CHAPTER III

JIWE AND INDIAN DRAMA IN ENGLISH
"Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity nor, on the whole, of high quality. Enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English - but seldom for actual stage production," observes Prof. Iyengar, surveying the growth of Indian Drama in English. There is no gainsaying the valid observation. All the same, one cannot ignore, the strides made even in this limping genre of Indian Writing in English. (The history of Indian drama in English can be divided into two phases -- the Pre-independence phase and the Post-independence phase. The drama before mid-forties of this century was essentially symbolic, lyrical and allegorical. The drama after Independence gradually became social, realistic and satirical.  

In the Pre-independence phase we have major playwrights like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai. The works of these dramatists on the whole, poetic. Commenting on the language of these dramatists, Ramamurthi says that the early dramatists cast their plays in an idiom which has "an archaic quality and this archaism lends the dialogues a charm, a grace and a kind of distance which produce a heightened aesthetic pleasure."

The plays of Tagore are essentially symbolic and lyrical. Rabindranath Tagore's plays -- Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice, Red Oledanders, Chandalika, Mukta Dhara were translations from his Bengali originals. He tries to adapt old myths and legends so as to make them acquire a new significance. Tagore's plays are mostly unactable inasmuch as they are "vehicles of thought rather than expressions of action."

Sri Aurobindo made significant contribution to Indian drama in English. His poetic plays --

2. K.S. Ramamurthi, "Indian Drama in English with special reference to Tughlac" Litcrit, V. 1 (June 1979), p.11.
Perseus, The Deliverer, Vasavadutta, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassora and Eric—were written in English as original dramatic creations. All these 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 Bhavabhuji—though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones". An interesting feature of his plays is "their variety of period and locale, ranging from ancient Greek times to medieval India and covering diverse lands including Iraq, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway".

T.P. Kailasam, who comes next, has, no doubt, a better stage sense and his plays appear to be capable of greater success on the stage than most of those of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. All his English plays deal with the epic themes unlike his Kannada plays which reflect the social problems of contemporary society realistically. Although he chooses his subjects from

ancient epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, he brings a challengingly individual approach to bear upon the mythological personages he portrays. Kailasam's *Kichaka*, a superbly realised character, is one of his most imaginative creations. Kailasam retains the outward structure of the events as he found them in the original, but the structure of the meaning that he evolves out of it is entirely his own. His rendering of puranic characters like Bharata, Krishna, Ekalavya, Karna, Draupadi and others has also a touch of iconoclasm. In his plays, he makes an earnest attempt to blend the Indian and the Western traditions of drama. They also display a blend of his vision and stagecraft. Kailasam's greatest weakness, however, is his style. His exuberance of thought makes both his prose and verse rhetorical and, at times, pseudo-poetic. As G.S. Amur observes, "... his English plays, though they are among the best in Indian Writing do not achieve greatness. The reason for this lies in Kailasam's failure to find for himself an original style."

of writing suited to his matter and sensibility."

None the less, his contribution to Indian drama in English is significant. Though his creative output is not very impressive, the few plays he has given us are a solid proof to consider him an original talent, endeavouring to achieve superb self-expression.

Like T.P. Kailasam, his contemporary, Harin- dranath Chattopadhyaya employs hagiological themes to dramatise the lives of saints with a view to bringing to light their greatness and exposing social discrimi-

nation against them. His devotional plays — Raidas, Chokamela, Eknath, Pundalik, Sakubai, Jaideva — are all written in verse and they are playlets rather than full-length plays. Barring Tukaram, which could be considered one of the best Indian plays in English, they are loose in structure and blurred in characteri-

zation and suffer from predominance of poetry over action. Dhan Gopal Mukherji, Dilip Kumar Roy and D.S. Mardhekar who have just one play each to their credit are among the other writers of verse plays of this period.
Among the woman dramatists, Bharati Sarabhai made a notable contribution to Indian Drama in English. She has only two plays—The Well of the People (1943) and Two Women to her credit. Of these two plays, the former is "symbolic, poetic. It is a significant contribution to the Gandhian social order. Two Women probes the private world of a sensitive individual."

