



Advent and Role of Female Dramatists in the Growth, Evolution and Development of Indian English Drama

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ABSTRACT

Drama has been the most primitive and popular form of entertainment all around the world. The genre has always been considered as a field of male domination since the beginning of its origin. Till the sixteenth century, no women dramatist could be traced in the history of world literature. Reasons of women staying away from this fabulous genre of literature have been varying from culture to culture but the most common reason is the women's succumbing to age old male dominance. However, with the feminist discourse all over the globe in the 1970's gave an impetus to women entering into fields considerably dominated by men and drama has not been an exception. The advent of women dramatists in world literature in general and Indian literature in particular has been very refreshing and enriching for the growth, evolution and development of the genre.

KEYWORDS

Women, growth, evolution, development, drama, feminist discourse.

Introduction:

Drama has been one of the most primitive forms of visual art in all civilizations including the Indian civilization. Drama has gained popularity among masses gradually since it was a part of religious rituals and traditional modes of entertainment to the contemporary form of a powerful audio-visual mode of art. It is an irony that despite being a very potent form of self-expression and having the power of social enlightenment and education, it has been a less attractive area of interest among the female writers if compared with other genres of literature. The dramatic creations in world drama have been overshadowed with the plays written by the male playwrights and comparatively fewer plays have come down from the hands of women playwrights. The factors preventing women from venturing into this field appear to be the social, cultural, economic, traditional and political barriers women have faced since the beginning of the history. The common factors that culminated in preventing women were poverty, lack of education, subjugation and suppression. It is not that women have never endeavored to break away from these barriers rather feminist movements and revolutions for equality of women around the globe have been making news time and again. Consequently, women have been venturing into fields considered less appropriate for them and succeeded in changing general beliefs regarding women. In other genres of literature women writers and poets have considerably recorded their powerful presence and enriched the fields with the freshness and vigour of their artistic insight, brilliance and excellence. The contemporary literature abounds in poems, novels, essays and stories of excellent qualities penned by women authors and drama is no exception. In the form of drama, these women dramatists have found a patent device to express themselves in more powerful way and it has proved handy to give their views a proper expression. Moreover, taking drama as a more serious tool of expression and representation, the women playwrights have addressed certain issues in their plays which the men playwrights have failed to do.

The tradition of Indian drama has been very rich and glorious. Be it ancient Sanskrit drama, the hoary folk drama, the splendid tradition of vernacular drama, modern Indian drama or Indian English drama or Indian drama in translation, Indian drama has followed a very impressive course of development and growth. But, disappointingly, it has been very hard to trace any remarkable women playwright in the history of Indian drama before independence. However, in the nineteenth century, when the first women playwright AphraBehn appeared in British literature, we come across a couple of women writers who tried their hands in drama besides other genres of

literature. Women's theatre movement is another remarkable feat in the line of the growth of Indian drama in general and Indian English Drama in particular. Commenting on the contribution of women playwrights, Tutun Mukherjee writes:

Women playwrights in India contributed to the genre from the late nineteenth century, though not in a very significant way. The earliest plays were written in regional languages, among which Marathi and Bengali plays were more in number. Happily, the regional languages continue to serve as the rich archive of plays written by both women and men. It is in these texts that one feels the pulse of the people of the country, their daily struggles, their problems and difficulties as tangible realities. The issues raised in these plays are amazing in their variety and range, especially with regard to the women's experiences. Despite English having become a lingua franca in India, plays in English are fewer in number compared to those written in the other languages. (Mukherjee, 2005)

The earliest woman who tried her hand in the field of Indian English drama was Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932), an elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore. Her play *The Wedding Tangle* was first published and performed in 1904. The play deals with the issue of dowry and widow remarriage. Her other plays were *Rajkanya* and *Divyakama*. During the time there was another female women dramatist RaseedJahan (1905-1952) who wrote a play entitled *Women*. But in the later decades a huge gap is observed in terms of play writing by women playwrights.

The only noteworthy woman who wrote successful English plays in the pre-independence period of India is *Bharati Sarabhai* (b.1912). Her plays *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1943) are noteworthy as to her contribution to the development of Indian English drama. Sarabhai's plays were remarkable for their strong contemporary appeal and high performativity with their vivid dramatic aspects.

The post-independence period is remarkable not only for notable progress in terms of thematic and dramatic innovations in the realm of drama but also for the significant contribution of women playwrights. The drama of the period was deviating from history, folklore and legends to the realistic, social and contemporary issues in terms of form and content. Impressed by the movements for equality of women, men playwrights also chose issues and subjects pertaining to women in their plays and accentuated accord and accolades. Mahesh Dattani's *Taraand Safdar* Hashmi's agitprop street play *Aurat* are some of the examples of such plays.

The post-independence period was significant for Indian drama in general and women's drama as it received a considerable lift in the form of institutions like Indian Peoples Theatre Movement (IPTA, SangeetNatak Academy and National School of Drama etc. Consequently, a number of theatre festivals, workshops, and ideologically committed theatre groups celebrating various social, political, aesthetic and feminist concerns proved a boost to Indian drama. The entire world of Indian drama was instigated into innovative dramatic productions in terms of form, content and techniques. A whole class of regional and national playwrights, actors and directors became busy in theatrical productions involving excellent dramatic themes and techniques amalgamating the western thoughts, ideals, theories and innovations with the Indian classical and modern dramaturgy. Alongside, theatre doyens like BadalSircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, GirishKarnad and Mahesh Dattani, women playwrights like PoileSengupta (English), VarshaAdalja (Gujarati), ManjulaPadmanabhan (English), Dina Mehta (English), Tripurari Sharma (English and Hindi), Dr. Kusum Kumar(Hindi), Gitanjali Shree (Hindi), Iripinder Bhatia (Hindi), NeelamMansinghChaudhury (Punjabi), Binodini (Telegu), B. Jyashree (Kannada), ShanoliMitra(Bengali), UshaGanguli (Hindi), Shanta Gandhi (Gujarati), SushmaDeshpande(Marathi), Veenapani Chawla (Marathi), QudisiaZadie (Urdu)etc. became common names of Indian drama.

Towards 1970's of post-independence period, the feminist theories and arguments were gaining ground throughout the world including India. The subdued and marginalized sections were also raising their voices against the age old subjugation and marginalization in society. Obviously, women were also craving for the articulation of their voices and dra-

ma besides other genres of literature was a perfect tool for the representation of their lives. The plays penned by writers like "Mahasweta Devi (*Water, Mother of 1084, Bayen*), ManjulaPadmanabhan(*Harvest, Lights Out!*), Uma Parmeshwaran (*Sons Must Die, Meera, Sita's Promise, Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees*), Dina Mehta (*Brides are not for Burning*), Vera Sharma (*The Early Bird, The Chameleon, Life is Like That*), PoileSengupta (*Inner Laws, A Pretty Business, Keats was a Tuber, Collages, Alipha, Thus SpakeShoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni, and Samara's Song*)" are the milestones of women's drama which were successfully able to attract due attention and consideration of the feminist issues and demands of being looked upon carefully.

Conclusion: The women playwrights with their commendable contribution to Indian English as well as regional drama have not only enriched this field but also have paved the way for future generations of feminine geniuses to plunge into the exciting world of drama. This is very clear from the growing number of female playwrights in world drama including the Indian drama and the frequency of plays rich in thematic virtues, technical qualities and innovative ideas penned by women dramatists. The advent of women dramatists has certainly been a pleasant and fruitful happening in line of the growth and development of world drama in general and Indian drama in particular.

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