

HISTORICAL ESSENTIALS OF INDIAN DRAMA IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT:

The history of Indian English drama is rich and diverse, reflecting the cultural, social, and political changes that have taken place in the Indian subcontinent over the years. Indian English drama has evolved through various phases, from its inception during the British colonial period to its vibrant contemporary forms.

This research paper delves into the rich tapestry of Indian English drama, unraveling the intricate historical elements that have shaped and defined this literary tradition. Spanning from its nascent stages in the late colonial era to its contemporary manifestations, the study traces the evolution of Indian English drama against the backdrop of significant historical events. The paper employs a multidimensional approach, intertwining literary analysis with socio-political context to unveil the nuanced interplay between historical forces and dramatic expressions. It explores the early influences of British colonization on Indian playwrights, examining how they grappled with identity, cultural hybridity, and the quest for autonomy in the face of colonial dominance.

KEY WORDS: Drama, evolution, multi-dimension, approach, etc....

Introduction:

Indian English started its journey with Krishna Mohan Banerjee's first play, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes illustrative of the present state of Hindu Society in Calcutta*. He wrote it in 1831. The play gives us a vivid picture of the conflict faced by a Bengali youth, torn between Western education and Hindu orthodoxy. It deals with the influential members of Hindu society. After Krishna Mohan Banerjee Michael Madhusudan Dutt came on the dramatic scene almost a quarter century in 1852. Though he was primarily a poet yet he translated three of his Bengali plays into English. Thus came *Ratnavali* (1858) and *Nation Builders* (1922)

Colonial Period (18th to mid-20th century):

Early Influences: The origins of Indian English drama can be traced back to the influence of British colonial rule. The East India Company established a strong presence in India, bringing with it European theatrical traditions.

The early influences on Indian English drama can be traced back to the colonial period when British rule had a profound impact on the cultural, social, and literary landscape of India. Here are some key influences:

1. British Colonial Rule:

The introduction of English education and the establishment of English-language institutions by the British colonial administration played a crucial role in shaping Indian English drama. English became a medium of instruction, leading to the emergence of a class of Indian intellectuals proficient in the language.

2. European Theatrical Traditions:

British colonialism brought with it European theatrical traditions. The influence of Shakespeare and other Western playwrights was particularly strong. Many early Indian English dramatists drew inspiration from these traditions, adapting and incorporating them into their works.

3. Parsi Theatre:

The Parsi Theatre, which flourished in Bombay (now Mumbai) during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, also played a significant role. While not in English, the Parsi Theatre influenced Indian English drama in terms of style, stagecraft, and the use of melodrama. This period saw the blending of Western and Indian elements in theatrical performances.

4. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay:

Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, an early Indian playwright, wrote plays in English during the mid-19th century. His works reflected the cultural amalgamation that was occurring during the colonial period. Mukhopadhyay's plays, though not as widely recognized, are considered early examples of Indian English drama.

5. Bengal Renaissance:

The Bengal Renaissance, a cultural and intellectual movement in Bengal during the 19th and early 20th centuries, had a profound impact on Indian English drama. Figures like Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote plays in both Bengali and English, were instrumental in bridging the gap between Indian and Western dramatic traditions.

6. Indian Mythology and Folk Traditions:

While influenced by Western styles, many Indian English playwrights also drew inspiration from indigenous sources, including Indian mythology and folk traditions. This blending of Western and Indian elements created a unique and diverse theatrical landscape. These early influences set the stage for the development of Indian English drama, laying the foundation for subsequent generations of playwrights who would continue to explore and shape the form. Over time, Indian English drama evolved to reflect the changing socio-political landscape of the country, encompassing a wide range of themes and styles.

Bengal Renaissance (late 19th to early 20th century):

Rabindranath Tagore: The Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore made significant contributions to Indian English drama with plays like "The Post Office" and "The King of the Dark Chamber." Tagore's works combined Indian and Western theatrical elements.

Rabindranath Tagore, primarily known for his contributions to Bengali literature and music, also made significant contributions to English literature, including drama. While he is more widely recognized for his Bengali plays, Tagore did write a few plays in English, and his work in this language deserves attention.

