

# A study on a role of plays in India

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**Abstract:** Modern theatre includes performances of plays and musical theatre. The art forms of ballet and opera are also theatre and use many conventions such as acting, costumes and staging. They were influential to the development of musical theatre; see those articles for more information. In this paper we bring the concept of some of the play writer and their contribution towards the Indian play. Street theater evolved in the early 20th century as a tool to emancipate the working class and reinforce revolution against the established power. Its journey began in India during the time of anti-colonial struggle, essentially by the left-wing theater activists. Although street theater, as a form, bears close alliance with the folk theater, it's more of a social communication process with a participatory approach, than a simple art form. This paper attempts to analyze the role and potential of street theater as a community development tool that aims at bringing a social transformation.

**IndexTerms – Theatre, Conventions, Ancient, musical, folk theater.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The earliest form of classical theatre of India was the Sanskrit theatre which came into existence after the development of Greek and Roman theatres in the west. One theory describes this development as an offshoot of Alexander the Great's India conquest. The invading army staged Greek-style plays and Indians picked up the performance art. While some scholars argue that traditional Indian theatre predated it, there is recognition that classical Greek theatre has helped transformed it. Indian theatre is one of the most ancient forms of Indo-European and Asian theatre and it features a detailed textual, sculptural, and dramatic effects. Like in the areas of music and dance, the Indian theatre is also defined by the dramatic performance defined by the concept of Natya, which is a Sanskrit word for drama but encompasses dramatic narrative, virtuosic dance, and music. Indian theatre exerted influence beyond its borders, reaching ancient China and other countries in the Far East. Drama is an important cultural performance of a society. Drama not only registers but also manifests the changes (social, political or cultural) the society undergoes. Thus, the study of drama would enable to reconstruct the history, Drama is an important cultural performance of a society. Drama not only registers but also manifests the changes (social, political or cultural) the society undergoes. Thus, the study of drama would enable to reconstruct the history, This book of Indian aesthetics details all kinds of performance and according to this book, drama is the prominent form of performance. Ancient drama followed Natya in every respect. Natya instructs right from the construction of the stage, the place where different artisans are supposed to sit, the direction of each artisan etc. all these details are a part of the construction of the stage and setting. The selection of the plot or itivrtha is a significant aspect of a drama. In chapter XXI entitled Sandhyanga Vikalpa, Bharata mentions all the details of the plot and its development. Drama has been a very influential and powerful medium in the English literature because of its audiovisual medium of expression. "Drama is a mimetic representation of life combining in itself the real and the fictional, art and reality and representing the events and characters within a dimension of space and time. It combines the qualities of narrative poetry with those of visual arts. It is a narrative made visible."

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:-

Sanskrit theatre emerged in the 2nd century BCE and flourished between the 1st century CE and the 10th, which was a period of relative peace in the history of India during which hundreds of plays were written. Despite its name, Sanskrit theatre was not exclusively in Sanskrit language. Other Indic languages collectively called as Prakrit were also used in addition to Sanskrit. However, although there are no surviving fragments of any drama prior to this date, it is possible that early Buddhist literature provides the earliest evidence for the existence of Indian theater. The Pali suttas (ranging in date from the 5th to 3rd centuries BCE) refer to the existence of troupes of actors (led by a chief actor), who performed dramas on a stage. It is indicated that these dramas incorporated dance, but were listed as a distinct form of performance, alongside dancing, singing, and story recitations. An appreciation for the stagecraft and classic Sanskrit drama was seen as an essential part of a sophisticated world view, by the end of the seventh century.<sup>[15]</sup> Under the patronage of royal courts, performers belonged to professional companies that were directed by a stage manager (sutradhara), who may also have acted. This task was thought of as being analogous to that of a puppeteer—the literal meaning of "sutradhara" is "holder of the strings or threads". The performers were trained rigorously in vocal and physical technique. There were no prohibitions against female performers; companies were all-male, all-female, and of mixed gender. Certain sentiments were considered inappropriate for men to enact, however, and were thought better suited to women. Some performers played characters their own age, while others played ages different from their own (whether younger or older). Of all the elements of theatre, the Treatise gives most attention to acting (abhinaya), which consists of two styles: realistic (lokadharmi) and conventional (natyadharmi), though the major focus is on the latter. The next great Indian dramatist was Bhavabhuti (c. 7th century CE). He is said to have written the following three plays: Malati Madhava, Mahaviracharita and Uttar Ramacharita. Among these three, the last two cover between them the entire epic of Ramayana. The powerful Indian emperor Harsha (606-648) is credited with having written three plays: the comedy Ratnavali, Priyadarsika, and the Buddhist drama Nagananda.

