



## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DRAMA AS A LITERARY GENRE IN INDIA: A BRIEF STUDY

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### Abstract:

*Drama is a theoretical performance where actors take the role of the characters and utter the written dialogues and do the indicated actions. The birth of drama happened in Greece and different genres of drama emerged throughout the history. According to Oxford Dictionary, 'a play for the theater, television, or radio; plays considered as a form of literature (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>). This paper brings out a brief survey of historical perspective of Indian drama from Sanskrit theatres to modern English Indian drama. Most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwagosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bhavbhuti, Vishakhadatta etc. Indian English drama initiated with Ravindranath Tagore who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913. Vijay Tendolkar, Girish Karnard, Badar Sircar are most famous playwrights in Indian English Drama. Indian English drama started in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century during the British rule. They brought drama and modern theatre with them. In the beginning of British rule, people did not know English. Therefore, they have learned Indian languages and translated English plays, mostly Shakespeare's plays and shown in the Theatre. This was the reason when Indian English drama came to existence.*

**Keywords:** *Drama, Sanskrit Theatre, Indian English Drama, etc.*

As all we know that literature is reflection of human nature or it holds mirror to human society, Drama is one of the dominant and significant genres of literature. The play began in Greece along with theatres, and globally it became highly popular. Our nation, India too has a rich history of Drama and theatre. The theater began with Sanskrit drama in India and continued its dominance still today. M. H. Abrams defined drama as, "The form of composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated actions, and utter the written dialogue" (Abrams, 79). According to Oxford Dictionary, 'a play for the theater, television, or radio; plays considered as a form of literature (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>).

This paper brings out a brief survey of historical perspective of Indian drama from Sanskrit theatres to modern drama.

### • Sanskrit Theatre:

Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* involves the playwright, the actor, the audience, plot-construction, characterisation, dialogues, music, dance, posture, stage sets etc. Indian Drama is a broad concept comprising entire Indian myths and culture. The journey of Indian Drama begins with the Sanskrit plays, among which *Natyashastra* is the oldest text of the theory of the Drama.

Thus, the origin of Indian drama is found in the Vedic Period. It was got its peak of excellence during the Gupta Empire when Kalidasa has produced three masterpieces of Indian drama. Most

celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwagosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bhavbhuti, Vishakhadatta etc.

Literature in Sanskrit is classified into two categories:

Drishya:- that can be seen; and Sravya:- that can be heard

Drama falls in the category of Drishya

The earliest-surviving fragments of Sanskrit drama date from the 1st century CE. The ancient Vedas from between 1500 to 1000 BCE that are among the earliest examples of literature in the world contain no hint of Drama. Although a small number are composed in a form of dialogue. (Richmond, 516).

The *Mahabhasya* by Patanjali (treatise on grammar- 140 BCE) contains the earliest reference to what may have been the seeds of Sanskrit drama. It provides a feasible date for the beginnings of theatres in India.

Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* whose date of composition is uncertain (estimates range from 200 BCE to 200 CE), regarded as the highest achievement of Sanskrit Drama. It utilized stock characters such as the hero (*nayaka*), heroine (*nayika*), or clown (*vidusaka*). Actors may have specialized in a particular type. *Mricchakatika* (The Little Clay Cart) is one of the earliest known Sanskrit plays, this play was composed by Sudraka in the 2nd century BC. The main story is about a young man named Charudatta, and his love for Vasantasena, a rich courtesan or nagarvadu.

The plays written by Bhāsa were only known to historians through the references of later writers, the manuscripts themselves being lost. Manuscripts of 13 plays written by him were discovered in an old library in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) in 1913 by the scholar Ganapati Sastri. His plays are *Pratimanātaka*, *Abhishekanātaka*, *Bālacharita*, *Dūtavākya*, *Dūtaghatothkacha*, *Chārudatta*, *Madhyavyayoga*, and *Ūrubhaṅga*.

Kalidasa in the 3rd-4<sup>th</sup> century CE, is arguably one of ancient India's greatest Sanskrit dramatist. His plays are *Mālavikā and Agnimitra*, *Pertaining to Vikrama and Urvashi*, and *The Recognition of Shakuntala*. Bhavbhuti (c. 7<sup>th</sup> century CE), is said to have written the following three plays: *Malati-Madhava*, *Mahaviracharita* and *Uttar Ramacharita*. Among these three, the last two cover between them the entire epic of *Ramayana*.

