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Indian English Drama and the Theatre of Social Realities

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Abstract:

The Indian English drama has its distinguished position in Indian literary and cultural life. Although poetry and fiction have always occupied the centre stage in Indian writing in English, drama has contributed significantly to the expression of social facts, cultural conflicts, and political changes in India. The theatre has been an effective platform to portray behavior like caste discrimination, gender inequality, colonialism, religious wars, and class struggles, and identity crisis. English Indian dramatists have used theatre as an instrument of artistic expression and as a way of criticizing the society and promoting social consciousness. Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and many other playwrights have given stories that reflect the concealed social frameworks and dispute the prevailing thought processes. Their works are evidence of how drama can move audiences at the emotional level, and at the intellectual level, and make people think about the social injustice and cultural contradictions. This essay discusses the development of the Indian English drama and how it interacts with the social realities. It examines the use of the theme of tradition as opposed to modernity, gender oppression, caste hierarchy, communal tensions and urban alienation by the playwrights. Through the analysis of the selected plays and theatrical methods, the paper will bring out the importance of drama as a reflection of the society and a means of social transformation in India.

Keywords: Indian English Drama, Social Realism, Modern Indian Theatre, Cultural and Social Issues, Postcolonial Literature.

Introduction:

Drama has been always in close relationship with the society. Theatre is a very effective platform through which social issues can be expressed unlike in other forms of literature where the performances are done in front of a recording device. Indian English drama has evolved as a genre of great importance in depicting the transforming Indian society realities. Drama narratives, characters, and stage performance are some of the aspects that are used by the playwrights to expose the social life and culture change complexities.

Indian drama is said to have been founded on classical Sanskrit theatre especially by Kalidasa and other ancient playwrights. But the contemporary Indian English drama came into being at the time of colonial and postcolonial era where English became a significant literary expression. The playwrights in India started adopting the western styles of dramas and using the Indian themes and the Indian culture.

Indian theatre has been used in many situations to talk about social injustice and human plights. Other problems that have featured prominently in most of the plays include caste discrimination, patriarchy, political corruption and identity problems. Indian dramatists have entertained the audiences as well as ask them to challenge social norms and structures.

Theatre of social realities is the idea used to denote dramatic productions, which describe the realities and the situation of people in society. This style has especially been important in Indian English drama since it enables a playwright to reveal social imbalances and encourage critical thinking. These plays show the contradictions between tradition and modernity, personal freedom and social norms, and ethical and social principles and behaviors by displaying the real characters and circumstances.

This essay attempts to discuss how Indian English drama and social realities are linked. It looks at how playwrights have used theatre to reflect the social issues of the society in addition to questioning the current forms of power.

Literature Review:

The Indian English drama has emerged as a significant literary genre where the social, cultural and political reality of Indian society is reflected. Historians have highlighted that the contemporary Indian drama in English shifted the focus of the dramatic works to not just a copying of the Western dramatic traditions but also included the exploration of the problems which are entrenched in the Indian society. The development of playwrights during the post-independence era introduced the element of realism wherein literature was used to discuss topics of discrimination of gender, caste system, corruption in politics and identity crisis (Naik & Narayan, 2001). This revolution contributed to the fact that Indian English drama became an effective tool of social commentary and cultural criticism.

Girish Karnad is one of the greatest contributors to the creation of socially conscious Indian drama. According to critics, plays written by Karnad are a unification of mythology, folklore, and history with modern issues to explore social realities. His dramas reflect the conflict of tradition and modernity and the bewilderment of human identity in the shifting society. To cite some examples, the plays like Tughlaq and Hayavadana use historical and mythological stories to criticize political authority, moral challenges and existential issues about contemporary India (Dharwadker, 2005). The dramaturgy of Karnad is one to show how traditional forms of the culture can be utilized to solve the current problems and challenge the social order.

Mahesh Dattani is another author of the Indian English drama who has worked in social realism genre. His plays are centered on the voices of the marginal and the forgotten social problems in Indian society. Lal (2004) remarks that the themes of the dramatic works by Dattani include gender inequality, family conflicts, sexuality, psychological struggles of the people living in the patriarchal social structure. His work of Tara is also quoted as the example of revealing the case of gender discrimination within the Indian families through theatre. By the novel of conjoined twins, Dattani emphasizes the preference of male children that is very strong and the social injustice against women. Raising such concerns on the stage, Dattani challenges the viewers to shatter all conventional beliefs and hypocrisy in the society.

