

BOOK REVIEW

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

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Tracing back into times, we come across that the history of Indian Drama is embedded with a number of plays and playwrights who contributed in development of the genre “Drama”. Though the genesis of Indian Drama is traced to Sanskrit literature, but it was only after the regime of British government that India experienced the revival of Indian Drama. And “Indian-English Drama” was born with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerjee’s *The Persecuted* in 1831. Followed by works of dramatists like Sri Aurobindo, C.S Nazir, Madhusudan Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and many more. Indian English Drama didn’t step onto the stage anytime sooner, as the belief of extinction of Indian English Drama preceded the attempt to stage the plays. It was believed for much longer that the standard of Indian English Drama will fail to meet the popularization of Classic Drama and hence will not be able to survive for long. Still it managed to spread its root with some outstanding playwrights and stage performances.

In her book “*Contemporary Indian English Drama: An Overview*”, Anita Myles enlightens the aspects of Indian English Drama. As this genre established its root firmly in the middle of twentieth century, it is quite obvious that there are not many books appreciating the attempts of rare playwrights, who stepped forward and dedicate their writing skills into this. The author in this book attempts to establish a comprehensive approach along with historical perspectives. The book began with a chapter throwing light on the advent and gradual development of Indian English Drama and an outline about the playwrights to be discussed in following chapters, thus providing required information in a nutshell before continuing with

the detailed contributions of various contributors to this genre. Chapter wise peep into different playwright's works, achievements and contribution in brief let the reader grasp and interpret quite easily.

The introductory chapter "*Evolution of Indian English Drama*" provides a base for the reader, it displays works of some famous and shining Indian dramatists like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Bharati Sarabhai and many other famous playwrights. Apart from mentioning well known works of dramatists, there is an extract from Chattopadhyaya's famous play *Siddhartha: Man of Peace*, centering its futuristic theme in the form of prophecy. Precise idea about different texts can also be found in paragraphs, and establishment of relation between works of author helps in broadening the surface of understanding. Specialization, style, interests of dramatists contributes majority of the chapter, symbolization is common in many of the works, portrayal of brief character sketch adds up to the interests. The first chapter ends with a powerful quote of Mahesh Dattani mentioning India's rich cultural heritage, the last paragraph anyhow encourages the evolving playwrights to keep producing plays despite of unsympathetic criticism, negligible stage facilities and other hurdles.

The second chapter, "*Asif Currimbhoy*" portrays an in detailed study of the dramatist's achievements, style of writing, areas of interests, critic's quotes and reader's response towards his works. There are extracts from his play *The Refugee* depicting the pain and agony of refugees around the world. His plays *Inquilab or Revolution (1970)*, *The Refugee (1971)* and *Sonar Bangla (1972)* constitute the Bengal trilogy, which was also translated in Bengali language and successfully produced in Bengal's regional theater. The chapter so on continues with the brief touch up of themes and its relation with his other works as well as tracing the similarities. There are description present from his plays like *The Restaurant (1960)*, *The Hungry Ones* which was first performed on stage in the year 1966, *Goa (1964)*, *The Miracle Seed (1973)*, *Angkor (1973)* and many more from his total of 29 works.

The third chapter, "*Nissim Ezekiel*" as per the motive of the author, is an in-depth study of the dramatist's work which has been discussed along with bits of extract from the plays. Few quotes by the dramatist are also mentioned in order to relate with his opinion and thought process, as it gets necessary to understand the playwright's point of view while going through

the work. An interesting fact mentioned about Nissim Ezekiel is that he considered women as the weaker sex, inferior to men and different from them in many ways. But surprisingly in his play *Nalini* he portrayed the character of Nalini as an independent, strong and positive female. She creates a new world for herself by breaking conventions, traditions and all the outdated formulae that prevents a woman to move forward in life. The play *Nalini* is actually accompanied by two other plays that contribute to *Three Plays* of Nissim Ezekiel, *Marriage Poem* aptly subtitled as *Tragi-Comedy* and *The Sleepwalkers* subtitled as *An Indo-American Farce*. In order to bring out dramatist's view on women, the author makes a contradictory analysis of female characters in the above plays. There is a brief discussion on *Song of Deprivation*; a one act play subtitled *A Comic Morality*, this play comes under the category of absurd play. Anita Myles discussed precisely about the setting and characters in order to present a clear picture of the dramatist's variation in composition of a play.