1. "The Post Office" (1912):

This is one of Tagore's most famous English plays. It is a one-act play that revolves around a young boy named Amal, who is confined to his room due to illness. The story explores themes of imagination, freedom, and the limitations of the physical world. "The Post Office" is widely performed and studied globally.

2. "The King of the Dark Chamber" (1910):

Another significant English play by Tagore, "The King of the Dark Chamber" is a poetic drama that delves into spiritual and philosophical themes. It tells the story of a queen who seeks spiritual enlightenment and the challenges she faces in her quest. The play reflects Tagore's deep interest in mysticism and spirituality.

3. "The Cycle of Spring" (1919):

This is a symbolic play written in English, and it is a part of Tagore's creative exploration of themes related to nature, human emotions, and the cycle of life. The play is a poetic expression of Tagore's vision of life's interconnectedness and the perpetual renewal of nature.

Tagore's English plays are characterized by their poetic language, philosophical depth, and exploration of universal themes. While he is more celebrated for his Bengali works, his English plays have been praised for their lyrical quality and profound insights. Tagore's contribution to English drama is often overshadowed by his immense influence in Bengali literature and global recognition as a poet and philosopher. However, his English plays remain important works that showcase his versatility as a literary artist. Early influences on Indian English drama can be traced back to the colonial period when British rule had a profound impact on the cultural, social, and literary landscape of India. The early influences set the stage for the development of Indian English drama, laying the foundation for subsequent generations of playwrights who would continue to explore and shape the form. Over time, Indian English drama evolved to reflect the changing socio-political landscape of the country, encompassing a wide range of themes and styles.

Post-Independence Period (1947 onwards):

Vijay Tendulkar:

In the post-independence era, playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar emerged, addressing contemporary social and political issues. Tendulkar's play "Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" is an important work in this regard. Vijay Tendulkar was primarily a Marathi playwright and social activist, known for his powerful and provocative plays in the Marathi language. While he is not recognized as an English dramatist, he did contribute significantly to Indian drama in English through translations of his Marathi plays. Some of his works have been translated into English, allowing a broader audience to engage with his powerful narratives.

Tendulkar's plays often dealt with social issues, political corruption, and the complexities of human relationships. One of his most famous works, "Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" ("Silence! The Court Is in Session"), was originally written in Marathi but has been translated into English. This play, in particular, explores themes of patriarchy, morality, and the legal system. While Tendulkar's impact on Indian drama is primarily associated with his contributions in Marathi, his translated works have allowed English-speaking audiences to

appreciate the depth and intensity of his storytelling. Therefore, although he is not classified as an English dramatist per se, his influence extends to the realm of Indian drama in English through translations of his significant Marathi plays. His primary body of work is in Marathi, several of his plays have been translated into English. Here's a brief analysis of some of his notable plays available in English:

1. **"Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" ("Silence! The Court Is in Session"):**

This play explores the impact of societal norms and prejudices on an individual's life. It takes place during a mock trial, revealing the hypocrisy and biases of the characters involved. Tendulkar uses the courtroom setting to critique societal attitudes towards women and the abuse of power. The play is a scathing commentary on the inherent injustices in society and the way individuals conform to oppressive norms.

2. **"Sakharam Binder":**

The play revolves around the unconventional character of Sakharam Binder, who rejects societal norms and traditions in his relationships with women. Tendulkar challenges traditional gender roles and explores the consequences of breaking societal norms. The play is a bold critique of the patriarchal structure and questions the morality imposed by society.

3. **"Kanyadaan"**

"Kanyadaan" addresses the clash between idealism and societal expectations. It delves into the complexities of relationships, particularly within the context of marriage and dowry. Tendulkar critiques the oppressive dowry system and explores the conflict between personal desires and societal pressures. The play reflects Tendulkar's commitment to social reform and his willingness to confront uncomfortable truths.

4. **"Gidhade" ("The Vultures"):**

"Gidhade" explores the moral decay and corruption in society, focusing on the character of an unscrupulous contractor. Tendulkar's play exposes the ethical degradation prevalent in society and the compromises individuals make for personal gain. The title metaphorically represents the scavenging nature of people who exploit the system for their benefit.