The works of playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar have also been appreciated by scholars whose works have brought a strong impact on the current Indian theatre. Their dramas tend to be on the topics of violence, power relations and ethical issues of people who must live in complicated social conditions. The dramatic stories by Tendulkar, such as, expose the gloomy aspects of social inequality and politics on the Indian society (Mukherjee, 2010). By means of strong character oppositions and life-like dialogues, these dramatists reveal the problems of the dark side of social life and make the viewers think about their personal moral principles.

Moreover, the importance of theatre as a tool of social consciousness and change is emphasized by the modern research. Theatre involves the direct involvement of the people being entertained by the live performance, and an emotional contact between the people watching and the people on the stage. This interactive quality enables drama to convey social messages with a lot of effectiveness and provoke critical thinking on social matters. This has made the Indian English drama to be a popular research topic not only as a form of literature but also as a cultural activity that leads to social discourse and reform (Dharwadker, 2005).

All in all, the literature available shows that Indian English drama can be a major platform of representing and challenging the social realities. Playwrights still make use of theatre as a source of exploration of the Indian society complexities through various themes, experimental forms and through compelling stories. Their works show the way drama may be both artistic manifestation and a weapon of social criticism and change.

History of Indian English Drama:

The Indian English drama was formed slowly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Early on, the English drama in India was under the influence of the western theatre. The styles of the British dramatists were emulated by many early playwrights, and their works were not usually very close to the Indian social realities.

Once the independence however, Indian dramatists started experimenting with indigenous theme and cultural experience. Indian theatre underwent a great change during the post-independence

era. Playwrights began to concentrate on social matters which impacted the common man. They used the traditional story telling techniques and the contemporary dramatic forms to make up strong narratives.

The development of the Indian drama was also provided by the appearance of the experimental theatre groups and the regional theatre movements. Playwrights started to work on the complicated social and political problems, such as poverty, corruption, gender discrimination, and intercommunal tensions. The theatre turned out to be the field of discussion and the social commentary.

Nowadays, the Indian English drama became a vibrant and versatile sphere. Globalization, urbanization, and identity politics are some of the themes that are presented by contemporary playwrights. Their writings are a manifestation of the transforming social and cultural facts of contemporary India.

Indian English drama Social Realism:

Social realism is the depiction of the daily life and social issues in literature and arts. In theatre, social realism is concerned with depicting the lives of common men and bringing out the plight the people are going through in the society.

To be able to demonstrate social issues, Indian English dramatists tend to adopt realistic settings, dialogues, and characters. They expose the issues of human relations and social organization through dramatic conflicts and emotional interactions.

Through theatre, people can engage in social realities. It is when the audience observes the characters playing against injustice or discriminations in the stage that they get emotionally engaged in the story. This emotional appeal makes viewers think about their social surrounding and principles. The other aspect of social realism in the Indian drama is the revelation of concealing power relations in the society. A lot of plays explore the role of institutions, like a family, religion, and politics on the lives of individuals. Undermining these institutions, the playwrights attack the conventional beliefs and foster social change.

Gender Issues Representation:

Gender inequality is one of the themes of Indian English drama that is extremely important. The plight of women in patriarchal societies has been presented by many playwrights. The theatre is transformed into the place in which female characters find a lot of ways to show their wishes, disappointments, and defiance against the social oppression.

The women in the traditional Indian society have been known to play rigid social roles and norms. Modern dramatists however defy these expectations by making women individual and complicated.

Domestic violence, discrimination, and absence of autonomy are some of the common problems that are brought out in plays that touch on gender issues. The female characters cannot

establish their identity and freedom in a society dominated by men.

Another theme of these plays through social structures is the reinforcement of gender inequality. As one example, marriage, cultural practices, and the demands of family tend to restrict the opportunities and free will of women.

Playwrights reveal the emotional and mental effects of gender oppression through dramatic moments and strong dialogues. The theatre is therefore used to promote gender equality and social consciousness.

Caste and Social Hierarchy:

One of the social issues that has remained in India is the caste discrimination. Indian English drama has dealt with this problem through depicting the lives of the marginalized groups and questioning the hierarchy within the society.

The caste system has been known to separate the society into strict categories thereby creating inequality and discrimination. The impact of caste on social relations, availability of resources, and social mobility is the focus of many dramatists.

