



Introspection on the reasons for failure of English drama written by Anglo Indian writers

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Abstract

In the genre of drama, 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 'transcreations'. This paper makes an attempt to introspect the reasons for the failure of English drama written by Anglo-Indian writers.

Keywords: symbolic, lyrical, poetic, musical qualities, verbosity

Introduction

In the genre of drama, 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 'transcreations'. In his plays like *Chitra*, *Post Office*, 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's plays are regular poetic plays, entirely unfit for the stage. In his plays *Perseus*; *the Deliverer*; *Rodogune*; *Eric*, *the Veziars of Bassora*, he used the blank verse of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, which sounds artificial and unnatural in the modern age. It has no roots in the idioms and rhythms of current speech. Hence their failure on the stage.

This failure to capture speech rhythms and consequent artificiality characterizes Indian verse drama in general. This is also the besetting sin of G.V. Desani's *Hali* and Bharati Sarabhyai'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 *The Proclamation* and T.P. Kailasam *The Brahman's Curse* fail in this respect.

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 Play's*, Asif Currimbhoy's *The Tourist Meca*, *The Doldrummers* and *Dumb 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

intrusions 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 is one of those few Indo-Anglican dramatists whose plays *A Touch of Brightness*, *The Professor Has 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 adapt it to his creative purpose. Gieve Patel's *Princess* is singularly free from these 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-Anglican drama for in it the dramatist has successfully tackled the problem of dialogue. Nissim Ezekiel in his plays *Nalini* 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 that are not likely to speak English. This limits the scope of the dramatist but it makes for greater realism and authenticity.

Another successful play by an Indian writer Santha Rama Rao is *A Passage to India* a close adaption 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 Santha Rama Rao 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, where require to be stereotypes. The problem of creating 'round', three dimensional figures, has not been successfully tackled so far. Even novelists, like Mulk Raj Anand, despite all their psychological insights, are deficient in this all-important aspect of the art of a novelist, so that the play becomes a truly dramatic rendering of the novel.

In short, Indo-Anglican 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-Anglican writer is enjoying a much wider market. It has, indeed, a bright future.

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