Chapter - I

Introduction
The second half of the 19th century witnessed the revival of English drama. A number of new trends both in themes and methods of presentation developed. England in those days was the melting pot of new ideals in every conceivable realm of human thought and activity. There was a change in political economy and religion. The clergy grew uneasy at the rapid studies science was taking, because a reconciliation between the emotional necessity of having faith in the Bible and the intellectual urge to believe in empirical science was difficult.

There was a progress in the field of Biology, resulting in an attempt at a rational explanation to every aspect of life. Carlton Hayes explains this development, “Materialism” may conveniently be used to designate the general nature of a main stream of thought which flowed from nineteenth century science and industry. But when thought was concentrated on man’s animal and caveman ancestry and on the earthly nature of his “reason” and “intelligence”, pessimism must result. Man had so much of the beast in him and was misled by his imaginings that there was little chance of improving him, at least within a calculable period or by usual means.

The gradual infiltration of the revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx changed the outlook and attitude of the lower working
classes. A new realization of the dignity of man and of their own significance in society made the labourers demand their social rights and privileges. Class consciousness developed itself into extreme fanaticism. The relationship between the Capitalists and the labourers became more and more tense.

There was a gradual development of an ideological conflict between the old and new generations. The attitude of the younger generation was influenced by the new social philosophy, where as the older members of the society took it as their moral obligation to preserve the values they had esteemed high.

"Naturally the younger generation of scientific men rushed to defend their revered chief to establish their claim to come to any conclusion to which their researches led, regardless of the cosmogony and chronology of Genesis, and regardless of the ancient traditions of the church. It came to involve the whole belief in miraculous extending into the border of the New Testament. The "intellectual" became more and more anti-clerical, anti-religious and materialistic under the stress of conflict."

The social and economic emancipation of women led to a severe criticism of the prevailing standards of sexual conduct and mortality. A new type of women, bold, self confident, aggressive and contemptuous of sweet domesticity began to figure in the
literature and social life of the age. The Women’s emancipation movement which found staunch support in intellectuals like Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Bernard Shaw and such others resulted in another trend that contributed to the spirit of conflict inherent in the age. The movement “created a new feminine type, distinct from the prevailing Victorian ideal of the submissive and “respectable” wife whose sphere of activities and interests was circumscribed by the trial church, child, kitchen”.

The financial independence they had won subsequent to the Industrial revolution was an immediate reason that prompted the Victorian women to assert themselves both in private as well as public spheres of life. The spirit of new woman was another influence harmful in effect to the harmony of home.

Modern Realistic drama in England began with the writing of Caste in 1867 by T.W. Robertson. Among the pioneers of modern realistic English drama, Thomas Robertson occupies a significant place. He made people feel an awareness of their intimate domestic problems in the theatre. He introduced realistic situations and living characters in the plays which are remarkable for their craftsmanship. His plays presented the point of view of the rising Victorian middle class in England. Life presented on the stage
was no more romantic, it was what they were already familiar with.

Despite his preoccupation with comedy, Robertson introduced an awareness of the seriousness of life and of the spiritual questions involved even in apparently trivial aspects. Allardyce Nicoll refers to Lord Lytton's view that the general outlook on drama has undergone a radical change. Life is no more a matter of jest. The playwrights had developed a serious attitude to domestic problems which used to be treated in a light vein by their predecessors.⁴

In plays like Caste and society Robertson focused on the social codes standing in the way of marriages between members of different social classes. Caste has for its theme the marriage between the George D' Alroy an aristocrat and the humble Esther Eccles. Though he could not completely get rid of Victorian sentiments, the very idea was revolutionary. He was good at plot construction and he tried to introduce some realistic techniques of stage presentation.

While assessing the worth of Robertson's contribution of English drama, Allardyce Nicoll places him as the first among the new generation of playwrights because there are more of
revolutionary and novel tendencies in him than a strict adherence to the old school.

