



## RISE AND FALL IN ENGLISH DRAMA UPTO JOHN OSBORNE AND VIJAY TENDULKAR

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### ABSTRACT

*Drama is a realistic portrayal of life, a representation of natural objects and actions. It imitates life at some extent. In fiction, men may be imitated worse or better or as they are. Aristotle in his Poetics also mentioned first two variants but not the realistic one. The scholars have defined drama in different ways but through all the definitions it is concluded that drama requires a lot of efforts and audience are the real protagonist. The real aim of the drama is to entertain to educate and to arouse the feelings amongst people. Since medieval time till present age drama is performed on the stage to achieve the same. The present research paper will discuss the origin of drama and its development, its decline and revival. The paper will also discuss the turning point and stage transformation on the stage by the plays of John Osborne. The translated plays of Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar has also changed the conviction of Indian theatre and raised the voice of common people. Both the playwrights gave a new dimension to the drama and received international fame.*

**Keywords :** Renaissance, decline, tragedy, comedy, Licensing

### INTRODUCTION

Drama mean 'to do', 'to perform' or to act where stage is indispensable. It is not confined to read only but it is written for presentation. According to Hari Ran Shankar, Sanskrit Scholar, drama is defined as:

*Drama is the representation by actors put up for show at certain place before spectators in the form of imitation of conditions and situations in which*

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*persons are placed from time to time by certain means, leading to enjoyment of a particular pleasure (99).*

## Origin of Drama

Some Scholars trace Greece as origin of drama, some Egypt while many others consider the wordless actions like mimes or mosque are its origin. According to the Greek sources, Thespis introduced the world with first actor by introducing prologue and internal speeches to the Chorus. Aeschylus, father of tragedy, added the second actor and introduced conflict in the play that completes the definition of drama according to *Encyclopedia American* It says:

*“The Greek term drama (meaning action) applies to a form of literature intended to be interpreted to an audience by actors who impersonate the characters, recite the speeches and dialogues and perform the action of the story based on conflicts.”*

Sophocles influenced the drama by adding a third actor and thus reduced the importance of chorus in the presentation of the plot in sixth century whereas the origin of Sanskrit drama is believed to have been in Ist A.D. through *Natyaveda : The FifthVeda*. India possessed its well-developed drama even before the emergence of Greek tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus.

Bharat’s *Natyashasira* is considered as the most pioneering work on Indian dance, Kalidas *Abhijnana – Shakuntalam*, Bhavabhuti’s *Malti-Madhavon*, Bhasa’s *Swapna – Vasavdattan*, Hashdeva’s *Ratnawali – Nagananda* etc. are some well-known drama of Golden Age of Sanskrit Drama.

## Development of English Drama

During the Middle ages Pageants were performed in order to entertain kings on their celebrations but during Renaissance masque replaced pageants that were based upon religion. The Church took over the theater in medieval period that is the evolution of three main genres of theater. These are Mystery, Morality and Miracle plays. The plays which are based upon the lives of Christ or the stories from Old Testament are called as Mystery plays whereas the plays that depict life and martyrdoms of Saints are Miracle plays. The third genre is interlude or allegorical play in which abstract qualities are personified as the main characters and presenting a lesson also known as Morality play. Such plays were popular in Europe during 15<sup>th</sup> century. *Everyman* (1490) by Ben Jonsoss is the most famous Morality play. Now, dominance of Church over theatre was weakened and the venue of drama was also shifted



from Church to streets but Senecan Tragedy and comedians of Plautus and Terrence had already fascinated the people of England due to Renaissance. *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall is the first English comedy and *Gorboduc* by Thomas Sack Ville and Thomas Nortan is the first English tragedy based upon classical pattern.

This period is known as Artistic period of English drama and drama reached at its acme during the age of Renaissance. The English Renaissance literature has been divided into four periods:

- (i) The Period of Preparation (1500-1579) Youth period
- (ii) The Elizabethan Period (1579-1602) Manhood
- (iii) The Jacobean Period (1603-1625) Middle Age
- (iv) The Caroline Period (1620-1660) Old Age or Decline

The spirit of Renaissance was fully reflected in sixteenth and seventeenth Century literature. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* heralded the dawn of Renaissance. Spenser has been recognized as 'The Touch Stone of English poetic Sensibility'. But in the field of drama University wits emerged with the spirit of Renaissance. The constellation of University Wits includes Thomas Kyd, John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge and Thomas Nash: Christopher Marlowe was the central sun and also called as 'The True Child of the Renaissance'. The living Spirit with true aspiration can be observed in his four plays. *Tamberlaine, Dr. Faustus, The Jew of Malta and Edward II*. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* had supplied romantic melodrama to English literature before Shakespeare. In the remarks of Percy Simpson:

*"Kyd is important not for, what he added to him – for a mastery of situation. Shown in the skill with which he works out some of the episodes and for a grim use of dramatic irony."*

*The Spanish Tragedy* was written in Senecan style and followed by a number of Elizabethan dramatists in writing tragic plays. The pre Elizabethan imprints are quite visible on Elizabethan Icon Shakespeare who remained strict to conceptions yet developed certain artistic traits that account for his timelessness. Ben Jonson a stern classist and critic appreciated the universal appeal of Shakespeare's plays and poems in his poem; *To The Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare* 'Soul of the Age. The applause delight! The wonder of our stage.

