

CHAPTER - I

DRAMA : AN OVERVIEW

From Religious Mythology to the contemporary reality the journey of Drama is long.

“Lord Indra requested Brahma : Please give us something which would not only teach us but be pleasing to both eyes and ears...” (Adya Rangacharya)¹. And Natyaveda came into creation.

In his Author's *Introduction to three plays* 1994, Girish Karnad stated : “To my generation urban theatre seemed to have left almost nothing to hang on to, or take off from. And where was one to begin again ? Perhaps by looking at our audience. Again by trying to understand what experience the audience expected to receive from the theatre”².

The Contemporary society is reflected through various literary efforts and means. Drama is the mirror of the era. Drama reflects the culture embedded with myth. The origin of the Indian Drama can be treated back to the Vedic period. Indian Drama is the manifestation of our National sensibility; Indian Drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of life and was popularly hailed as the *Fifth Veda*.³

“*Aristotle's Poetics* is the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory and the first extant philosophical treatise to focus on Literary theory”⁴.

The Hallmark of the Greek Drama is *Aristotle's Poetics*. Till date, it is revered as such. The most interesting aspect is that the history of Ancient Hindu Drama is 2000 years older than the celebrated *Poetics*. In the famous treatise *Natya Shastra*, Bharat Muni has propagated the theory and stage craft. All the

aspects of drama, stage setting, music, plot construction, characterization, dialogue and acting are very well taken care of. He has taken special care of elaborated *Rasa* with eight basic emotions i.e., love, joy, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion and wonder.

Bharat Muni in *Natyasastra* ascribed a divine origin to drama and considered it as the Fifth Veda. Its origin seems to be from religious dancing. According to Bharat Muni, poetry (Kavya) , dance (Nirtta)and mime (Nritya) in life, is play (Vila) produce emotion (Bhava) and Drama (Natya) produces flavour (Rasa).

“Aristotle's work *The Aesthetics* consists of the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. The *Poetics* is specifically concerned with Drama. At some point, Aristotle's original work was divided in two, each book written on a separate roll of papyrus. Only the first part that focuses on *tragedy* survives. The lost second part addressed *Comedy*”.⁵

In *Poetics*, Aristotole offers an account of what he calls *Poetry* (a term in Greek literally means making and its context includes drama - comedy, tragedy and the satyr as well as lyric poetry and epic poetry. They are similar in the fact that they are all imitations but different in three ways that Aristotle describes :

- 1) Difference in music rhythm, harmony, meter and melody.
- 2) Difference in goodness in the characters.
- 3) Difference in how the narrative is presented telling a story or acting a story.⁶

Generally, Drama has two plots Main plot and sub plot. The main plot focuses on consciousness and sub plot is frequently developed to strengthen

audience understanding and emotional appreciation of the main plot. They are never included as simple appendages to the main action. They are inevitably welded into it so that the total effect is that of one play and not that of two or more plays. The originality of the Drama's base has its roots in its characters. There is a dramatic bond between actors and events, thus things happen as they do because the characters are what they are.

“*Tragedy* consists of six parts which Aristotle enumerates in order of importance, beginning with the most essential and ending with the least. Aristotle considers *Tragedy* superior to epics and considers them higher forms of art”.⁷

To bring about the self actualization, the effectiveness of the dramatic art should be brought about as it is. The dramas are usually revelation of deep experiences. All knowledge is re-incumbereance. Bharat Muni says that only the artistic genius of a man i.e. *Prathibha* can improvise an emotion i.e. of an actor. The specific quality of an actor is to incorporate the ability, to improvise an emotion in the present moment i.e. to carry on four fold acting through limbs, face expressions, through speech, thoroughly involuntary emotions, through available properties and paraphernalia. The speech links the inner conscious and the outer expression.

“The *Natya Shastra* is our ancient Indian treatise on performing arts, encompassing theatre dance and music, it was written during the period between 200 BCE and 200 CE in classical India and is traditionally attributed to the Sage Bharata”.⁸

If the history of drama as an Art, is considered, one will definitely end up tracing the History of Mankind. The Art of Drama is as old as Human Civilization. The story of Drama, which has taken the shape of Art began

within the origin of language. To be specific, etymologically, the term i.e. theatre is derived from its Greek Root i.e. Theaomai meaning *To see* and also from its another Greek word Theoria meaning *to be spectacle of*. To continue further, the term Drama is derived from its Greek root *Dan* meaning *to do, to act* and *to perform*. In the Indian context, very interestingly, the Sanskrit term Karam is derived from its root kriya, this is a dhootu roop which simply means the sum of i.e. *to do, to act* and *to perform*, it is actually fascinating to realize that both the terms Drama and Natya mean the same i.e. To Do, To Act and To Perform.

