

Modifiers of Modern Indian Drama



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Abstract: *Drama in India has been the mainstream source of entertainment for ages. It is in fact the oldest form of entertainment. It has for centuries survived as a way of life rather than an organised event. Stories from religious scripts were being performed on various events. However the Modern Indian Drama came into existence only in the early eighteenth century. The major factors that created a great impact on the growth of Modern Drama may be considered to be: Colonial Cities, Indigenous Theatres, Playwrights, Ticket. With the development of these concepts Modern Indian Theatre grew substantially.*

Keywords: *Drama, Modern Indian Theatre, Playwrights, Tickets, Urban Cities*

I. INTRODUCTION

Drama as an art form has been the earliest form of entertainment throughout the world, while other genres such as poetry, prose and fiction contributed more to art and literature, drama was contemplated much as a source of entertainment. Drama stands unique from the other forms because, unlike the other forms of literature, drama is directly influenced by collaborative production and collective reception. In all other genres there is an author and then the readers. Whereas in drama the playwright, the producer, the drama troupe or company and the actors had to join hands to satisfy the mass. Drama has been enacted in a theatre, performed by various actors on a stage before an audience, which stands as a witness to unity in modes of production and diversity in forms of reception. Again drama has the bigger responsibility of satisfying the audience at each broadcast failing which it would lose its audience.

II. METHODOLOGY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN INDIAN DRAMA

Drama as a genre set about as early as in the 5th century, its evolution started with the classic Greek Theatre followed by

the Classic Roman Theatre succeeded by Medieval theatre, Elizabethan theatre, Jacobean theatre,

Restoration Drama, Modern and Post Modern Drama falling in line one after the other.

The modern Indian theatre is a summation of all the theatrical activities which had been taking place for more than 2000 years of the Indian theatrical history. Indian theatre is said to have begun even before the Greek theatre. Dr. Bhangé Prakash and Bhagat Santosh Vishwanth express their view as "The Indian theory of drama preserved in Natyashastra, the oldest texts of the theory of drama. It says that the drama is a divine origin, and is connected to the sacred Vedas." (619)

The Patanjali contains the earliest reference to what may have been the seeds of Sanskrit drama. This treatise on grammar from 140 BC provides a feasible date for the beginning of Indian theatre. The earliest-surviving fragments of Sanskrit drama date from the 1st century AD. Drama since then had been the main form of entertainment among the masses. The major source of evidence for Sanskrit theatre is *Natyashastra* (A Treatise on Theatre) which is believed to be authored by Bharata Muni. Kalidasa is arguably considered to be the greatest Sanskrit dramatist, he is followed by Bhavabhuti and then by emperor Harsha. However the concept of playwriting was non-existent between 6th to 18th centuries.

Playwriting in India took a rebirth in the early 19th century, it was initially introduced by the British themselves. Later sprung whole lot of modern playwrights in India Micheal Madhusudan Dutt, Nil Darpan, Dinadandhu Mitra etc may be mentioned as early playwrights of Modern Indian Theatre. Rabindranath Tagore Aurobindo and Chattopadhyaya were pioneering modern playwrights who sowed the seeds of modern Indian Drama, following them a long list of playwrights started emerging in India. Among them Badal Sarkar, Mukesh Dhatani, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad etc were the predominant ones

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

MAJOR TURNING POINTS IN MODERN INDIAN THEATRE

A. Colonial Cities

Enactment of plays in India was something like a way of life or a routine event rather than an organised one. Though there were not many playwrights between the 6th to 18th centuries, plays did happen regularly.

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It was as a part of a religious festival, a remedy for a prayer petition or sponsored by a wealthy village head. The first major contribution to the development of the modern Indian theatre was the development of Colonial cities. Cities existed in India even before the British invasion, they remained the major trade centres, and the notable Indian Cities were the ones which developed around the ports with access to trade. However the people of the Indian cities still remained connected to their family roots in their native villages, they did not change their way of life, their beliefs, their rituals and practices. With the development of the colonial cities there was a drastic change in everything. Till the British came, Drama was considered a lower caste activity, the upper caste women were allowed neither to act nor even to watch plays. However, educated people who could find a job in the government offices under the British Government belonged to the higher castes. Once the Colonial cities started flourishing, everything became materialistic, the upper caste people working in the British Governed offices started imitating the British to hold on to their positions. All of a sudden, people started becoming rational, caste system was wrong, joint families started breaking for convenience sake and a lot more changes were visible. Mentioning about the connection of theater and cities, Partha Sarathi Gupta rightly says "Historically, it has been the urban metropolis in India that has fostered drama in English." (p.4) One major change which crept in through the British influence was the interest for entertainment. The British adored theatre, they started staging plays with drama troupes from their native countries. At this phase the Indian upper castes who were very much imitating the British started their own theatres which led to the development of the modern Indian Drama. Quoting Partha Sarathi Gupta again "Such theatre/drama has always targeted (and has been encouraged) by the metropolitan audience." (p.4)

