

The origin of Indian dramatic art is legendary, as it, "is said to have its birth in the *Devaloka*, or in the region of the gods, and Mahadeva or Shiva one of the great Hindu Trinity - was its originator."<sup>1</sup>

The sage Bharata is regarded to be the first to introduce the dramatic art in India, that is why, "the actors are all called *Bharataputras* or the sons of Bharata and almost everything commented with drama or the stage is named after him, and the oldest and most authoritative treatise on Indian dramaturgy is named after him as *Bharata Natyashastra*."<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside the legends, when we come to tangible historical evidence, we find that the most ancient works of the *Hindus*, like the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Srimad Bhagwata* abound in dramatic elements. In *Rigveda* the dramatic element in the form of dialogue is found. Similarly, in an Upanishad called *Brihadaranyaka*, "we come across excellent conversations of dramatic character between the highly learned lady Vidushi Gargi Vachaknavi and the erudite sage Yajnavalkya and that between the latter and his wife Maitreyi "<sup>3</sup>

In some other *Upanishads* also dramatic dialogues are found as, "between *Yama* and *Nachiketa* in *Katha* and that between *Shvetaketu* and his father - both of

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<sup>1</sup> Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, *The Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009)1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.25

which contain the very essence of all Upanishadic teachings”<sup>4</sup>. After legends and the ancient works of *hindus*, like the *Vedas* , the *Upanishads* , the *Ramayana* , the *Mahabharata* and the *Srimadbhagwata* we also find the dramatic element and it's development during the Buddhistic period when Sanskrit drama reached its great height. The term '*Nata*' and '*Nataka*' are dramatic , meaning an 'actor' and 'drama' respectively, find their existence in the documents belonging to Buddhistic periods. Along with the literary treasure we also find the traces of drama existing in Buddhistic period out of some dramatic discoveries, as there were found the, “fragments of three dramas on palm leaves of great antiquity at Turfan in central Asia”<sup>5</sup>

Among earliest Sanskrit dramatists the most distinguished are Kalidasa , Bhasa and Bhavabhuti. Mahakavi Bhasa is the first playwright in Sanskrit literature. He has written thirteen plays , taking the story of the *Ramayana* , the *Mahabharata*, *Puranas* and *Lok kathas*. Kalidas' immortal piece *Shakuntala* a dramatic romance of the surpassing beauty is undoubtedly one of the master-pieces in world's literature. Bhavabhuti stands second only to Kalidasa in the field of Sanskrit dramatic literature. He has written three dramas - *Mahavircharitam*, *Malti madhava* and *Uttararamcharita*.

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<sup>4</sup> Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, *The Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009) 25-26

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 39

Taking inspiration from the rich tradition of dramatic art Indian theatre remained occupied with plays written in regional languages as they were comprehensible to the audience of the time. During the British period English being a foreign language was hardly intelligible to the people and, therefore, the playwrights too found it difficult to write crisp, natural, spontaneous and dignified dialogue in English. Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote the first play. Then Michael Madhusudan Dutt translated his plays - *Ratnavali* (1858), *Sermista* (1859) and *Is this called civilization?* (1871) from Bengali into English. Ramkinoo Dutt wrote *Manipura Tragedy* (1893). Indian English drama, thus made a humble beginning in Bengal in nineteenth century. So in pre-independence days drama in English could not occupy that established place which was enjoyed by the plays in mother tongue. But the three distinguished personalities Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and H.N. Chattopadhyaya, made significant contribution to the development of Indian English drama in pre-independence days. Rabindranath Tagore being a prolific dramatist, himself rendered some of his Bengali plays into English. Sri Aurobindo wrote plays directly in English and successfully imitated the blank verse drama of the Elizabethans. He wrote five complete and six incomplete poetic plays between 1891 and 1916. Both as a poet and playwright H.N.Chattopadhyaya is noticeable for his fecundity and versatility. *Five Plays* (1937) has a Galsworthian flair for social awareness and realism. Some minor

dramatists as S.K.Ghose's *The Prince of Destiny* , C.D.Gupta's *Calif for Day*, Dhan Gopal Mukherjee's *Layla Majnu*, C.S.Nazir's *The First Paris Baronet*, D.M.Wadia's *The Indian Heroine*, P.P.Meherjee's *Dolly Parsen*, P.V.R.Raju's *The Prince Regained* and *Lord Likely*, Krishnamacharya's *Harichandra*, Krishna Iyer's *Lord Clive*, S.Krishna Iyer's *The Hanging Doctor*, R.C.Narayanswami Aiyar's *Scenes from Social Life : Varasulka* and K. R. Ramaswami Sastri's *Harishchandra and Droupadi* deserve mention in the history of Indian English drama. A.S.P.Ayyar (1889-1963), T.P.Kailasam (1884-1946), Bharti Sarabhai, J.M.Lobo Prabhu, S.Fyzee Rahmin and Sudhindra Nath Ghose are some milestones in the development of Indian English drama. B.S.Mardhekar's *Prometheus Rebound* is a rendering of the Greek myth successfully dealt with Aeschylus , Shelley and Andry Gide. Indian English drama despite some monumental works could not attain the same artistic excellence as was shared by poetry , prose , and fiction in pre- independence days.