Robertson brought Naturalism to the British stage. He was followed by Arthur Pinero. Sir Arthur wing Pinero’s plays show signs of having outgrown the melodramatic and romantic tendencies of the age. He was one of those who had effectively brought about radical changes in the literary contents as well as in stage presentation. He wrote a number of realistic domestic dramas like The second Mrs. Tanqueray. He introduced new technical methods in British drama. Pinero shows clear tendencies of having been influenced by Ibsen. His plays satisfy the popular demand of serious domestic themes. Domestic tragedies occurring because of the social codes and conventions of the day are his favourite themes. The second Mrs. Tanqueray was one of the foundation stones of the revived English drama. It is the story of a fallen woman who tries to build up a happy home life by marrying a man who knows everything about her, and shares her enthusiasm of beginning a new life. Nemesis hunts her down and leads to a tragic end. Allardyce Nicoll points out, “Ibsen had drawn the woman of the future, Pinero substituted the woman with a past.”
Though Pinero was bold to present his advanced ideas about society and the harmful effect of certain moral codes, his courage was not enough to attack it directly. By giving up asides and soliloquies and making dialogues as natural as possible, Pinero brought his plays one step ahead of the earlier plays in realism. In his capacity to correlate the tragedy of the individuals with allied social evils, he had been very often compared to Ibsen, but Pinero’s scope was narrow. Ernest Reynolds remarks how “a closer examination shows Pinero as parochial whereas Ibsen is universal.”

Pinero does not believe in conventions but deals with realistic situations. With him character is destiny.

A real advance in realistic drama was made by Henry Arthur Jones. He combined in himself a tendency to adhere to the artificial and melodramatic techniques of old, and an attempt to enlarge the sphere of dramatic material by introducing current social problems into his plays. “For this we may be grateful to him, and in this tendency we may readily see the beginnings of that movement which later produced such social plays as those of Galsworthy on one hand and, on the other of Somerset Maugham.”
Jones was master of satirical humour that was very effective, but the significance of his contribution depends more on his tragedies like *Saints and Sinners* and *Michael and his Lost Angel*. In both these plays he tries to analyse a deeper question i.e. a new interpretation of religion vis-à-vis social codes. An awareness of the spiritual conflict of the age made him feel the imperative necessity of such an attempt. Jones's contribution to English drama is of supreme significance as the pioneer attempt to fuse spiritual problems of the age with those of society, even though his success was only partial. His contribution had a refining influence on English drama.

Henry Arthur Jones was a social reformer. He regarded drama as criticism of life. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Oscar Wilde started delighting British audiences with his comedy of manners. He was weak in characterization but knew how to create humorous situations. His dialogue is full of witty and paradoxical statements which send audiences to roars of laughter. Entertainment was his one aim and he was not concerned with the problems of the society. *The Importance of Being Earnest* has continued to delight audiences to this day.

Later the person who revolutionized British drama was a Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen. He started introducing
contemporary problems in the plays. The spiritual legacy of Ibsen was conspicuously felt during the formative period of modern English playwrights of the day. His characters are governed by a determinism moulded by environment over which they had no control. His social plays have the outstanding characteristic of presenting characters who try to swim both along the current of social conventions, and against it, both meeting with the tragic fate. He created a sensation in the literary circles of Europe by publishing a play begins in a traditional way till the middle of the last act and then there is a sudden change which heralded the Drama of Ideas. Nora the heroine of A Doll’s House, struggles against the social codes which bind a woman to her husband’s house even against her own individuality and make a doll of her. In the last scene she determines to become economically and mentally independent and she sweeps out of the house leaving her husband and children behind. This discussion scene disturbed a thousand homes and create a storm in literary circles throughout Europe. In Ibsen’s Ghosts, the problem of hereditary disease is discussed. His other plays also discussed the problems of the society.

The influence of Ibsenism was felt even in Robertson and it found its impact in the works of Pinero. Frank exposition of all emotional, spiritual and social problems especially those of sex is
the chief characteristics of Ibsen’s drama. He presented the intricate workings in complex individual minds, especially those with certain abnormal psychological tendencies. J.B. Priestley explains how Ibsen could find dramatic equivalents to inner mental conflict, and states that he suggested to the audience “the misty and often sinister borderland between conscious and unconscious, turning himself into a prophet in the theatre of the depth of psychology that was soon to invade the clinics, a Freudian before Freud, a Jungian before Jung.”