Characters in several plays fight with the oppressive apparatus of caste hierarchy. Their histories show how prejudices and unfairness still root in society.

These issues can be addressed face to face in theatre. By portraying the tales of the oppressed people, the dramatists draw the audience into doubting the validity of the caste-based discrimination. Social reform and equality are also brought to the fore in such plays. They can remind the audiences that, only an understanding of the dignity and rights of every individual in the society can lead to true progress.

Tradition versus Modernity:

The other theme of Indian English drama is the contravention between tradition and modernity. With modernization of the Indian society happening with an unprecedented speed, people must experience conflicts between old values and new ways of life.

Most of the plays set characters who are torn between cultural values and modern desires. Such conflict is especially observable in urban areas where globalization and technological progress affect social relations and social identities.

The conventional tradition and values tend to conflict with the new concept of freedom, equality and individuality. These wars are analyzed in the theatre in terms of their impact on family life, individual decisions, and social norms.

Dramatic situations are used by playwrights to demonstrate the difficulties of adjusting to the shifting social situations. In their characters, they explore the issues of cultural identity in the fast-changing society.

Political and Social Critique:

The Indian English drama is highly active in dealing with political reality and social criticism. Theatre is a medium through which corruption, power misuse and injustice in political institutions have been unveiled through the theatre.

A lot of playwrights represent how the political choices affect the everyday people. Their dramas show us the impact of power structures on the social situation and personal life.

Political theatre usually applies satire, symbolism, and allegory to criticize authority and to question the mainstream narratives. Dramatists stimulate the audience to think over the governance and social responsibility by bringing into the stage controversial issues.

Theatre is therefore turned into a democratic arena and the means of communal interaction. It enables the citizens to consider the moral and ethical aspects of political activities.

City Liquidation and Identity Crisis.

The urbanization and its psychological and social effects are also the subject of modern Indian drama. The high rate of urbanization has changed the traditional social set ups and brought new challenges on people.

City life can be accompanied by economic growth but on the other hand, it can result to isolation, depression, and identity crisis. Loneliness, alienation, and cultural rootlessness are some of the problems faced by many characters in modern plays.

The theatre depicts the effects of modern way of life on relationships and individual values. Characters can be in conflict of professional goals and emotional satisfaction.

These stories bring out the nuances of contemporary identity during the multicultural and global society.

Function of Theatre as a Social Change Medium:

Theatre can shape the social opinion and the change. In comparison to written literature, drama is characterized by visuals and performance that affect the audience with a great influence of emotions. Traditionally, Indian theatre has become a significant component of social movements and political awareness. Theatrical performances can talk of sensitive issues that are hard to speak out in other media.

By engaging in a realistic narrative and raising powerful characters, playwrights make people listen and care about the marginalized members of the community and think about the way they approach social problems.

Theatre is also applied in education and cultural institutions as a community tool and social educational tool. Drama serves the purpose of making people more informed and understanding because it promotes dialogue and critical thinking.

Modern Trends of Indian English Drama:

The Indian English drama has been developing in the recent decades in line with the changing

social and technological realities. Modern drama writers explore new styles and themes of the play. In the contemporary plays, many issues are concerned with globalization, migration, digital culture, and the environment. These issues are indicative of the widening edge of societal reality in modern society. Theatrical performances have also been revolutionized using multimedia, experimental staging and interdisciplinary co-operations. The innovations enable the dramatists to provide complicated social stories in luxurious and entertaining forms.

Nevertheless, the purpose of Indian drama has not changed, and the main goal of this genre is to envision human experiences and social life with the help of strong narrations.

Conclusion:

Indian English drama appears to be a valuable channel of examining the social realities of the Indian society. In the form of authentic stories and strong characters, the playwrights emphasize gender inequality, caste discrimination, political corruption, cultural clash, and identity crisis.

Theatre enables the viewer to see the life and the tribulations of people in the society, making them empathize and understand. Drama serves as a way of making people doubt the social norms and the social ills that surround them, and the dramatic work makes the audience critically think about their own beliefs and actions.

The history of Indian English drama shows that literature and theatre may be adapted to new social circumstance and remain socially critical and culturally observant. Theatre is still used by theatre writers as an avenue of dealing with modern issues and fostering discussion.

The theatre of social realities is essential in a diverse and dynamic society such as India since it helps promote understanding, empathy and social change. Indian dramas in English are thus an inalienable component of cultural and intellectual life of the country.

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