Although in post-independence India too the pace of the development of Indian English drama has been slow, as during that period too the Indian regional languages more or less monopolised the theatre. "Unlike poetry and fiction, drama has not registered very notable gains during the post-Independence period." <sup>6</sup>Still the plays of Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma and Gurucharan Das

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<sup>6</sup> M.K.Naik, A History of Indian English Literature (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982) 267

were successfully staged in Europe and U.S.A. And over a period of time the typical Indian feeling of inhibition that English was a foreign language disappeared and Indian English dramatists could mould English to express social, cultural and literary values. The efforts of Lakhan Deb, Asif Currimbhoy and Girish Karnad are laudable in this respect. Pratap Sharma's two plays *A Touch of Brightness* and *The Professor Has a Warcry* can not only be performed on stage but also reflected for local colour and criticism of social hypocrisy. Gieve Patel's *Princes* dealt with a conflict between two *Parsi* families over the possession of a child who becomes an invalid and later dies. Lakhan Deb wrote three plays, *Tiger claw*, *Vivekanand* and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting*. Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) includes *Nalini* : A comedy, *Marriage Poem* : A Tragi-Comedy and *The Sleepwalkers* : An Indo American Farce. These plays are noticeable for considerable imagination, bold thematic experiments, masterly use of irony and fantasy. Gurucharan Das's *Larin's Sahib* (1970), a play in three acts deals with nineteenth century colonial India. It is a successful historical play. Girish Karnad (1938 - ), actor and film director, is originally a Kannada dramatist who wrote *Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. He successfully translated *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana* into English. M.V.Rama Sarma's *collected plays* (1982) is a collection of eleven plays on a wide variety of themes. Santha Rama Rau brilliantly adopted E.M.Foster's famous novel *A Passage to India*. P.A.Krishnaswami's *The Flute of Krishna* (1950) is a love play.

M.Krishnamurti's *The Cloth of Gold* (1951) is a dance drama set in feudal times , Uma Maheswer's *Buddha* and *Sita in her Sorrow*, V.N.Bhushan's *Samyakta* and *Anklet Bells*, Manjeri Isvaran's *Hira Bai* and *Yama and Yami* are some important plays. K.S.R.Sastri's *Droupadi* is an interesting retelling of the Mahabharata story. D.M.Borgaonkar's *Image Breakers* is a problem play on the institution of marriage. The plays of Krishna Gorowara ironically expose urban sophistication in *The Way up, And A Mourning Do We Go, Call It a Day, Refineries Unlimited* and *Indo Anglians in Anglia*. Pritish Nandy's *Rites For Plebeian Statue*, Shree Devi Singh's *The Purple Braided People*, P.S.Vasudeva's *The Sunflower*, S.Raman's *Karma*, V.K.Gokak's *The Goddess Speaks*, K.Nagarjan's *Chidembram : A Chronical Play*, M.D.Mejwani's *Deep Roots*, Shiva K. Kumar's historical play *Line of Mars*, Sayed Amanuddin's *The King Who Sold His Wife*, Ahmad Akhtar's *Anarkali*, K.S.Duggal's *To Face a Widow : Six Radio Plays* and Masti Venkatesa Iyengar's *Kalidasa* deserve a place in Indian English drama.

Thus, despite limitations and hinderances Indian English drama has come to maturity and it has shown its colour of liberation from the yoke of British influence.

One of the major contributors to the present strong establishment of Indian English drama is Girish Karnad. Born in Matheran, near Bombay, in 1938 he is a renowned actor , film producer and playwright. He wrote three plays in Kannada -

*Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964) and *Hayavadana* (1971) while, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* was published in 1997. He himself translated *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana* into English and by virtue of these English renderings, he has carved out for himself a privileged place in Indian English Drama. “The myths, legends and folk forms are reflectorts of the racial and cultural unconsciousness and all ritualistic performances.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, “Karnad employs mythical, historical, and folk themes as the skeleton for his plays, but they are identified with the contemporary scene.”<sup>8</sup> His first play *Yayati* reinterprets an ancient myth from the *Mahabharata* in modern context. His second play *Tughlaq* is a historical play which deals with the complex and paradoxical character of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq who ruled over India for twenty six years. In this play also he represents the Kannada tradition of writing historical play. His last play *Hayadavana* is a bold and successful experiment on folk theme.

