

## EMERGING TRENDS IN INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

**Ms. Yogita Bajaj,**  
Asstt. Professor  
Govt. College, Gurgoan,  
India

**Ms. Sangita Mehta,**  
Asstt. Professor  
HCTM, Kaithal,  
Haryana, India  
sangeetuabhi@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

India has the longest and the richest tradition in drama. During the age of the Vedic Aryans, drama was performed in a simple way. Different episodes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad-Gita were enacted out in front of people. It depicts different situations relating to men good, bad and indifferent, and gives courage, amusement, happiness and advice to all of them. When Britishers came in India, the crippled Indian drama regained its strength. In 1920, a new drama in almost all the Indian languages came to the fore, it was a drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, symliolism, and surrealism. Indian drama got a new footing when kendriya Natak Sangeet Akadmi was started in January 1953 National school of drama set up Sangeet Natak Akadami in 1959 was another development. The year 1972 was a landmark year for Indian theatre. Badal Sircar, vijay tendulkar and girish karnad have contributed to the modernization of the face of the Indian theatre, these play wrights have made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuositities.

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### Emerging Trends in Indian English Drama

India has the longest and the richest tradition in drama. The origin of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic Period. As a manifestation of our national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of things and was popularly pailed as the "fifth Veda" (K.Venkata reddy, R.K.Dhawan: 7)

During the age of the Vedic Aryans, drama was performed in a simple way. Different episodes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad-Gita were enacted out in front of people. Such type of performance is still very popular in India during the time of dussehra. Bharata's natyashastra in Sanskrit is the most pioneering work on Indian dance & drama. It displays consciousness of all major aspects of drama, namely stage-setting, music, plot construction, charachterization, diologue and acting. According to legend when the world passed from golden age to silver age, people started getting addicted to sensual pleasure and jealous, anger, and desire. Then Gods, demons, yakshas, rakshas, nagas inhabited the whole world. At that moment, Lord Indra requested God Brahma:

“Please give us something which would  
not only teach us but be pleasing both to  
eyes and ears.”(Adya Rangacharya: 1)

God Brahma gave the pious idea of Natya Veda after meditation. He combined the essence of Natya Veda out of the four Vedas, dance from the Rig Veda, song from the Sama Veda, mimicry from Yajur Veda and passion from Athar Veda. Vishwa karma was the celestial architect who builds a stage in Indian heaven and Bharta was the actual manager. Bharta's 'Natyashastra' is a detailed treatise that deals with all aspects of the diverse arts and that are embodied in the classical Indian concept of drama including dance, music poetics and general aesthetics. Bharta describes drama as mimicry of the actions and conduct of the people (owashanukri lirmaalym). It follows that only drama uses the eight basic emotions of love, joy, anger, sadness, pride, fear, aversion and wonder. It depicts different situations relating to men good, bad and indifferent, and gives courage, amusement, happiness and advice to all of them, Bharat muni's own concept of dramatic theory can be quoted in the sixth chapter of 'Natyashastra':

“The combination called Natya is a  
mixture of rasa, bhavas, abhinayas  
dharmics, vrittis, provrittis, siddhis  
avaras, instruments, song and theatre  
-house” (Bharat Gupta: 86)

Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the fifteenth century but thereafter Indian drama activity almost came to an end due to certain invasion on India. When Britishers came in India, the crippled Indian drama regained its strength. 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 way for  
a fruitful cross fertilization of ideas and  
forms of expression.”(Iyengar: 4)

In 1920, a new drama in almost all the Indian languages came to the fore, it was a drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, symbolism, and surrealism for certain reasons and difficulties the growth of Indian English drama has not been able to keep pace with that of poetry and fiction. Many literary giants like Ravindernath Tagore, Shri Aurobindo, Bharathi Sarabhi tried to overcome these difficulties and opened up new vistas in the genre. This preindependence crop of dramatist, despite the poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical competence and symbolic and moral significance of their works, did not give enough weightage to the acceptability and “stagaworthiness” of their plays. (Prema Nandan kumar: 1)

