



Indian Drama in English: A Journey from Margins to Mainstream

- 1. P Raja Sekhar Reddy**, Dept of Humanities and Basic Sciences, Aditya College of Engineering and Technology, Surampalem
- 2. J M Kanthi Thilaka**, Dept of Humanities and Basic Sciences, Aditya College of Engineering and Technology, Surampalem
- 3. M. Mary Jyothi**, Dept of Humanities and Basic Sciences, Aditya College of Engineering and Technology, Surampalem

Abstract

From the periphery of literary expression to a prominent position in both national and international literary landscapes, Indian play in English reflects a dynamic evolution. Indian dramatists, who first appeared during the colonial era, struggled with language, identity, and cultural representation. They engaged with Western theatrical conventions while utilizing theatre to express indigenous issues. By fusing traditional Indian aesthetics with contemporary sensibilities, pioneers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh established the foundation for a developing tradition. Playwrights like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, and Badal Sircar rewrote Indian drama in English after independence by tackling gender issues, cultural hybridity, and sociopolitical concerns. These dramatists demonstrated the depth of Indian ethos and storytelling by creatively fusing Indian myths, oral traditions, and folklore with modern forms. on international stages. To portray India's many realities, thematic concerns have broadened beyond identity politics to encompass caste dynamics, urban alienation, gender fluidity, and globalization. This voyage demonstrates how Indian drama in English has advanced from its colonial beginnings to achieve widespread literary recognition on a national and worldwide scale. Indian theatre is an important cultural product that exemplifies the meeting point of tradition and modernity through the interaction of language, cultural identity, and universal appeal. This essay examines this journey while honouring Indian dramatists' accomplishments and their part in making play a dynamic and influential literary medium.

Keywords: Indian, drama, dynamic, cultural identity, theatrical conventions, hybridity



Introduction

Colonialism is a key aspect of human history from the inception of the second century onwards. The consequence of colonization in different continents of the globe has led to the hegemony of the natives in their respective lands. Colonialism, defined as the process of colonization, has caused damage to the natives especially a damage to their culture and tradition of the colonized countries by the white masters. Thus, the result of colonization is not just geographical in terms of occupying lands and areas of the indigenous people by the Britishers, but the colonization of the mind, body and soul. In this process the countries which have undergone British, imperialism and domination are Australia, India, Africa, Canada and USA to name a few. Thus, colonization is many-folded hegemonic factor- political, cultural, psychological, religious and social.

Colonization and Hybridity

The usurping of political power by European nations and their subjugation of Asian and African continents achieved a new meaning. The indigenous cultures of both these continents experienced annihilation of a rich and glorious native culture, thereby ending up in the formation of new or hybrid culture. In this sense, colonization assume control over the psyche of the rule, a European colonization thus becomes the assertion of psychological supremacy. To cite the words of Nandy:

“This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonial societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. The west is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds.”



This makes colonialism a political and psychological hegemony and the insatiable greed for materialism and power over the acquired territory eventually becomes a complex problem of sociology when two cultures come into close contact with each other.

The effort to wield control over the destruction of native culture continued even after political independence of the colony. To attain this end, the colonizer employed various tools as disguised towards emancipation and is inaccessible to the attempts of the natives to redeem the lost pride in their own native culture. Though there is strong desire in the natives to build by, a totally new world urges these nations to march forward, yet they are weighed down by years of colonial oppression. To overcome these, the former colonies need to shed their self-imposed forgetfulness of their history and purge these memories by remembering them. This manifestation of memory is vital, as Homi Bhabha observes, to bridge the gap of colonialism and the question of cultural identity.

“Remembering is never a quite act of introspection
or retrospection. It is painful remembering,
a putting together of the dismembered past
to make sense of the trauma of the
present” (Bhabha 90).

