



The Development and Significance of Myths in Indian English

Drama: Pre- and Post-Independence

Nidhi Verma, Research Scholar, English, The Glocal University Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Vandana Srivastava, Associate Professor, Research Supervisor, Glocal School of Art & Social Science, The Glocal University, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh

ABSTRACT

Drama is one of the most dynamic literary genres because it can interact directly with an audience in real time and provide viewers with a cathartic experience. It has its own universe, where the behaviors, feelings, and attitudes of the characters reflect human sensitivities and experiences. It is writing that comes to life, bringing readers to tears, laughing, and voices. In all of world literature, it is the most potent genre. Greece, Rome, England, and India all have longstanding dramatic traditions, demonstrating the importance of theatre in these societies' politics, philosophy, religion, and culture. Following the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century, England is where English drama first emerged and developed. The current research article examines the evolution of drama worldwide as well as its history in India, with a focus on the study of pre- and post-independence drama.

Keywords: Development, Significance, Myths, Indian English Drama, Pre- And Post-Independence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Greece, Rome, England, and India all have longstanding dramatic traditions, demonstrating the importance of theatre in these societies' politics, philosophy, religion, and culture. Following the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century, England is where English drama first emerged and developed. Outside of London, there was a primitive kind of theatre known as "Tableau" before the Norman conquest. In England, the Church was very important to people's lives, and clergymen's plays were performed in churches. These plays, known as Miracle Plays, depicted the lives of saints and Christ and were based on moralistic, ethical, and theological themes. Craft guilds started staging mystery plays outside of churches in the thirteenth century, and they included satirical aspects. In France and Italy, plays were performed on stages, but in England, they were frequently presented on movable carts known as "pageants." Drama gradually moved from the clergy to the average person. London developed into a hub for theatrical activity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, under Elizabeth I's reign. The first known play was written in 1541 and was a comedy by Nicholas Udall named Ralph Roister Doister. With playwrights like Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Lodge, George Peele, and Thomas Nash, English drama reached its pinnacle during the Renaissance. A group of guys known as "The University Wits" were primarily concerned in composing plays intended for public performance.

Under William Shakespeare's direction, English drama reached its pinnacle. Shakespeare penned comedies, tragedies, and historical plays. He is acknowledged as the unchallenged master of English theatre and has influenced writers everywhere. English drama underwent several shifts in subject matter and technique after 1610. A new generation of playwrights emerged, specialising on thrilling and exciting plays. Among these undiscovered playwrights were John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont. In the eighteenth century in England, drama waned as the Restoration comedy arrived but could not last. The entrance of Irish writers George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, as well as Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, in the later nineteenth century brought about another major upheaval on the London stage and helped to revitalise domestic English drama.

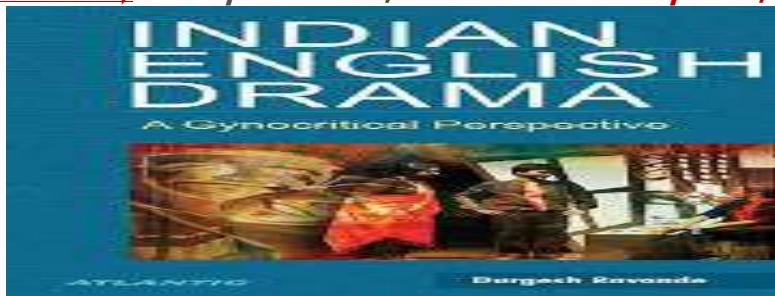


Figure 1: Indian English drama

Other playwrights all over the world, such as Indian English dramatists Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani, whose plays are the focus of this study project, were influenced by these writers. The history of theatre in India dates back thousands of years. Indian theatre, which is essentially indigenous in form and essence, is thought to be the most genuine and ancient art form. In ancient India, temples hosted plays based on mythology, tales, and sacred texts. It was a combination of dance and music honouring the gods; later on, story recitation was included. Epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana also try to define drama. Famous Indian poet and Ramayana author Valmiki uses the term "Nat" or "Nartaka," which refers to an actor or entertainer. Drama, according to the Mahabharata, is an amalgam of action, plot, and poetry.

