

Theatricality in Arun Mukherjee's *Mareech the Legend***Boopathi P****PHD research scholar****Department of English Literature****School of English Literary Studies****The English and Foreign Languages University****Hyderabad****ABSTRACT**

The imitation of action had turned out to be the act of performance through the medium of “imaginative recreation” in the period of Aristotle and later the same act got manifold into many sub genres of drama. In fact, the difference between the drama and the play was understood only in the modern period, as the writers started to write the same play in the different forms. Many critics of Greek and classical drama are of the opinion that even in the Aristotle period the playwrights demarcated the difference between the text as performance and the text as reading, yet the text was used broadly for performance rather than reading. Moreover, in the Greek period the drama was enacted during the time of festival and the people were also interested in watching the drama performance, since the performance contained Greek mythologies and projected them in such a way the audience were carried away both by enactment and by the theme of the drama, be it was comedy or tragedy. Hence, the clear cut demarcation can be drawn between drama as text and as performance, by looking at the origin of drama and from which it was developed into tragedy, comedy, and of course tragicomedy in the Elizabethan period. In the dawn of seventeenth century, the British began to colonize the east and started to impose its culture on the people, by doing so it totally ruined the eastern culture and civilization, and replaced the western culture, which was entirely alien to them. It goes without saying, in the process the eastern art and literature had also been colonized by the British and imposed the new genres in literature. In a nutshell, the eastern writers had adapted the writings, techniques, forms, and theories of colonizer in order to have what is called “syncretic literature,” drama being an evolved form of literature is not an exceptional one. The very genre of drama itself had a two- fold dimension in the pre-independent period as folk and classical. It later developed to be the post-independent theater by fusing the folk and the classical, which is called in the contemporary times as “third theater” by Badal Sarkar and other playwrights. This paper will try to analyze the play *Mareech the Legend* by Arun Mukherjee against such background and find the space for theatricality in the light of post-independent theatrical trends.

Key words: Theatricality, Greek Theatre, Classical and Folk Theatre, Postcolonial Theatre, Syncretic Theatre post-independent Indian Theatre, etc.

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The function of literature was considered to be the act of giving pleasure both in the classical period and in the modern period, yet the way in which the literature gives pleasure necessarily differs from genre to genre, which is vividly understandable in the genre of drama, where the text is transformed to the act of performance primarily by the playwright and later through the actors. The very text is shown to audience as an enactment in which what is called visual medium of literature is indeed inexplicably conformed. In the classical period both in the west and in the east, the genre of drama was first seen as performance rather than as text, in the process the playwrights were forced to cater the needs of audience, thus they wrote the plays not to form the genre of drama but to give the piece of their own creation, which gave both enlightenment and entertainment to the audience, who watched the performance and the readers, who read the text. In the west Aristotle's *Poetics* was the first theoretical work of drama in B.C. and it is considered as a poetics of drama even still, for in that text he talks about all those features of drama. It is also inferred from the *Poetics* that even epic and lyrics are defined as the significant medium of expression in the poetry. Hence Aristotle's Poetry can be taken as an example for the definition of drama in general, as a work, which illustrates the way in which the text of drama should be performed in the most theatrical way in particular.

Similarly in the east Bharatha's *Natya Shastra* is considered to be a groundbreaking work of Indian classical drama tradition, which talks about Bhava and other aesthetics theories of drama. Though in the apparent level both the writers seem to have highlighted the aesthetic sense of drama according to their tradition and culture, in the profound level these two writers irrespective of cultural, traditional and other differences have illustrated the basic form, theme and of course the way in which any drama should be performed, be it is tragedy or comedy. As Philip Signey says in his critical piece *the Apology for Poetry* "the purpose of literature is to teach and delight," the dialogue form of literature drama also muses on the fact that both enlightening and entertaining the audience are the primary principle of drama, which is very much discernable from the quoted texts. Unlike the classical period of west and east, the Elizabethan period had seen various kinds of plays by different playwrights. Shakespeare is often revered as a father of drama, who wrote almost seven categories of plays such as: tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, history, roman, and others. Among them critics are of the opinion that his fore tragedies one way the other seem to have been written with the playwright consciousness or they have been written having the audience in mind.

