

DRAMA: EVOLUTION, HISTORY AND AFTER JOURNEY**Shweta Verma* & Dr. Sangeeta Jhajharia****

* Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, College of Arts Science and Humanities, Mody University, Lakshmangarh, Rajasthan

** Assistant Professor, College of Arts Science and Humanities, Mody University, Lakshmangarh, Rajasthan



Cite This Article: Shweta Verma & Dr. Sangeeta Jhajharia, "Drama: Evolution, History and After Journey", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Conference World Special Issue 1, Page Number 264-267, 2018.

Abstract:

Drama began in Greece with the observation of religious ceremonies in the forms of chorus. The term comes from a Greek word meaning "action". Drama is a specific mode which was represented in performance. Generally, considered as a genre of poetry. The two masks associated with the drama represents the generic division between tragedy and comedy, the two major forms of drama. The masks are the symbol of ancient Greek muses, Thalia, and Melpomene. Thalia represents the comedy, where Melpomene represents tragedy. The word "play" also refers to drama from the era of Shakespeare. Drama has its development from ancient time to Modern Age. It is combined with music, dance and dialogues between the characters of the play. Opera, Pantomime, Mime, Creative drama are also some other genres of drama in ancient and modern times. From the very beginning i.e. from the Age of Chaucer to the Modern Age, it passed through Renaissance, Age of Shakespeare, Age of Milton, Restoration drama, and from the Age of Interrogation and Anxiety to the Modern Era. The first movement of drama came when one member of the chorus separated himself from the rest, speaking lines to which the chorus collectively replied. Tragedy and Comedy also have their own emergence. Tragedy emerged out of religious observance whereas comedy has its emergence in the minds of people, who suffer from deep grief and pain and want to find some relaxation. Miracle plays and Morality plays have also contributed in the revival of drama, in the very form we find today in our literature. As far as the whole is concerned we can quote that "drama is not suddenly born out of something, it has its own long journey, the journey of evolution, the journey of decades, the journey with different forms".

Key Words: Renaissance, Restoration, Age of Interrogation and Anxiety, Chorus

English Literature began far back with the beginnings of the history of English people on the continent of Europe. The early English literature is called the Anglo-Saxon period (450-1050) or the Old English Period. The use of drama in a more narrow sense to designate a specific type of play dates from the modern era. Sophocles wrote many plays out of which only seven have survived. His most enduring plays are: *Antigone*, and *Oedipus Rex* all dealing with related characters and themes. We can divide English Drama into various ages:

Drama in Early Periods,
The Age of Chaucer,
The Early Renaissance,
The Age of Shakespeare,
The Age of Milton,
Restoration Drama,
The Age of Pope,
The Age of Johnson,
The Age of Wordsworth,
Early 19th Century, and
The Age of Interrogation and Anxiety or the Modern Age.

Beowulf is the first Old English epic which recounts the great deeds and death of Beowulf. It is written on continental Germanic theme. It's a poem of more than 3000 lines, celebrating the heroic deeds of the warrior who gives his name to the poem. The first period of Middle English Literature, like Anglo-Saxon literature had great impact on literature for future. Chorus performances continued to dominate the early plays until the time of Aeschylus, who added second actor and reduced the chorus from initial 50 to 12 performers. It was a group of people, wearing masks, who sang or chanted verses while performing dancelike movements. Drama has many other forms, having music and dance, characters and dialogues. Some major known forms of drama are: Western opera which is a dramatic art form that ascended during the Renaissance in an attempt to revive the classical Greek drama in which dialogue, dance and songs were combined. Pantomime was a type of musical comedy stage production, designed for family entertainment which developed in England during the Christmas and New Year Season. Mime is a theatrical medium where the action of a story is told through the movement of the body, without the use of speech. Creative drama includes dramatic activities and games used primarily in educational setting with children, started in U.S. in the 19th cent.

Modern English literature which really begins with Chaucer who belongs to the 2nd period of Middle English. This period lasted roughly 350 years from Norman Conquest to the end of 14th century. The English were captivated by the romantic literature of France which turned the stream of English literature into entirely different channels. This revival of English literature began in the reign of King John. The first noteworthy work produced under French influence is Layamon's "*Brut*" (1205).

