CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This research is the natural outcome of the researcher's keen interest in the comparative study of George Bernard Shaw; not because he is a critic of art, music, literature, and drama; a novelist, an economist, a Fabian Socialist, and a funny man; and Lakshmi Narayan Mishra; not because he is a poet, and an indelible writer of a number of plays with historical and cultural themes; but because both Shaw and Mishra occupy prominent position as the innovators of a new dramatic genre, commonly called 'problem plays' in English and 'Samasya Natak' in Hindi. Both of them distinguish themselves as eminent writers of problem plays by reacting against the depiction of shoddy romanticism in the contemporary drama in English and Hindi respectively, and laying bare the realities of life by means of witty, intellectual and psychological discussion of the social, and political questions¹ in the words of common speech. After passing M.A. Examinations in English and Hindi, the researcher found himself deeply absorbed in the works of both the playwrights, with a religious belief that the best work on Shaw is Shaw

and that on Mishra is Mishra, and Shaw's warning '... before you attempt to enjoy my plays, clear out of your consciousness most absolutely everything you have ever read about me in a newspaper'.

One of the chief problems in making a study of Shaw is that his creative life extends over more than seventy years, and he continued to develop and change long beyond the age at which most writers can only repeat themselves. Moreover, embracing so many subjects, he wrote and talked so endlessly that his works have become voluminous. The critics and the biographers have further added to the volumes on his works. In educated opinion, Shaw now stands as the greatest all-round English dramatist since Shakespeare. He is regarded as a prose writer of classic lucidity and enviable readableness, who has kept social responsibility and a fine sense of artistic form.

Shaw's three most distinguished biographers are — Archibald Henderson, E. Maseketh Pearson and St. John Ervins. Henderson's

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The biography is massive, critical and packed with information. Of the very numerous approximations to a definitive critical biography, William Irvine's *The Universe of G.B.S.* is good. The early studies by G.K. Chesterton and Eric Bentley are keen and intelligent entries into Shaw's multifarious intellectual and artistic activities. Besides early study of Shaw by Henry Charles Duffin, there have been a number of dedicated critics and scholars who have been continuously contributing significant and original scholarly assessment and reassessment of Shaw. Among them, the important names are—S. Winsten, Richard M. Ohmann, Martin Reisel, Louis Crompton, Audrey Williamson,  


Daniel Bern’s *The Dramatic Theory of George Bernard Shaw* is an unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation.

Among many critics who contributed to periodical literature on Shaw, a mention may be made of Stanley Weintraub, Frederick Mowbell, John Gasaner, and Eric Bentley, who are devoted and accomplished Shavian critics. Besides these, Shaw’s

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18 (Madison, Wis., 1969).


20 (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1962).

21 A two-part bibliography of books and articles on Shaw from 1948 to 1955 compiled by Carl Farley and Marvin Carlson appeared in *Modern Drama*, September and December, 1959. More recent studies are chronicled annually in the *PMLA* bibliography.
Prefaces are most substantial and revealing, and can be read independently as his systematic explorations of such topics as parenthood, marriage, education, Christianity and poverty.

The critics and scholars mentioned above have made a general study of the various aspects of Shaw's works. But Ramadan Balfour has made an attempt to study the problem play, in general, and its influence on modern life and thought, while R.C. Gupta made another study of similar nature in India. The Shaw Review has been creating new opportunities for the Shavian scholars and critics to contribute critical assessment of the content and manner of Shaw's works. Important specialised studies are also going on incessantly.

Commenting on the condition of the Indian theatre in 1922, Sir C.P. Rameswar Iyer had noted that the double life of Indians due to 'the divorce between the real and the ideal, precept and practice' was distressingly reflected in the modern Indian theatre. A few years later, Lakshmi Narayan

22Viz. Prefaces for Getting Married, Misalliance and Androcles and the Lion.
23Problem Play and Its Influence on Modern Life and Thought.
24The Problem Play (Agra).
25The Social Drama and Its Scope", SHAKA, II (January 2, 1922), p. 68.
Mishra wrote his second problem play entitled *Nakhesa Ka Randir* to liberate the people from the prevailing hypocrisy. In 1939, Indar Nath Madan produced an outline study of Mishra's problem plays in the context of Hindi literature. Before Madan, R.K. Yajnik had made a study of the origin of the Indian theatre and its later developments under European influence. Since then a number of scholars and critics have been presenting the analysis and assessment of Mishra's works in the periodicals of Hindi literature.