In the Well of the People we are in a village, confronting the tradition-bound idea of woman as a drudge. In Two Women, on the contrary, we look at the perplexed personality of the sophisticated modern woman of the play. As M.K. Naik puts it, 'Bharati Sarabhai's sympathetic pen effortlessly projects the image of the undying Indian womanhood that is verily like gold—the only metal that can stand a trial by fire'.

The plays of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai are essentially poetic, symbolic and allegorical. However, great these plays are in themselves, they are not.

8. Ibid.,
actable. Most of the playwrights do not seem to write with distinct awareness of the question of the staging of their plays. This was mainly due to the dearth of living theatre and a live audience. As regards technique, it is evident that most of these playwrights have not availed themselves of the rich tradition of the classical Sanskrit drama and folkstage. Their plays show least concern over the burning problems of the contemporary society. They present life not as it is but as it should be.

However, a perceptible change came over the dramatic scene with the world economic depression of 1929 dealing a severe blow to the economy of India, the Progressive Writers' Movement of 1930, the Industrial explosion and political upheaval of Indian National Movement. The dramatists of the period who found a number of burning problems demanding immediate attention began to use the stage as a 'pulpit' to express themselves. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has already paved the way through his five plays of social protest: The Widow, The Parrot, The Sentry's Lantern, The Evening Lamp, and The Coffin which are essentially realistic in tone and satirical in purpose, revealing
as they do his social consciousness. Subsequently, there emerged Indo-Anglian drama of Social realism. Fyzee Rahamin and A.S.P. Ayyar took the cue from Harin and wrote plays of social realism, though suffused with sentimentalism.

Like Harindranath Chattopadhyaya in his social plays, Fyzee Rahamin is concerned with the plight of the underprivileged in contemporary society. Though he has produced only two plays — *Invented Gods* and *Daughter of Ind*, his contribution to Indian Drama in English in the transition period is significant. A.S.P. Ayyar comes to us as a vigorous critic of contemporary life. In *The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays*, he tries "to portray modern Indian life in this time of transition when old ideas are being gradually displaced by new". His *Sita's Choice* deals with the problem of widow marriage. In the *Clutch of the Devil*, Ayyar depicts the rural life of Malabar in particular and south India in general. In the *Trail of Science for the Murder of Humanity*, Science is charged with

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'attempt to murder humanity'. It is written in lighter vein and is replete with humour which is generally absent in Ayyar's plays.

Lobo-Prabhu's Collected Plays includes 'Apes in the Parlour', a long skit on our sophisticated life. 'The Family Cage' is an attempt to present the plight of the widowed sister in a joint family. Flags of the Heart is a sentimental piece with a sentimental conclusion. A close study of Lobo-Prabhu's plays reveals that they are worked out in terms of sentimental melodrama through which he chooses to expose the 'sickness' that prevails in the affairs of men and manners of his day. Iyengar says: "Lobo-Prabhu's energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise situations; but his characters are rarely alive, and his denouements are seldom wholly convincing". 10

G.V. Desai came to prominence with this play, Hali published in 1950. The play was praised for its

originality, its symbolism, the richness of its imagery and its sheer apocalyptic quality. A short poetic play, Hall, is an attempt to project the story of a passion. In other words, "Hall's confrontation of powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communion with love and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place". 11

Asif Currimbhoy is an astonishingly prolific dramatist. Since 1959, he has written at least one full-length play a year and often as many as three, making a total of twenty-five plays. The Tourist Mecca, The Clock, The Doldrummers, The Dumb Dancer, Thorns on a Canvas, The Restaurant, The Captives and Goa are some of his important plays. He can contrive interesting situations, his dialogues are arresting, and his plays are actable. He is a dramatist with a social purpose. He integrates his social concerns with the artistic content of his plays.

