CHAPTER VII.

SUMMING UP.

It would be presumptuous on the part of even a widely acclaimed scholar to assert that he has studied every aspect of problem play in English and Hindi and that he has missed nothing that deserves notice. Such a tall claim besides being boastful is unacademic also. Literature like life never exhausts its possibilities and new interpretations are always possible. But, still, on the basis of the comparative study of Problem Play in the two languages certain conclusions can be drawn and certain assumptions made which, although, always open to intellectual enquiry, can serve, in their own way, as guide lines for the scholars of comparative literature. The term 'SAMASYA NATAK' in Hindi is a literal translation of the term 'PROBLEM PLAY' in English. The acceptance of the term 'Samasya Natak' in Hindi is indicative of the fact that no better term was available to the critics, scholars and creative writers to convey with all its amplitude the philosophy of life which problem play purported to take up as its raw stuff. But despite the acceptance of the term 'Samasya Natak' and despite the fact that Samasya Natak drew its inspiration from Western dramatists and thinkers, the native genius of India has left its distinct mark on Hindi Problem Play. To drive this point home we will have to go a little back in history to see how the birth and growth of 'Samasya Natak' in Hindi was somewhat different than the birth and growth of problem play in English.

Problem play was the result of new insight into the origin

1. Dr. Viney Kumar - Hindi Ke Samasya Natak - P. 543
of human life and civilization. It drew its sustenance from the philosophy of Intellectualism which was so powerfully operative in all fields of life during the latter half of the nineteenth century. There was nothing that was not to be questioned. The pious notions of heaven and salvation, the sanctimonious talk of men's divine descent and the holy humbug of traditional morality perpetrated in the name of higher sanction were put to searching enquiry and were found to be time-impositions. The duality of human nature, the presence of hundreds of lives in one life and the irrepressible forces of beastly inheritance were analysed in such a way as to make them intelligible to common men. The world of idealism could no more stand on its feet. Reality was dawning upon men with all its irresistible horrendous effects. In the field of literature the tendencies of realism were visible right from the sixties. But till eighties these tendencies could not gather enough strength to emerge as a distinct literary force. English Drama was still under the French influence and the well-made plays after the pattern of Scribe and Sheridan ruled the day. Grunty was a rage for the theatregoers and the public taste seemed to have touched the lowest depth. The new wind came with Robertson, Pinero and Jones. The emergence of Ibsen gave a death blow to the idealist tradition. Europe, since Shakespeare, had not seen a dramatic genius of the stature of Ibsen. If Shakespeare was a typical product of the Romantic Elizabethan age Ibsen was the representative spokesman of the new scientific spirit and the matter-of-fact realism. For hundreds of years Western drama has lived in a make-believe world of its own and it was in the

1. Allardyce Nicoll - British Drama - P. 349
nineteen that it broke away from that tradition with a bang. Shaw, Galsworthy and others perfected the technique of problem play to such an extent as to make it the most suited form for the expression of the Time-spirit. For about forty years problem play ruled supreme in England and English drama became the sanctuary for the lovers of realist art all over the world.

In Hindi the situation was a little different. There was no one except Jai Shankar Prasad to rebel against and even Jai Shankar Prasad's plays had not been put to the test of stage performance. Bhartendu himself and a good number of his contemporaries had tried to deal with social problems in their plays and some of the 'Prabhasa' had genuine realistic tendencies. But, I must say that the intellectual ferment which was so forcefully visible in England in the nineteen of the nineteenth century was nowhere in sight either in the time of Bhartendu or even in the early thirties of the twentieth century when Harsh Kesarin Misra came forward with his 'sanyasi'. The fact remains that even today, Indian consciousness is not fully conditioned to accept a scientific view of life and a majority of people in India still prefer to live under delusion of one kind or the other. For example, there are scholars who would not admit the simple fact that 'Samasya Natak' in Hindi owes its birth to the inspiration got from the West. They would mention Bhaskar Vasant's Nen and Kalidas's Shakuntala and assert that the two Sanskrit dramatists raised the problem of exploited womanhood in these two characters. The less rigid among them would trace the origin of Samasya Natak to the 'Prabhasa' and social plays of the Bhartendu Era, and a few to Prasad's Shruvanavami.

