Although Indian Drama in English lags behind Indian poetry and Indian Fiction in English, it has come of age with its own distinctive features. Indian Drama in English has witnessed two traditions – the poetic tradition and the social tradition. To the poetic tradition belong great playwrights like Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadyaya. The poetic plays are known for their lyricism, symbolism and ideal themes. Sri Aurobindo has eleven verse plays to his credit. *The Viziers of Bassora, Perseus the Deliverer, Rodogune, Eric and Vasavadatta* are some of his best plays. His plays are mostly influenced by the English Theatre of the late Victorian era, which was dominated by Robert Bridges and Stephen Phillips. Sri Aurobindo carried foreword the tradition of British poetic drama revived by these dramatists.

Sri Aurobindo's plays are the revisions of the plays of old masters in the past. The themes are taken from the Indian and the Greek myths, legends and sometimes from history. He takes liberty with the sequence of events, names of personages and qualities associated with historical and legendary figures. His use of dialogue resembles that of Phillips. Though his plays were never staged by dramatic companies, they easily satisfy the criteria of true drama which he himself evolved as a critic. In his *The Future Poetry* he says:
Drama must have an interpretative or implicit idea of life; the vision and the idea have seem to arise out of the much life of characters and through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action, the true movement and result in all great drama is really psychological, action and events in drama have to be cast into a close dramatic form, and the essential purpose of drama is the presentation of the poets' vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul.

From this it is revealed that Sri Aurobindo’s plays are primarily poetic with an interpretative vision which “renders both the action and characters more psychological than physical. As a result, each one of Sri Aurobindo’s plays assumes a well-knit form and brings out the philosophical implications of the causal effect of the psychological presentation of character and action.”

Next appears on the scene Rabindranath Tagore, a great lyric poet, who also wrote some plays. He wrote his plays in Bengali and later they have been translated into English. He is known for his variety of themes. He wrote social comedies like The Society of Confirmed Bachelors (1926), A Wrong Start (892) and Vaikuntha’s Manuscript. He wrote romantic plays like Chitra (1892), Sacrifice, Sanyasi and The King and the Queen (1899). His plays have
become famous for their rich poetry Edward Thompson considers Chitra as “loveliest drama a lyrical frost.”

Tagore wrote some dramatic dialogues in verse based on Sanskrit heroic story. He also wrote a few plays in the allegorical and symbolic mode. His play, The Post Office has become famous for its construction and dialogue. It is a rich and suggestive play that can be read on many levels. At least one notices the naturalistic and the symbolic levels in the play. The main theme of the play is the yearning of mind for king’s meeting. On philosophical level the play is about the yearning of the soul for a meeting with the over soul. The king symbolises God. Death brings the fulfilment of such a yearning. From this particular point of view, death is visualized as a liberator as it frees man from all earthly pain. In the ‘preface’ to the play, Yeats emphasises deliverance as the theme of the play, the deliverance which the child discovers in death.

The economic depression of the 1930s stirred the imagination of quite a few creative artists in the world. This period has been considered a great period of revolution and resurgence. Gerald Rabkin observes

During the 1930s it was a widely held view that poets, novelists and playwrights should be closely concerned in their writing with the fundamental political issues of their times.
Odets shows the suffering endorsed by the common man:

Hellow America! Hellow! We are storm birds of the working class worker of the world. Our bones and blood! And when we die they all know what we did to make a new world Christ catch upto little pieces. We will use for what is light! Put fruit trees where our ashes are.

Economic depression in a way influenced some of the creative artists in India. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand were influenced by this movement directly or indirectly. Besides economic depression, freedom movement pioneered by Gokale, Thilak and W.C.Benerjee influenced the writers in India.

With the clarion call given by Mahatma Gandhi quite a few writers participated in the freedom struggle and also recorded their experiences in the struggle. Naturally the writers thought that it was their duty to discuss the problems of the common man in their works. This led to social tradition in Indian Drama in English.

Playwrights like A.S.P.Ayyar and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, wrote plays dealing with the problems of common man. The playwrights belonging to this tradition do not hesitate to discuss the problems of the common man. They use a language that is in keeping with character and situation. Moreover, they made of a fervent plea for the employment of common man's language. Their
plays never lacked in structural unity. Sometimes they were produced successfully on the stage. In the words of H.H. Wells, “they presented what life is but not how life should be.”6 Most of the plays written by the social playwrights are theatrically vital.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's Five Plays have brought him some fame. The Window his first social play, “depicts the misery and squalor of poor factory workers and highlights of cruelty of capitalistic factory owners.”7 This powerful play describes what happens in a poor workman's house one evening nurturing into night. The sufferings of the entire body of workmen seem to find voice in what one of the characters says desperately:

I wonder why we were born, to suffer – why we were born at all. Why some were born to rest and others to toil and weep.8

The protagonist in the play expresses his agony and despair powerfully. The capitalists are so greedy that they do not give any freedom and at the sametime extract a lot of work from them. But the workers realise that they are being exploited. So, they revolt against the cruel existing order and unhearing in a new year of light and happiness for the workers.

