treasure as Vishakhadatta with his famous creation *Mudraraksha* or *The Minister's Seal* being based on the political intrigues, Harsha with the creation of his three dramas *Ratnavali*, *Nagananda* and *Priyadarshika*, Banabhatta belonging to seventh century AD who is believed to produce *Parvatiparinaya*; and Bhattanarayana supposedly belonging to seventh to eighth century AD with his creation, *Venisamhara*.

The earliest symptoms of Sanskrit drama are marked in Patanjali's *Mahabhasya*, a grammatical treatise, belonging to 140 BC with the availability of a feasible date for

the beginning of Indian theatre. The dramatic references are evident even in the *Vyakarna* of Patanjali, *Arthashastra* of Kautilya and *Asthabhyam* of Panini. Thus, it shows the clear evidences of Hindu's possession of their original dramatic theory even over two thousand years ago with no trace of the Western assistance or influence. Despite a number of contradictory opinions, the exact date of Indian theatre's commencement is still unknown but there is no doubt about the richness of Indian Classical Sanskrit drama having a number of outstanding playwrights in the form of Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka, Vishakhadutta, Harsha, Banabhatta and Bhattanarayana and the great exponents of the dramatic art in the form of Bharata, Bhatta, Abhinavgupta Dhananjaya, Ramchandra and Ashvaghosha etc. All these personalities are the pioneering figures to promote Indian Sanskrit drama.

Thus, the emergence of Sanskrit drama is supposed to take place between the second century BC and the first century BC; and its flourishing period ranges from the first century to the tenth century which was comparatively a peaceful period of Indian history with the production of hundreds of plays. So, the period of Sanskrit drama's prosperity lasted for twelve hundred years without any interruption until it approached a mode of decline around the twelfth century AD which is noticeable in this way:

The Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory under the patronage of the court and the aristocracy till the 12th century when the Mohammedan intrusion shifted the Sanskrit stage. The glory of

Sanskrit drama became a thing of the past in the period of decline when it was divorced gradually from the stage.¹²

Gradually, the Sanskrit language started splitting into various vernaculars later adopting the form of regional languages. Persian invasion stilted the growth of theatrical activities in India. By the twelfth century AD, with the establishment of the rule of Muslim invaders, theatre was restricted. About this time, the growing folk theatre replaced Sanskrit drama. The subject matter of the various forms of folk theatre was derived from the epics, *puranas*, legends, mythology, popular lore and the religious stories, etc. This second phase of Indian theatre evolved in the form of oral traditions. This kind of theatre was in vogue with its performances from about 1000 AD to 1700 AD with the further continuation upto the present time existing in almost all the parts of India. The change of Indian political set up and the evolution of different regional languages in every part of India caused the emergence of this form of theatre. The classical theatre being inspired by *Natyashastra* was basically urban-oriented with the great satisfaction of its form and nature. This folk theatre, known as traditional theatre, based on rural roots, was quite simple, immediate, unsophisticated, informal and basically rural-oriented. The peak period of folk theatre's emergence in different regions of the country was ranging from fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. In every region, it emerged in the same regional language. Initially; they were quite devotional in nature being based on religious and local stories and mythological tales. Later, with the change of time, they got quite

¹² Reddy, K. Venkata and R.K. Dhawan. *Flowering of Indian Drama: Growth and Development*. New Delhi: Prestige Books. 2004. 9-10. Print

secular in terms of their content, getting inspired by romantic folk stories and heroic deeds and biographical accounts of the local heroes.

Though there are a number of forms of folk theatre existing in different regions of India with a slight or huge difference from one another, sometimes, sharing the same feature or having an interconnection yet a brief description of the most popular folk theatre forms should be given to have a better understanding of it.

Swang is the most popular folk theatre form of North India especially that of Haryana. This folk drama is basically musical enacting almost the similar stories with slight variations according to the related regions. These verse stories are presented with the help of related folk musical modes. Several musical instruments as *dholak*, *sarangi kharta*, *ektara* and *harmonium* are also used in *Swang* to make the dialogue delivery quite effective. A major offshoot of *Swang* is found in the form of *Nautanki*.

Another folk theatre form known as *Bhavai* is popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The *Bhavai* of Gujarat is more theatrical and less musical in comparison to that of Rajasthan. Flute, *sarangi*, *tabla*, *manjeera rabaab*, *bhungal* and *pakhaawaj* etc. are the instruments to be used in *Bhavai*. There is found a rare synthesis of romantic and devotional sentiments in this form of folk theatre.

Yatra or *Jatra* is the traditional theatre form of eastern India especially that of Bengal. Even in the different regions of eastern India including Orissa, Assam and West Bengal, it is presented in different forms. The literal meaning of *Yatra* suggests a pilgrimage or a procession moving from one place to another. So, its performance

requires an open area. Being originated in Bengal, *Jatra* was basically a ritual theatre deriving its themes from the life of Lord Krishna. Chaitanya, the famous Vaishnava saint used *Jatra* as a medium to collect his devotees in a large singing and dancing group with the propagation of his teachings of Krishna. Along with the dramatization of Lord Krishna's exploits, the *Jatra* also presented folk-tales, *puranic* legends and various episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Maach is the popular folk theatre form of Madhya Pradesh. The term *Maach* signifies both, the play and the stage itself. This form of folk theatre gives more importance to the songs which are played in between the dialogues. It originated in Ujjain about two centuries ago. Romantic folk tales or the mythological events are basically used as its themes.