Thus the invention and memory of tradition and culture are central to a nation and many historical moments bring out the glory of the past tradition and culture through symbols and icons which represent the very spirit of the nation .The tradition and culture are celebrated to strengthen the feeling of oneness among the people of a nation and develop an urge in them to stay together for the well-being and prosperity of the nation .The traditions and culture plays a vital role in giving a specific and unique identity to the indigenous people .As Frantz fanon in his essay “*On National Culture*” states and urges the writers of the colonies to put forward the



idea of a nation as central point of anti-colonial resistance. For Fanon, the anti-colonial resistance cannot move forward without planting the awareness of national culture and tradition in the minds of the people, thereby making the nation actively participate in the cultural struggle against colonial rule. So, by creating a distinct national culture and traditions, Fanon demands the writers to create a bonding between the people and their land, as it would instill and enhance in them the feeling of rootedness and definite sense of belongingness. In this respect the native culture and tradition act as tools for anti-colonial resistance.

Colonial Origins: Experimentation and Marginality

Indian play in English has its origins in the colonial era, when Indian writers were influenced by English education and Western literary conventions. Due in large part to the predilection for vernacular theatrical traditions like Sanskrit drama, folk theatre (such as Jatra, Yakshagana, and Tamasha), and Parsi theatre, drama as a genre in English did not take off as quickly as poetry and prose. Nonetheless, Indian authors quickly started experimenting with using English as a dramatic expression language. During this time, Rabindranath Tagore became a trailblazer. Despite writing mostly in Bengali, Tagore's plays, such as *Chitra* (1913) and *The Post Office* (1912), were translated into English and won praise from all around the world. The Post Office's worldwide message of human freedom and spiritual development struck a strong chord with audiences in the West. Despite not being originally written in English, these works contributed to the early recognition of Indian play. This stage was also influenced by Sri Aurobindo's philosophical and symbolic dramas, such as *Perseus the Deliverer* and *Vasavadatta*, which examined themes of spirituality, mythology, and heroism. Despite these initiatives, English-language drama throughout the colonial era was mostly experimental and



restricted to elite circles, being overshadowed by popular indigenous and vernacular theatre traditions.

Using Brechtian elements and folk theatre traditions, Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads* and *Kathasaritsagara* examine themes of identity and human incompleteness. Originally from Marathi, Vijay Tendulkar became well-known for his English-translated plays. Power, corruption, and misogyny in society are all addressed in his frank drama *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), which demonstrates his acute awareness of human nature and sociopolitical criticism.

Post Independence Scenario

For Indian drama in English, the post-independence era was a watershed. Authors started writing about modern topics including identity, the effects of colonialism, and sociopolitical difficulties. Dramatists who aimed to tell Indian stories to audiences in the country and beyond the world using English emerged during this time.

One prominent figure in Indian drama after independence is Girish Karnad. Karnad's seminal play *Tughlaq* (1964), which was first written in Kannada but was later translated into English by Karnad, explores political disillusionment and the cyclical cycle of history. The play is highly pertinent to contemporary Indian politics because Karnad illustrates the shortcomings of idealism and leadership via the character of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq.

Originally from Marathi, Vijay Tendulkar became well-known for his English-translated plays. Power, corruption, and misogyny in society are all addressed in his frank drama *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), which demonstrates his acute awareness of human nature and sociopolitical criticism.



Mahesh Dattani's emphasis on taboo subjects, gender dynamics, and urban challenges further transformed Indian drama in English. His 1993 play *Final Solutions* explores intercommunal conflicts and provides a complex analysis of identity politics and religious intolerance. Similarly, *Dance Like a Man* (1989) emphasizes gender roles, family tensions, and the battle of art against cultural conventions, while *Tara* (1990) explores gender discrimination and societal biases. Dattani's writings are notable for their realistic settings, issues that speak to modern audiences, and use of informal English.

A Path from the Margins to the Mainstream

The rise of Indian play in English from obscurity to popularity demonstrates its adaptability and tenacity. By fusing traditional storytelling methods, myths, and folk forms with contemporary, realist, and experimental styles, Indian dramatists progressively established a unique identity after being first eclipsed by vernacular theatre and Western drama. Among the main causes of this evolution are: Thematic Relevance: Indian dramatists created works that were both intellectually and socially stimulating by addressing socio-political realities, cultural disputes, and current challenges. Innovative Techniques: By combining Brechtian elements, symbolism, and folk forms, writers such as Karnad and Dattani created Indian drama that is both traditional and contemporary. Indian drama in English entered the literary canon thanks to the international acclaim of plays like *Harvest* and *The Post Office*.