The Age of Chaucer dated from 1340-1400. It was an age of transition, an age in which growth of national sentiments can be marked, where Black Death and famine are the biggest enemies of people, where we can find the corruption of church. But still, it marks the new beginning of learning. In this era we can see the dawn of learning. It also marks the era of new language. It is convenient to divide the era of Chaucer in three stages or periods like- the French period, the Italian period and the English period. The crowning and the monumental work of this period is *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer had probably made the pilgrimage to Canterbury in the spring of 1385 or 1387, and was led by this experience to the framework in which he set his

pictures of life. William Langland and John Gower were the other major writers of this era. They are known for their works like *Piers, the Plowman* and *Vox Clamantis* respectively.

After the death of Chaucer were the 100 years which are considered barren in English literature. The 15th century marks the literary barrenness, deficiency of poetic understanding, poor state of education, and political changes. In 15th century drama emerged in its real form. The origin of drama was religious. It grew out of the Liturgy of the church. The Gospel stories were illustrated by a series of living pictures in which the performers acted the story in dumb shows. *Adam* is the best known example of this type of play, written in French. The Mysteries and the Miracles plays have their origin in this era. They also grew out of early liturgical drama. There is a distinction between the two. The Mysteries dealt with subjects taken from the Bible and the Miracles with the lives of saints. The actors in these plays were all amateurs. Both seriousness and laughter characterize these plays.

Morality and Interludes were also good dramatic forms in English literature. They can be defined like- in the Mysteries and Miracle plays, serious and comic elements are interwoven. Now they part. The Morality presents the serious and the Interludes the lighter side of things. The Morality was didactic and dealt in abstractions and allegory. The Interlude was a late product of the dramatic development of Morality play. John Heywood was the most gifted writer of the Interludes.

The early Renaissance had great impact on the drama of 16th century. The influence of renaissance reached England quite late as late as the end of the 15th century. The word Renaissance means rebirth. It was the human spirit that was reborn or awakened after the long slumber of the middle Ages. Italy was the home of Renaissance. Renaissance began in Italy with Petrarch, Boccaccio, Giotto, Nicolo, Pisano, Raphael, Leonardo, Michelangelo and Machiavelli. It was an intellectual rebirth, revival of the knowledge of antiquity, new discoveries, new renaissance in England and Germany. It makes the real beginning of English drama. Seneca, developed the tragedy form.

In *Poetics* Aristotle define tragedy as- "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellishment with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.... Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality- namely, Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody."

Plautus and Terence directed the formation of comedy. The classical drama gave English drama its five acts, set scenes, and many other features. Nicholas Udall's "Ralph Roister Doister" (1553) was the earliest comedy. "Gammer Gunter's Needle" (1575) by unknown writer was another comedy of classical style. First complete tragedy was "Ferrex and Porrex" better known as "Gorboduc" (1562) by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville. Some memorable plays of this type are-Whetstone's "Right Excellent and Famous History".

In the Age of Shakespeare, drama flourished a lot. This period followed the production of Gorboduc and was a period of great confusion in English drama. The classical drama had three main characteristics:

It prescribed rigorously the unity of subject and tune and therefore implied total separation of comedy and tragedy. A tragedy ought to be pure tragedy, that is, it should strictly avoid the inclusion of the light and humorous episodes. A comedy should be pure comedy, that is, it should have no tragic elements in its composition. The three unities of time, place and action should govern the construction of a play. And the third is, there was little or no dramatic action.

The development of drama during the Age of Shakespeare was greatly influenced by the establishment of the private and public theatres. Theatres were of two kinds. First, the private theatres and secondly, the public theatres. In this Age many writers contributed to the development of drama.

Commenting on the contribution of the "University Wits" to the British drama, Nicoll writes: "The classicists had form, but no fire, the popular dramatists had interest but little sense of form. Drama, that is to say, was struggling between a well formed chill and structure less enthusiasm. The great merit of the University Wits was that they came with their passion and poetry, and their academic training to unite these two forces, and thus to give Shakespeare a pliable and fitting medium for the expression of his genius."