Bhaona, one another folk theatre form presents the *Ankia naat* of Assam. Several glimpses of the culture of Assam, Orissa, Bengal, Brindavan and Mathura are presented in *Bhaona*. The story begins with *Sutradhara's* narration who first speaks in Sanskrit and later turns into Assamese or *Brijboli*.

The earlier forms of folk theatre existing in Maharashtra gave birth to a new form called *Tamasha*. It is full of humour, erotic songs and dance. In this traditional theatre form, women themselves play the feminine roles in place of men which is rarely found in any other folk theatre form. A *Tamasha* play always begins with some naughty episode of *Krishna-leela*. The erotic songs, sung during the performance of dancing, are called the *Lavani* songs.

Kashmiri folk theatre form, known as *Bhand Pather* is a combination of music, dance and acting with the inclusion of witty, satirical and parodical elements which add laughter to the performance. The musical instruments used in this are *dhol*, *nagaara* and *surnai*. As *Bhand Pather* is performed by the local farmers, the influence of their life-style, sensitivity and ideals is marked in this.

Dashavatar, presenting the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu – the God of creation and preservation, is the folk theatre form of Goa and Konkan regions. The performers personifying these incarnations of the god wear stylized make-up and wooden masks.

Krishnattam, a folk theatre form evolving in seventeenth century AD, belongs to Kerala. It is a sequential performance of eight plays lasting for eight days. The themes of these plays are based on various events of Lord Krishna's life presenting the victory of good over evil. There is one another traditional form of theatre of Kerala called *Mudiyettu* being performed only in the Kali temples as an oblation to the goddess. It is celebrated in the month of November and December presenting the triumph of goddess Bhadrakali over the *Asura Darika*. It contains seven characters in the form of Shiva, *Bhadrakali*, *Darika*, *Narada*, *Koimbidar*, *Kooli* and *Danavendra*, all of them wearing a heavy make-up.

Yakshagana, a popular folk theatre form of Karnataka, gives the presentation of puranic tales and mythological stories. The prominent episodes of the *Ramayana* as *Raajyaabhishek*, *Baali-Sugreeva yuddha*, *Lav-kush Yuddh*, and of the *Mahabharata* as *Subhadra vivah*, *Draupadi swayamvar*, *Karna-Arjun yuddh* and *Abhimanyu vadh* etc. are presented through it.

Khyal, belonging to Rajasthan, is such traditional folk theatre form which is full of music, songs and dance. In different regions of Rajasthan, it is known with different names as *Nautanki*, *Tamasha*, *Swang*, *Maach* and *rammat*. Thus, all these forms are similar, with the slight difference in their stylistic features, maintaining their particular identity.

Keertan, being presented in almost every part of India with different names, is the most popular narrative form of traditional theatre which is used in the exaltation and worshipping of the god by chanting and celebrating his praises with the help of music.

Thus, in the eighteenth century, a new awakening in Indian theatre was marked with the establishment of British imperialism as: "It was only after the British set up their regime in India that the crippled Indian drama received new strength and witnessed a revival."¹³ The influence of Western civilization on Indian life caused a new renaissance to emerge in Indian theatre. Along with this, the installation of English education also helped in making a critical study of western drama as well as the classical Indian drama. Some dramatic troupes from England and Italy visited the Indian cities like Madras and Bombay and performed there several English plays, especially those of Shakespeare.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, with the translation of two English comedies, *Disguise* and *Love is the Best Doctor* in Bengali, Lebedoff, a Russian music director is believed to produce the first modern drama in Calcutta. In this way, the influence of the west awakened "the dormant, critical impulse in the country to bring

¹³ Reddy, K. Venkata and R.K. Dhawan. *Flowering of Indian Drama: Growth and Development*. New Delhi: Prestige Books. 2004. 10. Print

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.”¹⁴

In this way, the initial creative efforts, being inspired by this new awakening, were found in the form of translations and adaptations of Sanskrit and English dramatic works; and the translation of Kalidasa’s masterpiece *Shakuntala* was made in different regional languages. Similarly, Dewan Kauromal translated Harsha’s *Ratnavali* into Sindhi, and Ishanatha Jha translated Sudraka’s *Mrichchhatika* into Maithili. From the English drama, the most tempting for the Indians, were the plays of Shakespeare in the form of *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, *Merchant of Venice* and *The Comedy of Errors* which were frequently translated and adapted by them. Along with Shakespeare’s so many plays, the Indian translators also seemed interested in Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer*.

The historical moment came in 1831 with the production of the very first original Indian English play. Krishna Mohan Banerjee produced *The Persecuted* or *Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the present state of Hindu Society in Calcutta*, a social play presenting the conflict emerging between the new ideas coming from western education and the deep-rooted orthodoxy. Later came Michael Madhusudan Dutt with the translation of his three plays from Bengali into English which were *Ratnavali* (1858), *Sermista* (1859) and *Is this called civilization?* (1871).