India has a long history of theatrical performance dating back to the Vedic era. Traditionally, Indian drama is credited to its creator, the dramatist Bhasa or Bharata, who lived about the seventh century A.D. In his widely read book Natyashastra, Bharata refers to drama as the "Fifth Veda" or "NatakoPanchamo Veda". Drama, also known as Natya, is described as a "imitation" of the trilokya, or "Three Worlds." It stands for life, with all of its pleasures and hardships. Drama's dual purposes are to entertain and educate audiences on topics related to moral elevation, happiness, and peace. All facets of drama, including stage design, acting, conversation, characterization, music, and story development, are covered in Natyashastra. This passage from the Natyashastra, which reads, "The combination called natya is a mixture of rasa, bhavas, vrittis, pravittis, siddhi, svaras, abhinayas, dharmic instruments song and theatre house," captures the essence of Bharata's poetics of play.

South India boasted of a great literary and dramatic history known as "Sangam Literature," which was more of a dance-play than true drama, at the same time that Sanskrit drama was flourishing. Sanskrit drama was eventually limited to the pastime of professors and learned men and moved to the courts, where it was patronised by kings and nobles. Political shifts further restricted its growth. Regional or vernacular languages became more popular throughout time. It is noteworthy to add that Indian playwrights are still inspired by Sanskrit drama to this day.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ahmad's (2021) work offers a perceptive examination of how mythological themes were incorporated into Indian English drama before to India's independence. The study explores the ways in which playwrights from this century used myth to provide social and political commentary on the state of society today, highlighting the dual function of myths as symbols of cultural legacy and subversive means of subversive opposition to colonial authority. Ahmad describes a number of important plays and playwrights, including Harindranath Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore, demonstrating how they used old mythology into their stories to promote a feeling of cultural pride and national identity. The author contends that these dramatists used myth to both challenge and subvert colonial ideas in addition to preserving cultural traditions. This twin strategy struck a powerful chord with the audiences of the era by offering a complex kind of resistance that was both political and cultural.

Bhattacharya (2022) investigates how myths were reinterpreted and placed in new contexts in Indian English drama after independence. This study focuses on the ways that playwrights in India after independence have modified ancient myths to represent the country's changing



social and political climate. Bhattacharya showcases the plays of prominent modern dramatists like Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, showing how these writers dissect and reassemble mythic stories to tackle topics like modernity, caste, and gender. According to the author, myths are frequently used in the post-independence era to question the conventional norms that uphold societal injustices and to criticise current ones. These playwrights cultivate a critical consciousness by challenging the audience to reevaluate their own ideas and the society institutions they support through the rewriting of myths.

Desai (2023) examines how modernism and mythology interact in Indian English play, highlighting the ways in which playwrights use these aspects to reflect current social challenges. The study highlights significant developmental stages as it follows the development of Indian English drama from its colonial beginnings to the present. According to Desai, myths are an essential storytelling device that enable playwrights to address contemporary challenges while preserving a link to their cultural past. The article offers in-depth studies of plays by well-known dramatists, illustrating how mythological motifs are reworked to tackle concerns like globalisation, identity, and societal change. Desai's work is noteworthy for its thorough analysis and attention to how flexible and resilient myth is in the face of modernity. The author comes to the conclusion that myths' ongoing significance in Indian English theatre highlights their continuing ability to communicate intricate cultural and social narratives.

Iyer (2021) explores the theatrical works of renowned Indian playwright Girish Karnad, who is well-known for his use of mythological themes. The essay looks at how Karnad uses a combination of myth and fact to comment on current social challenges. Iyer analyses a number of Karnad's plays, such as "Hayavadana" and "Tughlaq," emphasising the ways in which Karnad uses myths as instruments for social criticism and philosophical investigation in addition to serving as story devices. The analysis highlights Karnad's singular talent for contrasting the legendary with the everyday, highlighting the underlying conflicts and inconsistencies in contemporary Indian society. According to Iyer, the works of Karnad demonstrate the dynamic interplay between modernity and tradition, in which myths are reinterpreted to both confront and reflect current reality. The essay emphasises how myths in Karnad's plays have the power to transform, contending that they offer a critical prism through which viewers can examine their own sociocultural environments.

Kaur (2023) offers a thorough analysis of the ways in which mythical concepts are incorporated and modified in Indian theatre today. Her research is based on an investigation of several contemporary plays that retell myths from antiquity, emphasising the dynamic interaction between classic narratives and modern settings. According to Kaur, these mythological ideas are changed rather than just repurposed in order to speak to contemporary social, political, and cultural concerns. She names a number of major themes, such as the investigation of identity and belonging, the challenge of historical narratives, and the disruption of patriarchal systems. Mythology is a powerful tool for contemporary narrative in Indian theatre because playwrights modify tales to reflect modern circumstances, offering fresh viewpoints and challenging conventional wisdom.