Chattopadhyaya's next play, The Parrot, is about a woman's hard life, which resembles the life of a parrot in a cage bought by her
husband for a rupee. The play speaks for hundreds of our women who are caged and sentry streamed by conventional morality. The Lantern another powerful play has for its theme the evils impress him. The Coffin his next play provides as satirical picture of an artist and his wife. It is primarily concerned with writers and their responsibility.

Like Odets Chattopadhyaya is a committed writer deeply concerned with the fight for social justice. He is critical of long held myths that induced complacency in times of success and tannic in the face of disaster. In the words of K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, Chattopadhyaya's Five Plays are the "manifesto of realism." Thus, Chattopadhyaya's plays really give us his first-hand knowledge of the underdog.

The plays of A.S.P.Ayyar present a true picture of the contemporary society revealing his dramatic power, which he has drawn from realistic world." He presents a realistic picture of the social life of the times. The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays is a collection of A.S.P.Ayyar's plays Sita's Choice is a representative play of A.S.P.Ayyar. This play is about Sita, a beautiful girl of fourteen who is given in marriage to Vengu, a consumptive looking, prematurely aged man of fifty with all his hair gone grey. She is forced to marry the sick man because her poor father cannot give dowry. She becomes a virgin widow at fifteen, ten months after her
marriage. Mangala, the mother is worried about the plight of her daughter. She tells her husband about the hypocrisy of men. She says:

Why should old widowers be allowed to marry a fourth or fifth time and a young virgin widow is forbidden a mate.\textsuperscript{11}

Mangala also honestly feels that all young men are interested only in money but not in the beauty of the girls. After a few weeks, Achyuth a young man who is employed in an oil company in Iraq accepts the hand of Sita. Thus in his plays A.S.P.Ayyar not only projects a realistic account of contemporary society but also offers his comments on the state of affairs prevailing in India.

Lubo-Prabhu, Asif Currimbhoy and Nissim Eziekiel are some of the playwrights who wrote plays recording the society around them. By the 1960s playwrights like Murali Dass Melwani, Guru Charan Dass, Gieve Patel, and Rama Sarma wrote plays in English which were sometimes produced on the stage. Of these playwrights, Rama Sarma is known for his creative writing as well as for his critical writing. Though he is known as an established critic of John Milton, he has also made a mark as playwright.

Rama Sarma hails from a family of scholars who were the descendents of Kshetrayya, a well-known composer and singer of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. His father was a traditional scholar who enlightened the villagers of Movva, a remote village in Andhra Pradesh. He was
brought up in an environment of scholars whose ideas formed an integral part of his temperament. His collegiate education in Noble College, Machilipatnam, exposed him to the English language and to some extent freedom struggle. As a student of Noble College, he did not hesitate to express free and frank views on the society around him.

After obtaining a post-graduate degree in English, Rama Sarma went abroad for higher studies. As a young man with reformatory zeal, Rama Sarma was naturally drawn towards Bernard Shaw, a great man of letter of those times. He very much liked to explore the inimitable interaction between man's attitude of his own self and his attitude towards life. But he was asked to work on John Milton and bring out a comparison between John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Mahabharata*. During his study in England, he witnessed many literary trends which went into his work at a later stage.

After taking his Ph.D from the University of Wales, United Kingdom, Rama Sarma joined Delhi University as a lecturer in English. During his five year stint in Delhi, Rama Sarma witnessed new currents of violence that erupted in Delhi and its environs. He also saw a few discontented political groups which attempted to achieve their aims through force and intimidation and others through democratic procedures. He also closely observed the lack of attitude
and objective among students and incompetence among the teachers in India.

In 1955 Rama Sarma joined Sri Venkateswara University where he served for about three decades. An eminent Milton scholar and creative writer, Rama Sarma distinguished himself as a perspective teacher and an academician held in high esteem. In recognition of his valuable contribution to higher education he was elevated to the Vice-Chancellor of Sri Venkateswara University.