Then, for a very long time, there was not marked any such fruitful creative effort. There are several authentic reasons for such a hampered development of Indian

¹⁴ Iyengar, K.R.Srinivasa. *Drama in Modern India*. Bombay: The P.E.N. All India Centre. 1961. 4. print

English drama. First of all, it can be said that drama's success lies on a combined co-operation of a number of people as the playwright, the actors and the audience to make a perfect performance and leave a lasting impression as it is an integrated form of art, contrary to novel or poetry. Along with this, another major factor is found in the form of language difference; as English, being a foreign language for the Indians, was not a quite comfortable and natural medium to present a dramatic performance with, as the dialogues of the drama, making a conversation among the characters, could not make the audience feel that affinity, which they could feel with their mother tongue.

After a long pause came a period during the pre-independence era which marked an affluent progress of the Indian English drama, with its great promoters, in the form of Rabindranath tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P.Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Bharathi Sarabhai, Lobo Prabhu and many others, bringing it on a strong footing with its great development and progress.

Tagore's plays are full of allegory, symbolism and lyricism. His most famous plays as *Mukta Dhara*, *Sacrifice*, *The Post Office*, *Chitra*, *Red Oleanders* and *The King of the Dark Chamber* present a unique blend of two contradictory or opposite features in the form of modernity and conventionality as well as complexity and simplicity. Tagore has, indeed, a rich collection of his plays with a variety of taste but they are quite symbolic and suggestive in nature thereby causing a huge hurdle in their dramatic performance as it is rightly said:

Tagore's dramatic art is simple and complex at the same time.

From the point of view of style and manner of expression, his

dramatic art is simple, whereas in terms of variety of its forms and depth of its meaning, his dramatic art is complex. Tagore is essentially a lyric poet and sometimes his lyricism goes to such an extent that we find it difficult to distinguish his plays from ordinary dramatic productions such as lyric drama or dramatic lyrics.¹⁵

Tagore's plays basically belong to Bengali Drama only; despite most of them getting translated into English by the playwright himself.

Sri Aurobindo, getting influenced by the poetic drama of the Elizabethan period – that of Marlow and Shakespeare which got revived in the Victorian era by Stephen Phillips and Robert Bridges, produced a number of plays. Apart from six incomplete plays, the five complete verse plays of Aurobindo being written originally in English, are *Perseus*, *Vasavadatta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassara* and *Eric* which display his great dramatic genius. The play *Perseus* is based on a Greek legend presenting the vision of such a world which moves through evil and anarchy to attain a blissful state. The other play *Vasavaddata* taking its theme from Somadeva's *Kathasaritasagara* is presented in the form of a romantic comedy which depicts the love story of the princess of Avanti named Vasavadatta and the young king of Cosambie named Vuthsa Udayam, who is kept in the prison of Avanti. *Rodogune*, being inspired by the Shakespearean and Jacobean tragedies, presents the idea that suffering, coming to man's life, is not to destroy him but to take him to a higher state with a new consciousness. *The Viziers of Bassara*, deriving its theme from the *Arabian Nights* and presenting itself in the

¹⁵ Myles, Anita. *Contemporary Indian English Drama: An Overview*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2010. 4. Print

Elizabethan pattern, depicts the love story of Vizier's son named Nur-ul-din, having a very sophisticated nature, and a slave girl named Ania-al-jalice. The play *Eric* is presented in the form of comedy, focussing on love and adventure as displaying several different stages of love, and the establishment of man's affinity, not just with the people around him but with the whole universe. *Eric* is a great attempt of Aurobindo to put it in the form of classical drama; and like Shakespeare's *Tempest*, this play too maintains the dramatic unities of time, place and action.

With the study of Aurobindo's all these five plays one can easily get aware of his dramatic excellence and outstanding craftsmanship in verse. Apart from getting influenced by the Elizabethan drama with the use of blank verse in his plays, Aurobindo also seems to be inspired by the stalwarts of the Indian Sanskrit drama as K. R. S. Iyengar rightly remarks: "But all five plays are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti – though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones."¹⁶ Besides their being quite poetic in nature, these plays are put in the category of 'closet drama', which are designed just to be studied rather than getting them performed on the stage. Still these plays definitely present Aurobindo's excellence of portraying unique characters with their distinctive features as it is said that Aurobindo has created "extremely interesting men and women by developing psychological element which endows his plays with inexhaustible human interest and significance."¹⁷

¹⁶ Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publication. 1985. 226. Print

¹⁷ Naik, M.K. and S. Mokashi Puneekar, eds. *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English*. Madras: Oxford University Press. 1977. 7. Print

Apart from this, Aurobindo introduced an optimistic approach in Indian English drama by presenting in his plays quite positive visions regarding the future of mankind:

Thus it is quite obvious that the plays of Aurobindo have a variety of periods and locales ranging from ancient Greek times to medieval India and covering several countries like Iraq, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. Through all these plays run two characteristic themes used by Aurobindo: the idea of human evolution and love as a benevolent force capable of destroying evil. His plays may not have contemporary significance but they succeeded in keeping alive interest in Indian English Drama, which as a genre had yet to establish itself.¹⁸