In addition to above, many scholars have conducted their studies of Mishra's works, most of which are research works leading to the Ph.D. degree of different Universities of India. The most significant among such studies have been made:


by Babban Tripathi, Shashahukher Neithani, Anusuya Gupta, Shivnath Pandey, Ram Achal Shukla, Karn Singh Bhati, and Bhagat Singh Gautam. Bharat Bhushan Chadha, Jyesh Chandra Mishra, Dinanath Pandey, Vinay Kumar, and Mandhata Ojha have also published their respective assessments of Misha's works in shape of books which have elucidated their
critical understanding. Vinay Kumar and Mandhata Ojha have conducted their studies of the Hindi problem plays in general, and evaluated Mishra's problem plays in the context of the whole Hindi Samasya Natak which emerged as the continuation of the contemporary realistic plays as well as due to the western revolt against the idealistic and romantic plays and its influence on Hindi drama.

In 1963, Vishwanath Mishra tried to ascertain the impact of English on Hindi language and literature, and in 1966, the impact of west on Hindi drama. Besides these, a number of other books were also written to present the critical, evolutionary, and psychological growth of Hindi drama which studied Mishra’s works in the context of the history.

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of Hindi drama. Nirmala Hemant, Dr. Nagendra, Kusum Kumar and Satyendra Taneja tried to study the dramatic principles of the Hindi problem plays in the context of modern Hindi drama.

From the bibliographical survey made above, it is obvious that individual studies of Shaw and Mishra have been made separately, but none of them have made a specific study of the problem plays of either of the two. Moreover, except a few articles and chapters which outline the impact of the English drama on Hindi drama, no attempt has been made to study the problem plays of both Shaw and Mishra on comparative basis. Besides, most of them are scanty and disinclined to make deeper and systematic studies of both as the writers of problem plays in two divergent literatures like English and Hindi.

In this context, the present research work, entitled *English and Hindi Problem Plays: A Comparative Study of George Bernard Shaw and Lakshmi Narayan Mishra*, becomes justifiable in the

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51 *Hindi Natyak Purnamulyankan* (Kanpur: Grantham, 1971).
52 See Vishwanath Mishra at F.N. 29 (1), above.
53 See footnotes 40-51, above.
sense that it endeavours to make a comparative study of their experiments and practices of writing problem plays which reached their eminence at their hands.

The main object of the present study is to assess the influence of Shaw on Mishra as problem playwright along with critical analysis of the points of similarity and difference taking into account their ideas and techniques with a view to making a comparative estimate of the two as writers of problem plays in English and Hindi respectively. It is, however, not possible to study the work and thought of a major literary figure in vacuum because he is 'deeply influenced by the circumstances of his day'. Moreover, man and his social conditions do change from age to age but, to a great extent, they also remain the same. Therefore, the study of the relation of the literature of a period to the more general life of the age increases our understanding of both. And it is more so in case of problem plays. It is with this aim that the second chapter deals with the social and intellectual background of both English and Hindi problem plays. A brief survey of the problem plays in English and Hindi has been given to exhibit that when Shaw and Mishra set about producing


the drama of the future, which reconciled philosophy and stage, they profited from the common mistake of the nineteenth century men of letters who were not also men of theatre. Both wished to create plays which were indeed not only drama but literature also. This chapter shows the relationship of Shaw and Mehta, as great problem playwrights, to the late nineteenth century popular theatre in order to suggest that this relationship was of the greatest importance in their dramaturgy. Moreover, it reveals that Shaw's problem plays were the legitimate results of that popular theatre, and belong in the main stream of English dramatic history. So were those of Mehta, and they belong in the main stream of Hindi dramatic history. But what is finally very important is what they made of their connections with the late nineteenth-century drama.