The Fourth chapter is titled "*Girish Karnad*". Girish Karnad evolved as an outstanding playwright with his excellent plays like *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1962), *Hayavadan* (1970), *The Fire and the Rain* (1998), *Naga-Mandala*(1990), *A Heap of Broken Images* (2005) followed by many other great plays. His plays were originally written in Kannada and later translated into English. Girish Karnad is marked for extracting the material for his plot from history and mythology mostly. But he makes it a point to interpret the past in the contemporary relevance, a system which he evolved from his very first play *Yayati* which examines a myth from *The Mahabharata* in modern context. This chapter discusses his use of myths, folk tales and legends for the base of his plot. While discussing the style of his plays, the author does not fail to present the various responses of critics and readers. *The Wedding Album* (2008) is Karnad's recent play, and in this chapter there is a brief outline mentioned along with its episodic division and characters. His play *Flowers* was performed in the year 2007, as mentioned in the chapter, its theme being unsuitable for dramatization as it was a reinvention of Karnataka's popular folktale from *Chitradurga*, it ended up as a flop among the audience. According to the author's study, she derived that the play *Flowers* has invited more attention to its theme rather than to its dramatic conversion because the issue highlighted was the perennial question of gender equality. And the chapter ends with a positive outlook towards the playwright's inspirational and enlightening works, bringing out the true essence of literature and giving meaning to the love of literature.

The fifth chapter is titled “*Vijay Tendulkar*”. Vijay Tendulkar as a former journalist observed the post-independence Indian social setup and felt deeply concerned about the predicament of certain sections of society especially the marginal position granted to women. This chapter highlights the major themes in his plays and about how they cater to the social lot. His plays like *Kamala (1981)*, *The vultures (1970)*, *Ghasiram Kotwal (1972)*, *Kanyadan (1983)*, *His Fifth Woman (2004)* pinpoints the indisputable fact that religiosity and sexuality are mis-utilized as means of exercising one’s power. He believed that power when institutionalized can be found in the media, in a stage, society morality and social mores, indeed a powerful belief that made him one of the great Indian English dramatists. As playwright he combined the power of character delineation with the versatility of dialogue writing without compromising with the compactness of the plot.

Sixth chapter, “*Mahesh Dattani*”, Mahesh Dattani a versatile playwright who succeeded in attracting attention of the theatre going audience till the end of each performance. He became the first Indian English Dramatist to be honored with the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1998. Among the themes taken up by Dattani in his plays religious tension, sexuality and gender issues also find expression. Though a worthy successor of Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani does not make use of myths in his plays. As depicted in this chapter by Anita Myles, Dattani’s plays become exceptionally stimulating because they reveal the complexities of modern day life. As seen in previous chapters, the author Anita Myles makes it a point to present brief outlook of important plays of a playwright, with the mention of few characters and their position in the play, how the play connects with the main theme etc. Important plays of Mahesh Dattani like *Where There is a Will (1988)*, *Dance like a Man (1989)*, *Do the Needful (1997)*, *Bravely fought the Queen (1994)*, *Seven Steps Around the Fire (1999)*, *Tara, Final solutions (1994)* are depicted here with precise understanding of their themes and thus doing justice to the dramatist and helping the readers in having a brief idea about the plays as well as about characters.

And the Final chapter, “*Postscript*”, one can notice without fail that all the chapters catered to the popular male population of playwrights, now the author makes it a point to wind up the book by mentioning some of the female playwrights and their contribution towards Indian English Drama. The last chapter contains brief outlines from works of famous female

dramatists like Uma Parmeshwaran, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta and Ninaz Khodaiji. There is also a precise paragraph on Ramu Ramanathan, a contemporary writer director who is known for the production of his most powerful play *Mahadevbhai*, a play in response to India Politics, especially the anti-Gandhian wave and the bold attempts to discrete democratic institutions. Anita Myles saved this playwright to mention in the end pages.

This book on “*Contemporary Indian English Drama*” can be useful for student as well as the teachers to enrich the student’s knowledge about great playwrights born in India. Their immortal and enlightening works in the field of drama will provide a concrete base for the Indian students in understanding the social, political and literary issues of different periods. Having precise idea about the achievements of such great playwrights will escalate the inspirational value among the readers.

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