Its plot comes from *Kathasaritsagar*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. But Karnad's play is mainly based on Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in *The Transposed Heads*. In *Hayavadana* Karnad uses successfully the conventions and motifs of folk tales and folk theatre. Masks, curtains , dolls and the story within a story have been deftly employed to create a bizarre world. There is an element of

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<sup>7</sup> P.D.Nimsarkar, *Women In Girish Karnad's Plays: A Critical Perspective* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2009) 34

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Iros Vaja, *Myths in Girish Karnad's Plays: A Critical Study* (Jaipur: Paradise Publishers, 2010) 19.

farce and satire, especially in the subplots in *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. Indeed, Karnad follows the traditions of Kannada plays. His another play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* examines the inner life of this warrior, political visionary and dreamer. The figure of Tipu Sultan has continued to dominate Indian and British imagination for over two centuries, as the endless flow of scholarly works, ballads, plays and novels about his tempestuous life. What, however is less well known is that this man who spent a large part of his life on horseback, maintained a record of his dreams, which he kept concealed from his nearest associates. This play was commissioned by the BBC and broadcast in Britain on the fiftieth anniversary of Indian Independence. Describing the significant contribution of Girish Karnad in Indian English drama Kirtinath Kurtkoti rightly says that the “new playwrights like Girish karnad have been able to bring to drama a first hand knowledge of the practical demands of the stage and a better understanding of dramatic style and technique”.<sup>9</sup>

Girish Karnad is a pioneer in new-drama and all his plays can be performed on stage. The neo-literary movement throws a vivid light on the disparities in our social life. It aims at reconciling paradoxes and contraries in life.

The plays of Girish Karnad show all the depth of this complexity. They are built on

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<sup>9</sup> Girish Karnad, “Introduction” *Hayavadana* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975) V.

paradoxes. Mostly it is considered that Indian English plays can not be performed on stage because the playwrights have little knowledge of the theatre. But Girish Karnad can easily correlate his plays with the exigencies of contemporary theatre. *Tughlaq* was successfully performed in Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi and English. Thus, “*Tughlaq* was an immediate success on the stage.”<sup>10</sup> *Hayavadana* too has been a success on the stage. As a dramatist, Girish Karnad hits at the consciousness of the self. It also implies problems of selfhood, search of identity, isolation and frustration. It affirms the dignity of man. “*Tughlaq*, the second play of Girish Karnad, is based on history which is presented in the existential framework.”<sup>11</sup> The events and incidents in Karnad's plays are organised into an artistic whole with a view of creating unity of impression or effect. Karnad's characters are also vividly delineated. He observes economy, precision and concentration in portraying his characters. His characters and settings are plot-centred. Karnad chooses apt and appropriate words from a rich treasure of vocabulary. His words are suggestive and reveal both character and situation. He writes dialogue in lucid, pointed and precise language which is conspicuous for flexibility. They are crisp and full of dramatic verve.

There have been several dramatists who have made significant contribution to

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<sup>10</sup> Girish Karnad, “Introduction” *Tughlaq* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975) V.

<sup>11</sup> Punam Pandey, *The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Study in existentialism* (New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2010) 90

the development of the Indian drama in English. In their hands Indian English drama became more experimental, innovative and creative. Drama for them was not simply 'Performatory ritual' but it was 'Participatory ritual'. Badas Sircar brought drama not only 'from page to stage' but also 'from page to street'. Badal Sircar, born in 1925 in Calcutta is an influential Indian dramatist and theatre director. Being a town planner he worked in India, England and Nigeria then he entered theatre as an actor, moved to direction but soon started writing plays. Being influenced by Richard Schener, the founder of 'the Performance Group', an experimental theatre troupe and Jerzy Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre', he established his 'Third Theatre'. *Evam Indrajit* is a Bengali play written in 1963 by Badal Sircar and translated into English by girish Karnad, which catapulted him into instant fame. Then he wrote *Baki Itihas (That Other History, 1965)*, *Tringsha Satabdi (The Third Millennium, 1966)*, *Pagla Ghora (The Crazy Horse, 1967)* and *Sesh Nei (There Is No End 1969)*. In 1967, he formed 'Shatabdi' theatre group, which in five years of it's existence performed several of his plays and had deep impact on contemporary theatre, especially after 1969 when it started performing plays both indoors and outside amidst people and evolved the '*Angan Manch*' (Courtyard Stage) and inspired by the direct communication techniques of Jatra a rural theatre form, his 'Third Theatre' eventually became a protest against prevalent commercial theatre establishment. It added a new realism to