This historical approach makes it clear that Ibsen's plays exercised influence on English plays which were manufacturing 'an artificial world unvisited by any gleam of intelligence', and English plays, in turn, influenced their Hindi counterparts, which were producing mere entertainment. Naturally, English and Hindi problem plays emerged under 'foreign' influence, but developed in their own respective dramatic traditions.

Shaw's reactions against the contemporary romantic drama in English, and the influences he received from the thoughts, experiences and company of the men of letters that helped him in making himself a problem playwright constitute the beginning of the third chapter. In the light of above, Shaw's views about problem plays have been discussed, and in this background, his individual problem plays have been interpreted separately. An attempt has been made to analyse the problem plays of Shaw by looking into their themes, plots, dialogues, characterization and the language. The discussion of their content and technique has revealed their merits and demerits also.

The fourth chapter presents a study of the problem plays of Mishra in the background of both Hindi dramatic traditions and the impact of English problem plays. Mishra's reactions and ideas about the Hindi drama before him have been examined. The influences that went on making him a problem playwright have been considered. His individual problem plays have been analysed, and their themes, plots, dialogues, characterization and language, discussed to see his contribution as a Hindi problem playwright and the relation his problem plays bear with those of Shaw.

After the problem plays of both Shaw and Mishra have already been discussed in English and Hindi dramatic traditions and backgrounds respectively as well as the studies of these plays made individually, the fifth chapter emerges naturally as the
presentation of a comparative analysis of these two playwrights, as the writers of problem plays, with special reference to their themes, plots, characterization and dialogues. Furthermore, this chapter gives an assessment of English and Hindi problem plays with special reference to Shaw's influence on Mishra, and determines the nature of influence and its consequence on the strength of the illustrations from both.

The sixth chapter, which is Conclusion, gives an estimate of this study, and proves the significance of comparative study in general, and of this study in particular. It gives an evaluation of Shaw's problem plays in the context of the English dramatic traditions; and makes an assessment of the contribution of Mishra, as a writer of problem plays in Hindi, to his own literature. While discussing the relative merits and demerits of the foreign influence on Mishra, especially that of Shaw, the limitations of foreign literary and cultural influence on Indian culture and literature, including Hindi problem plays, have exposed the limitations and possibilities of the influence of one culture on the other. It has also been made clear as to what extent the foreign influence has been beneficial or detrimental to the growth of the Hindi problem plays as a form of dramatic literature.

The methodology for conducting this research work on a topic of comparative study involves an amalgamation of the
techniques of both historical and literary criticism. It is essential to make a comparative study of English and Hindi problem plays in general, and of Shaw and Mishra in particular, very much discriminative in nature. Shaw has been placed first in the perspective of his native tradition. Then the same thing has been done to Mishra. This has required the researcher to present a socio-intellectual background along with a brief survey of the dramatic literature leading to the emergence of problem plays as a new dramatic genre in both English and Hindi. This survey has revealed that a proper background was prepared for Shaw and Mishra to write problem plays in their respective literatures. In this context, the problem plays of Shaw have been discussed individually in respect of themes, plots, dialogues and characterization, which has also added further to the background in which Mishra's problem plays have been discussed as it has been done with Shaw's.

After doing this much of background study, the problem plays of both Shaw and Mishra have been taken up for comparative evaluation. While doing this, the similarities and differences in the nature of their themes, solutions, plots, dialogues and characterization have been analysed. This approach has exhibited the link between English and Hindi problem plays in general and those of Shaw and Mishra in particular. Having revealed the impact of English literature in general and the problem plays
of Shaw in particular on Aishra's distinctive contribution of both Shaw and Aishra to their own literatures has also been indicated.

One thing which is lacking in this novel is the study of theatrical traditions and conditions, and the composition and intellectual level of the audience of both the dramatists. It was these real conditions which compelled Shaw to abandon the ordinary technique of drama, and create what has been called 'the arm-chair theatre', i.e., a drama which can be read and enjoyed in a study as much as seen on a stage. Did Laleshwar Narain Mishra also have to struggle with the stage conventions of the time, and did he also evolve a new technique?