Though T. P. Kailasam derives the themes of his English plays from the *puranas* as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* yet they are rendered into contemporary context. *The Burden* (1933) depicts the story of Bharata from the *Ramayana* presenting him in a state of predicament at the time of his father's death; and his elder brother's exile to communicate the message that one should abide by one's duty, despite having any adverse condition. Though the theme of *Fulfillment* (1933) is based on an episode from the *Mahabharata*, it contains the high imagination of Kailasam narrating the story of Eklavya who decides to join the Kauravas against the Pandavas; and brings his disaster this way when Krishna slains him stealthily and gets his mother spare from the grief of her son's loss. *The purpose* (1944) also depicts the story of Eklavya, a character

¹⁸ Myles, Anita. *Contemporary Indian English Drama: An Overview*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2010. 8. Print

from the *Mahabharata*, who is highly devoted to the art of archery to protect the lives of the weak creatures of the forest from the strong tyrannous elements. Kailasam's another play *Karna* (1946) also picks a character named Karna from the *Mahabharata* and presents it in an idealized state. The play describes that the fairness of killing is assessed through the purpose behind it, not by the ways in which it has been done.

The play *Keechaka* (1946) also demonstrates a character with the same name from the *Mahabharata*. Though the Keechaka of the *Mahabharata* was a mean-spirited person yet the play presents him in a quite idealized form; who falls in love with Sairandhri after returning from the war and is killed by Valala. Thus, the English plays of Kailasam reflect his intense interest in the presentation of the epical characters with their idealization. Despite lacking the proper use of the dramatic style and a perfect command on the art of characterization, Kailasam's most plays remained successful on the stage.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya widened the horizon of Indian English drama with his revolutionary ideas and leftist inclination. On one hand, where he has some devotional plays as *Tuka Ram*, *Raidas*, *Saku Bai*, *Pundalik*, *Jayadeva* and *Chokha Mela*, etc. presenting the lives of some Indian saints, on the other hand, he has some social plays as *The Parrot*, *The Window*, *The Sentry's Lantern*, *The Evening Lamp* and *The Coffin* showing his deep knowledge of the problems prevalent in the society; and his great sympathies for the suffering people or the victimized ones. *The Parrot* is a revolutionary play against the oppressive state of the women confined within the four walls; and *The Window* is against capitalism. *The Sentry's Lantern* displays the evil

forces of imperialism. *The Coffin* is a biting comment on those snobbish creative writers who remain confined in their own blissful world, staying quite unaware of the problems of the outside world. The play asserts the need of a purposeful writing. Thus, the plays of Chattopadhyaya project his deep analysis of the most vital issues of the then society.

Bharati Sarabhai, a prominent woman dramatist, was inspired by the *Gandhian* philosophy which is projected in her plays. As her play, *The Well of the People* (1949), is based on a quite famous doctrine of Gandhi called *Daridra Narayana* which considers the poor as equal to God. It is the story of an old widow who could not go on a pilgrimage. Then she utilizes her savings for the pilgrimage by spending it on building a well in her village for the untouchables. It is a lyrical play presenting the problems of the untouchables during the age of Gandhi. Her next play, *Two Women* (1952), is a presentation of conflict between two opposite forces as spiritualism and materialism, modernity and tradition, asserting the idea that God is within.

A.S.P. Ayyar and J.M. Lobo Prabhu are two other distinguished playwrights who made a remarkable contribution to Indian English drama. Ayyar's plays as *In the Clutches of the Devil* (1926), *Sita's Choice* (1935), *The Slave of Ideas* (1941) and the *Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1942) are full of reformist ideas dealing with the most prominent evils existing in the society in the form of superstitions or blind beliefs, caste system, widow-marriage and the deep-rooted materialism. Thus, Ayyar gets quite critical of the contemporary life in his plays produced in the prose form. J.M. Lobo Prabhu's plays belong to both, pre and post-independence period as his two creations *Mother of New India: A Play of the Indian Village in three acts* (1944) and

Death Abdicates (1945) are from the pre-independence era. His post-independent plays were published under the title *Collected Plays* (1954), possessing dramas of a good grade. *Apes in the Parlour* targets the sophisticated life making a biting comment on it. *The Family Cage* displays the predicament of a widowed sister living in a joint family. *Flags of the Heart* is a play which considers the service and sacrifice, made for the poor, to be of a great value. Lobo Prabhu's employment of proper dramatic situation and dialogues compensates his drawback of presenting unconvincing characters.

A mention may be made of a few more playwrights with their little contribution to Indian English drama. V.V.Srinivasa Iyengar's publication of *Dramatic Divertissements* is found in two volumes, Sudhindra Nath Ghose produced his play *The Colours of a Great City*, R.K.Narayan came with the *Watchman of the Lake*, K.R.S.Iyengar produced two plays, *The Storm in a Tea Cup* and *The Battle of the Optionals*, Balwant Gargi's creation is *The Vulture and Other Plays* and Mrinalini Sarabhai wrote the play; *The Captive Soil*.

Though, Indian English drama of the pre-independent era is remarkable for a large variety of themes, higher skills of technique, proper employment of symbolism, its devotion to moral and human values and, most importantly, a great lyrical excellence yet it was not basically constituted for the stage performance.