contemporary dramaturgy , and thus started a new wave of experimental theatre in Indian theatre. His 'Third Theatre' involved 'Street Plays', with actors being attired no differently than the audience. The formal bindings of the 'Proscenium Theatre' were also given up. The main aim of third theatre is to change the thoughts and beliefs of spectators and leading them to some action, laying emphasis on human body. It is literally a free theatre in the sense that no tickets are sold. It is essentially flexible, portable and inexpensive. Sircar became famous with the writing of the play *Evam Indrajit* in 1963. The most significant of Sircar's later plays, based on the concept of the third theatre and translated into English are *Procession* (1972), *Bhoma* (1974) and *Stale News* (1979). *Procession*(*Michhil*) has been an immensely successful play. Badal Sircar wrote this play having in mind that Calcutta is a city of procession. "While writing it other dominant images drawn from the period crept into the play such as the generation gap and the image of the young man getting killed again and again..."<sup>12</sup>. The play *Procession* is about the search of a real home - a new society based on equality. The chief concern of the play is to show a real way to a new society in which man would not exploit other man and each would work according to his abilities and gets according to his needs.

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<sup>12</sup> Badal Sircar, *Three Plays* (Calcutta : Seagullbooks, 1985) VIII.

The play *Stale News* revolves round a young man who is bombarded with shattering bits of information full of contradictions and contrasts which come to him as stale news. Sircar and other members of 'Shatabdi' team collected various news items of the exploitation and oppression and made a collage that portrays man. Sircar adopted a totally different approach while writing *Bhoma*. It was not written at a stretch nor was it written as a play. For three years different scenes were written down. *Bhoma* is a dramatization of the life of the oppressed peasants through a series of scenes in which they are socially and economically exploited. In the play various problems of common people can be observed. Sircar's another play *Evam Indrajeet* looks at idealism and realism. The protagonist Indrajeet is an idealist who tries to break himself from the laws of the society, by doing things differently and ultimately ends in putting forward a question relating to the mundane life. It starts with a writer, who painfully strives to write a play but in vain. He is goaded to write about those sitting in the audience, only to find them as undramatic. Here Indrajeet is described in terms of the society and not in terms of his own existence. There are also Amal, Bimal and Kamal who conform to the dictate of the society, and prefer to run along the same rope as long as possible. They function as cogs in the wheel, providing a kind of an amusement with their humdrum existence. The realism of *Evam Indrajeet* is a psychological realism with his revolutionary tendencies against the society.

'The theatre of roots' is the most important post independence theatrical movement in India. Everyone involved in Indian theatre since the 1960s has been part of it. People have worked against it, promoted it and criticised it. As a matter of fact the roots movement began in India shortly after its independence. Playwrights and directors made a move to liberate the theatre from the colonial fetters. In order to decolonise their work the playwrights turned to their indigenous roots in religious rituals, classical dance, popular entertainment and Sanskrit esthetics theory to see what they could use to create a modern Indian theatre. Therefore, in a sense the theatre of roots is part of the larger process of De-colonisation, and it has both shaped and been shaped by the long and complicated process of nation-building that followed independence. It is quite interesting to note that the two playwrights, being proposed for the detailed study are pioneers in the movement of decolonisation of Indian theatre. Their consistent attempts to fuse the performance idioms of their indigenous traditions with the western are well evident in their plays.

Therefore, the objective of the proposed study will be:

- To have a historical perspective of Indian theatre from earliest time till date.
- To examine the ideological roots of the 'post-colonial' efforts both in analysis and theatre practice.
- To make a comparative study of Girish Karnad and Badal Sircar with special reference to their post-colonial stance.
- To study the post-colonial canon both in terms of its idioms and ideology.

**The proposed chapters will be as follows:**

Chapter-I : From Roots to Roots : A Historical Perspective of Indian Theatre.

Chapter-II : Matrix of Decolonization : Tradition and Modernity in Indian Theatre.

Chapter-III : The Archetypal Arch : The Plays of Girish Karnad.

Chapter-IV : From Page to Pavement : The Plays of Badal Sircar

Chapter-V : Idiom and Ideology : Language of New Theatre.

Chapter-VI : Conclusion.

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