1. Bhaskar Shinas - Charuduttam
2. Kalidas - Abhijan - Shakuntalam, Act V.
4. Dr. Viswanath Prasad Mishra - Hindi Natak Par Prasankya Prabheey 1920 - K. Band F. 387, quoted by Dr. Mandhana Ojha - Hindi Samasya Natak - P. 96
The modern critical opinion in Hindi is, however, veering round the view that 'Samasya Natak' came as a reaction to the dramas of Pipli theatre and to the romantic plays of Jai Shankar Prasad. They present the whole thing in such a way as to relegate the Western influence to a secondary place. I, whom however, feel that had Indian writers not come in contact with the works of Western Problem Playwrights, the course of Hindi Drama after Jai Shankar Prasad would have certainly been different. Not that the same romantic tradition of Prasad would have continued but the emphasis on problems and the technique of presentation would not have been the same as it is today. True creative genius can never be a pale copy of any influence direct or indirect but it certainly seeks sustenance for its flowering in some mysterious way from a congenial soil. Hindi Problem play has certainly charted its own route and has fixed its own guide lines suited to the native genius but its indebtedness to English especially in its earlier stages cannot be played down by any amount of verbal jargery.

Problem play is altogether a different genre and there is nothing like it among all the divisions and sub-divisions of Rupak so elaborately discussed in Sanskrit dramaturgy. Attempts of certain scholars to seek similarities between 'Prakaran' - a form of Rupak - and 'Samasya Natak' are fallacious. In the same way the content and technique of problem play in English cannot be restricted to any one of the many traditional styles and forms of play writing in the West. The French form of Drama known as 'Drame' also cannot do justice with all that problem play stands for despite A. Nicoll's attempt to trace similarities in the two forms.

1. Natak, Prakaran, Dhan, Vyanag, Vitti, Samavaka, Prabhaan, Dim, Namrig and Ank.
So we will have to admit that problem play is a distinct genre of dramatic art that it is a unique phenomenon which came as a literary manifestation of the Time-spirit. The strange similarity of content and technique between English Problem Play and Hindi Samasya Katak makes one wonder how the problem playwrights although writing in different conditions thousands of miles away from each other could look at life, quite often from identical viewpoints and could demonstrate the truth of the expression that the pleasures and pains and the toils and turmoils of humanity are the same in all climes and countries.

If one has to see what a 'new woman' stands for, one will have to go to the problem playwright. One may read the whole of Jai Shankar Prasad and yet one may not come across a new woman. Not only this, one may read all the dramas written during a hundred years before Pinero's coming on the English stage and may not meet a new woman. She came with Pinero's Mrs. Tanquerary, Ibsen's Nora, Shaw's Ann, Barker's Miss Kate and Houghton's Fanny Heathe. She came with Laxmi Sarain Mishra's Asma Devi, Seth Govind Das's Achla, Ashit's Rani and Udaya Shanker Bhat's Amma. Not only this if one wants to see a real picture of the frustrations and miseries of middle class life, of the evil effects of dictatorial parental authority, of the slow but sure disintegration of personality under the tyrannical weight of dead customs, of the heroic yet hopeless fight of the individual against blind totalitarian trends, one will have to go to the problem playwright both in English and Hindi. There is so much in common and yet there is so much to guarantee their distinctive separateness.

Hindi Samasya Katak is not that razor sharp and its spirit is not entirely devoid of that enigmatic quality we call 'Indianness'. It drew ideological support and borrowed freely from English problem Play but as its roots went deeper into the native soil it took its own independent
course of growth and got a place in the field of drama in its own right. If Prem Chand's 'Godan' is the most impressive literary record in story-form of the hopeless and yet determined fight of the poor Indian peasantry against the soul-killing tyrannies of a feudal social order kept intact and even encouraged by the British imperialism, 'Sindur-Ki-oli' is certainly an impressive dramatic record of the essential Indianness of womanhood presented in the back-drop of changing values and of the ultimate futility of material pursuit at the cost of all that distinguishes a man from a beast.

The mill-owners belonging to the older generation in Seth Govind Das's 'Problem Plays' did never think the way Sir Anthony did in 'Strike'. But the young generation of the capitalist was mostly painted after the western fashion. So the concept of Trusteehip, the most important aspect of Gandhian economics, always reflected itself in the Problem Plays dealing with Labour-Capital strife. The new woman was never so new for Hindi Problem Playwright as to take pride in attaining motherhood without getting the identity of a father established. The growing of wild oats could never be an integral part of the theme of a problem play in Hindi and even the revolt against parental authorities was always presented in subdued colours. The test came only through the screening intellect of Hindi Problem playwright whose intellectualism has always remained shrouded with mystic associations going back to the hoary past. The technique is sometimes identical and the theme too and yet characters behave differently because of different types of social pressures and point out to different conclusions. One cannot form a definite opinion about Indian society after having read English problem plays although one can safely presume the same type of

