



THE ORIGIN OF INDIAN DRAMA DURING THE VEDIC PERIOD

Ms N Nirmala Mary
Lecturer in English
Andhra Loyola College
Vijayawada

India has a rich tradition of Drama from immemorial times. India is a land of several types of dramas in several languages. Drama in India begins its journey with the Sanskrit plays. A.L. Basham, a prominent historian, viewed that 'the origin of Indian theatre is still obscure'. Genius has its own alchemy to transmute everyday life experiences into artistic creation and conceals the potential to reconstruct life beyond its apparent realistic fabric of human conditions. Indian Drama having found its roots in Classical Sanskrit models, in post-modern era has emerged as a potent force to fill the gap of 'page and stage' and bring theatre close to life. It is certain, however that even in the Vedic period dramatic performances of some kind were given, and passing references in early resources point to the inaction at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and mime" Indian traditions are preserved in the *Natyasastra* the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama. This play claims for the drama divine origin and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. Origin of Indian English drama can be traced to the ancient rules and seasonal festivities of the Vedic Aryans. The dramatic performances of those times mainly included such events like depiction of events of daily life accompanied by music. Some members of the tribe acted as if they were wild animals and some others were the hunters. Those who acted as



animals like goats, buffaloes, reindeers and monkeys were chased by those, playing the roles of hunters and a mock hunt was enacted. In such crude and simple ways drama was performed during the age of the Vedic Aryans. Later, different episodes from *The Ramayana (Ram Leela)*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Bhagvadgita* were chosen and dramatized in front of the people. This kind of performance is still very popular in India especially during the time of Dussehra, when the episode of the killing of Ravana is enacted out in different parts of country.

There are references to drama in Patanjali's *Vyakarna Mahabhashya*, as well as Vatsyayan's *Kamastura*, Kautilya's *Arthasastra* and Panini's *Ashtabhyam*. Thus the origin of Sanskrit drama dates back to 1000 BC. All the literature in Sanskrit is classified into Drishya (that can be seen or exhibited) and the Sravya (that can be heard or recited). While poetry in all forms can be said to fall under the latter, drama falls under the former. Drama in Sanskrit literature is covered under the broad umbrella of '*rupaka*' which is depiction of life in its numerous aspects represented in forms by actors who take various roles. A '*rupaka*' has ten classifications of which '*Nataka*' (drama), the most important one, has come to mean all dramatic presentations. The Sanskrit drama grows around three primary constituents namely *Vastu* (Plot), *Neta* (hero) and *Rasa* (sentiment). The plot could be either *Principal* (*adhikarika*) or *accessory* (*prasangika*). The former concerns the primary characters of the theme and pervades the entire play. The latter serves to further and supplement the main topic and relates to subordinate characters other than the chief ones. This is again divided into *banner* (*pataka*) and *incident* (*parkari*). The former is a small episode that presents,



describes, improves or even hinders the primary plot to create added excitement. The latter has minor characters. The *Neta* or the hero, according to the definition prescribed by the *Natyashastra*, is always depicted as *modest* (Vineeta), *sweet tempered* (Madhura) *sacrificing* (Tyagi), *capable* (daksha), *civil in talks* (priyamvada), belonging to a *noble family* (taptaloka), *pure* (suchi) *articulate* (vagmi), *consistent* (Sthera), *young* (yuva) endowed with *intellect* (buddhi) *enthusiasm* (utsaha), *good memory* (Smrthi) *aesthetics* (Kola), *pride* (maana) and is *brave* (Shura), *strong* (dridha), *energetic* (tejaswi), *learned* (pandita) and *pious* (dharmika). The main category in which the hero of Sanskrit drama normally falls is the '*Dheerodatta*' that is he who is brave and sublime at the same time.

Bharat's *Natyashastra*, is the most significant work on Indian poetics and drama. In it there is description in detail about composition, production and enjoyment of ancient drama, a wealth of information of types of drama, stage equipment, production and music. According to the legend, when the world passed from the golden age to the silver age and people became addicted to sensual pleasures and jealousy, anger, desire and greed filled their hearts. The world was then inhabited by gods, demons, yakshas, rakshasas, nagas and gandharvas. It was the gods among them who were led by Lord Indra, approached God-the Brahma and requested him thus, 'Please give us something which would not only teach us but be pleasing both to eyes and ears'.

Bharata ascribed a divine origin to drama and considered it as the fifth Veda. Its origin seems to be from religious dancing. According to Bharata, poetry (kavya) dance (nritya), and mime (nritya) in life is play (lila) produce emotion



(bhava) but only *drama* (natya) produces flavor (rasa). The drama uses the eight basic emotions of love, joy, humour, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion and wonder attempting to resolve them in the ninth holistic feeling of peace. Thus, when the dramatic art was well comprehended, the natyaveda was performed on the occasion of the celebration of Lord Indra's victory over the Asuras and danavas. In the *Natyashastra*, there is a verse in its sixth chapter which can be quoted as Bharat Muni's own summary of his dramatic theory. This kind of combination in natya sastra is called 'a mixture of rasa, bhavas, vrittis, pravrittis, siddhi, svaras, abhinayas, dharmis, instruments, song and theatre-house'.