The Indian culture has evidences of existence of Drama as the form of Art. There are many pre-historic cave paintings of hunting, dance and war-dancer that have been observed. The great Art-Historian and Artist Asit Kumar Halder has traced several such caves from Kalibanga or Jogimara. The cave paintings are the assets that establish the roots of Indian Folk Art i.e. even from the times of Stone age. This Art form is predecessor of Drama. In the earlier stages, there was no distinction between the Folk and Elite Art. As the class distinction began so did the distinction between Tribal/Folk Art or Classical / Refined Art.

Initially, the term Natya means the representation of any emotion or incident through posture and gesture i.e. Dance which is accompanied with music either vocal or instrumental. As we learn the Indian history further we realize that *Instruments* are very much active in Vedic Hymns, Vedic Mantras of sacred syllables.

Thereby, it has been treated that Nritta, Nritya, Natya, Nata and Natak i.e. Drama are correlated. These terms are like five basic technical terms from

ancient, Drama-Art history, Mritta, basically means pure dance without any emotion.

Nritya means dance with emotional representation. Now, Natya means dance with acting.

Indian valley civilization sites like Harappa-Mohan-Jodaro deciphered many figures and figurines in bronze and others medals. These figurines possess forms and gestures that indicate Dance-Drama organisation. All original mythological, characters, stories, language initiate drama. For eg. legendary characters like Arjun, Nachiketa, Krishna or Yama are dramatic otherwise too. It is said that in language the semantics according to Brahma is symbolic representation of the creative mind of the another, by this he tried to submit his ego before the pure consciousness.

Natya Shastra has borrowed its text, acting, music and effect from Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda respectively. It has also discussed the types of auditorium as triangular, square and rectangular. *Natya Shastra* has thrown light on the stages of seer mind described in shulba sutras, the Indian Geometry. The first dramatic production on the earth could be called Samudramanthan, including some secret wisdom of the Art called Drama.

“There are references to drama in Patanjali's *Vyakarana Mahabhashya*, James Aagan of Raypaseni Sulta as well as Vatsyayam's *Kamsutra*, Kautiliya's *Arthasastra* and Panini's *Ashtabhyrm*. Thus origin of Sanskrit Literature drama dates back to 1000 BC.”⁹

All literature in Sanskrit is classified into Drishya (that can be seen or exhibited) and Sarvya (than can be heard or recited). While poetry can be heard or recited). While poetry can fall under the later, drama falls under the former. It

is a fact that , no one knows when Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti lived or wrote. The linguistic character of the literature is also unknown. The various aspect necessary for writing and producing the drama are (a) of play writing; (b) acting ; (c) costume and (d) scenic design.

Dramatics, the very word includes conflicts, tension, contracts and emotions.

The Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the 12th century in India, i.e. when the Mohammedan intrusion shifted the Sanskrit stage. Till the 15th century, plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat but thereafter, Indian dramatic activity almost ceased due to foreign invasions on India.

English and Italian troupe toured India and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare's plays, in cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The Portuguese brought a form of dance drama to the west coast. A Russian music director Lebedoff said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta towards the end of the 18th century.

“The dramatic performance of earlier times mainly included depiction of events of daily life accompanied by music. Some members of the tribe used to act as if they were wild animals and some others were the hunters. Those who acted as animals like goats, buffaloes, reindeers and monkeys were chased by those, playing the role of hunters and a mock hunt was enacted. In such a crude and simple way drama was performed during the age of the Vedic Aryans.”¹⁰ Different episodes from the *Ramayan*, the *Mahabharat* and the *Bhagawat Gita* were dramatized. Till date such performance are popular during the time of Dussehra. Gothe has made an attempt to describe the beauty of *Shakuntala* as the drama.

“Wouldst thou the blooms of the early the fruits of the later seasons?

Wouldst thou what charms and enraptures, what satisfies, nourishes, feeds ?

Wouldst thou heaven and earth in a single name comprehended ?

Name, I *Shakuntala*, thee and so is everything said!”¹¹

Appraisal of *Shakuntala* by Goethe is a highly commendable read, with this translation, Kalidas and his *Shakuntala* got international recognition. The translation in German language was published in 1791. The enthusiasm it aroused, says a latter day American Editor of the play is immortalized in Goethe's apostrophe. He goes on to remind us that *Shakuntala* was “indeed an inspiration to poets, a thirst for natural colour, for unspoiled emotion, for the exotic, the supernatural, graceful wild.”¹² Gothe was highly appreciative of the play presentation which was very natural. He went on to add that there was no insipidity or superficiality in the play.