India's artistic identity is deeply rooted within its social, economical, cultural, and religious views. For this reason it is essential to understand Indian cultural practices as they relate directly to performers and performances of this time. Performances including dance, music, and text are an expression of devotion for the Indian culture, so when looking at 'theatre' of this time a broader definition must be ascribed to the word. Drama in India is older than in Western Literature, as when Indian Drama was at its zenith, the Western countries were in chaos. Indian drama came 2000 years before Aristotle's monumental work 'Poetics'. The journey of Indian Drama begins with the Sanskrit plays, among which *Natyashastra* is the oldest text of the theory of the Drama. Thus the origin of Indian drama is found in the Vedic Period. Most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwagosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bhavbhuti, Vishakhadatta etc. Literature in Sanskrit is classified into two categories—

1. *Drishya*:- that can be seen; and
2. *Sravya*:- that can be heard

Drama falls in the category of *Drishya*

### III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Indian English Drama dates back to 18<sup>th</sup> century when the British Rule became stable in India. British brought with them, the theatre. But during the initial decades of their rule, they could not present English Drama due to the unawareness of Indians regarding the English Language. Hence, a lot of English plays, like those of Shakespeare were translated into Indian Languages and then presented before the Indians. Gradually, Western education made its way to India. As a result, Indian English Drama came into existence. English Drama in India was started by Krishna Mohan Banerji with his work *The Persecuted*(1837). It was a social play dealing with the conflicts between East and West. The real beginning of the English Drama in India was with *Is This Called Civilization* by Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt in 1871. Indian English Drama could not progress for two decades after M.M.S. Dutt due to some plausible reasons. e.g. English is not the mother tongue of Indians, hence it was difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound natural and convincing. This difficulty was overcome by eminent playwrights like R.N. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Indian English Drama made quite progress after R.N. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

#### Characteristics

- Most of the playwrights preferred to write short plays as compared to full length plays.
  - As far as themes are concerned, social problems were the main focus of this era. Plays dealing with legendary and historical themes occupied next place to the social ones.
1. Playwrights like the Sri Aurobindo, Bharati Sarabhai drew their themes from the ancient myths and legends and interpret them in terms of a contemporary social problem.
  2. Playwrights like Kailasam and Ramaswami Shastri focussed on highlighting the greatness of epic heroes and heroines.
  3. Playwrights like Chattopadhyaya, Ayyar and Narayanan made contemporary issues the theme of their plays.
  4. S.P., Annayya, Ayyar etc took interest in history and current politics.
- 1 means APT is more strongly supported by data under consideration than CAPM.

#### Main Playwrights

☞ **RABINDRANATH TAGORE:** – He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and was entitled as “*the epitome of Indian Spiritual Heritage*”. He wrote primarily in Bengali, but most of his plays were translated into English. His best-known works are *Chitra*, *Sacrifice*, *The Post Office*, *The Cycle of Spring* etc. Tagore was first to use symbolism and allegorical significance as a prime technique in his plays. He presented a synthesis of East and West in his plays.

☞ **SRI AUROBINDO:** – He wrote five complete and six incomplete verse plays. There is a variety of periods and places in his plays. He dealt with human evolution and love in his drama. His famous plays are-*Perseus the Deliverer*, *Prime of Edur*, *Eric* etc.

☞ **HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHAYA:** – His plays fell under four groups- Devotional, Social, Historical, Social and Devotional. In his social plays, he presents social evils and problems through symbolism. He is deeply influenced by Progressive Writer's Movement.

☞ **S.P. AYYAR:-** He was a social reformer who exposed ills of contemporary Indian society. His main grounds were widowhood, religious orthodoxy, superstition and hypocrisy.

☞ **P. KAILASAM:-** He wrote both in English and Kannada. His dramatic genius is fully expressed in his plays:- *The Burden*, *Fulfillment*, *The Purpose* etc. He was regarded as the father of modern Kannada Drama.

☞ **BHARATI SARABHAI:-** She gave a touch to *Gandhian Touch* to Indian Drama. Her two famous plays-*The Well of the People* and *The Women* are based on *Gandhian Philosophy*.

☞ **N. LOBO PRABHU:** – It was the last great name in Pre-independence Indian English Drama. Out of his dozen plays, only two were published before independence-*Mother of New India* and *Death Abdicates*.

#### Problems

- There is a lack of understanding, in case of a few playwrights regarding the structure of the plays, as the so-called ‘acts’ of their plays were not acts in real but scenes.
- Language has remained a major obstacle to almost all the playwrights of this era. Many playwrights had tried to overcome this problem but could not succeed.
- Sri Aurobindo's long speeches trouble the action of his plays.
- Kailasam enhances the beauty of his language with his excessive rhetoric and archaism.
- There is artificiality of dialogues in the plays of Ayyar and Chattopadhyaya.
- English Drama in India was not staging worthy drama but read-only drama

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this paper we bring the concept the recent decades Indian Drama has manifested a significant independence of its own. It have successfully overcome the influence of the Western scholars. Modern Indian drama as well as the modern Indian English drama is the product of the classical India Theatre, medieval folk theatre and the western influence. Rabindranath Tagore, a synonym of the Renaissance in India is the first dramatist to set the tone of the contemporary drama.

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