Indian drama got a new footing when Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akadmi was started in January 1953 National school of drama set up Sangeet Natak Akadami in 1959 was another development. In the 1960 by suitable mixing of various styles and techniques from Sanskrit western theatre, the modern Indian theatre was given a new, versatile, and broader approach at every level of creativity; the year 1972 was a landmark year for Indian theatre. Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad have contributed to the modernization of the face of the Indian theatre, these playwrights have made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical

virtuosities. They are using legends, folklores, myths, history with splendid results. They broke the barrier of regional works at national level languages and produced many good works at national level. They do, however, also represent Indian drama at national level for they dramatize universal aspects of human life in India.

While Mohan Rakesh presents the total absence of communication between one man and another in contemporary life. Mohan Rakesh plays tried to project something challenging in his plays. As Nirad Chaudhry points out, "With Mohan Rakesh Hindi drama makes a departure from pseudo modernism and traditional symbolism to the drama of 'non-communication' - modern man's failure to understand each other which is real tragedy of human life" (Badal Sircar : 25-26)

While Rakesh uses historical character to highlight the problems of real life, Badal Sircar chooses contemporary situations to create a new society by giving a 'real way' in which man does not have to live by exploiting man. Everyone works according to his or her own wishes.

Badal Sircar is one of the major playwrights of modern India, one of the makers of Indian theatre." Third Gaze; The theatre of Badal Sircar", was once described by Rustom Bharucha "as the most rigorously non commercial political theatre in India". (Rustom Bharucha:127) Badal Sircar depicts the existential attitude of modern man in the present times. Tendulkar focuses on middle class life in India and show the isolated individual's confrontation with adverse circumstances and hostile surroundings. He strongly believes that ideas are firmly entrenched in our psyche at an early age and 'our attitude has a lot to do with what we internalize in our early formative years" (Shoma Choudhary: 65)

Tendulkar plays like 'Sakharam Binder', 'Ghashiram Kotwal', 'Silence! The Court', focus on love, sex, marriage and moral values prevalent in Indian society. He makes ample use of irony, satire, pathos and mock element. Vijay Tendulkar has received many prestigious awards like Kamladevi, Chattopadhyaya award, Sangeet Natak Akademi award, and Kalidas Samman award. He abolished the traditional form of drama of three acts of plays and created new models to bridge the gap between modern and traditional theatre. There is now an awareness that the traditional form need to be utilized to revitalize Indian English Theatre. As Girish Kumar Karnad rightly points out,

"The past is never totally lost; it coexists with the present as a flow. A rich variety of theatre form still exists, with a continuous history stretching over centuries" (Girish Karnad:11)

This new phase of Indian theatrical development happily coincides with the personal development of Girish Karnad as a dramatist. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has directed feature films, documentaries, and television serials. He represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art & culture. He has experimented with the fusion of the traditional and modern dramatic forms and content. The purpose of using traditional forms is to achieve a rare insight into the contemporary reality because Karnad believes that complexities of post colonialism are inherited from that the colonial and precolonial times. Precolonial, colonial and post colonial experiences in literature can not be compartmentalised in true sense. They are not divorced from each other. His play 'Tughlaq' was a reflection of the changing times- the narrowing of the great divide between the rulers and ruled. Karnad reminds us of T.P. Kailasam and Rangacharya who go back to myths and legends to show absurdity of modern life with all its elemental passions and man's eternal struggle to achieve perfection.

