CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
The origins of Indian drama are linked with hierarchy of Gods and deities. Indra, the vedic God of heaven, went to Brahma, the Creator with a plea that he create a pastime that could be shared by all mankind and that would amuse and ennoble them. Brahma took words from Rigveda, music and songs from Samaveda, the quality of acting from Yajurveda and rasa, (aesthetic flavour) from Atharva Veda and created the 'poetics of drama' which was also known as Natyaveda. Drama was "expected to comprehend the whole arc of life ranging from the material to the transcendent, and provide at once relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination."¹

(The classical Indian drama dealt with godly events and idealism. In the words of H.W.Wells, "it is an uttermost expression of idealism."² Quite in keeping with the Hindu mind the classical plays presented an ideal view of life. Kalidasa, Harsa, Sudraka and Bhavabuthi are some of the talented dramatists in the ancient India in the hands of whom the drama flourished. The Indian classical Drama "shranks not only from violence, horror and physical tragedy, but even from the tragic in moral problems which attracted the Greek mind."³ It owed its existence mainly to the patronage of royalty.

¹

²

³
Plays were presented on special occasions for kings and noble men. Each production was done by a travelling company of professional actors. They were produced against a backdrop of painted curtains prepared for the occasion. The producers took every care to keep up symbolic significance by means of costumes and designs. Although the classical Indian drama existed in some form or other till the first century A.D. sporadic and artificial revivals of it took place throughout the subsequent centuries, it left no sincere practitioners behind it.

With the advent of the East India Company and the consequent assumption of political power by the Britishers, English education began to take roots in India. After the founding of educational institutions and sponsoring of school text books there began works of literature from many translations and adaptations of Western models. The English education in India not only fostered a critical study of Western drama and the classical Indian drama but also gave rise to the English theatre in India. The theatre in English flourished in cities like Bombay, Simla, Calcutta and Madras. By the end of the 19th century a few plays in English also appeared. M.K.Naik rightly observes: "By the end of the 19th century, the Bengali theatre was already well established, whereas drama in English in Bengal had to remain
content with a solitary play, Madhusudhan Dutt's *Is this Called Civilisation?*) 4.

The Indian drama in English has not fared well mainly because of the continued lack of the 'living Theatre' and a 'live audience'. (Naturally the Indian Playwright in English is liable to forget the vital distinction between the "voice of the poet addressing an audience and the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse." 5 The blurring of this main difference has made most of the Indian verse Drama in English dramatic poetry rather than authentic poetic drama. The playwright knows that his play is not going to be staged at all. So "he allows his dramatic vision to be insidiously warped in the embryo itself." 6 This process is manifest in most of the Indian verse plays in English by the dramatists like T.P. Kailasam and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya,) However Tagore and Sri Aurobindo succeeded in writing poetic drama.

Tagore is a unique figure in the history of Indian drama in English. He had a thorough knowledge of the Indian classical Theatre and drama.) He was at the same time alive to the western dramatic tradition. He evolved a dramatic form which influenced the Bengali theatre at the beginning of this century. He is known for his prolific output. (He borrowed his themes from Indian mythology, Buddhist legends
and other classical sources. His plays are mostly symbolic. This can be seen in his play *The Post Office*. Amar who is forbidden by the village doctor not to move out of doors, is not only happy but also makes those who come in contact with him very happy. He is ready to journey from this world to the next. Here 'The Post Office' becomes a symbol of the universe.) The king stands for God and the letter represents the message of eternity, the message calling us to reach God. The blank slip of paper symbolises the message of God which one is free to interpret according to one's own imagination. The post office is the place where the messages are received and delivered. Even in other plays, one finds a profuse use of symbolism. In *The King and The Queen* the king represents God and the Queen becomes a symbol of soul.

Tagore's plays are known for their lyrical excellence and also for their rich variety, but his plots are weak in construction. (The symbolism of his plays some times becomes excessive. Edward Thompson rightly says: "Tagore's plays are vehicles of thought rather than expressions of action."? Next appears on the scene Sri Aurobindo who has quite a few plays in English.

Sri Aurobindo inherited and carried forward tradition of the British poetic drama revived by Stephen Philips and Robert Bridges. His plays have well-knit
structure. The themes are drawn primarily from the classical mythology of the East or the West. His *The Viziers of Bassora* is based on the story of Noor Al-Din-Ali. The incidents of the story take place in the 9th century Muslim city of Bassora. His *Perseus the Deliverer* very ably dramatises the ancient Greek legend of Perseus. The play depicts the vision of a world moving forward through evil and anarchy towards the attainment of a blissful state. His *Rodogune* is a tragedy of a Parthian Princess. This play illustrates how the suffering that comes to man is designed not to crush him but to raise him to a new consciousness. His another powerful play *Eric* shows various stages of love—love as passion, love as a union of souls and love as a cosmic force which establishes man's insight not only with his fellow human beings but also with Universe. His *Vasavadatta* deals with the love between Udayan and princess Vasavadatta. The play is a celebration of love which is more divine than song.