B. Indigenous Theatres

The Parsis were the business communities of the northern and western India, they introduces the first commercial theatre in India. The first Parsi production was introduced somewhere around October 1853, by the **Parsee Stage Players** at Grant Road Theatre. The early plays in Parsi theatre presented Indianized versions of Shakespeare's plays, by turning them into folk performances, with dozens of songs added in. This in fact was a welcoming change; the educated, city-settled Indians, no longer took interest in religious plays which was nothing much than a repetition. However Indians could not relate themselves with the Shakespearean plays for too long though it was fashionable. In the meanwhile the Urdu Plays started gaining merit among the Indians. Dramatists also shouldered the additional responsibility of satisfying the orthodox Hindu crowd, soon Indian legends, epic and mythological tales made an appearance as source material. As Parsi theatre companies started travelling across North India, they employed native writers to churn out scripts in the Hindustani language which was a mixture of Hindi and Urdu, these two literatures were popular among northern India in those days. In this respect Somnath Gupta says, "Then fairies, princes, devils, and wizards from Muslim tales became more attractive than English spirit and ghosts, and the Parsi stage presented its patrons with such highly successful plays as Indar Sabha, Khurshed Sabha, Farrukh Sabha, Havai Majlis and Benazir Badre Munir."(175)

C. Playwrights

The third major impact on the growth of Modern Indian Theatre may be considered the emergence or sprouting of many new playwrights. The British represented Shakespeare as the icon of drama, whereas in India religious plays were predominant. Though drama originated as early as in the third century BC, surprisingly there were no major playwrights in India between the eighth to eighteenth century AD. Plays during this period were more of a religious activity which did not need scripting. As J. Christinal Grace quotes "After a lull for a few decades, Indian English Drama came back to life in the 20th century." In the nineteenth century when the British placed Shakespeare as their iconic playwright, the Indian theatres fell short of indigenous playwrights. It was then that they suddenly popularised Kalidasa and other early playwrights. This demand for indigenous playwrights resulted in sprouting up of many new writers writing plays in vernacular languages. The modern Indian theatre henceforth evidenced drastic changes, songs were replaced with dialogues, the length of the plays were shortened, genres changed from religious to rational and social ones. Playwrights stated writing in vernacular languages. However the educated and modern audience had a yearning to watch plays in English. This demand was initially met by translating vernacular plays into English. However, within a short span of time playwrights began writing directly in the English language. English Drama in India kick started with the work "*The Persecuted*" by Krishna Mohan Banerji in 1837. The real beginning of Indian English Drama however could be attributed to the work "*Is This Called Civilization*" written by Micheal Madhusudhan Dutt in 1871. Though these writers took the credit of being the initiators of Indian English drama, the major contributors may be considered to be playwrights such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, S.P.Ayyar, P.Kailasam etc. Contemporary Indian drama earned a rich source of quality plays written by eminent playwrights such as Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Duttani and Girish Karnad. They deviated from classical and European models and experimented in innovative themes. They succeeded in producing world class dramas by reinvestigating history and mythological and blending them with modern concepts. They also touched on contemporary concepts such as socio-political issues, religious conflicts, family and psychological issues and so on. The emergence of these playwrights brought about major improvisations in the growth of Drama in India.

D. Ticket

Amongst all the other revolutions, the major turning point that throttled the modern Indian theatre could be considered the introduction of ticket for watching plays. Earlier plays were more of a social event; most of the plays were sponsored by either the king or other rich men as a penance or thanks giving. The introduction of tickets for viewing drama changed the mentality and quality of the drama audience.

As long as dramas were free, people did not bother much about things like errors in dialogues, length of the play, stage perfection, costumes or anything for that matter. But once the practice of paying for viewing developed, the audience became more demanding; they wanted value for their money. All of a sudden the audience started demanding perfection in every aspect of drama. Theatres became sophisticated, length of the play was taken into consideration, show timings got regularised, and more importance was given to costumes and dialogues, genres too changed. The playwrights started touching on more modern and contemporary topics. Audience satisfaction became the ultimate goal, without which there was the danger of losing the audience and ultimately facing a loss in production. In order to avoid losing the audience, the drama companies had to update themselves. They consequently started involving technology. Technology on its part played a vital role in the development of the Modern Indian Drama. Recording of music, improvement in the lighting and audio systems, stage set-up and even better advertising became possible. However to bring about these changes the production companies needed proper funding. This demand was met with the amount of money pooled in through selling the tickets. So it was the ticket collection for plays that made all these developments practically possible.

IV. CONCLUSION

Drama in India is more than two thousand years old; however as an art form it has seen a very passive growth. Modern Indian theatre which was established during the early 19th century has contributed in rejuvenating drama. The major contributions which brought about changes in Modern Indian Drama include, the development of urban cities, building new theatres in India, emergence of playwrights and the concept of paying for the tickets. Drama as a genre has still not seen the limelight in even the recent times; it has been overshadowed by the more popular novels. However its struggle to fight back its place has not faded away.

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