Gradually, India became enveloped in Nationalist movement. The conviction that *Romantic Spirit* had reached a pinnacle of art “but not alone in Shakespeare and in Calderan but in the wondrous east as well”.¹³ And India represented east. *Shakuntala* was translated in English, French and German languages it was translated in many Indian languages.

It took a century and a quarter for Indian drama to reach a respectable stage and it now challenges comparison with other forms of literature, be it poetry and fiction in terms of quality if not quantity. The first play in English entitled *Is This Civilization?* was written in 1871 by Michael Madhusudan Dutt. He had written, a play *Sharmistha* in Bangla in 1856. Kirloskar had narrated the story of Subhadra (from the Mahabharata) in Marathi less than quarter century later.

Disguise and *Love is the Best Doctor* were translated from English into Bangali by Labedoff and Goloknath Das on 7th Nov. 1795. These plays were produced in Kolkata. The first Bengali theatre, *The Hindu* was established by Prasannakumar Tagore in 1831.¹⁴

Since then, many plays have been genuinely written in English by *enterprising* Indian writers, in spite of the fact that drama in English fascinated only, the super -sophisticated who live in the cities and the larger towns, in the universities or in certain government offices or business houses. Srinivas Iyengar states “The failure to the fact that English is not a natural medium of conversation in India”.¹⁵

The search for an authentic Indian literature and Indian theatre form had begun. It is important to realize that modern Indian theatre was being written in different languages and English was the most effective medium. But still “English is a language of our intellectual make up and not of our emotional make”.¹⁶ This fact could not be denied.

Rabindranath Tagore and Shri Aurobindo emerged as great poets. Rabandranath and Khandikar wrote their first play within about ten years of each other. The plays of Ravindranath Tagore were written in two different languages depicting two different culture. All his plays are available in English, depicting the unique *Indian Culture*, New Theatre, that grew under the shadow of British Rule threaten the cultural plays of Ravindranath Tagore. To be specific the first modern Play in India was staged in Calcutta. The Director was a European. Sir William Jones translation of *Shakuntala* was chronologically not very far from it.

Rabindranath Tagore primary plays are Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice , Red Obanders, Chandalika and Sanyasi. Sri Aurobindo's complete plays are

Perseus the Deliverer, Vasvadutta, Radoguna, the Viziers of Bassora and Eric. Another prominent playwright had been Harindranath Chattopadhyay. The Indian English Drama further evolved by the effort of T.P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabrai and J.M. Lobo Prabhu.

One has to keep in mind, the fact that has flourished under the parameters of European impact Shri Aurobindo's debt to Elizabethan Drama for plot construction and characterisation is undisputed.

During the post Independence era ; English fixation and Poetry ; evolved on a firmer ground than Drama. The Poetic dramas were popular and the use of blank verse was flawless in that period. Nissim Ezekiel's three plays had great impact in 1969-70.

The contemporary Indian Drama is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It deviates from classical and European Drama.

Government encouraged the performing arts as an effective means of public entertainment through its first five year plan Thereby, established the National School of Drama in New Delhi. Institutions for training in dramatics were founded in big cities; some drama departments were established in some universities. The National Drama festival was started in Delhi by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1954, though it began one year ago in January 1953. Even during 1943-44, Indian people's Theatre Association (IPTA) brought some life to the theatre in many regions of the country and it gave some strength and direction, though it catered to the needs of regional language drama but still it had motivational power in the enhancement of Indian English Drama.

“Therefore the latent Indian drama regained its glory. The dormant critical impulse in the country to bring Indians face to face with new forms of life and literature and to open the way for a fruitful cross fertilization of ideas and forms of expression.”¹⁷

Modern and English Contemporary Drama has created unique impact. “...a selection of modern and contemporary drama, which represents the social and political changes that excited the world in the 19th century and which continue until our day. These dramas varied significantly from various - *isms* ; that is from realism to naturalism , expressionism , symbolism, marxism, psychoanalysis, surrealism and towards the Epic Theatre of Brecht and Absurdist Drama of Beckett.”¹⁸

As far as the field of Indian Drama is concerned it had its heyday again with establishment of Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akademi in 1953. When drama got such Institutional affiliations people were more interested in this culturally enriched form of amusement. 1972 was the landmark year of Indian theatre. The modernization of Indian Theatre was done with literary excellence of playwrights like Badal Sirkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. “These dramatics have approached dramatic skills with their innovative ideas to present legends folklore, myths and history in front of larger audience. They made fruitful experiments with the theatre concerns and technical virtuosités. Tracing the drama of these maestros we get the reflection of Bharat's Natay shastra stage, settings, music, plot construction, characteri-sation, dialogue and action every thing had its innovative outputs....”¹⁹

The contributon of Mohan Rakesh in Hindi Drama brought a change. Hindi Drama directly made a departure from pseudo modernism and traditional

symbolism of *non-communication*. It indicated modern man's failure to understand each other, which is a real tragedy of human life.

