

# THE INDIAN DRAMA IN ENGLISH: IT'S STAGE WORTHINESS

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## **Abstract**

***Drama requires specialized skill and talent in selecting a theme which is presentable on the stage and in picking up a technique which appeals to the audience. The drama is an expert form of art and it involves the playwright, the actor and the audience for the representation of life and vivid experiences in it. It is directed in an environment which commonly shares the rich talents as well as customs of the nativity. It tries to establish to create a long lasting experience and impact on the audience by its total commitment of the persons who are involved in it. The present paper throws a light on the aspects of stage worthiness of Indian Drama in English.***

**Keyword: Indian Drama in English, stage worthiness**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In all the genres of writing English in India, the Indian drama in English is slightly paid low attention due to several factors. It is neglected, because it has not received any recognition as much as the novel and short fiction in English in India. Even the writing poetry in English has an advantageous growth than that of the drama in English. However the form is much neglected, there have been a considerable number of playwrights who tried their hands in writing plays in English. Ever since the English language firmly established its roots in the country, there has been writing of plays in English in spite of their generally poor stage worthiness.

In India, the language of English, due to its complexity in many forms, is more practically confined to the elite in the urban areas and the academic and spoken purposes only. But the theatre needs not only a professional stage but also an encouraging audience where it is meant to be staged. In the words of R.K.

Dhawan, who feels sorry in this regard, "It is a well-known fact that the real success of a play can be tested on [the] stage. A playwright needs a living theatre to put his work on acid test, evaluate its total effect on the audience and thereby get a chance to improve upon his performance. This handicap has not allowed him to pursue playwriting in a systematic and comprehensive way." It is hard to say we can ever hope to find a play to be staged successful.

The drama comes in direct contact with the people through its stage production. Even an illiterate and a literate enjoy the same privileges that the drama provides, as it is half literary and half sociological. M.K. Naik observes the detained status of the Indian English drama as follows: "A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience...It is precisely the lack of these essentials that has hamstrung Indian drama in English all along." The role of the audience is an important factor; the study of drama is a study of audience too.

The most important reason is that English is not the mother tongue of the Indians, and therefore it remains alien. It is learnt as a second language, and its teaching is still, for all practical purposes, confined to the urban elite. Usually, the participation of the audience is made possible through the mother tongue, not through a foreign tongue. That's why Indian drama mostly flourished in regional languages. Obviously Indian English drama does not enjoy this privilege, and has to pass through a tortuous experience for many years.

Drama is a mimic representation of life. It combines in itself the real and the fictional, art and reality, and presents the events and characters with both a spatial and temporal dimension. But the real reason for the setback of Indian English drama is that it has not been able to plant itself in the Indian ethos. India has

been a rich storehouse of myths and legends, of folk-tales and customs, of historical events and cultural heritage, and our dramatists ought to have made use of them in their creative writings. However, some talented writers like Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, T.P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabhai and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya in the past and Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Lakhan Deb, and Vijay Tendulkar in the present have enriched the Indian English drama through their solid contributions.

Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore did try their hands in using the myth in their plays, but they could not resolve the conflict between the inner and outer worlds. What they failed to realize was that the pre-classical Sanskrit tradition had to be tailored to modern needs. But some other dramatists like Asif Currimbhoy and Girish Karnad have skilfully employed ancient tales and myths, folk-tales and conventions, in their plays. Satish Kumar in his survey observes that Asif Currimbhoy and Girish Karnad have used the myths skilfully in order to "interpret contemporary social and political situation". Currimbhoy's *The Dumb Dancer*, and "OM" and Karnad's *Tuglaq* and *Hayavadana* are the glaring examples of it. These plays are of cultural, social and political relevance, and point to a direction that has not been thoroughly explored.

Indian dramatists both in English and also in the other Indian languages have a rich tradition to fall back upon. Indeed most of the dramatists of the pre-Independence period have been deeply influenced by the classical traditions as also by the characteristics of the popular stage of the folk art. However, the Indian English dramatists, most of whom have been the products of the English education, have come under the great impact of the English dramatists in general and of Shakespeare in particular. In recent times the influence of the American dramatists has also become quite evident. Thus the present-day Indian English drama has signs of the influence of two great dramatic traditions - the Classical and the Western. But the degree of this impact varies from one dramatist to the other, and among the most recent Indian English playwrights the classical influence is not much evident.