5. **"Kamala":**

This play examines the exploitative nature of the media and the consequences of sensationalism. It follows the story of a rural woman exploited by a journalist for a sensational news story. Tendulkar critiques the media's role in sensationalizing issues at the expense of

individuals' lives. The play raises questions about journalistic ethics and the responsibility of the media in portraying reality.

In these plays, Tendulkar skillfully addresses societal issues, often challenging prevailing norms and advocating for social change. His works are known for their powerful narratives, deep characterizations, and unflinching portrayal of harsh realities. Through his exploration of complex themes, Tendulkar leaves a lasting impact on Indian drama in both Marathi and English translations.

Experimental and Modern Theatre (Late 20th century onwards):

Badal Sircar:

Playwrights like Badal Sircar introduced experimental and innovative forms of theatre. Sircar's "Evam Indrajit" is considered a landmark in Indian English drama.

Badal Sircar, primarily known for his contributions to Bengali theatre, is not typically considered an Indian English dramatist. His significant body of work is in Bengali, and his influence on Indian theatre is often discussed in the context of his work in the Bengali language. However, some of his plays have been translated into English, allowing a wider audience to engage with his unique theatrical vision.

Here are a few of Badal Sircar's plays that have been translated into English, along with a brief analysis:

1. "Evam Indrajit" ("And Indrajit"):

The play explores the existential crisis faced by the protagonist, Indrajit. It delves into the complexities of identity, alienation, and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. It is considered a landmark in Indian theatre for its experimental structure and existential themes. It challenges traditional narrative forms and is known for its use of non-linear storytelling and symbolic elements.

2. "Pagla Ghoda" ("Mad Horse"):

The play examines the fractured nature of reality and the characters' subjective experiences. It blurs the lines between illusion and reality, questioning conventional notions of truth. It is a post-modern play that challenges the audience's perception of reality. Sircar employs innovative techniques, such as multiple perspectives and unreliable narrators, to create a disorienting yet thought-provoking theatrical experience.

3. **"Basi Khabar" ("Stale News"):**

The play addresses the dehumanizing effects of urbanization and modern life. It revolves around the lives of people living in a high-rise apartment, exploring their alienation and disconnection from one another. It critiques the isolating impact of urbanization and the breakdown of human relationships in a fast-paced, technology-driven world. Sircar uses a minimalist approach to stage design and dialogue to convey a sense of desolation.

Badal Sircar's plays, whether in Bengali or translated into English, are known for their experimentation with form and content. He often challenged traditional theatrical conventions and sought to engage the audience intellectually and emotionally. Sircar's contribution to Indian theatre goes beyond language, and his impact can be appreciated by English-speaking audiences through translations that capture the essence of his innovative and thought-provoking works.

Girish Karnad:

Karnad's plays, such as "Hayavadana" and "Tughlaq," blended mythology and history, reflecting the complexity of Indian identity. Girish Karnad, an iconic figure in Indian literature and theatre, primarily wrote his plays in Kannada, but some of his works have been translated into English, allowing a wider audience to engage with his profound narratives. While he is not typically classified as an English dramatist, his contributions to Indian theatre and his translated plays are certainly noteworthy.

Here are a few of Girish Karnad's plays that have been translated into English, along with a brief analysis:

1. **"Hayavadana" ("Horse-Face"):**

The play is a modern retelling of a story from the ancient Indian text, the "Mahabharata." It explores the complexities of identity, the search for completeness, and the consequences of desire. It is known for its exploration of the theme of incompleteness and the consequences of swapping identities. Karnad combines folk elements with modern theatrical techniques, creating a play that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant.

2. **"Nagamandala":**

This play draws inspiration from a Kannada folk tale. It weaves a narrative around love, desire, and societal expectations, all set against the backdrop of a magical, talking cobra. It explores the constraints imposed by societal norms on women and the transformative power of storytelling. Karnad skillfully blends folk elements with contemporary issues, creating a play that is both rooted in tradition and relevant to modern audiences.