Next popular name was Badal Sirkar, one of the playwrights to give boost to Indian Drama. Vijay Tendulkar brought a revolution. He abolished the drama of three acts. His plays *Sakhram Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court!* created history. With him the Indian English Drama took a leap from traditional to modernism.

In 1970s, a new trend came forward in English plays in India which changed its face i.e. Translation method, which means to translate the plays of contemporary notable regional playwrights into English and stage in theatre. It got huge success for its bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosity within no time.

Most of the plays produced between 1930 and 1950 drew heavily on symbols due to which the dialogues were hampered and there was a marked loss of dramatic conflict which was claimed as the soul of drama by George Bernard Shaw.

Strangely enough the women dramatists are shouldering the responsibility of protecting the candle of Indian Drama in English from getting extinguished. Dina Mehta's *Brides are not for Burning* won BBC radio-play contest in 1979. It was published in 1993. This was followed by *Getting away with Murder* (2000) both being perfectly crafted. These dramas confirmed subaltern position of contemporary Indian women. Uma Parameswaran came to lime light with the staging of *Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees* in 2000. It projected the diasporic plight of immigrants to Canada. Several of her stage plays were published in the collection, *Sons must Die* and other plays (1998). She aids the cause of Indian Drama by her respective roles as a stage

director, as a drama teacher and as impartial critic. Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (1998) and *Lights Out !* (2000) have been successfully staged winning acclaims and awards.

The dramas written and performed in the colonial period was different than the traditional. The text become more important than performance; The dialogues seemed to matter. No longer dramatic speeches were imminent. Conscious efforts were made to write for theatre. Rabindranath Tagore *Chitra* is an standing example.

Girish Karnad is known to bring about further progression of Indian English drama.

“The past is never totally lost :
it coexists with - The present as a flow.
A rich variety of theatre form still exists
with a continuous history stretching over centuries”.²⁰

He dramatised various complexities of society and promoted post colonial dichotomy. His play *Tara* is depiction of the modern society that needs to be liberal and advanced in thought and action. Mahesh Dattani is the true follower of Girish Karnad. Women centric plays were popularized. *Bravely fought the Queen* seems to be predecessor play, then no social issue remained a taboo.

Feminism in India can be traced down to the days of Ram Mohan Roy. The earliest feminist were men who had set out to introduce reforms in upper caste Hindu society addressing social evils like child marriage, dowry, female illiteracy and the practice of sati. Social reformers believed that education was the key to social change for improving the position of women.

In the changed atmosphere of the mid-to late 1970s, socially relevant theatre and the women's movement began to show the way forward. A great number of tabooed issues found expression and acceptance through theatre in 1980s and 1990s. Women's question entered, the Indian theatre scene in a large way. The form of the experimental theatre and the agenda of the women's movement shaped the content and mounting of plays. It sought a definition and found several features:

1. Production and script characterized by consciousness of women as women.
2. Dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women performances.
3. That deconstructs sexual differences and thus undermines patriarchal power.
4. Scripting and production that present transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition and creation of women characters in the subject position.

Like most of the contemporary writers, Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan also trained critical gaze on the plight of women in the contemporary society, where women are the victim of the institutional body of powers.

To trace the growth of Indian writers in English, it becomes imperative to trace colonialism that survived in India, rather dominated Indian culture and ideology, Literature is the record of history. In order to understand infrastructure of past, we need to read and re-read the folk tales, legends and informal literary out put of the contemporary period. The writers of every era

are influenced with the political, social, economical and cultural transformation. Non-fictional and fictional literature of the contemporary period is *the most reliable source* of history. With colonialism English grew as the language. “The playwrights definitely had a drawback i.e. in making Indian characters speak in English, the playwrights need, therefore no qualms at all. Let him first create living characters in live situations and language will take care of itself.”²¹

The various literary forms such as poetry, novel, short stories or drama in any language or English are sources of history, which not only provides background to the study of the texts, but also forms an essential part of textual meaning.