The literary career of Rama Sarma may be divided into two periods spanning into fifty years. The first period ranges from 1951 to 1980 and the second period from 1980 to 1999. During the first period he comes before us primarily as a critic. His book on *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1951. It is a slender volume that gives us an authentic Indian perspective on John Milton. It discusses the genre of literary epic and the practitioners of the epic tradition. He also discusses how Milton conscientiously upholds a life given to virtuous living and scrupulous adherence to moral righteousness. Virtue for him, is an active force and in strict obedience to God, controlling one's passion. It is in such a context that the author places Milton's great work which deals with the conflict between virtue and vice. The major theological problem in *Paradise Lost* is the justification of God's ways.
Rama Sarma's next work *Heywood A Prose Shakespeare* appeared in 1962. Here Rama Sarma draws his bearings from a revival of interest in the minor Elizabethan playwright. He analyse the work of Heywood in terms of certain of his Shakespearean attributes and by means of an examination of genre to which certain of the plays of Heywood belong and how a study of the genre offers cross illuminations providing an insight not only in to Heywood's plays but also into Shakespeare's. He further shows how the Homiletic tradition of sin, repentance and forgiveness is worked out into a series of creative configurations in Heywood's Plays.

His next work *A Heroic Argument* appeared in 1971. In this book is instilled the essence of Milton's concept of heroism. Rightly does he point out that Milton's four works - *Comus*, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonites* - belong to the same category of heroic poetry. Milton's heroic ideal of fighting the evil forces in life is well illustrated in his poems. The protagonists are exposed to temptations. The best in them comes out only when they resist the forces of evil. Milton maintains the view though God commands us temperance, justice, continuance, yet out before us even to profession, all desirable things and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit. Man is purposely put in the midst of plenty so that he may be tempted and tested. In all these heroic poems, the critic sees a great
conflict between good and evil and vindication of the ways of God to men.

The Eagle and the Phoenix is another critical work of Rama Sarma where the critic gives importance to ethical idealism and the justification of God's ways to men. Rightly does he emphasise the theme of martyrdom in this work. Later Rama Sarma edited quite a few books for The Macmillan Co., of India. With his editorial material he expresses his scholarly perceptions in these works.

Things unattempted that came out in 1982 sums up lucidly Rama Sarma's view on the life and work of Milton but also gives a well balanced account of Milton's aspirations and achievements. It also reflects the growing phenomenon of oriental approach to western literature in particular. In Milton and the Prophetic Strain that appeared in 1991 Rama Sarma sums up Milton's age old concept of poet as a prophet. He also dwells upon Milton's mind and thought that produced a body of work which reveals his prophetic vision of a perfect world governed by the principle of equity and justice. Harmony Restored that appeared in 1991 makes an objective evaluation of William Shakespeare in the light of certain Renaissance intellectual. Milton and Indian Epic Tradition that came out in 1995 shows that the Indian epics belonged to succeed literature and the Indian epic tradition upholds loftiness of theme, historicity of plot,
sublimity of heroism and delectable aesthetic appeal. His latest critical work is on Bernard Shaw.

It is surprising to know that E.M. Forster has turned to creative writing after the production of a considerable body of critical writing. Rama Sarma like E.M. Forster turned to creative writing after trying a lot of critical writing. *The Stream* is his first novel that appeared in 1956. In this he discusses the pursuit of the ideal love of man. He presents the problem in an altogether novel way, tackling it from a purely different point of view where neither love nor beauty predominates. The situation is solved most effectively by the triumph of justice. The purity, simplicity, contentment and the meditative peace of Suguna is the hero's answer, as well as the gift to his unsympathetic and non-understanding world.

*The Farewell Party* is Rama Sarma's second novel that concerns itself with the musings of Prakasam the main character, on the various episodes in his life as a teacher for over 30 years, during the ninety minute of time before living for the Farewell Party on the eve of his retirement. It presents an ideal teacher who accepts life service to mankind.

*Look Homeword*, Rama Sarma's another novel appeared in 1976. It is indicative of the noble ideal that after one's sojourn in foreign lands, one has to think of developing one's country with the
rich knowledge and experience acquired during the stay abroad. The ultimate fulfilment of all knowledge is to make humanity share the benefits of developments. It comes before us as a novel with a message and it aims to create love for the nation and devotion to serve it.

The Bliss of Life appeared in 1979. This novel presents life in its totality and complexity. All this planes of life are ultimately made to blossom to a decline love. The whole process is artistically depicted in terms of the life of the poet musician Kshetrayya who possess through all these stages and struggles of mundane life, finally attaining God realization. The life of Kshetrayya reveals a clear and convincingly gradual progression of an individual from a physical to spiritual plane ultimately surrounding to the will of God. It thus gives to the readers the concept of a life divine full of ethical idealism and spiritual illumination.