In 1889, A Doll’s House was produced in England as translated by William Archer. It created an uproar. Many critics condemned Ibsen, but Shaw strongly supported Ibsen. He wrote The Quintessence of Ibsenism in support of Ibsen’s dramatic practice.

After Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw started writing play himself to demonstrate that problem plays of the type that Ibsen was writing could succeed on the stage. In his plays there was no action on the stage. There was only dialogue and discussion of problems. And yet the plays were of great success because they provided wit and humour to the audience. Shaw wrote Windower’s House on the problem of slum land lordism and he wrote Mrs. Warren’s profession on prostitution. The Philanderer
and Getting Married were written on the problems of marriage. Arms and the Man was an anti-romantic comedy which threw a search light of reason on the problems of love and war. In Candida he wrote a domestic drama in the style of Ibsen. Man and Superman deals with Shaw's theory of Creative evolution. The Doctor's Dilemma deals with the whims and follies of doctors. In Pygmalion he showed that a charming play could be written on the dry subject of phonetics and spellings reform. In Saint Joan he presented the life of Joan of Arc of France as a problem play. She literated France but was burnt alive as a witch. She was the pioneer of nationalism and the new art of warfare. She was like a person with eyes in a land of the blind. Naturally the blind people decided to kill her. All the plays of Shaw presented various problems realistically.

St. John Hankin, Stanley Houghton and Granville Barker also wrote problem plays in a realistic vein. Granville Barker contributed to the English drama in various capacities. A playwright of very high caliber himself, he was a good critic and actor too. His themes in the plays include the individuals crushed by the society, and the fiery spirit of defiance and revolt that is the natural outcome. His The Voysey Inheritance, similar to Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession, deals with the ideological clash between two generations. Barker's play deal with professional
morality and scruples. In Granville Barker, thus there is the clear symptom of the revival of Domestic drama where the individual is seen struggling against the unseen forces in society. "His Waste is a so called 'domestic tragedy' which does not touch the social problems so much as eternal moral ones, and it reaches the mark with greatness effect subtly obtained, it is a precious and rare example of complete tragedy in modern English drama."9.

The background for 'plays of Ideas' was thus ready by the time of the advent of Galsworthy. His plays deal with the conflicts at various levels. He always had individual and home in view and therefore the impact of social upheaval on individuals happen to be his favourite theme seen in his plays, novels short-stories e.t.c. within the individual mind itself there are clashes between ideas, equally emphatic is the tension between generations in the name of the ideals, between individuals and society, and between individuals and concepts of a much wider significance like those of religion and problems of national and international significance.

Plays of Galsworthy which deal with the domestic problems are 'Joy,' 'A Family Man', and 'The Fugitive'. He wrote the plays like Strife, The Skin Game, The Eldest Son, Loyalties and few others dealing with class consciousness,
fanaticism and subsequent social stratification. Satirical flavour is seen in *The Pigeon*, *The Foundations* and *The Little Man*, where sociological problems and not family considerations are concentrated on. *Justice*, *The Silver Box* and *The First and the Last* deal with the tragedies of the individuals brought by certain fundamental drawbacks in the legal system in England. Galsworthy finds the tragic incompatibility between the essential principles of Christianity and the working principles of individuals including clergyman in *A Bit O’ Love*. The Mob is the story of a martyr who lays his life down for his pacific principles, being victimized by the illiterate hooligan mob. Old English and *The Forest* deal with professional morality. *The Forest*, *The Roof* and *The Little Dream* have mild symbolic significance.

In Galsworthy’s plays, the individual villain is substituted by the invisible force society. As R.H. Coats observes “His naturalism is a kin to that of Ibsen, he shares the moral earnestness of Shaw, in his preoccupation with the sores and diseases of society he resembles Brieux.”10.
References:


10. *Coats, R.H:* John Galsworthy as a Dramatic Artist (Duckwork, London) P-9