The pre-independent tradition of verse plays continued in post-independent India, too; with the writing of some more verse plays, but during this period, prose plays are more in number and higher in quality as compared to the verse plays. Therefore, before we come to analyze the prose plays of this period, a reference should be made to the

verse plays; regarding which M.K.Naik says: "The Tagore-Aurobindo-Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continues, but with a difference, in the hands of Manjeri Isvaran, G.V.Desani, Lakhan deb and Pritish Nandy."¹⁹ Manjeri Isvaran's poetic play *Yama and Yami* (1948) presents Yami's incestuous love for her brother Yama. This play employs the classical devices of prologue and epilogue. G.V.Desani's *Hali* (1950) is a unique play which is full of imagination and symbolism. Later, come the plays of Lakhan Deb getting presented in blank verse. His play, *Tiger's Claw* (1967), depicts the nobility and the heroic nature of the historical character, Shivaji, who murders Afzal Khan. Deb produced two other plays as *Vivekanad* (1972) and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976). His last play, being inspired by T.S.Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, depicts the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. Along with employing the classical devices in the form of prologue and chorus, this play is cast on the model of Greek tragedy; employing its dramatic unities of time, place and action. A mention may be made of some other significant verse plays as well belonging to this period like P.A.Krishnaswami's *The flute of Krishna* (1950), Satya Dev Jaggi's *The Point of Light*, Pritish Nandy's *Rites for a Plebeian Statue* (1969), Sree Devi Singh's *The Purple Braided People* (1970), P.S.Vasudeva's *The Sunflower* (1972) and S.Raman's *Karna* (1979), etc.

Stage performance is definitely the most distinguished feature of drama; and it was only in the post-independence era, when this phenomenon was marked in the form of the plays by Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma and Gurucharan Das which were successfully staged abroad. Asif Currimbhoy's plays were basically written for theatre. Comprising the elements of singing, dancing and pantomime, the plays of Currimbhoy

¹⁹ Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 1995. 268. Print

culminate into the full fledged pieces of dramatic performances with their capability of creating strong auditory and visual images.

Currimbhoy has written around thirty plays being based on a variety of themes as contemporary politics, history, religion, art, philosophy, psychological conflicts, economic crisis, social problems and east-west relations etc. A theme-wise division of his plays may be made to have a better understanding of them as *The Captives* (1963), *Goa* (1964), *Valley of the Assassins* (1966), *Abbe Faria* (1968), *An Experiment with Truth* (1969), *Inquilab* (1970), *The refugee* (1971), *Sonar Bangla* (1972), *Om Mane Padme hum!* (1972), *Angkor* (1973) and *The Dissident MLA* (1974) belong to historical and political themes. The only play *Om* (1961) comes in the category of a religious theme. *The Clock* (1959), *The Dumb Dancer* (1961), *This Alien....Native Land* (1975) are the plays based on psychological themes. While, *The Doldrummers* (1960), *Thorns on a Canvas* (1962) and *The Miracle Seed* (1973) reflect the social themes. And the most prominent theme of the post-colonial period being influenced by British colonialism in the form of East-West encounter is displayed through *The Tourist Mecca* (1959), *The Hungry Ones* (1965) and *Darjeeling Tea?* (1971). These are the published plays while there are a number of unpublished plays which were successfully performed on the stage as *Monsoon*, *The Lotus Eater*, *The Restraunt*, *The kaleidoscope*, *The Mercenary*, *And Never the Twain shall Meet*, *The Temple Dancers* and *The Great Indian Bastard*. Thus, K.R.S.lyengar rightly remarks about his dramatic genius as: "Farce, comedy,

melodrama, tragedy, history, fantasy: Currimbhoy handles them all with commendable ease.”²⁰

Nissim Ezekiel, a renowned name in Indian English poetry has also contributed to the enrichment of Indian English drama in his own distinguished way. His *Three plays* (1969) comprising *Nalini: A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy* and *The Sleepwalkers: An Indo-American Farce* depict the hollow life of the urban middle-class people, fickle relationships of modern lovers and a greedy temptation to adopt the American life-style, respectively. His another play, *Songs of Deprivation* (1969), exposes the hypocritical and rigid nature of the contemporary Indian society. Ezekiel is an outstanding craftsman presenting his plays in a symmetry being quite witty, humorous and ironical. He observes quite minutely the oddities existing in the behaviour of the people of the contemporary society and demonstrates them quite satisfactorily in his plays. Regarding this Chetan Karnani opines that “in his satire of current fashion, in his exposure of pose and pretence, Ezekiel comes very closer to the spirit of some English social satirists in the theatre.”²¹

Like Lakhan Deb, Gurucharan Das also promoted the historical play by producing *Larins Sahib* (1970) presenting some historical events, taking place during the period of one year ranging from 1846 to 1847 in Punjab. The events are depicted through the letters and the documents which the major characters of the play exchange. It is a distinguished historical play with a fruitful demonstration of history as well as the proper employment of the required qualities in the historical characters. Moreover, the

²⁰ Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publication. 1985. 732. Print

²¹ Karnani, Chetan. *Nissim Ezekiel*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann. 1974. 126. Print

play's success lies in its perfect presentation of the colonial background of the nineteenth century India.

