

Dr. Shankar M.A. IV<sup>th</sup>  
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## Indo-Anglian Drama

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### Indo-Anglian: Defined and Explained

The term 'Indo-Anglian' is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. Today there are a large number of educated Indians who use the English language as a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. Their writing has now developed into a substantial literature in its own right and it is this substantial body of literature which is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. As C.R. Reddy in his foreword to Srinivasa Iyengar's work *Indo-Anglian Literature* points out, "Indo-Anglian literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian literature. It is part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the *Vedas*, has continued to spread its mellow light now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history ever increasingly upto the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghosh, and bids fair to expand with ours, as well as humanity's expanding future."

### Paucity of Indian Drama in English: Tagore

Paucity of Indian drama in English is the one fact which strikes even a cursory student of Indo-Anglian literature. In this genre Indian writers have lagged behind and this despite the fact that the first Indian play in English *The Persecuted* was written as early as 1832. Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh are the only two writers who have made contribution to Indian drama in English. Tagore's plays have been failures upon the stage because they are excessively symbolic-lyrical poetic plays. In the original they have great musical qualities but even these qualities have been lost in their English transcreation. In his play like *Chitra*, *Post Office*, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, Tagore has tried to impart new values and symbolic significance to ancient Hindu myths and legends. Whatever may be the literary value of such plays, they are not successful stage plays. However, plays like *Sacrifice* have been quite successful on the stage also.

### Aurobindo Ghosh

Aurobindo's plays are regular poetic plays, entirely unfit for the stage. In his plays *Perseus*, *the Deliverer*; *Rodogune*; *Eric*; *The Veziers of Bassora* he used the blank verse of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, which sounds artificial and unneutral in the modern age. It has no roots in the idioms and rhythms of current speech. Hence their failure on the stage.

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### G.V. Desani

This failure to capture speech rhythms and consequent artificiality characterises Indian verse drama in general. This is also the besetting sin of G.V. Desani's *Holi* and Bharati Sarabhai's *The Well of the People*. They might have literary poetic qualities, but they do not have dramatic qualities. Dialogue in drama should be graceful and speakable; it should be racy and close to the spoken language. But even such able writers of drama in English as Harindranath Chattopadhyaya in *The Proclamation* and T.P. Kailasam in *The Brahman's Curse* fail in this respect.

### Indian Prose Drama in English

Indian prose drama in English also suffers from these very faults. Harindranath's *Five Plays*, Fyzee Rahamin's *Daughter of India*, A.S.P. Ayyar's *The Slave of India and Other Plays*, Asif Currimbhoy's *The Tourist*, *The Doldrammers* and *Doomb Dancer* and many others do not rise above ordinary conversation in their dialogue and are dull, drab flat and artificial. There is too much of speechifying, too frequent intrusion of colloquialism and wrong use of Indian phrases and idioms. Such plays are the products of craft rather than of art. The dramatists have no individual vision of life, or at least they fail to communicate it through their works.

### Pratap Sharma: His Contribution

Pratap Sharma is one of those raw Indo-Anglian dramatists whose plays *A Touch of Brightness*, *The Profession*, *War-Cry* etc., are more successful dramatically. They are good acting plays. But there is too much of verbosity and irrelevancy in dialogue. The dramatist fails to exploit the resources of English as a spoken language and adapts it to his creative purpose.

### Gieve Patel and Others

Gieve Patel's *Princess* is singularly free from those faults. He succeeds in giving his language a touch of the local idiom which, therefore, is more refreshing and natural. It is a landmark in the history of Indo-Anglian drama for in it the dramatist has successfully tackled the problem of dialogue. Nissim Ezekiel in his plays *Nalinin* and *The Marriage Poem* is successful in his dialogues, and his example shows that success in dialogue can be easily achieved if English knowing characters who will naturally speak English are introduced instead of characters who are not likely to speak English. This limits the scope of the dramatist but it makes for greater realism and authenticity.

*Princess* is Gieve Patel's first play. The play is about two families in a Parsi village in Gujarat. The conflict and tension in the play arise from the struggle of the two families for the possession of a child who in the play becomes an invalid and later dies but is nevertheless the cause of quarrel in the story. The struggle for the possession of the child is so effectively

handled in the play as to bring out the ugly selfishness of the two families. A very important feature of the play is the modified English speech which Gieve Patel uses for the dialogue to give it a Parsi tang.

Thus it is not merely as a Parsi play realistically portraying Parsi life, but as one of which the playwright tackles the problem of dialogue that *Princess* is important in the history of Indian drama in English.

#### Santha Rama Rau

Another successful play by an Indian writer Santha Rama Rau is *A Passage to India* a close adaptation of the well-known novel of that name. She shows great dexterity in the handling of dialogue. Her task was made easier by the fact that the dialogue in her play closely follows dialogue in the novel. But there is skilful adaptation and selection. As Paul Verghese puts it, "Santha Rama Rau deserves praise for the careful selection of those pieces of dialogue in the novel that can be effective on the stage and for putting them together with appropriate connecting links, wherever required so that the play becomes a truly dramatic rendering of the novel."

#### Girish Karnad

Girish Karnad (1938- ) an actor and film director is originally a Kannada dramatist who wrote *Tughlaq*, *Yayati* and *Hayavadana*. He successfully translated *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana* into English. *Tughlaq* is a historical play which deals with life and times of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India. Karnad deviates from history when it is inevitable from the artistic view point. It is a play based on opposites. *Hayavadana* is based on the Kathasarilesagara tale which Thomas Mann used for his novel *The Transposed Head*. It is a bold experiment in the use of folk motifs.

K.R.S. Iyengar says: "In all his three plays—be the theme, historical, mythical or legendary—Karnad's approach is modern, and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intentions, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements." All the plays of Girish Karnad are conspicuous for the deft employment of irony and crisp dialogue.

The above discussion shows that proper dialogue and carefully selected situation count most in drama. The problem of truly effective stage-dialogue will have to be solved before the Indo-Anglian drama can come to its own.

#### Conclusion

In short, Indo-Anglian literature continues to grow and flourish and this despite all the misguided and prejudiced and politically motivated campaign against English as a 'foreign' language, a language which comes in the way of its growth. More Indians are writing in English than ever before, and the Indo-Anglian writer is enjoying a much wider market. Indo-Anglian drama has, indeed, a bright future.