Despite having their roots in Indian realities, these plays frequently address universal issues of power, identity, and interpersonal relationships, making them suitable for a wide range of audiences. In India's literary and cultural legacy, English-language Indian play holds a special place. It began as a minor and frequently disregarded literary style during the colonial era, but it has since developed into one of the most important and vibrant genres in Indian literature. In



addition to reflecting the sociopolitical development of the country, the rise of Indian play in English from the periphery to the mainstream also demonstrates the dramatists' capacity for innovation, assimilation, and expression of the complexity of Indian identity.

Projection of Indian Ethos

The post-colonial playwrights made deliberate attempts to project their native cultures and traditions in their plays. They employed varied techniques and stylistic devices to express the aesthetics of their native cultures. The post-colonial playwright also used the major technique of dislocating the centrality attributed to English language. For them, the use of English language in their plays and one of the most visible signs of cultural and traditional domination.

“while some post-colonial dramatists deliberately avoid using the imperial language altogether, many more use it as a basic language which is necessarily modified, subverted or decentered when indigenous languages are incorporated into the play” (Peyma 50).

So along with language, theatre also provided the post-colonial playwrights to draw elements extensively from the indigenous culture, especially the oral tradition of music and dance and incorporated it to the totality of the art and thus attribute a political shade to the work.

“There is a repeated use of indigenous song and music or hybridized forms recalling pre-contact ways of communication, proving the validity of the continued oral traditions, helping to dismantle conventional



western representation” (Peyma 55)

Hybridity is a key cultural strategy for the projection of decolonization. By adopting native elements and forms of drama, they create a post-colonial playwright trying to establish a rapport with the nostalgic and primitive past and firmly believed that the elements of a society’s secular festivals, religious rituals and traditions provided a major archive to articulate the specificity of local experience and regain the lost identity of the writers and his people.

Balancing the Past and Present

Girish Karnad and other Indian Dramatists have achieved a fine balance of past and present in their works through the elaborate and meaningful portrayal of their cultures. They have meticulously captured the aesthetics of the Orature of Indian culture and traditions. Indian Playwrights have made a noteworthy contribution to the field of drama through the depictions of native culture and traditions and applauded the essence of cultural ethos in their place. Soyinka and Karnad have employed traditional art forms and ideas from their respective cultures for creating the structure of their plays.

Conclusion

From a fringe, experimental genre to a thriving, popular literary form, Indian play in English has undergone significant change. This path has been significantly shaped by dramatists like as Rabindranath Tagore, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, and modern playwrights. Indian dramatists have established a distinct place for Indian drama in international literature by tackling urgent social themes and experimenting with form and language. The rise of Indian play in English and the country's overall cultural and creative development are both reflected in the trip from fringe to mainstream. With its diverse range of



themes and forms, Indian play in English is still a potent narrative medium that promotes cross-cultural discussion and reflection.

References

1. Diana Devlin, *From Mask and Scene: An Introduction to a World View of Theatre*. London. Macmillan, 1989.
2. Bhatta S. Krishna, *Indian English Drama: A Critical Study*. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers. 1970.
3. Bhatta S. Krishna, *Indian English Drama: A Critical Study*. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers. 1970.
4. Bhatta S. Krishna, *Indian English Drama: A Critical Study*. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers. 1970.
5. Naik M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*, New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi, 1995.
6. Iyer N. Sharda, *Musings on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi. Sarup & Sons. 2007.
7. Dhawan, R. K. *Flowering of Indian Drama*. New Delhi. Prestige Books. 2004.
8. Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected Plays*. New Delhi. Penguins. 2003.
9. Naik, M.K., *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. 1995.
10. Naik M.K. *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English*, Madras. O.U.P. 1997.