Gieve Patel can be mentioned overhere as the next playwright with the production of his play, *Princes* (1970), being the first Parsi play. The play is set in the background of a semi-urban area of South Gujarat, having the Parsi culture, where a great conflict is observed between the two Parsi families over the possession of a single male child. This play is remarkable for its perfect handling of situation and presentation of characters; and their dialogues along with the use of experimental language. The situation presented in the play introduces the typical Indian mentality of yearning for male children, with the perfect use of sub-cultures' language in the form of modified English, containing Indian rhythms as contrary to the standard English.

Pratap Sharma has occupied a distinguished place among contemporary playwrights with the treatment of bold themes in his two plays as *The Professor Has a Warcry* (1970) and *A Touch of Brightness* (1970). The first one demonstrates the mental anguish of the protagonist of the play named Virendra; after being aware of his illegitimacy, while the second one is the true presentation of Bombay's red light area. Both these plays received a praise for the boldness of theme, perfect presentation of characters and technical virtuosity.

Habib Tanvir, a man of versatile genius, being a playwright, poet, actor, director and founder of a theatre company, called 'Naya Theatre' in Bhopal, produced a number of plays, among which the most famous are *Agra Bazar* (1954) and *Charandas Chor* (1975).

Ranganathan Parthasarathy, with the pen name of Indira Parthasarathy, is widely known as Ee. Paa. His first production *Mazai* or *Rain* (1972) was the first modern Tamil play which was performed on the stage by a Delhi group. Then, he produced *Aurangzeb* (1973) with the alteration in the characteristics of the historical figure of this emperor. *Nandan Kathai* or the *Legend of Nandan* (1978) depicts the story of an untouchable peasant who yearns to have a glimpse of God Shiva in the temple which he is forbidden to enter. Then came *Kala Iyantirankal* or *Time Machines* (1977) and *Porvai Portiya Udalkal* or *Bodies Wrapped under Blankets* (1978). Thereafter, he produced his most popular drama, *Ramanujar* (1996), presenting the character of the founder of the 'Vaishnava School' of Vishishtadvaitam, who was a great philosopher and reformer belonging to the eleventh century.

Mahasweta Devi, a social activist, devoted herself completely to the upliftment of the untouchables, the downtrodden and the marginalized. She also backs the struggling tribal people of Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Her same zeal is reflected in her dramatic works also which are based on the problems of *Dalits*, women and the rural tribal communities of West Bengal. Her *Five Plays* (1997) contains *Mother of 1084*, *Aajir*, *Urvashi and Johnny*, *Bayen* and *Water*. These works basically were in other genres as novel and stories which she later converted into plays and combined them in *Five Plays*.

Contemporary Indian drama in English translations is found getting quite innovative and experimental regarding the selection of its themes and the techniques applied in it. Social, historical, mythological, legendary and folk themes have been

largely used in these works maintaining their vitality which brings out outstanding popularity for them. Mohan Rakesh writing in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Girish Karnad in Kannad are regarded to be the most prominent representatives of the contemporary Indian drama, on the pan-Indian level, with the English translations of their plays written in regional languages.

Mohan Rakesh stepped out of the traditional threshold of Hindi drama and entered his self-created dramatic world which is full of innovation. An influence of Marxism is marked on him, with his new and challenging experiments, in the form of his endeavours to project vital tragic issues of the life of modern man as how they fail to understand each other or even themselves. It is known as the drama of 'non-communication', taking a step ahead of the typical Hindi drama, based on traditional symbolism and pseudo-modernism. His plays demonstrate the agonies of the men and the women of the society who suffer at the hands of the socio-economic hierarchical forces and cultural hegemony. His two plays, *One Day in Ashadha* and *The Great Swans of the Waves*, employ historical and legendary base to project the contemporary problems. The characters of his plays use smooth flowing dialogues, containing a great meaning and depth, which are quite suitable to them.

On one hand, where Mohan Rakesh presents communication gap among contemporary people with the help of historical figures, Badal Sircar, on the other hand, presents the existential problem of modern man, with the help of contemporary situations, which are well depicted in his play, *Evam Indrajit*. Along with this, Sircar is also a prominent experimental dramatist regarding the themes and techniques of

dramatic creations and performance. He is widely known as a 'barefoot playwright', with the establishment of his 'Third Theatre'. It is authentically a theatre of the people which is not only performed by them but also created and supported by them. Beyond the restrictions of the classical and the folk theatre, the 'Third Theatre' breaks the wall standing between the performers and the audience, by allowing a four way communication between the actor and the actor, actor and audience, audience and actor and ultimately audience and audience. It is a portable and inexpensive theatre with no use of the accessories during performance, and no sale of the tickets to watch the performance as it is performed anywhere in the open area as a street, market place or outside the office where people moving around can watch it. It is not just to make people aware of the socio-economic and political problems but also to awaken them to take a strong step which could bring a radical social change. Sircar's prominent plays *Procession*, *Bhoma* and *Stale News* belong to 'Third Theatre' only.

