

NARRATIVES OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN MODERN INDIAN THEATRE

Thammaiah. R. B

Research Scholar, Head of the Department, Department of English, Padmashree Institute of Management and Sciences, Bengaluru, India

Received: 05 Apr 2021

Accepted: 09 Apr 2021

Published: 12 Apr 2021

ABSTRACT

The mechanics of theatre production need not be known to its audience because what they eventually see on stage is nothing but a rebuilding of life. Hence it is not surprising that theatre became a very popular and powerful form of art until it was challenged by the modern mass media. Hitherto it can be safely said that theatre even today wields a formidable influence on the people and can be as during the 16th century it was the most popular and influential form of entertainment. It is intended to study the plays of two well-known Indian dramatists and see how they all tend to depict the transformation that has been witnessed in the Indian psyche and society. The Indian social set up has changed, but in a subtle, unnoticeable way. But the change has not escaped the eyes of these dramatists. Voices of the hereto suppressed women, is being heard and depicted in contemporary dramas. The surprising fact about it is that women are given expression by male playwrights, than the women playwrights.

KEYWORDS: *Mechanics, Theatre, Indian Dramatists, Psyche*

INTRODUCTION

Theatre has been a very sole form of art since the very beginning. It has been an enabling and enriching medium of art. Also it has been the best form of art to reach the masses more effectively. No other art form has ever been able to reach as many people as much as drama did. The drama audience require very little or no preparation at all to appreciate a play, unlike any other form of art, such as music and dance, which all need a certain amount of preparation and a degree of taste. Music, painting, sculpture, architecture and all other forms of art need the audience to have cultivated a taste to appreciate what is being presented as the expression of art. They all require a certain amount of knowledge, without which the art expression falls flat. Play does not need any such preparation as it is an expression of life itself.

Though the Indian English Theatre began very early in year 1831 on a very promising note with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The persecuted or Dramatic scenes illustrative of the present state of Hindoo society in Calcutta*, the Indian English theatre failed to establish itself strongly as an independent entity (M.K.Naik, *A history of Indian English Literature*, 102). More plays were written in regional languages than in English. Recently more number of dramatists has started to write in English. Yet the number of plays translated from regional languages to English is more than those written in English itself. Be it translated or plays written in English, it took more than a generation or two for the radical, social, revolutionary spirit to surface again after it was first demonstrated in the pioneering work of Banerjee nearly more than a century ago. After the initial attempts of staging poetic dramas, with romance, mythology, freedom struggle, mahathma, ideals, morals, ethics, social reformation etc as the theme, the Indian drama gradually turned to more

modernistic preoccupations like psychology, women emancipation, class-caste divisions, polity and so on. A more modernistic attitude which is essentially post colonial and feministic in nature runs strongly through the plays of recent times. It would be interesting to trace the growth of the Indian theatre along with its changing, evolving trends and record how similar or different it is than the western theatre.

It is intended to study the plays of two well-known Indian dramatists and see how they all tend to depict the transformation that has been witnessed in the Indian psyche and society. The Indian social set up has changed, but in a subtle, unnoticeable way. But the change has not escaped the eyes of these dramatists. Voices of the hereto suppressed women, is being heard and depicted in contemporary dramas. The surprising fact about it is that women are given expression by male playwrights, than the women playwrights.

The two dramatists that will be studied are Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. *Hayavadana* and *Where there is a will* are their works respectively selected for the purpose of a sample study. The three plays have seemingly different themes but are very close in the way they treat the issues. The three plays selected display a very modernistic feminist approach towards their women characters and view them more as equals than as inferiors to be pitied. It is in the way these women characters are looked at, not the situations they are put in or shown in, that make these plays similar. The women who were hitherto treated as subordinate secondary characters by writers, here in these plays are shown not merely as equals, but as superiors to men.

Padmini, in *Hayavadana*, is also in a similar plight. Though not accused by anybody in the play as immoral, anti social, she is almost blamed of adultery. She marries Devadatta and falls in love with Kapila, her husband's friend. Devadatta is the epitome of all intellectuality and Kapila of physicality. Padmini will never be complete without either of them. Her desire to have both men does not look immoral or unnatural. The dilemma of the woman is portrayed in such a way that it never appears to be vulgar or indecent.