Indian emperor Harshavardhan (606–648) is credited with having written three plays: the comedy *Ratnawali*, *Priyadarshika* and the Buddhist drama *Nagnanda*. *Mudrarakshasa* was written by Vishakhadatta, based on Chandragupta Morya and Chanyakya.

#### • Indian English Drama:

Indian English drama started in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century during the British rule. They brought drama and modern theatre with them. In the beginning of British rule, people did not know English. Therefore, they have learned Indian languages and translated English plays, mostly Shakespeare's plays and shown in the Theatre. In this way Western drama entered in India. As a result, Indian English Drama came into existence.

English Drama in India was started by Krishna Mohan Banerji with his work *The Persecuted* (1837). It was a social play dealing with the conflicts between East and West. It was the real beginning of the English Drama in India

#### • Indian English Playwrights:

Ravindanath Tagore (1861-1941) was one of the greatest Indian dramatists who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913. His dramatic work is the vehicle of ideas rather than the expression action. Tagore's dramatic achievement includes *Sannyasi* or *The Ascetic* (1884), *Nature's Revenge*, a drama in verse (1884), *The King and the Queen* (1889), *Sacrifice* (1892), *Malini* (1895), *Gandhari's Prayer* (1897), *Karna and Kunti* (1897), *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1910), *The Post Office* (1912), *Chitra* (1913), *The Cycle of Spring* (1916), *Mukta Dhara* (1922), *Red Oleanders* (1924), *Natir Puja* (1926), and *Chandalika* (1933). In these plays, Tagore has dealt with philosophical, religious, political, social issues and in some of them presented Indian myths and legends. Vijay Tendulkar (1928-1994), a lifelong resident of the city of Mumbai, was born in 1928. He is the author of thirty full-length plays and twenty-three one-act plays, several of which have become classics of modern Indian theatre. His plays - *Kamala* (1981), *(Kanyadan)* 1983, *The Vultures* are excellent pieces of dramatic works.

Asif Currimbhoy (1928-1994) has written about 30 plays. His two plays- *Inquilab* (1970) and *Sonar Bangla* (1972) based on political events. Goa-1970 deals with colonialism. The hungry ones-1965 deals with suffering motherland India.

Mohan Rakesh (1925-1972) has written several plays they are as follows: *Ashad ka ek Din* (One Day in Ashadh) (1958), *Lehronke Rajhans* (1963) and *Aadhe –Adhure* (1969) translated into English. The first is about Kalidasa and his love, the second play reflects the modern life and third one deals with the clash of man and woman.

Mahesh Dattani (7 August 1958....) has written following plays: *Where There is a Will* -1988, discusses the negative love of father for his son. *Do the Needful*-1997, deals with love and terrorism. *Tara*- 1990 portrays characters that suffer from repressed desires and victims of cultural construct of gender. *Dance Like a Man*- 1989 deals with traditional dancing and family issues.

Badal Sarcar (1925-2011) is among the greatest playwrights of his contemporary writers- Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar and Mohan Rakesh. He delves deep into the problems of middle-class society. His plays *Procession* (1972), *Bhoma* (1974), and *Stale News* (1980) are based on the concepts of third theatre.

Girish Karnad, born in 1938 in Matheran, spent his childhood in a small village in Karnataka. *Yayati* in 1961 and later publication of *Tughlaq* in 1964, established Karnad as a master dramatist. Subsequently, he published *Hayavadana* (1971) *Angumalige* (1977), *HittinaHunja* (1980), *Nagamandala* (1988), *Tale Danda* (1990), and *Agni Mattu Male* (1995). Five of his plays *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Nagamandala* (1990), *Tale Danda* (1993) and *The Fire and the Rain* (1998) have been translated into English.

In addition to the above playwrights, a few minor playwrights have also produced English translations of their own works. Some of them are *R. S. Dalal's Victory* (1939), *M. Mujeeb's Ordeal* (1857), and *C. C. Mehta's Iron Road* (1970).

In short, Indian drama and theatre started with Sanskrit theatre and then flourished in modern period with Indian English Drama. Drama has also played a vital role in literature of regional languages. The greatest Indian dramatist is Kalidasa and Natysatra is first critical and theoretical book on Drama and theatre.

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