Sri Aurobindo's plays present the dramatist's vision of the evolution of man. They also lay stress on the harmonising power of love. They show the vision of not only the whole man but the whole society. But they lack in theatrical vitality. They are more dramatic translations of Sri Aurobindo's "Laws and Facts of Evolution" than pieces of
Theatre. But they reveal his exquisite skill in the portrayal of characters and his hold on rich poetry.

(T.P. Kailasam is another poetic playwright who draws much from Indian mythology. His *The Burden* is the story of Bharatha who on his way back from his grandfather's place to Ayodhya, learns that his father is dead. He is so enraged that he does not want to spare even the royal priest Vasistha. *Fulfillment*, his other play, tells us the story of Ekalavya who is about to join the Kauravas and the war front. Krishna tries to dissuade Ekalavya from doing so. But Ekalavya remains firm. At last, while Ekalavya goes on narrating the Birds' Tree, Krishna stealthily kills him and his mother. While *The Purpose* delineates Ekalavya's concept of idealism (*The Curse of Karna* describes the destiny of Karna and the tragedy caused by Bhargava. The plays of Kailasam are known for their rich poetry, sparkling wit, subtle humor and ideal characters.)

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya comes before us as a poetic playwright with his devotional plays like *Raidas*, *Chokha Mela*, *Eknath*, *Pundalik*, *Sakubai* and *Jayadeva*. The plays with their rich poetry and devotional fervour, have drawn considerable attention of the audience.) Some of these are loose in construction and they suffer from predominance of poetry over action. So the poetic plays remain
essentially lyrical, allegorical and symbolic. These playwrights wrote their plays in an idiom which has an "archaic quality and this archaïcness lends the dialogue a charm, a grace and a kind of distance which produce heightened aesthetic pleasure."9

(The economic depression of the Thirties aroused the responsibility of the creative writers towards society. They felt that there was a need to portray the problems of the society around them. Some of the basic economic and social changes formed the background to their plays. In their works they portrayed the lives of the middle-class people, their joys and sorrows.) Their themes sprang from objective situations based on experience and observation and not from deeply contemplated ideas. (They described the real Indian life in their works.)

(The emergence of the drama with social purpose in English is also due to the rise of the national movement. The playwrights who have been influenced by this movement roused the feelings of nationalism in common man through their works. They made the common man politically conscious. As a result of this new wave of social realism sprang up plays dealing with the underdog of society, the peasant and the factory worker. To this tradition of social realism
belong A.S.P.Ayyar, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's plays of social protest, Asif Currimbhoy and Partap Sharma.)

A.S.P.Ayyar was born at Ayilam, a village in Kerala on 26th January, 1899. It was the period when Queen Victoria reigned over our nation. It was also characterized by its improved standard of decency and morality and unquestioning acceptance of authority and orthodoxy in England. But in India The Indian National Congress, founded by W.A.Hume, established its deep roots. A.S.P.Ayyar's father was a prominent land lord of the village and he was alive to the conditions of the age both in India and England. Naturally the young boy might have received inspiration and enlightenment from his father. It is likely that he incorporated the views of his father in his plays.

Ayyar's education in the Board High School, Kottayam must have familiarised himself with the rural landscape, the attitudes and predilections of the villagers, which later on appear in his plays. Through his education in Madras and in England he witnessed the literary trends in England. He served in the Judiciary Department for several years and rose finally to become the Justice of the Madras High Court. During his career in the Judiciary Department he had the opportunity of touring the whole of Madras Presidency. He might have seen persons of various
dispositions and attitudes. He was known for his spirit of independence and thorough outspokenness. (In his plays, most of the characters come out openly with their frank and independent views.

A.S.P. Ayyar started his literary career with his An Indian in Western Europe in 1929. His discourse on the essence of Hinduism, Bramha's Way appeared in 1935. Next appeared The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays (1941), The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity (1942), Jolly Old Tales of Ind (1945), A Layman's Bhagawad Gita (1946), Chanakya and Chandragupta (1946), Famous Tales of Ind and Baladitya (1956).

A.S.P. Ayyar's reaction against the ills of the contemporary society must have brought him to the sphere of drama. He purports to "portray modern Indian life in the time of transition, when the old ideas are being gradually displaced by new." He seeks to present men and things as he sees them and he also projects his own point of view. He deals with contemporary social issues such as the place of a woman, the hypocrisies of middle-class society and the problem of the destruction of man by misdirected knowledge. In his own words his plays contain discussions on conflicting opinions on social customs which are "the beatings on the drum of
society for creating the harmony of life."\(^{11}\) So he comes before us as a playwright with social purpose.