John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nash, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe are the best known playwrights of the era, who have contributed a lot to brighten the drama. Marlowe wrote many plays. His *Doctor Faustus* and *Edward II* made him one of the most prominent writer of the era. *Dr. Faustus* comes after *Tamburlaine* in order of time, as it shows development in Marlowe's dramatic art and style. The idea of Nemesis underlies the play because it suggests that the evil doer who transcends earthly limitations is caught in his own trap.

Shakespeare's command over English is unsurpassable. The period of Shakespeare's literary activity, which spans over 24 years is divided into four sub parts. He wrote 39 plays and more. Comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies are all his types. His tragedy is romantic and not classical.

Dryden rightly pointed out: "he was the man, who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, has the largest and most comprehensive soul".

Drama in Post-Shakespearean England began to decline and lost the wide catholicity of appeal which distinguished Shakespearean drama. Ben Johnson's works show the unity of aim underlying his work. His first play *The Case is Altered* (1598) is purely experimental in character. He was the real founder of Comedy of Manners. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher combined to produce a great number of plays. Their typical comedies are *A King or No King* (1611) and *The Scornful Lady* (1613). In comedies by George Chapman we includes *All Fools Day* (1605) and *Eastward Hoe* (1605). Thomas Middleton, Thomas Heywood and Thomas Dekker are the other playwrights of the era.

From 1625-1660 we mark the age as The Age of Milton. It was an age of poetry and verse. The restoration has its roots in this age. The authors of this periods were not endowed with exceptional talent of literature. So they turned to the ancients, particular, to the Latin writers for their guidance and inspiration.

The 19th century made remarkable advancement in novel and poetry but lagged conspicuously behind in drama and theatre. The first half of the 19th century was almost completely barren from the dramatic point of view. But in the middle of 19th century there is a radical changes in the thoughts and activities. The influence of continental dramatists brought about a revolutionary changes in British drama. Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright revolutionized British drama. His *A Doll's House* (1879) created a sensation in European literature. Ibsen pioneered the problem plays, the drama of ideas and symbolic realistic plays. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) brought back the English theatre something of distinction absent from it since Sheridan ceased to write a century before. G. B. Shaw's *Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898) launched the New Drama.

The first half of the 20th century is one of the most turbulent eras in the history of English literature. Robertson was a pioneer not only in introducing realistic themes but also in imitating realistic acting and stage productions. Realistic drama in its zeal for realistic effects had stripped itself of all those elements of entertainment – verse, music, song, dance spectacle- which are so necessary for a full blooded dramatic experience. The 20th century is called the Age of Interrogation and Anxiety, because the scientific revolution and changing social, moral, political, and economic conditions had shaken man's faith in the authority of Religion and Church. At the turn of the new century came a number of writers who were skeptical in outlook and were not touched. In this era drama was full of urbanization, which completely changed the pattern of social relationship. The growth and development of literature inevitably influenced and conditioned by the mental and moral climate of the period in which it is produced. This is the new milieu in which modern literature has been produced. It is the literature of challenge and of the reconstruction of new values.

The realistic drama, also known as the naturalistic drama or the problem play, presents a real pictures of life. Pinero was highly influenced by Ibsen. His *The Weaker Sex* is a biting social satire. John Galsworthy also belongs to the tradition of Jones and Pinero. His first play *The Silver Box* (1906) exposes the pernicious distinction between the rich and the poor. *The Skin Game* (1920) deals with the different values of the old aristocracy and the newly rich businessman.

Maugham's earlier plays had been delightful examples of the comedy of manners but they had little substances and less bite. All his plays are well constructed. *A Man of Honour* is a realistic tragedy. Sir J. M. Barrie cultivated the vein of sophisticated sentimentalism in his plays. His plays have well constructed plots, slight but charming characters, and crisp dialogue. J.M. Synge's finest comedy *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) is also based on an old legend and presents an excellent but ironical picture of Irish character. Sean O'Casey is one of the greatest figures in modern drama. He is known for his naturalistic tragicomedies on the life of the Dublin tenements in which he had been brought up. His famous play is *Juno and the Peacock* (1924). J. B. Priestley's well made conventional comedy is *When We Are Married*. He had a great contribution to the theatre.