Rama Sarma’s Collected Plays consisting of his twelve plays, appeared in 1982. As he himself observes in his Prefaces to his plays, he is influenced by George Bernard Shaw. Just as Shaw’s plays deal with the burning problems of the British society Rama Sarma’s plays concern themselves with the problems of contemporary Indian society. Mostly the playwright in these plays is interested in social criticism.

Rama Sarma’s next work, The Pastures New, appeared in 1985. Here the novelist presents the life of the individuals who belong to the
privileged middle class. He presents the harmonious side of life. Lalita shows her equanimity of mind and she is prepared to accept life with understanding. The happy pair Dr. Madhu and Sarala have their fruitful pride. They are happy at the individual level and establish good relations with Rama and Suguna, another good pair with domestic bliss. The ideal pairs lead a happy and a contented life. In the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "The Pastures New holds India together and preserve its inner purity." Thus the novelist shows in this novel his firm faith in exploring fresh woods and pastures new that may ultimately lead human beings to a new world order transcending the limitation of caste, creed, race and religion.

*Height of Noon* is another novel that deals with the life of a teacher who started his career as a lecturer in a newly formed university but was finally elevated to the post Vice-Chancellor of the same university. It also makes a comprehensive study of the academic life of a university in India today. It deals with the interpersonal relationship, the cultural assimilation of the East and West, husband and wife relationship. The novel ends on a note of calm acceptance of life with all its joys and sorrows.

The novels of Rama Sarma come before us as the novels of ideas pertaining to human values and traditions. As one critic observes, the concept of triple force of beauty, love and justice in *The Stream* the
plea for good teaching in *The Farewell Party* the brain drain and the call for the exhilarating love of country in *Look Homeward* man's willing submission to God's will as a desirable goal in *The Bliss of Life*. The glory of India as a leading country in the world in *Pastures New* and finally the imperishable significance of one's one duty as an act of faith in God in *Height of Noon*, all these compress the social religious political and educational conditions of the present day. These novels can rightly be called the novels of India."¹³ Like the novels, plays also concern works deal with the problems of people in contemporary society. It is pertinent to note a brief account of his plays.

Rama Sarma's first play, *Youth and Crabbed Age*, appeared before he left for England. In this play Rama Sarma rightly records the conflict between tradition and modernity. Rama is an easy going young man unlike his wife who is an ordinary Indian woman representing a different attitude and vision of life. Gopalam and Lakshmi represent old and conservative values of life and society. Ramu represents a new world defying age old customs and traditional norms. The playwright explores the two generations of people, their attitudes towards life, their misunderstanding incompatibility. *Like to Like* also appeared before Rama Sarma went abroad. It concerns itself with temperamental incompatibility and the conflict between practical approach and the platonic approach to life. Although the main thrust of the play is on the psychological aspect of man and

15
woman relationship it presupposes the changes in society allowing a new freedom of choice for the life partners.

Marpessa was written during his stay in England. It is based on a Greek myth that depicts the conflict between mortal and immortal love and the precedence of the former over the latter. This Busy World is a satire on the new-fanged ideas of life and happiness. Ignorance and Idiocy dramatises the conflict between materialism and spiritualism. Sakuntala is a full-length play modelled on Kalidas's Sakuntala. It is concerned with sublimation of love. In the words of the playwright himself:

The growth of Sakuntala from a purely physical plane to that of a spiritual exaltation, through a process of suffering, is brought out in this play. I have concentrated mostly on the chastening aspect of physical love into a spiritual one.¹⁴

Urvasi is another play dealing with the love between Arjuna and Urvasi. It brings out the essential grandeur in human life despite its misery and hardship. The Carnival is a full length play dealing with the problem of non-alignment between love and money which are two fundamental problems of human life. Inspector Raghavah is a social play dealing with the theme of corruption in the realm of
education in Indian society. It also dramatises the lack of standards and also the poor performance of teachers in India.

The Mahatma is a powerful play that depicts the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi. It also shows the conflict between Gandhi's ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity and fundamentalism and fanaticism of Hindus represented by Nathuram Godse and his followers. Thus, the plays of Rama Sarma come to us primarily as social plays though two or three of the plays deal with mythological themes. The following chapters make a brief critical study of Rama Sarma's major plays — Towards Marriage, The Carnival and Sakuntala.
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