The traditional and modern elements in the Indian plays in English can be traced both in substance and in style. Some themes in the Indian English drama show how the dramatists had gone mainly to the epics and myths for the plots and themes of their plays. Even

playwrights like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and T.P. Kailasam have made use of many myths and legends to build their plays on. However in the hands of these great dramatists, these myths and legends acquire new dimensions and significance. In some cases the old legends and myths are used to deal with the modern predicament, and they become sustained metaphors. But these plays are of cultural, social and political relevance, and point to a direction that has not been thoroughly explored. They open up a vast vista before us, but only a few dramatists have realized the truth.

Unfortunately, the form of drama in English still awaits Indianization. Though some dramatists have attempted to Indianize the form by using some of the conventions of the Indian classical drama and some of those of the folk theatre and by blending them in a singular style of his own, there seems to be a world of difference between a reading or performance of these plays and that of the translated English ones.

The plays originally written in English and the plays translated into English from regional languages fall into two distinct categories. The only alternatives available to readers of English who do not know the regional languages are the translated versions of the regional plays. While reading these translated plays in English, a conscious reader is beset with the feeling that something very important is missing in the texts, and there is an element of artificiality about them.

The artificiality seems to result from the inherent inadequacy of the English language to contain temperaments, sensibilities and realities which are quite essentially Indian. As Rama Sarma, in the preface to his *Collected Plays*, remarks: "Any play written in India in English has an inherent disadvantage in the sense that it is not very often staged. Stage worthiness being a basic test for play, many of the plays written in English do not fulfil this requirement." Lack of clarity pertaining to these issues in most potential playwrights can account for the paucity and the inferior quality of plays in English.

The contemporary Indian drama in English is getting richer day by day. It has achieved a considerable measure of success in the recent decades, as it is being continually fed by a few talented playwrights. H.M. Williams, a reputed literary critic, examines Indian English drama within his own critical framework: "The English speaking theatre in India anxiously awaits a writer of Narayan's or Raja Rao's stature, one who might

perhaps combine the poetic vision of a Sri Aurobindo or a Dom Moraes with the professional craftsmanship of an Asif Currimbhoy." Yet it has to go a long way to compete with the other literary genres in the Indian English literature. But it needs to be carried on in the light of innovative themes and techniques. The playwrights have to be solidly grounded in contemporary problems while deriving their inspiration and sustenance from his hoary wisdom and culture. In fact, they have to base their plays on our history, epics, legends, myths, folklore, art and culture.

Consequent on the Second World War (1939-45), there had been innumerable catastrophes that proved to be so turbulent to many a writer who tends "to veer between his sense of belonging to a world community, a common humanity whose spokesman he is and a more specific awareness of his own rootedness among the people he knows best and of when he writes". The great famine of Bengal (1943), which caused the death of millions of helpless rural people, is one of those calamities. The mass exodus of the refugees after the Partition caused the plight of the thousands of refugees.

The field of contemporary Indian drama in English boasts only of a few writers with a keen eye for the dramatic technique. The Independence to India brought with it the fateful Partition of the country which caused the deepest anguish especially in Bengal and Punjab. The advent of the Independence and the trauma of the Partition were responsible for the sudden failure of the spirit of brotherhood and the collapse of human values. This aspect touched the playwrights in English and it served as the source material for quite a few of their plays. The dramatists were profoundly influenced by the new currents of violence that took place in the nation during the sixties and seventies.

## CONCLUSION

Many schemes such as the Land Reform Bill, which were given a lot of publicity by the government, were poorly enforced. Hence there emerged a few discontented political groups which attempted to achieve their aims through force and intimidation rather than through democratic procedures. These are very much involved in the celebration of human spirit in its confrontation with violence and despair. Thus, an appreciation of these plays in English demand a

sympathetic understanding and identification with the cause of the suffering humanity. The playwrights in Indian Drama in English should have made use of the realities to bring out the change among the audience and its stage worthiness.

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