The most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwaghosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidas, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Visakhadatta, Bhattranarayana, Murari and Rajeshkhara, who enriched Indian theatre with their words like *Madhya-Mavyaayoda*, *Urubhangam*, *Karnabharan*, *Mrichkarikam*, *Abhigyana Shakuntalam*, *Malankagnimitram*, *Uttar Ramacharitam*, *Mudrarak*, *Shasa*, *Bhagavadajjukam*, *Mattavilasa* and so on. The supreme achievement of Indian drama undoubtedly lies in Kalidasa who is often called the Shakespeare of India, the Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the 12th century in India when the Mohammedan intrusion shifted the Sanskrit stage. But till the 15th century, plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karanataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttra Pradesh and Gujarat but thereafter, Indian dramatic activity almost ceased due to foreign invasions on India. The beginnings of *Loknatya* (people's theatre) are noticed in every state of India from the 17th century onwards. We see in Bengal '*Yatrakirtaniya*' '*Paol*' and '*Gaan*' in Madhya Pradesh '*Mach*'



in Kashmir '*bhandya thar*' and in Gujarat the forms were '*Bhavai*' and '*Ramleela*' in Northern India. There were '*Nautanki, Bhand, Ramleela* and '*Rasleela*' in Maharashtra '*Tamasha*' in Rajasthan '*Raas*' and '*Jhoomer*' in Punjab '*Bhangra*' and '*Song*' while in Assam it was '*Ahiyanat*' and '*Ankinatya*' in Bihar it was '*Videshiya*' and '*Chhari*' in West Bengal and Bihar.

The rise of the modern drama dates back to the 18th century when the British Empire strengthened its power in India. As Krishna Kriplani points out, the modern Indian drama 'Owed its first flowering to the foreign grafting. With the impact of western civilization on Indian life, a new renaissance dawned on Indian arts including drama. Furthermore, English education gave an impetus and a momentum to the critical study of not only Western drama, but classical Indian drama. English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare's in cities like Bombay and Madras. The Portuguese brought a form of dance drama to the west coast. A Russian music director, Rebedoff, is said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta towards the end of the 18th century. Thus, the western impact awakened "the dormant, critical impulse in the country to bring Indians face to face with new forms of life and literature, and to open the ways for a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and forms of expression". In 1765 one Russian drama lover Horasin Lebdef and Bengali drama lover Qulokhnath had staged two English comedies *Disgaig* and *Love Is the Best Doctor*. But the real beginning was in 1831 when Prasanna Kumar Thakur established '*Hindu Rangmanch*' at Calcutta and staged Wilson's English translation of Bhavabhuti's Sanskrit drama *Uttara*



Ramacharitam. Social drama of Girish, Chanda Chosh, historical dramas of D.L.Roy and artistic dramas of Rabindranath Tagore (*Muktadhara*, *Chandalika*) continued to reach up to the stage of realistic dramas during the period of the worst- ever famines of Bengal and the second World War. In 1852-1853, the famous Parsi Theatre was launched in Bombay which influenced the whole country in no time. Postagi Pharmji was the pioneer in establishing the Parsi Theatre company in India. Many new theatre experiences were brought up on stage during Parsi Theater' evolution in India. On the other hand, the amateur theater also developed with the works of Bharatendu Harishchandra, acclaimed as the father Hindi drama.

Indian English drama was inaugurated when Krishna Mohan Banerji penned *The Persecuted* in 1837. The real odyssey of Indian English Drama begins with Michael Madhusudan Dutt's 'Is this called civilisation' which appeared on the literary scene in 1871. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, the two great sage-poets of India, are regarded the pioneer Indian dramatists in English. Rabindranath Tagore wrote mainly in Bengali but almost all his Bengali plays are available to the readers in English translation. His prominent plays are *Chitra*, *The Post Office*, *Sacrifice*, *Red Olenders*, *Chandalika*, *Muktadhara*, *Natir Puja*, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Sanyasi* and *The Mother's Prayer* and so on. These plays are firmly rooted in the Indian culture in their themes, characters and treatment. R.K.Ramaswamy appreciates his plays for depth and gravity of purpose and appreciates his dramatic art for more than anything else. He has shown the way both in respect of ideas as well as of methods, by which the soul of India could be



realized and revealed in the realm of dramatic creation and representation. Then, Sri Aurobindo is the second prominent dramatist in Indian English drama. He contributed five complete black verse plays besides his six incomplete plays. His complete plays are *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodoguna*, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric* and each of these plays is written in five acts. His incomplete plays are *The Witch of Ilni*, *Achab and Esarhaddon*, *The Maid and the Mill*, *The House of Brut*, *The Birth of Sin* and *Prince of Edur*.

Sri Aurobindo's plays present different cultures and countries in different eras, with a variety of characters, moods and sentiments. This is in fact, one of the notable features of Sri Aurobindo's plays. For instance, *Perseus the Deliverer* is based on the ancient Greek myth of *Persues*, *Vasavadutta* is a romantic tale of ancient India, *Rodoguna* is a Syrian romance of Scandinavia, a story of love and war between the children of Odin and Thor. In Aurobindo's dramas the readers can make out all dramatic shades and varieties and fundamental concepts like romance, heroic play, tragedy, comedy, farce which we can expect from Indian English dramas. As Dr.K.R.S lyengaer observes, "But all five plays are steeped in poetry romance, recalling the spirit and flavor of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti. Though, of course all have Aurobindonian undertones"(89). Harindranath Chattopadhyay also made significant contribution to Indian drama. He started his career as playwright with his play *Abu Hassan* (1918). He has written seven verse plays to his credit published under the title of *Poems and Plays* (1927) and all the seven plays are based on the lives of Indian saints. His Five Plays are prosaic. *The Window and The Parrot* deal with the lives of the poor, where



as the *Sentry's Lantern* is a symbolic display of the expectation of the arrival of a new age for the downtrodden people. Sidhartha's *Man of Peace* is an adventurous effort to dramatize Lord Buddha's life. Another great dramatist who has become significant in Indian literary map is A.S.P Ayyar with his praise worthy six plays. *The Clutch of The Devil* (1926) is his first play and the last one is *The Trial of Science* for the Murder of Humanity.

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