For the first time in the history of drama, Shakespeare was the only playwright, who wrote the plays by looking at the aesthetics sense of the audience, which was later considered to be a "metadrama/metatheatre," a term, which denotes the form of theatricality, was coined by Lionel Abel, a critic of modern drama. Hence, the notion of theatricality can be traced back from Shakespeare, as his fore great tragedies stand as the primary examples of what in the modern time, we call "metadrama." The critic Lionel define metadrama or metatheatre or in the general term theatricality as "playwrights' self consciousness, which get reflected on the audience through the performance of the character, who are not aware of the fact that they also lost their consciousness while acting the role of their own" (abel 96). In other words, metadrama is the play making process through which the playwrights want to convey that the act of play making

process is already embedded in the minds of the playwrights, which is conveyed to the audience by creating another play within the play itself. Hence metatheatre is the play about the play, which makes the viewers to realize that they are watching the play, which is not a conscious effort but an unconscious effort in the part of playwrights.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the elements of theatricality can be seen through the character of Hamlet, while he is speaking soliloquy, which is very much discernable in the argument of Lionel in his book *Metatheatre: a new view of Dramatic Form*. He says in the book, while talking about *Hamlet* "for the first time in the history of drama, the problem of the protagonist is that he has a playwrights consciousness" (abel 47). The play making consciousness can also be interpreted from the perspective of Aristotle's concept of "catharsis" in which the audience's pity and fear are used by the playwright in order to purge their emotion. The same kind of act is also done in almost all the tragedies of Shakespeare and Marlowe, where the audience are filled with what Aristotle calls the pity and fear. Aristotle also says that the playwright has to take his material from the life of human being and fuse those material, which he or she borrowed in his creation of drama, only then the real representation of life through the medium of "imaginative recreation" can be done. However this kind of self consciousness through the medium of theatricality in the performance is represented by the playwrights such as Shakespeare, Brecht, Becket, and Karnad.

In the modern times there are some writers, who have employed a lot of theatrical techniques, among them Bertol Brecht stands as a supreme playwright, who has given the sole to the art of theatricality in his theater named "Epic theater." Brecht's Epic theater is often called as Social Theater, which has made social changes both in the Germany and in the entire world. His theater has transformed the audience into the social critic and has made them realize that they are not watching the play yet their life is presented in such a way in the play, the audience are able to correlate their life with the life of the character presented in the play, thereby not losing their consciousness, and identifying that they are not only in the play performance but also they are in the society, which intern corrupted and dominated by the capitalist setup. Beside what Brecht calls in the Epic theater "alienation effect" or in the German term "verfremdungseffekt" has again conformed what is called dramatic self-consciousness, which in fact rejected the realism in the drama. This paper focuses mainly on the part of theatricality, which is otherwise called "metatheater," which has already been discussed, the term was first coined by the critic named Lionel Abel in his book *Metatheatre: a New View of Dramatic Form*. In the Oxford advance learner's dictionary the prefix 'meta' is defined as "a sense of change of position or condition, behind, after, beyond of higher or second order change" The etymological root of the Greek word 'meta' is explained as "meta-, met-, meth-," the French "meta-," means with or after. However, the critics such as: Lionel Abel, James Calderwood and Richard Hornby seem to have defined the term "metatheater" in their book, yet the clear cut definition for the term has not been given by any critic, as the prefix "meta" itself leads to various kinds of origins and meanings. Hence, giving the clear cut definition for the word meta or metatheater is obviously not feasible.