In the mid of 20th century anti-conventionalist drama developed in its full form. The establishment of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956 gave new direction to the development of English drama. John Osborne introduced anti-hero tradition in drama from his play *Look Back in Anger* (1956). Arnold Wesker was a social realist with a sense of commitment that gave his plays a more positive quality than those of Osborne by his famous trilogy.

There was another type of revolt against the limitations of drawing room drama which denominated the Drama of Absurd. The term "Absurd" was used by French Existentialist writers as Sartre and Camus. About "Existentialism" – Camus said in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)

In universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His irremediable exile..... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity. "Theatre of the Absurd", the term is applied to a number of work in drama and prose fiction which have in common the view that the human condition is essentially absurd and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd. Avant garde drama movement originating in the 1950s and in Europe with the world view in which there was no God and life was meaningless. They had no faith in logic or rational communication, feelings that attempt construe meaning broke down into absurdity – 'absurd' in this context meaning "out of harmony" rather than "ridiculous".

The Renaissance of drama which began in the nineties of the 19th century reached its peak in the early decades of the 20th century due to the following reasons:-

- ✓ The Development of Theatre.
- ✓ Foreign Influences
- ✓ The Influences of Cinema, Radio, and T.V. in Drama.

There was another type of revolt against the limitations of drawing room drama which denominated the "Drama of Absurd" The term 'Absurd' was used by French Existential writers as Sartre and Camus to denote the essential meaninglessness of life and the burden on the individual of creating his own values in the midst of cosmic meaninglessness. Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), the Irish writer, was the most outstanding practitioner of Drama of Absurd in English, his most famous play *Waiting for Godot* (1953) depicts disturbingly and evocatively the almost futile quest for the discovery of some meaning in life. *Endgame* (1957) is even more completely negative and nihilistic.

The literature has its roots also in the movements of *expressionism* and *surrealism*, as well as in the fiction, written in 1920, of Franz Kafka. Both the mood and the dramatic form of absurdity were anticipated as early as the 1896 in Alfred Jerry's French play "*Ubu Roi*" (Ubu the King). The term was coined by Martin Esslin who wrote *The Theatre of the Absurd* in 1961.

Harold Pinter was the most gifted disciple of Beckett. His plays are quite short and set in an enclosed space, the characters are always in doubt of their function, and in fear of someone or something "outside". This tradition had included the assumptions that human beings are fairly rational creatures who live in an at least partially intelligible universe, that they are part of an ordered social structure, and that they may be capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat. But the challenges behind this message is anything but one of despair. It's a challenge to accept the human condition as it, in all its mystery and absurdity and, to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shading of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it

a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in this last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.”

Two of the most famous plays of the theatre of the absurd are Eugene Ionesco's *Bald Soprano* (1950) and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). The sources of the theatre of the absurd can be found in the principles of Surrealism, Dadaism and Existentialism; in the tradition of the music hall, vaudeville and burlesque. Akin to the theatre of the absurd is the so-called theatre of cruelty, derived from the ideas of Antonin Artaud who writing in the 1930s, anticipated a drama that would assault its audience with movement and sound, producing a shocking reaction. Elements of the theatre of cruelty can be found in the cruel acts and abusive language of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

The most prominent names associated with The Theatre of the Absurd are: Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Edward Albee, and Tom Stoppard. Gay themes also made their presence felt during the later decades of 20th cent.

Hence it can be concluded that drama has its roots in ancients and they were too strong and what we find today is very impulsive. Drama is a form and a literature in itself. It is not a slave of ages and atmosphere. It made its own way very clearly, through the decades. Changes in forms, themes, structures, composition never affect it in its journey of revival. It became popular in every era with new forms and subjects.

References:

1. Aristotle, Butcher Henry Samuel, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, Dodo Press, 2006.
2. Nicoll, Allardyce, *A History of English Drama*, vol. 1st, 4th Edition, Cambridge University Press, 1952.
3. Esslin, Martin, *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd*. . New York: Overlook Press, 1973.
4. Abrams, M.H., Harpman Geoffrey Galt, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 10th edition. Copyright 2012, Wordsworth, Part of Cengage learning, 2013.p.1.
5. Evans, Ifor, Benjamin, *A Short History of English Drama*, 2nd Edition, MacGibbon & Kee, 1965.