The dramatist through their characters and characterization skills truly represent history of the contemporary period. It is strange that the approach of Indian dramatists writing English is double edged. The Indian writers dramatizing have experienced opposition, to the ideology of the British administration.

The characterization skills of Indian Colonial or Postcolonial playwrights recreated the society through their characters. There is a balanced presentation of history of the period never direct condensation or applaud. The post-colonial writers have presented an unbiased common man's perspective. Among the various post colonial writers Uma Parameswara and Manjula Padmahabha hold high place.

A complete growth and development of arts, science and others mental faculties had emerged in India parallel to Greece. India had once enjoyed complete freedom from religious impositions materialistic and spiritual exploitation. The golden period of Gupta Dynasty for almost three centuries had enabled intellectual flowering in India. Unfortunately, political disunity and

military weakness made India vulnerable to colonialism. India was always caste oriented. To die in a war, was considered worthier than survival. Wars were held for no reason.

The countrymen always yielded to power, now who so ever conquered India, imposed different policies. There was a direct religious and cultural imposition. India suffered terrible repression.

“Exaggerated make-up to emphasis theatrically, break down of barriers between audience and actors open air performance - all can be viewed as symbolic gestures of protest of rejection of authority.”²²

The various playwrights reacted to the contemporary scenario and scripted plays which can be classified as :

- 1) The playwrights who took the lead of the modern post independence theatre.
- 2) Plays which promote our tradition and folk tales.
- 3) Plays which are the best examples of the post Tendulkar modernity bringing in women centric touch.
- 4) Plays with direct and explicit political issues.
- 5) The Indian English playwrights faced the following problems. Yet scripted plays in English.
 - (i) “Any play written in India in English has an inherent disadvantage in the sense that it is not often staged. Stage worthiness being the test for a play”.²³
 - (ii) Indian English playwrights did not give importance to Indian Tradition.

- (iii) “In order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience”.²⁴

The process of recovery of Indian culture began with developments of various forms of literature, specially drama as it relives and transforms life as well as encourages the reformation of society. Uma Paramaswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan have laid foundation of social transformation through their dramas.

The women contemporaries of Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan are J.M. Billimoria, Dina Mehta, Kamal Subramaniam, Shree Devi Singh, Aarti Nagarwalla, and Tripurari Sharma. There are many women writers writing dramas in different languages are Varsha Aadalja (Gujarati) Manjula Padmanabhan (English) Dina Mehta (English) Geetanjali Shree (Hindi) Neelam Chaudhary (Punjabi) Sushma Deshpande (Marathi).

The credit to raise the standard of Indian English drama at national and International level can definitely be claimed by Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan. They stand at par with their counter part playwrights. “Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan must be studied as two outstanding playwrights. who be another category”²⁵. Manjula is known as a playwright, cartoonist, journalist, novelist and children's book author. Her outstanding plays are *Lights Out!* (1984), *Hidden Fires* (2003), *The Artist model* (1995) and *Sextet* (1996). “Manjula Padmanabhan created history when her play *Harvest* (1998) won the first prize in the first Onassis International Culture competition. This is first time an Indian English dramatist had won an honour abroad.”²⁶ She bagged the prestigious award from 1470-entries of 70 countries for the Onassis Prize in 1997. “Manjula Padmanabhan belongs to that generation of Indian women writers in English who have boldly stepped out of conventions that define

respectability to address issues of gender, woman, her body and its behaviour, its exploitation in the family and social setting... Manjula Padmanabhan has opened a fresh dialogue on a new angle at feminist concerns”.²⁷

Getting There is a semi autobiographical novel and *Escape* is based on declining sex ratio in India. “I have known Uma Parameswaran for many years as a professor at the University of Winnipeg.....distinguished by many characteristics..... so delightful a colleague and friend ...curiosity about people and insight into their ways, a wise tolerance of human foibles ...intelligence and humour..”²⁸ comments Judith Kearns, Director, Centre of Academic Writing, Winnipeg.

Her celebrated plays are *Sons Must Die* (1962), *Meera* (1971) *Sita's Promise* (1981), *Dear Deedi my sister* and *Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees*. She is the exponent of diasporic literature.

Thereby, Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan have made commendable contribution to Indian English Drama. They have set milestones in the field of literature and paved a path for future generations of feminine genius playwrights. It is rightly said “Feminist theatre aims at empowerment, it enables the woman to speak out , giving then voice. It is considered as being at the intersection of art, activism and social relevance. Feminist theatre is seen as an instrument of real change in women's lives.”²⁹

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