Procession depicts man's search for a real home belonging to a society in which everyone is treated equally, without any exploitation. *Bhoma* presents the deplorable condition of the poor peasants of rural India; who are oppressed and exploited by the powerful people at the social and economic level. *Stale News* is based on the theme of revolt; in which the heart of an indifferent young man is ultimately moved by the pathetic condition of the victimized poor people. Thus, he decides to take an action against such inhumanity.

Vijay Tendulkar, being the pioneer of the avant-garde Marathi theatre, demonstrates the sufferings, agonies, cries and suffocations of the man belonging to

the middle-class society. The prominent theme of his plays is that of man's isolation and his confrontation with the alienated surroundings. Most of Tendulkar's plays, being inspired by Antonin Artaud, present man's anxiety taking the form of violence. He does not look down upon human violence but considers it to be an inborn element in human nature. Tendulkar presents violence in its quite natural and raw form on the stage as against presenting it in a refined form to look pleasant. His plays, *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*, caused a thunder in society. They deal with several problems regarding love, marriage, sex and moral values existing in the society. Tendulkar's latest plays, *To Hell with Destiny* and *The Tour*, project the mentality of the middle-class people and value system. In place of paying more attention, to increase the number of characters and the range of episodes and situations, Tendulkar gives more importance to convey deeper meanings and their corollaries in both these plays. Vijay Tendulkar, along with other playwrights as Mohan Rakesh, Badal sircar and Girish Karnad, has brought a great change in Indian theatre. He employed new models and avoided the three-act play and, thus, brought a change in the existing pattern and form of Indian drama. With the development of cautiously crafted flexible forms of story telling belonging to his region, Tendulkar tries to bridge the gulf between two contradictory theatres in the form of traditional and modern by producing a living and novel form of theatre, an instance of which is his play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. It is, therefore, said of him: "As a playwright, he has dwelt on all aspects of urban life in Indian cities. He has delineated the alienation of the modern individual,

satirized modern politics, depicted social and individual tensions, portrayed the complexities of human character and exploited man-woman relationship.”²²

As contrary to Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar, who deal with the problems of middle class people, Girish Karnad employs history, myths and legends as the basis of his plays to project a new vision. With the use of such themes, he tries to present modern life, being full of internal conflict and anguish and modern man’s endless struggle to obtain perfection. Karnad in his plays *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana* and *Tale-Danda* presents as how the archetypal, historical and mythic experiences relate to the contemporary problems. His creative reworking of history, myths and folk-tales reminds one of the great scholars as T.P.Kailasam and Adya Rangacharya. Karnad has been quite successful in his projection of the idea, not only before the Indian dramatists but the theatre community of the whole world, that our past and present can work mutually to provide contemporary existence with a meaning and theatre activity with a proper direction.

Thus, the combination of three dramatic traditions as, classical, folk and, western, is quite evident in the contemporary Indian drama in English translations, culminating into a new style and form of production. Karnad has taken the Indian theatre, to a great height, making it quite rich. Along with contributing into the theatre, Karnad has also directed and acted in several television serials, films and documentaries. As an ambassador of art and culture he has also represented India abroad.

²² Dodiya, Jaydipsinh K. and K.V.Surendran, eds. *Indian English Drama: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons. 2000. 93. Print

At present, Indian English drama has got quite prominent with the young talented playwrights as Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan, who have made the dramatic writing to be quite lively and forceful, focusing on the vital issues of the society. Dattani's plays are based on various problems of middle-class people; as his *Where There is a Will* (1988) displays familial relationships, *Dance like a Man* (1989) projects the problem of generation gap, while his three plays *Bravely fought the Queen* (1994), *Do the Needful* (1997) and *A Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) deal with the bold theme of homosexuality. His *Seven Steps around the Fire* (1999) depicts eunuch's lives. *Tara* (1990) reveals the male domination prevailing in Indian society and *Final Solution* (1994) is based on the theme of communalism. Thus, it is truly said about Dattani that he "is a dramatist of the modern times who has earned considerable repute by focusing on the burning issues that hog the limelight."²³ Padmanabhan's play, *Harvest*, got a world-wide fame with the reception of Onassis award. Raising the issue of organ-selling by a poor Indian, for a little amount of money, to a western buyer, displays the problem of poverty in India. It is the story of Om Prakash, a twenty year old poor young man, living in a single room with his family in a *chawl* of Bombay, getting unemployed and suffered from hunger, is ultimately bound to become an organ donor. Padmanabhan exposes the problems of big cities in India, where population explosion causes unemployment, which is followed by poverty and poverty in return forces the man to adopt the unfair means for the survival as is done by Om Prakash in the form of organ-selling. These two contemporary playwrights do not base their plays on the traditional themes but go out of the track and choose a unique subject to work on. Dattani exposes

²³ Chakraborty, Kaustav. *Indian Drama in English*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd. 2011. 264. Print

a mean and ugly face of life, with a number of unhappy things; while Padmanabhan depicts a quite inhuman and horrifying world, where people feed themselves at the cost of their bodies. Padmanabhan's play displays the picture of a more disgusting world as compared to the plays of Dattani. *Harvest* is quite intellectual in place of being stageworthy; as contrary to Dattani's plays, which have marked a great success on stage relating to middle-class audience's imagination. Thus, R.K. Dhawan Perfectly remarks about Dattani and Padmanabhan : "Very recently Indian English Drama shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing."²⁴

After having a detailed discussion on the origin, growth and development of Indian theatre, a concluding assessment of the contemporary drama can be made which is in the process of being written and performed on the stage. A deep analysis of Indian drama reveals the fact that Indian English drama has been lagged behind by the Indian regional dramas, being developed to a great extent. The basic reason behind this decline of Indian English drama is the absence of a living theatre for this. Stage performance is an integral part of drama which distinguishes it from other genres of literature. A true success of a play can be analyzed with its convincing stage performance only as it intimates the playwrights through the reaction of the audience whether his work is perfect or needs some improvement. Thus, the lack of stage performance of Indian English drama proved to be the greatest drawback of its development.