1. Seth Govind Das - Hindi Ya Alam - Madhuban
2. Granville Barker - The Madras House (Missa, Yatte)
3. Vandura Sethi Wali - Anjo Didi
conditions in other Western countries such as France, Germany and U.S.A. The same is the case in reverse. Having read Hindi Problem play one cannot have much idea of the Western woman, her concept of Lib. movement. Problems, more or less remain the same and yet they evoke different responses in the two countries because of the difference in ethics and the style of living. Still, for a fuller understanding of the vastness of life one must read the great problem plays of both the languages and only then one can have some idea of the spectacular achievement of this genre.

'Chhayavad' in Hindi case partly as a result of native urges and compulsions and partly as a result of the influence of the English romantic poets on creative talent in Hindi. 'Chhayavad', however, absorbed all foreign influences so beautifully that when it reached its full glory in Prasad and Pant it had hardly any trace of the alien contact. The masterpieces of Prasad, Pant and others can well match, if not surpass, the masterpieces of the nineteenth century romantic poets in English. Unfortunately this has not proved to be the case with Hindi Problem Play which seems to have exhausted its strength without producing anything to be placed by the side of, e.g., 'Kasavani' a 'Pallev' or even a 'Chandegupt'. 'Indur Khilji', Amiri Ya Garibi and 'Kali' can, at the most be called second best works judged by international standards. But Hindi problem drama has got a large number of good plays in its repertory and from this point of view it is certainly a period of achievement for Hindi.

English problem play had not much to offer after 1920 although random works like St. Joan (1927) continued to be published till the early thirties. But the political and social conditions remaining the same, there is not much of difference in the tone and temper of the problem play written during this period of forty years
or so. Of course some difference of approach can be seen in the plays written before world war first and after it. In Hindi, however, problem plays are still being written and although in the late fifties symbolic dramas and poetic plays gave a new direction to Hindi drama, the stream of problem play has yet not dried up. The plays written before Independence had more depressive notes and shadows of unrelieved gloom. After Independence we find subdued notes of hope and economic resurgence - although cautiously presented because of traditional Indian attitude of complete surrender to fatalism. Vidyasanker Bhattacharji's 'Kesla' written in 1939 and 'Naya Sankar' written in 1956 deal with almost the same theme and yet the difference of treatment on the above mentioned lines is very much traceable there. This type of difference can also be seen in Sahat's 'Kalid' (1943) and 'Aalag Alag Daste' in 1954.

English drama is moving from one experimental form to another and even the symbolic and poetical forms seem to have become outdated there. Political stability and far better standards of living ensure more creative productivity and a search for a new and more meaningful forms of intellectual entertainment. The rich dramatic tradition of centuries coupled with variegated intellectual capacity is giving English drama a new dimension which may open immense possibilities before gifted writers. In Hindi, during the last few years there has been almost blanket ban on everything that struck a revolutionary note and that did not fall in a set pattern. This ban came because in the late sixties and early seventies men of letters got

1. Dr. Mandhata Ojha - Hindi Saanya Matra - p. 290
disenchanted with the prevailing political system and spoke and wrote vehemently against the vested social and political interests. Dramatists of the realist school in Hindi were in the forefront in this respect. The emergency was a crude attempt to stifle the voice of dissent. But the problems cannot cease to be there only because some people refuse to take cognizance of them. A drama or for the matter of that a realist film such as 'Kisse Suri hai' cannot be suppressed for long. There is still a big scope for problem plays in Hindi and the problem plays at this stage can really strike a truly independent note because there is no contemporary foreign movement to inspire them.

There are many pleasures of tongue and eye in this world of ours. Other senses have their share of feast also. But for one who loves to think and derive pleasure in the process of thinking there is no pleasure greater than the pleasure of reading and witnessing a realist play on the stage. A problem play is not a propaganda play and it can never lead to wilderness as alleged by Acharya Vajpeyee. To be able to read both English and Hindi problem plays is to have both heaven and earth in one's solid grip.

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Hindi speaking people being the third largest group in the world also should certainly look forward to the day when Hindi literature becomes a source of inspiration to other world languages. Till then one will have to go to English and other literatures to seek explanation for many a literary tendencies in Hindi.

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1. Amrit Sahtia's file
2. Renu Dehlav Vajpeyee - Naya Sahitya - Naya Prashna - P. 10