Prof. Lakhan Deb is another important dramatist of modern period. Tiger-Claw and Murder at the Prayer

11. Ibid., p. 243.
Meeting are his important plays. Tiger-Claw is a three act play in verse on controversial killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. The Shivaji Afzal Khan theme has an element of pure drama. His presentation is credible and realistic. Murder at the Prayer Meeting marks an important landmark in the history of Indian Writing in English. It is a play "so deeply moving and exciting that it challenges a favourable comparison with T.S.Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral which has been the dramatist's source of inspiration." Deb has used a modern theme, the death of Mahatma and characters of our time for his verse play. The play is written partly in blank verse with occasional use of rhyme and metered prose. The play is written in the manner of a Greek Tragedy observing the three unities and adopting the use of chorus.

Though known mostly as a poet, Ezekiel wrote a few plays -- Nalini, a comedy, Marriage poem, a one act Tragi-comedy, The Sleep-walkers, an Indo-American

farce, and *Song of Deprivation*. The subjects of these plays have been mostly dealt with by Ezekiel in his poems. The plays make a very good reading. Ezekiel is a sharp observer of the local scene and has an eye for the oddities in human behaviour, word and thought. He is an excellent craftsman. But, we do not find much action in his plays.

Shiv K. Kumar wrote a play *The Last Wedding Anniversary* which is easily a milestone in the realm of Indian drama in English. The play deals with the theme of marriage and divorce. It holds up a mirror to the strained human relationship between man and woman so common in the contemporary sophisticated society. The successful employment of technical devices such as the characters hiding behind the curtain and jealous couples watching each other suspiciously remind us of the eighteenth century English comedy. The crispness of the language facilitates the quick movement of action.

150 years ago. **Mira** is an attempt to present the theme of Mira's immaculate God-love with all the sophistication of the contemporary theatre. Das's third play, *Jakho Villa*, is set in our time and the theme is the decadence that has overtaken a Hindu family in Simla.

Gieve Patel's *Princes* describes the state of war between two Parsi families of south Gujarat for exclusive possession of a male child whose dead mother belongs to one family and living father to another. Girish Karnard achieved success as an able playwright with English translation of his plays, *Tuqlaq* and *Yayati*. Karnad's approach is modern and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains in his plays.

Prof. M.V. Rama Sarma, noted Milton scholar and critic, has in his *Collected Plays* (1982) brought together 11 of his plays written over a period of 40 years. The early playlets were written under the influence of Shaw. *Shakuntala, Urvashi, Towards Marriage, The Carnival, The Mahatma* are some of the important plays of Sarma. Some of these are philosophical, others are realistic and satirical.
Plays long and short continue to be written, published and occasionally even produced. Manohar Malgonkar's *Line of Mars*, a play about Lord Dalhousie's regime of expansion culminating in 1857, Ahmed Akhtar's *Anarkali* (1978), a historical play, Dina Mehta's *The Myth-Makers*, K.S. Duggal's *To Each Window*, Six Radio plays, Lobo-Prabhu's *Broken Melody*, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar's *Kalidasa* are some of the recent contributions to Indian Drama in English.

Short plays, one act plays, translations of plays from Sanskrit, translations from regional languages of varying quality appear in journals and magazines. It is very difficult to keep track of them. In the light of what has been detailed above, we can conclude that though Indian Drama in English has minority appeal, it cannot be written off as being of no consequence.

In proportion to the output of drama which is very limited, the contributions in this field to the JIWE are also limited. Among the critics who have contributed articles on Indian Drama in English to JIWE, Annaiah Gowda is prominent. He makes a
brief survey of the growth of Indian theatre in English. He seeks to explain rich heritage of Indian drama and find out why English theatre failed? The alienation of audience is perhaps the major cause. As Gowda points out: "The play is created by the dramatist, recreated by a company of actors on the stage, and reincarnated in the mind of audience."  

Prof. K. Venkata Reddy and K. Sunanda analyse The Parrot by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. The Parrot is one of Harin's Social plays included in his Five plays which "contains some of his characteristic work as a playwright revealing his social consciousness, flair for realism and the bite in his prose writing."  