²⁴ Dhawan, R.K. *50 Years of Indian Writing*. New Delhi: IAES. 1999. 19. Print

However, some occasional stage performances of Indian English plays take place in some big cities of India as Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta. The American Centre and the British Council, devoted to the development of Indian English theatre, quite often, arrange the visits of some foreign troupes for such performances. 'Yatrik group', a theatrical troupe, performed several plays on stage in Delhi, and a famous director named Bary John also contributed prominently to the Delhi theatre. A few Indian English plays provide a great satisfaction, as *Mira* by Gurucharan Das, *A Touch of Brightness* by Pratap Sharma and *The Dumb Dancer* by Asif Currimbhoy, having made a successful stage performance in the West.

During a few decades, a noticeable development is marked in Indian drama produced in Indian languages and the drama in English translations. At the contemporary time, a number of plays written in the regional languages are found being translated into English. Now, a bulk of such plays is in existence, which offers the literary scholars to make an analysis and evaluation of Indian drama in its total form. The translations bridged the gap between the east and the west, north and the south and, thus, helped in the enrichment of today's creative consciousness. Regional drama, with its great success and prevalence in India, suggests the formation of a national theatre which includes all types of theatrical art.

Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Kannad are the most prominent language theatres, which remained active and contributed to the consolidation and rejuvenation of the growth of Indian theatre during the post-independence era, with their translation into the English language. Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad, the

true representatives of these respective language theatres, project through their works a new resurgence taking place in the dramatic field, with their bold experiments and innovative techniques, leading the Indian drama to a new direction which marks a stage of great achievement.

Thus, a minute analysis of the historical development of Indian theatre reveals the fact that the Indian theatre has its distinct foundation in the form of Sanskrit drama which is accountable for its present day success. The Sanskrit drama lavishly flourished by the twelfth century under the patronage of the Indian kings, being an ardent lover and supporter of it, until the Mohammedan intrusion demolished it. This demolition of the traditional Sanskrit theatre gave birth to a new form of theatre known as folk theatre. Thus, after six centuries, with the establishment of British imperialism in India in the eighteenth century, Western dramatic philosophy started to influence and neglect the original Indian dramatic traditions. Thereafter, the post-independent Indian theatre practitioners tried to create an authentic Indian theatre, having no influence of the western colonial theatre by making a revival of the classical elements and returning to their original roots. As a result of which, a new theatrical movement known as the 'Theatre of Roots' came into being as a practical effort to produce a distinct Indian theatre for urban audiences by combining the elements of both, the modern European theatre and the traditional Indian performance still keeping its distinction from the two.

In this way, a historical analysis of Indian drama projects that the contemporary playwrights are approaching the same Indian traditional roots which were the very foundation of Indian theatre. Girish Karnad, one of the stalwart dramatists of the roots

movement, does it by exploiting the traditional themes for the purpose of reviving the authentic Indian theatre. On the whole, it is rightly said that:

Modern Indian English theatre has, on the one hand, with the application of various modern theories and innovative tools, extended its focus from rural to urban India, while, on the other, these plays, as a part of the 'Theatre of Roots' movement, are significant in their binding of the traditional forms of Indian theatre with the modern.²⁵

Hence; the whole development of Indian theatre can be viewed with its division into three broad phases – The Sanskrit or Classical Theatre, Folk or Traditional Theatre and the Modern Indian Theatre. "This tripartite division is usually summed up simply as the Hindu, Muslim, and British eras or as the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eras."²⁶

The first phase was replete with plays based on themes narrating the incidents of the lives of kings and royal figures, love stories and religious stories. The second phase also comprises the plays mostly dealing with religious themes or narrating some local legends, but the focus was mainly on the performances. The third phase produced plays dealing with diverse theme as social, political, historical, religious, psychological and east-west relation. It is having many distinctive features; as during this time, Indian theatre got influenced by the British theatrical traditions, which introduced the proscenium stage in Indian theatre. After the independence of India, a return is marked to the ancient Indian trends of drama. Now the playwrights have started reviving the

²⁵ Chakraborty, Kaustav. *Indian Drama in English*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd. 2011. 1 Print

²⁶ Bhatia, Nandi. *Modern Indian Theatre*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2009. 13. Print

ancient Indian traditional themes to get rid of the British influence but due to the long existence of colonialism in India, Indian theatre has not yet completely decolonized itself as the proscenium stage, one of the most distinctive features of British theater, is still prevalent in Indian theatre.