(During the Thirties, with the awakening of the writers and the realisation of their responsibility to society, commitment to the betterment of human condition was very much in the air. (The dramatists of the period started using the theatre as a powerful weapon to attack and purge the society of its evils. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya appeared on the scene during this period with his *Five Plays* (1937) that "contains some of his social consciousness, flair for realism, and the bite in his prose writing."\(^{12}\) He made the Indian drama in English essentially realistic, satirical, purposeful and above all, theatrically vital. He perhaps for the first time, introduces working class characters on the stage. "No Indian dramatist had ever cut such a large slices of the working class life."\(^{13}\)

For more prolific than his sister Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has during the half century between 1918 when his first collection lyrics - *The Feast of Youth* - appeared and *Virgins and Vineyards* (1967) published numerous volumes of verse, the more significant of which are *The Magice Tree* (1922) *Poems and Plays* (1927) and *Spring in Winter* (1955). (He began his career as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918), a light fantasy in prose and verse. His *Five
Plays are in prose and "are strongly coloured by the author's socialist sympathies."\textsuperscript{14} The Window and The Parrot describe the lives of the poor. The Coffin and The Evening Lamp depict the problems of two young men. The Sentry's Lantern concerns itself with the depressed feelings of the poor. Like Mulk Raj Anand in the field of Indian fiction in English Harindranath Chattopadhyaya depicts the life of the underdog in his plays.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has a few plays on the lives of some Indian saints. In Pundalik there is a conversion in the end brought about by the sisters - Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi. Here the sinner becomes a saint. Sakubai, Meerabai, Jayadeva, Chokha Mela, Eknath, Tukaram, Raidas and Kannapan are the saints who belong to the Bhakti tradition and who prefer to rely on the grace of God. These plays reveal to us the unwavering Faith in these devotees.

Next appears on the scene Asif Currimbhoy who has shown great interest in producing drama. He hails from a family of industrialists who were awarded many titles by the British Government. His father was an intellectual and his mother was a social worker. He was brought up in an environment of congeniality which provided him with good literary atmosphere. His education in St. Xavier's High School in Bombay exposed him to the English language and also
to Western Culture. Naturally the sophisticated veneer of the West has gone into his plays. He made a close study of the holy books of the Christians and also those of the Hindus. He went to the United States for higher studies. He obtained an M.A. Degree in Economics in 1950 from the Wisconsin University. His college days in America shaped his thought to a certain extent. He was quite alive to the various literary trends in drama in the USA. This must have gone a long way in shaping him as a playwright.

Asif Currimbhoy joined as an executive in The New India Assurance Company in France and received the French sophistication and culture. He also took up to the post of an executive in a top Oil Company. Whatever job he took up, wherever he went he had developed considerable fascination for the place and the job. He observed people and tried to understand them and later recorded the experiences of those people in his plays. He strongly felt that he should creatively involve himself in society and seek a full revelation in his plays of what he finds in the world around him and within him. He chose to write for the theatre because he thought that this was the art form which allowed him most to show the complexity of the society he lived in. (In the words of M.K. Naik he is "indisputably the most prolific Indian English playwright of any period."15) His
range and variety of subject matter are indeed amazing. Besides history, the east-west encounter, religion, philosophy and art, he "depicts the exploitation and oppression of the poor workers and peasants."\(^{16}\)


It is interesting to note that particular events or conditions in the affairs of men always stimulated the literary endeavour of Currimbhoy and played a vital role in shaping his dramatic career. He was posted to Agra where he had to spend his time at Lauries Hotel. He wrote *The Tourist Mecca* which deals with the tourists to Agra. He used to go to suburban Juhu for his holidays and weekends. He used to see the young men and women at the beach enjoy in themselves outwardly. He wrote *The Doldrummers* portraying the lives of the urban youth living in a shack on the fashionable Juhu Beach. The riots in Gujarat resulting in the dissolution of
the assembly in 1974 provoked him to write *The Dissident MLA*. He makes it a point that he holds a certain responsibility to himself and to the society as well. He doesn't hesitate to stretch his material beyond the limits of a particular country. He also uses language in keeping with characters and situations.

Next appeared short plays and one act plays of varying quality in journals and magazines. Most of the plays seem to have laid buried in books and magazines without a chance on the stage. But Partap Sharma a Bombay based playwright, appeared on the scene with his play *A Touch of Brightness* that was performed on two continents abroad. This play was produced at the Commonwealth festival. It presents the picture of the Red Light area of Bombay. His next play *The Professor has a War Cry* is about young Veerendra who comes to know that he is an illegitimate child of a mother raped by a Muslim and an English man, after having been deserted by her lover, a Hindu Professor. In the end Veerendra and the Professor kill each other. Thus Sharma produced his plays successfully on the stage.

A.S.P. Ayyar, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Asif Currimbhoy and Partap Sharma are a few playwrights who have succeeded in their efforts to portray creatively in a realistic manner the various social and political changes.
that had on India. They focus their attention on contemporary problems. In a way they come before us as the playwrights with social purpose. A study is going to be made of the element of social relevance in the selected plays of these four playwrights.
FOOTNOTES


9. K.S. Ramamurthy, 'Indian Drama in English' with special reference to *Tughlaq* *Littcrit*, 5, No.1 June 1979, p.11.


15. Ibid. p.258.