Recently the country has given us some brilliant playwrights like Manjula Padmansbhan and Mahesh Dattani. Manjula Padmanabhan was the first Indian to earn international fame with her *Harvest*, a futuristic play that deals with the exploitation of human body in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Padmanabhan projects a dehumanized, tefrifying world in which mothers sell their sons for the price of rice. But her plays are intellectual and not suited for stage while Dattani is taken to be a true successor of Girish Karnad and responsible for the revolutionary progression of English drama, as a drama teaches, as a stage director, as a sociologist explaining various complexities of society. He emerges as a compelling playwright who projects the postcolonial dichotomy at various levels. He keeps women at the centre of his dramatic world and may be called avant-garde feminist. He was greatly influenced by Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Gyratti playwright Madhurye. At one phase he says:

“The playwright Madhu Rye influenced  
me a great deal in his portrayal of  
middle class Gyrati hypocrisises’  
(Lakshmi Subramanyam: 13-14)

His play ‘Tara’ gives us a glimpse into the modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced into thought and action. It speaks about male chauvinism prevalent in the present society and brings about the stark reality of the woman playing second fiddle to man. Homosexuality is the another significant subject matter chosen by Dattani. In ‘Bravely fought the Queen’ Dattani highlights the absurdity of the situation in which woman is trapped by birth. The questions that haunt Dattani are (a) Is homosexuality assertion of individuality? (b) Is it guided by some conviction? (c) Does it lead to some meaningful goal (d) What is the utility of marriage to such people (e) Is it quest for some exclusive identity. ‘Seven Steps Round the Fire’, the most popular play, dwells on the theme of eunuchs, their identity, their constitution and their connotation. In ‘Where there is a Will’ Dattani Portrays complicated modern urban family where the old patriarchal code finds a formidable foe in the feminist ideas. His ‘Do the Needful’ exposes the fact that the institute of marriage today has lost its sanctity and is nothing but a compromise to promote Personal needs. His plays fulfill the Post colonial condition of writing. His cry of dichotomy is present in most of his plays. He says “Change does not happen overnight, we grow liberal after not because we want to, but have to”. (Vandana Datta:157)

Dattani quees his success to the fact that he had a theatre company which produced his plays. His theatre group playpen was formed in 1984. Dattani is Indian’s first playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Akadani award. He wants to use theatre as a powerful medium to bring about the social change. He has an array of themes to offer us his plays and issues he chooses to project are the most topical but also the most controversial. A deep study of his plays lead us to an interesting study of stagecraft in Indian theatre using innovations introduced by Mahesh Dattani. The earlier stage was a simple platform erected for the purpose in a palace or temple courtyard to serve as backdrop. The stage setting of Mahesh Dattani is even more complex. There are multilevel sets so that whole interior of the house is visible to the audience. Jhon Mckae, Italian Director says: “Mahesh Dattani is always adventurous in his way of using the theatrical space at his disposal: multiple levels, breaking the bounds of Proscenium, wondrously inventive use of lighting to give height, breadth and depth”(John Mc Roe: 45)

He feels art of expressing the views through some powerful images, symbols stage direction and other means. But he never tried to preach, his purpose is chiefly aesthetic. According to him:

“Theatre is a reflection of what you observe.  
To do any thing more would be to become  
didactic and then it ceases to be theatre”  
([http:// www.anitanarinetpayes/profils-md](http://www.anitanarinetpayes/profils-md))

His plays are a refreshing treat for readers as his performances are to his spectators with the innovative theatrical techniques. But what distresses most is that Indian English Theatre is yet to gain a sizeable number of audience. It is still not able to keep pace with the world of poetry and fiction. The reasons are yet to be identified. KR Srinivas Iyengar is highly depressed at the dismal sight of the birth and progress of Indian English Drama

“Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity, now on the whole of quality enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English but seldom for actual production”  
(Iyengar: 226)

Indian English drama needs real theatre for stage performance and live audience. As M.K. Naik puts it,

“A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, 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”. (M.K. Naik: 81)

Secondly, Indian English dramatist did not use Indian Dramatic traditions and myths creatively. Another major reason was that English as a second language was not a suitable medium of expression for two Indians doing conversations. So Indian playwrights could not make their Indian characters speak in English. The language barrier prevents the lower classes from coming to the Indian English Theatre. Actually to form our culture identity we need tradition, continuity and change. It is only when we accept these three things that we can really have a theatre movement which is completely linked to the development of cultural social and individual identity. Only then we can achieve harmony through the language of theatre which must necessarily be filled with a sense of rootedness revealing a true Indian sensibility.

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