Rao (2022) highlights the renaissance of Indian English drama and the critical role mythology plays in this movement. According to his view, mythical stories and motifs have played a significant role in reestablishing a connection between contemporary audiences and their cultural past. Rao talks about how playwrights like Girish Karnad and others have successfully incorporated mythological themes into their stories to create works that are steeped in traditional legend but resonate with modern challenges. He emphasises how myths may be used to address a variety of issues, from larger societal problems to personal identity crises. Rao claims that this comeback is marked by a fusion of creativity with respect for the past, enabling myths to act as a link across different generations and cultural backgrounds.

Sharma's (2023) In order to confront post-colonial identity and cultural politics, modern Indian playwrights combine and reinterpret myths, as explored in the article "Post-colonial

Mythmaking in Indian English drama," which was published in Postcolonial Text. Sharma looks at how these myths have been modified to represent national identity, colonial history, and conflicts between tradition and modernity. A variety of dramatic works that use mythical narratives to question and navigate post-colonial realities are included in the research, underscoring the changing role of myth in contemporary Indian drama.

3. IMPACT AND INFLUENCE OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGY ON ENGLISH DRAMA

Indian mythology has had a significant influence on English theatre, greatly enhancing the works' subject richness and cultural resonance. Indian mythology, with its wide range of tales, personas, and philosophical foundations, has given English playwrights a distinctive fabric to incorporate into their plays, bringing both familiarity and exoticism to audiences around the world.

Indian mythology has had a tremendous influence on English play, mostly because it broadens and enhances the thematic range of plays. Dramatists like as Rabindranath Tagore and Girish Karnad have skillfully incorporated Indian myths into their pieces, employing them to delve into intricate subjects like destiny, selfhood, and the human experience. Plays of Tagore, like "Chitra" and "Chandalika," create a bridge between Eastern and Western perceptions by fusing aspects of Hindu mythology with universal human emotions. Similarly, Karnad's "Hayavadana" and "Naga-Mandala" delve extensively into folktales and classical mythology, providing novel insights on social conventions and existential questions.

Indian mythology has sparked intercultural discussion in English play. These stories have been used by playwrights outside of India, who have drawn inspiration from Indian mythology to explore issues of spirituality, mysticism, and the collision of civilizations. This blending of mythological aspects from many civilizations enhances the theatrical experience while also promoting a better awareness of the diversity of cultures around the world.

Indian mythology also has an impact on artistic innovation in addition to topic investigation. Indian stories' rich visual imagery, symbolic meanings, and ritualistic components have influenced English drama's innovative staging and narrative structures. Hybrid forms that push the bounds of convention and open up new channels for artistic expression are the result of this blending of Western theatrical traditions with Eastern mythological components.

Indian mythology continues to have a significant influence on English play by offering a rich source of stories, metaphors, and universally relatable philosophical ideas. Its capacity to cut over linguistic and cultural barriers enhances dramatic storytelling and provides a rich environment for playwrights to explore timeless topics and spark provocative conversations about the nature of humanity. The impact of Indian mythology continues to be a vital part of English drama's evolution, which adds to its ongoing relevance and appeal in modern theatrical settings.

4. MYTHOLOGY IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Pre-Independence Indian English drama combined traditional Indian storytelling with Western dramatic forms and ideas, frequently drawing significantly from mythology. The modern exploration of mythical themes in Rabindranath Tagore's plays, such "Chitra" and "Chandalika," is one notable example. By drawing on mythology, Tagore connects with India's rich cultural past and delves into more profound philosophical and social themes.

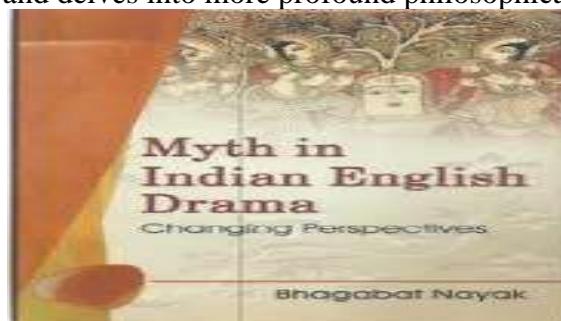


Figure 2: Myth in Indian English drama

Harindranath Chattopadhyay, another notable playwright, included mythological themes in his plays such as "Chitralekha" and "Mahishasura." These plays frequently portrayed Hindu mythological figures and tales, giving them a contemporary perspective and frequently touching on morality, identity, and social conventions.