Shakespeare wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets. In his poetic excellence he exceeds even Ibsen and Shaw. Because of Shakespeare's artistic excellence Bernard Shaw admits: "I Wish I



could write a beautiful play like *Twelfth Night*". No one has written a better tragedy than *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* are his well-known tragedies. He also got fame because of his comedies, Romantic comedy and Historical plays. Ben Jonson is another significant dramatists of his age but only in comedies. He is famous for his comedy of Humours like *Every Man in His Humour*, *Every Man out of His Humour*, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* etc. Many genres of drama came forth and developed during this age. Therefore, Elizabethan age is considered as the Golden age of English drama.

### **Declining Period of English Drama**

The beginning of seventeenth Century is the general decline of drama. The lofty, magnanimity and splendid fabric in drama created by Shakespeare crumbles to dust in the hands of his followers as realism has replaced imaginations. The Age that succeeds Elizabethan Era is Jacobean Era which is succeeded by Caroline Era.

The writers of Jacobean Era were failed to hold the old moral values and reflect uncertainty, doubt, confusion and pessimism in the tragedy by showing human follies and Foibles. John Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, revenge and blood tragedy regarded as masterpiece of early seventeenth century. In *Pity She is a Whore* by Ford and *A King and No King* of Fletcher and Beaumont dealt with incestuous themes, Dekker and Heywood, Comedy writers of age amused the public with sympathetic style. But English stage was deprived of thoughtful and meaningful dramas during the reign of James I (Jacobean period). The plays were staged only for wealth and to entertain the courtiers and kings. In the age of Charles I (1625 – Caroline Age) the old kind of drama expired, so eventually, the government had to intervene and theaters were closed in 1642. William J. Long Asserts:

*In 1642, only twenty six years after Shakespeare's death, both house of parliament voted to close the theatres as breeders of lies and immortality (long 257).*

The Jacobean and Caroline period was the period of dramatic recession. The theatres remained closed till restoration of Charles II in 1660 that brought a dramatic change in life and literature. The Restoration or Age of Dryden or Age of Science is the Age of skepticism and doubt. As this age was dramatically bankrupt, so the dramatists are just numbered and developed Comedy of Manners. William Wycherley, George Etherege, William Congreve are known for their comedies. Sir John Vanbrugh is known for genial humour and for energy in his plays. John Dryden is known for his heroic couplet and heroic tragedy. His *Tyrannic Love* is the best examples of heroic tragedy. *Love in a Tub* and *Man of Mode* of Etherege Old



*Bachelor* and *The Double Dealer* of Congreve, Wycherley's *Love in a Wood* and *The Country's Wife* are some famous comedies of the period.

In eighteenth century a new genre of literature was developed to pacify the interest of middle class people i.e. novel. The public needs reality and drama was no longer a social force because of The Licensing Act of 1737. The act was passed to control and censor what was said against the government through theatres. Henry Fielding, great novelist of the age, in his play *His Historical Register for the Year 1736*, denounced the contemporary society and politics. The satire was so harsh and direct that Prime Minister Robert Walpole's government in 1737 introduced a Licensing Act for the theatre which had passed drama under the direct control of the Lord Chamberlain. This censorship was responsible for the decline of drama and rise of novel in eighteenth century and thus the dramatists were constraint to express their genius and expression. The Licensing Act was abolished in 1968 and during the span of 230 years the output of dramatists was restricted and counted. The dramatists produced the plays with distant settings and locations to escape from the wrath of government and censorship. Some Revolutionary and Gothic Melodrama were developed during Romantic Age but not for theatre, only for pen and paper. Shelly's *Cenci*, Coleridge's *Osario*, Byron's *Marine Faliero*, Wordsworth's *Boulderers* and Baille's *De Monfort*, written in early nineteenth century, were political by nature with distant settings.

## Revival of English Drama

The plays produced in Victorian age are called as Realistic plays that was a revival in drama. Tom Robertson adopted a new phase of realistic depiction i.e. Cup and Saucer Drama – the forerunner of Kitchen Sink Drama. *Society* (1865), *A Caste* (1857) *Play* (1868) and *School* (1869) are his famous plays which are responsive to society. The Victorian stage was also influenced by Norwegian playwrights Henrik Ibsen. His play *A Doll House* is a challenge to the conventional thoughts of Victorian playwrights about Women freedom.

Bernard Shaw an Irish playwright, was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1925. His plays *Saint Joan*, *Man and Superman*, *Arms and The Man* proved, as a bombshell in the literary world. In the first half of the twentieth century Shaw, Galsworthy and Bary were known as the 'Big Three Dramatists'. Galsworthy a laureate, began a new style of drama in 1932 known as Problem Play. His leading plays *Strife*, *Justice* and *Loyalties* explored the reality of Modern World.