In *Where there is a will* there are three women characters that make an unlikely company. There is Sonal - wife of the deceased rich businessman Hasmukh, Preethi – his daughter in law and Kiran – his mistress. The three form an unlikely company because they are three different kinds of women with different interests. Yet they come together to protest and win against the patriarchy that has dominated them for years.

It is a new way that these dramatists look at their women characters. It is not mere sympathy. It is not mere ideological support. It is more a claim from within, internal to the dramatist. It is almost like a woman writing these works. The difficulties faced by women, the horrors they are subjected to, the discrimination, the suppression they suffer at the hands of men – all these are so well depicted that it all appears to have flown naturally from a woman's hand. And, instead of a loud clamour for rights and justice, there is a very strong, clear but calm assertion of women's position.

In *Hayavadana* too similar bold views about women are expressed. Padmini, the central character is a complex woman who is not ashamed to be in love with two men, her husband and his friend. The play is about incompleteness, imperfection in life. It begins with an invocation to Lord Ganesha who is an embodiment of imperfection himself with broken tusk, elephant head, seated on mouse, snake around belly etc. The play poses the question of imperfection through Devadatta and Kapila who symbolise intellectuality and physicality respectively. But the play stands out by the view it adopts towards Padmini who wants them both. The female chorus in the play ask "why should love stick to the sap of a single body?" The chorus sing as if they speak for Padmini "a head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each

arm. I have neither regret nor shame". Nowhere in the play is Padmini neither condemned nor criticised for her action which is surprising even from a modern point of view. Her wish to live and love both lives is accepted and treated as if it is natural. Neither the Bhagavatha nor the chorus nor any other character in the play says anything about Padmini's seemingly immoral actions.

Where there is a will goes a step ahead in supporting the women characters. It mocks at the male power and domination. Hasmukh, the rich businessman, considers himself to be an accomplished man and well in control of life. Both, when alive and after his death he is pitched against three women in life, his wife, his mistress and his daughter-in-law. It is ironic that all the three women, who he thought he had a control over, come together after his death to work against exactly what he had wished and stated in his will. Hasmukh's wife and his mistress come to live together after his death and agree that both of them had been ill treated by the deceased man. No character in the play nor the playwright consider it a crime that Preethi, the daughter-in-law, had killed Hasmukh by replacing his medicines. The mistress is accepted into the family.

If the plays discussed simply show an acceptance of the illicit, adulterous relationships of the women characters, Dattani tries to give it a kind of social recognition by letting the mistress become a part of the family. But it is clear from the above discussion that the new age dramatist has recognised the new emerging woman with a strong bold identity of her own. The plays discussed in the paper portray woman in a new light. They also assert her right to live a life completely independent of man as shown by the women characters in Dattani's play.

It is also intended to make a comparative study of the western and Indian theatre. It would also be an enriching and useful study to analyse how the playwrights differ from each other from region to region within india in theme, style, dramatic techniques and yet as Eliot says work towards a common end like there exists "an unconscious community" among them.

Each of these dramas exposes a new feminist reading of formerly patriarchal legends. The principle of a feminist theatre in the usefulness of theatre as a tool for critical consciousness for critiquing social inequality and for self examination and expression is at the centre. Feminist theatre is a source of empowerment; it facilitates them to speak out, giving them voice. It is at the connection of art, activism and social relevance and theatre is seen as a tool of real change in women's lives. It is an exploration of women's own exclusive idiom—their own form, their language and ways of communication.

REFERENCES

1. *The Churning*, Seagull Books, India, 1985.
2. *The Threshold: (Umbartha)*, Sangam Books, 1985.
3. *Karnad, Girish. Hayadana*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1975.
4. *Yayathi*, Oxford University Press
5. *Nagamandala*, Oxford University Press, 1996.
6. *Dattani, Mahesh. Where There Is A will...*, Lankesh Prakashana, Bangalore, 2011.
7. *Naik, M.K. A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1982.