In addition to being purely decorative, mythology was used in Pre-Independence Indian English drama to examine moral issues and universal human challenges. It also asserted a distinct Indian cultural identity within the confines of English-language theatre. This blending of old tales with contemporary issues contributed to the development of a distinctive theatrical heritage that still has an impact on Indian theatre today.

5. ROLE OF MYTHS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Mythology was still a major theme in Indian English drama post-independence, but there was a fresh emphasis on exploring and reinterpreting classic stories in new settings. Myths have been used by playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, among others, to tackle existential themes and intricate socio-political topics that are pertinent to contemporary India. Plays by Girish Karnad, like "Hayavadana" and "Naga-Mandala," are renowned for their in-depth exploration of Indian mythology. Karnad deftly challenges ideas of identity, gender roles, and the struggle between tradition and modernization by fusing folktales and classical myths with current issues. Characters in his plays frequently struggle with their legendary counterparts, making it difficult to distinguish between the past and the present.

Similar to this, in plays like "Ghashiram Kotwal," Vijay Tendulkar employed mythology as a prism through which to examine modern society. The drama, which is set against the historical backdrop of Pune, draws comparisons between political corruption in post-Independence India and the power conflicts found in legendary tales. Tendulkar's method demonstrates how myths can be used as allegories to shed light on current social and political concerns.

Myths are not only historical accounts in post-Independence Indian English drama; they are also active tools for examining and challenging the intricacies of Indian society. Playwrights are still challenging and reinterpreting cultural norms through the use of mythology, providing insights into the changing Indian identity and its ongoing conversation with tradition and modernity. This exploration of mythology highlights how important it is to Indian English drama today as a creative and analytical tool.

6. CONCLUSION

From the pre-Independence to the post-Independence periods, Indian English play has made frequent use of mythology as an effective device for telling stories. In addition to helping people connect with their cultural heritage, myths have also been used to question and reshape society norms, as evidenced by the sophisticated reinterpretations of Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar in later years, and by Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyay in their early explorations of mythological themes. The aforementioned dramatists have exhibited the timeless significance of mythology in contemplating India's intricate socio-political terrain, providing profound understandings of identity, customs, and the continuous discourse between the past and present. Mythology is still a vital and essential component of Indian English play, helping to connect ancient stories with modern reality and enhancing the theatrical experience with its enduring resonance.

REFERENCES

1. Ahmad, A. (2021). The mythic vision in Indian English drama: An analysis of pre-independence works. *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 56(1), 45-60.
2. Bhattacharya, S. (2022). Rewriting myths in post-independence Indian drama. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 39(2), 125-140.
3. Desai, R. (2023). Myths and modernity: The evolution of Indian English drama. *Contemporary Drama in English*, 30(1), 77-92.
4. Iyer, N. (2021). Myth and reality in the plays of Girish Karnad. *Literature and Belief*, 41(3), 210-225.



5. Kaur, P. (2023). Mythological constructs in contemporary Indian theatre. *Journal of Indian Theatre Studies*, 28(4), 33-48.
6. Khan, S. Y. (2023). The Subcontinental Postcolonialism—a Counternarrative (Part 1, 'Pakistan'). *Znakovivremena-Časopis za filozofiju, religiju, znanostidruštvenupraksu*, 26(94/95), 189-212.
7. Pandey, N. (2023). Indian Dramatists and Their Contribution in English Literature. *Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy and Culture*, 4(1), 102-110.
8. Rajak, S. (2023). 'Queering' Indian Theatre: A study of queer representation in post-independence, English-language theatre.
9. Rao, S. (2022). The role of mythology in the resurgence of Indian English drama. *Drama Review*, 50(2), 201-215.
10. Re-Written, M. Y. T. H. S. (2023). Chapter One Myths Re-Written: Indian Writing In English. A Case Study Ludmila Volná. *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Fiction*, 2.
11. Sengupta, R., Jha, A., Khuntia, D., Kumar, P., & Padmapati, K. (2023). Indian Screen Cultures and the Redefinition of Nationhood: The Evolution of Contemporary Productions and the Myth of 'National Security'. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 1-20.
12. Sharma, M. (2023). Post-colonial mythmaking in Indian English drama. *Postcolonial Text*, 18(3), 56-72.
13. Sharma, S. K. (2023). Indian English Literature: Issues and Dimensions. *Akshara*, 137.
14. Shende, Y. T., & Wagh, M. R. (2023). Indian english drama: A study of post-independence perspective. *Delta National Journal Of Multidisciplinary Research*, 10(spl), 124-131.
15. Zaidi, N. (Ed.). (2023). *Indian Modernities: Literary Cultures from the 18th to the 20th Century*. Taylor & Francis.