15. Ibid., p. 37.
There are two articles on Asif Currimbhoy. Peter Nazareth\textsuperscript{16} makes a critical analysis of \textit{Goa}, \textit{The Doldrummers}, \textit{Inquilab}, all related to public events in their themes. According to him, Currimbhoy is at his best when he writes about public or recent historical events such as Indian take-over of Goa, the Naxalite movement in Calcutta and Pakistani war that gave birth to Bangladesh. As he rightly observes, Asif Currimbhoy "interweaves the public event with the private to create exciting drama which asks moral questions about humanity in the cataclysmic period of decolonisation."\textsuperscript{17}

Daphne Pan considers \textit{Goa} a play "which clearly demonstrates Currimbhoy's fine sense of the theatre and his skill as a dramatist."\textsuperscript{18} Pan seeks to identify the dramatic skills of Currimbhoy with regard to his themes, characterization and structure. "His best plays are powerfully dramatic revealing his ability in contriving interesting situations creating atmosphere, portraying realistic and animated characters, writing sinewy

\textsuperscript{16} Peter Nazareth, 'Asif Currimbhoy: Dramatist of the Public event', \textit{JIVE}, IV, 2(76), 13-19.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{18} Daphne Pan, "Asif Currimbhoy's \textit{Goa}: A consideration," \textit{JIVE}, VIII, 1-2 (80), 77.
dialogue that flow naturally and lucidly, sustaining unified plot and coherent action, and experimenting successfully with a variety of theatrical techniques."19

Daphne Pan analyses the play Goa, its theme, its characters, its structure and action. Daphne point out that, inspite of its title, the play is not a political play. On the other hand, 'the political and socio-realistic setting is an allegory for the human tragedy rather than the main theme.'20 Daphne further analyses the important characters in the play. Daphne says: "The play contains some of Currimbhoys's most Psychologically complex characters, notably Krishna and Maria, and to less extent, Alphonso and Rose."21

In this analytical study, Daphne explains the dramatic unity, economy of style and texture of the play. Daphne concludes; "Currimbhoy's vision is a perceptive and honest and one which extends beyond the political allegory in GOA which is truly one of

20. Ibid., p. 78.
21. Ibid., p. 79.
those plays that depicts "perennial situations that transcend place, time and language." 22

Though the special Number of Ezekiel, concentrates mainly on Ezekiel as poet, it considers Ezekiel as a dramatist also. Santan Rodrigues takes up for discussion Nalini, a comedy, Marriage poem, a one-act Tragi-comedy, The Sleepwalkers, an Indo-American force and Song of Deprivation. Rodrigues sums up the Ezekiel's skill as a dramatist in the following words: "The plays make very good reading. Ezekiel is a sharp observer of the local scene and has an eye for the oddities in human behaviour, word and thought. He is an excellent craftsman. The plays are merely theatrical plots without drama. Most of the action is in fact inaction ... Ezekiel will be better remembered for his contribution as a serious poet in the Indo-English firmament than as playwright". 23

Further, there are two critical contributions on Tagore, one dealing with sacrifice and the other on Sanyasi. Tuck attempts to bring out Tagore's conception of normative religious life through an analysis of Tagore's play, Sacrifice, a translation of his Bengali Play, Visarjan. Tuck says: "Tagore offered through his play a religion of man in which inhuman attitudes and practices were removed and human values substituted." Padma explicates the play, Sanyasi or the Ascetic, from the point of view of the operations of feminine psyche as the basic pattern of the play's structure. She says: "The action of this one-act play highlights the role of Vasanti, an untouchable girl, in awakening the disdainful Sanyasi to the ineffable joys of folkways of living. The subtle processes of this transformation, suggested in the four movements of the action are reflected in the four-scene structure and heightened by evocative shifts in the background."

25. T. Padma, "The Role of the Feminine Psyche in Tagore's Sanyasi" JIWE, VI, 1(78), 51-56.
The critical material published in the JIWE on Indian Drama in English is quite inadequate to enable us to have a definite idea about the progress in this field. Since the creative output of Indian Drama in English is meagre when compared to that of Indian Poetry and Indian fiction in English, the JIWE would do well to encourage publication of articles and reviews on the regional drama rendered into English. The JIWE could also think of publishing short plays originally written in English, as in the case of Enact, with a view to giving a filip to the promising Indian Dramatists in English.