The critic Lionel says that our life must be a dream and the world must be a stage, only then dramatist's self-consciousness can be felt by the audience and understood the play as one of the parts of their life. He goes on to say that tragedy gives the stronger sense of our life, while metatheater shows the so called tragedy is only the projection of selfconsciousness, for which he cites an examples from the tragedies of Shakespeare. Another important critic of metatheater is Richard Hornby, who has first developed the theatrical concept of metatheater into a full fledged

one, which is still considered as the bible of the concept called metadrama. Hornby in his book called *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* brought out in the year 1986, talks about what is metadrama, its definition, and its features, which intern totally different from that of other theatrical concepts. According to Hornby, all dramas are metadrama, because they focus on drama/culture complex, the term used by Hornby to identify the system of literature. He has identified five varieties of metadrama both consciously and overtly: 1. the play within the play, 2. The ceremony within the play, 3. Role playing within the role, 4. Literary and real life reference, and 5. Self-reference. Apart from these Hornby talks about perception as the sixth feature, which indeed plays a vital role in the theatricality. The play *Mareech the Legend* by Arun Mukherjee seems to have been written with the perspective of theatricality and the characters and the structure of the play typify the fact that Arun Mukherjee being the contemporary playwright should have followed the technique of theatricality in his plays.

The play *Mareech the Legend* muses on the mythical character of Mareech, who is a brother of Ravana in *Ramayana*. Unlike the story of *Ramayana*, the playwright Arun Mukherjee employs Mareech in a different manor, attributing the contemporary characteristics to the character of Mareech, who is projected in the play in three characters such as Mareech as real character in *Ramayana*, Ishwar, who is a rebellious kind of man, fighting for the freedom of peasant, Gregory, who is an American man not obliging to participate in the America's war against other countries. Ustad is used by the playwright to act as a stage director in the western stage and Bhahavada in Indian classical theater, which is otherwise called in Indian folk theater as a man, who tells the audience that what is going to happen and conveys the audience who are all the characters are going to act in the play. In other words, Ustad is employed by the playwright Mukherjee so as to act as a mediator between the audience and actors, which is the typical trait of play making process in the post-independent period, where the difference between classical and folk is not seen in the plays of any playwright. Hence, fusing the folk and classical on one hand as way of play making process, on other hand depicting the theatrical trends, which prevailed in the post-independent period in the plays such as metadrama, syncretic theater and others. The play *Mareech the Legend* also portrays the syncretic theater on one side, on other side it vividly reveals the technique of theatricality on the part of playwright. Ustad, who acts as the stage director in the play, first plays Dug-Dugi, which is shown as a magical wand, which has the power of bringing any person and objects from anywhere in the world. Like Bhahavada in classical theater, Ustad also acts as a typical folk stage director, who introduces the character to the audience and acting as a director both for folk as Ustad and for classical as Bhahavada, and playing roles accordingly.

Don't you miss this chance to see the greatest show on earth, this magic wand dance!

The past, future and present are all in my hand, I can make them come alive with my magical wand. History, mystery, a simple tale are all in my bag, any scoop you want to hear, (456).

This reveals the fact that Ustad, who act both as folk stage director and classical director, asking the audience to pay attention to his play, which is revered as a typical characteristic of theatricality in the post-independent period. Throughout the play to the shock of the reader and the audience, Ustad acts as though for the first time he teaches the roles for actors, because the actors some time forget their role, acting in others role, thinking it as their role. As Ustad talks about adapting the myth and legend in the play, which he is going to present, says to the audience "legend and myth are not everyone cup of tea—so I will spice it up a little with tales of

our joys and sorrows—yours and mine—and along with it a fantastic scoop,” (457). It testifies that he is not acting neither as classical man, nor is he acting as a folk man, he is a man, who is conforming to the contemporary theatrical trends by fusing the present day relevance to the mythical story.

Thus Hornby's statement that any drama is about drama, is again proved by Mukherjee in his play *Mareech the Legend*, by fusing folk and classical and having another play within the play itself, thereby making the audience to realize that they are not watching the play instead they are participating in the play making process of playwright.

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