The Playwrights of Irish Literary theatre (Abbey Theatre) named Sean O' Casey, J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats were the key figure of literary revival. They plays of G.B. Shaw and John Galsworthy attracted the new crowds by creating new standards and new characters like



Chocolate Cream heroes (anti-hero). The twentieth century plays marked by excessive realism and naturalism, portrayed the alienation and frustration of human beings in the mechanical world of wars and industrialization. W.B. Yeats, foremost figure of twentieth century literature wrote poetic drama not only in form but in spirit too. According to Moody and Lovett:

*“His was the first dramatic verse since Jacobean days that was really related to human impulse and expression and was not a mere decoration.”*

*The Countess Cathleen, The King’s Threshold* and *The Land of Heart’s Desire* are Yeats’ chief plays. T.S. Eliot, a noble laureate, also proved his abilities in poetic drama through verse plays. *Murder in the Cathedral* is his most outstanding play. At that time A new practical world had replaced the earlier illusive world and dramatists began to opt the naturalistic style of Emile Zola (French writer). Noel Coward, a successful playwright, entertained the troops with his screen plays like *The Happy Breed* (1941), *Present Laughter* (1943) etc. Sean O’Casey, Irish dramatist and socialist, wrote first time about Dublin working class. These three remarkable playwrights Eliot, Sean O’Casey and Noel Coward were succeeded by Christopher Fry, Terrence Rattigan and Peter Ustinov. Rattigan’s plays had tried to pacify post-war disillusionment of the audience but with failure. After the wars many writers and directors came forth with different views. Harold Pinter, John Osborne, Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard founded the Absurdist drama with the theory of existentialism.

### **Turning Point of English Drama**

8<sup>th</sup> May 1956 is the date that is recalled in English Literature as the day of Renaissance for English theatre and for John Osborne who received the reputation as champion of ‘Angry Youngman Movement’. On this day Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* was first performed in Royal Court Theatre that transformed the English stage as well as the vision of Britons Youth. Jimmy Porter, the protagonist of the play appeared on the scene as revolutionary hero or anti-hero. Ronald Hayman says about Osborne:

*He was also the one who was most explicitly concerned with class, and as in all revolutions, class has been a very important factor. The working class that had been banging at the door for so long have been let in. (John Osborne,1)*

Osborne is a prolific writer who wrote thirty plays. His heroes resist against the socio – political disorder of post – war England. In portraying his characters he leaned towards reality instead of fantasy and for imagination. His plays *The Entertainer, Luther, Inadmissible Evidence, Epitaph for George Dillon, Tom Jones* (adoption) dealt with the



theme of disillusionment of Youth and their rebel against establishment in post-war era. Osborne raised the voice of ordinary citizens of the street for identity and existence. The dramatists of the movement depict domestic lives of the working class, to explore social issues and political issues. The absurdist play, *Waiting for Godot*, of Samuel Beckett Irish playwrights, also affected English drama profoundly [*The Homecoming* dealing with the theme of elusiveness]. Tom Stoppard, with influence of Beckett, is notable for his high spirited wit and intellectual issues which he discussed in his plays.

The Indian playwrights of the time such as Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnard, Badal Sirkar and Vijay Tendulkar also deal with the socio-political issues of post-independence India. They have also raised the voice of voiceless people by depicting realistic portrayal of contemporary life. The plays focus on man with all its complexities on psychological level. Vijay Tendulkar, a Marathi playwright, began a new school of drama like Harold Pinter handling new themes new subjects and new techniques. He uses the stage to aware the audience by shaking their sensibility. G.M. Kulkarni, a Marathi Critic, says:

*Like many other modern Marathi playwrights, Tendulkar follows the techniques of Ibsen's plays in his early dramatic writing. However, the plays after 1963, reject this technique. Tendulkar succeeds in setting a "new form" by using the new, modern, folk, and classical elements simultaneously in his plays. This can be particularly noticed in his plays after the successful presentation of 'Silence! The Court is in Session (38).*

In Tendulkar's play we have the sensation of western playwrights like Arthur Miller, Brecht etc. but we feel a superb touch of Indianness also. His plays successfully bridged the gulf between the traditional and modern Indian theatre.

Harlod Pinter is one of the most accomplished dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd. His play *The Birthday Party* and other two plays *The Homecoming* and *The Caretaker* possess the elements of Absurd theatre with the theme of elusiveness.

## CONCLUSION

Bernard Shaw, John Osborne and Vijay Tendulkar all are iconoclasts who ushered a new and original drama on the stage. A playwright is always influenced by the changes of society. Social, economic and political scenario across the world and altered ideas and movements leave a great impact on the writer and his writings and so the changes in drama. Thus, drama plays a significant role in society to entertain to guide and to aware the people.



From the whole discussion, it is observed that drama has undergone many changes. From Greek to contemporary modern period, from subject matter, themes to character portrayals. Drama and theatre has been started using for the common man instead of courtiers, kings or aristocracy. Theatre has become for the people, of the people and by the people.

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