3. "Tughlaq":

The play is set against the historical backdrop of the reign of the medieval Indian ruler Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the play explores themes of power, idealism, and the complexities of governance. It is considered one of Karnad's masterpieces. It offers a nuanced examination of political power, the clash between idealism and pragmatism, and the personal cost of leadership. The play resonates with the political and social realities of contemporary times.

4. "The Fire and the Rain":

The play is a reinterpretation of the myth of Yavakri, drawing from the Mahabharata. It delves into the consequences of disrupting the natural order and the tension between tradition and modernity. It combines elements of mythology and history to explore the impact of social change. Karnad's use of myth as a lens for examining contemporary issues is a hallmark of his work.

Girish Karnad's plays, whether in Kannada or translated into English, are known for their rich storytelling, complex characters, and exploration of cultural, historical, and philosophical themes. While he is primarily celebrated as a playwright in Kannada, the translated versions of his plays have allowed a broader audience to appreciate the depth and relevance of his work in the global context.

Contemporary Scene (21st century):

Mahesh Dattani: Mahesh Dattani is an Indian playwright and filmmaker who primarily writes in English. He is recognized for his significant contributions to Indian English theatre. Dattani's plays often explore complex interpersonal relationships, societal norms, and issues related to identity, gender, and sexuality. He is known for exploring issues related to gender, sexuality, and societal norms in plays like "Bravely Fought the Queen" and "Dance Like a Man." Here's an analysis of some of his notable plays:

1. "Dance Like a Man" (1997):

The play explores the conflicts within a family as they come to terms with the daughter's passion for Bharatanatyam dance. It delves into themes of gender roles, societal expectations, and the pursuit of personal aspirations. It is celebrated for its sensitive portrayal of familial relationships and its commentary on the challenges faced by individuals who wish to break away from traditional norms. Dattani skillfully weaves together personal and societal narratives, raising important questions about cultural identity and personal fulfillment.

2. **"Bravely Fought the Queen" (1991):**

The play addresses issues of sexual harassment and societal perceptions of gender. It revolves around the trial of a professor accused of sexually exploiting a male student. It is a bold exploration of sexuality, power dynamics, and the consequences of societal prejudices. Dattani challenges stereotypes and raises awareness about the complex nature of human relationships.

3. **"Final Solutions" (2003):**

The play explores the aftermath of communal riots and the impact of religious fundamentalism on individuals and communities. It weaves together multiple narratives to depict the interconnectedness of lives. It is a powerful commentary on religious intolerance and the consequences of communal violence. Dattani's exploration of the human cost of bigotry and hatred is both poignant and thought-provoking.

4. **"30 Days in September" (2001):**

The play addresses the sensitive issue of child sexual abuse and its psychological impact. It follows the protagonist's journey of confronting repressed memories and seeking closure. It is a poignant exploration of trauma, memory, and the challenges of confronting painful experiences. Dattani handles the delicate subject matter with sensitivity, shedding light on the importance of empathy and understanding in the face of personal struggles.

Mahesh Dattani's plays are known for their exploration of contemporary social issues and their impact on individuals. His use of English as a medium of expression has contributed to the growth of Indian English drama, and his works continue to be studied and performed for their relevance and artistic merit.

the research scrutinizes the transformative impact of India's struggle for independence on the themes, characters, and narratives of Indian English drama. It investigates how playwrights

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adapted traditional Indian forms and infused them with modern sensibilities, reflecting the socio-political fervor of the time.

The post-independence period witnesses a kaleidoscope of themes, ranging from nation-building and socio-economic changes to the exploration of individual and collective identities. This paper navigates through seminal works, dissecting how they encapsulate the ethos of different historical epochs, be it the Nehruvian era of idealism or the tumultuous times of economic liberalization.

Furthermore, the research sheds light on the role of Indian English drama in voicing dissent and social critique during periods of political turmoil. Through a close examination of select plays, the paper illustrates how playwrights employed the dramatic form as a potent medium for societal introspection and critique

Conclusion:

In conclusion, "Echoes of Time" synthesizes the historical trajectory of Indian English drama, offering a comprehensive understanding of how the genre has evolved in tandem with the socio-political landscape of India. This exploration not only contributes to the scholarship of Indian English literature but also provides insights into the broader dynamics of cultural expression in a post-colonial context.

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