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Introduction to Modern Indian Drama

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Good morning. So let us now recapitulate what we have done so far on the historical background to the introduction to modern Indian drama. So we began by talking about the earliest histories of Indian theater which were written by Horace Hayman Wilson three-volume *Select Specimens of the theater of the Hindus* which is published in 1827 in Calcutta, and Sylvain Levi's two-volume *The Indian theater*, which were both clearly influenced by Orientalism, in that they equated Indian theater with Sanskrit theater, while dismissing the multilingual nature of Indian theater, be it Sanskrit and other non Sanskrit forms of theater and performance. The colonial historiography of Indian theater follows the Western chronological categories of ancient, medieval and modern, where Sanskrit theater lasted from 200 BCE, medieval or traditional theater lasted from 1000 CE to the present and modern theater from the late 18th century to the present.

Sanskrit theater was modeled on Bharata's *Natyashastra*, the ancient text on dramaturgy, which provided copious data on theoretical and practical aspects of theater from acting and dancing to music and prosody, the sizes and shapes of playhouses, costumes and makeup, theories of emotions and sentiments, requirements for critics and audiences and so on.

One of the earliest Sanskrit plays to be translated and studied by Orientalist missionaries and scholars were Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntala*, translated by William Jones and published in Calcutta in 1789, which was actually a multilingual play with lines in Sanskrit, sauraseni, Maharashtri, and

Magadhi. And Sudraka's Mrcchakatika or Little Clay Cart which again comprised of many other languages that were lost in translation.

Then we also look at how there were other folk performative traditions of theater that colonial theater also incorporated into its own performances and a lot of these folk performative theaters rested on music and dance which were absolutely indispensable to forms but many of these traditions of music and dance were dismissed or overlooked by colonial scholars as

crude and low forms of performance art. Colonial era theater drew on western nations of theater in terms of lighting and scenography while shunning local forms of theater as crude. But there was a turn back to pre-modern Sanskrit models of theater, which came to be revalued as classical because of nationalist aspirations. The attempt was to build an Indian nation that was both traditional and modern through a return to Hindu Puranic traditions. Thus the creation of Indianness was a political issue.

The establishment of Indology in the mid-18th century enabled the possibility of this return to Sanskrit theater because of the interest that European scholars had in understanding India's past. Thus Sanskrit texts, both religious and secular, came to be preserved and transmitted.

Even later histories of Indian theater like Hemendra Nath Das Gupta's four volume, *The Indian Stage*, published in Calcutta between 1944 and 1946, and Ramanlal Kanaiyalal Yajnik's *The Indian theater*, did not acknowledge the presence of other theater performance traditions in India. Many of the later histories of Indian theater written after Independence continued to emphasize the lasting importance of Sanskrit theater on Indian theater. Many actors did not have a sense of western forms of theater and acting, and incorporated folk techniques into their performances despite the growing modernization of Indian theater.

Under the rule of the East India Company, the early playhouses were set up in Calcutta. In 1775 was Calcutta theater, the Chowringhee theater in 1813, the Sans Souci theater in 1839, which were patronized by colonial officials

The colonial idea of theater understood theater as an enclosed space with a raised proscenium stage before rows of seats. It made theater a spectacle to be watched by the audience who were at the same or higher level than the stage.

Colonial theater was an elite cultural art form that was patronized and frequented by the colonial western and Indian elite, particularly the Parsis of Bombay, who sponsored the early theater companies. It was only in the late 19th century that theater spread as a form of mass entertainment in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras to schools and colleges. theater became a commercial, ticketed event and there was a new distinction between the actor-manager and the director.

So if the folk performance traditions of India relied solely on the actor and his body, the director becomes an important figure who emerges in urban theater who is the one may not necessarily

act in the play but is the one who enables the actors to actually incorporate certain folk and Western forms of performance.

The mere importation of the proscenium theater did not modernize Indian theater. Indian theater in the 1770s was still an elite form of entertainment that was limited to small British populations in the three presidency cities of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. The early plays that were staged in the latter decades of the 18th century addressed social issues like polygamy, child marriage, opium addiction, faith sanctioned violence, the plight of Indian women and so on. Dinabandhu Mitra Nil Darpan, is a famous example which was a polemical attack on the exploitative British indigo planters, which was banned as seditious, and precipitated the passing of the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876 to curb seditious and patriotic tendencies.

theater scholar Ananda Lal argues that and this is of course another important 19th century Indian playwright whom we will be discussing in greater detail in the session. This is just a few points introducing Rabindranath Tagore contribution to modern Indian theater.

theater scholar Ananda Lal argues that Rabindranath Tagore was the pivotal figure in Modern Indian drama, in terms of his imaginative stagecraft modeled after Sanskrit aesthetics that attempted to transform Western theatrical modes of domestic realism and picturesque entertainment. His plays were controversial for the time as they dealt with female sexuality, the orthodoxies of Hinduism, untouchability, and also anticipated environmental concerns and revisited Buddhism as a pacific faith.

This is a quote from Ananda Lal's introduction to his translation of three plays by Rabindranath Tagore.

Tagore was also known for introducing women to the stage, which included women even from 'respectable families at a time when male actors impersonated women.

The beginnings of Modern Indian theater can be traced back to Parsi theater. Parsi theater was the dominant form of entertainment in urban India from 1860s to 1930s. Early colonial era theater companies were owned by elite Parsis, many of whom were wealthy bankers, traders and philanthropists. The term 'Parsi theater' is itself a conflicting one as the actors who joined these companies were Muslims, Hindus, Anglo-Indians and Baghdadi Jews. Their plays were also multilingual and performed largely in Gujarati, Marathi and Urdu and English too. These plays were designed along western notions of stagecraft like backdrop scenery, and were divided into acts and scenes.

Many of these plays were published with detailed prefaces by the playwrights that illuminated their choice of language and relationship to public. The Indian elites in Bombay, which included the Parsis, were invited to attend English-language Bombay theater also known as theater on the Green. Later an appeal was made by various notables like Jamshed Jejeebhoy, Jagannath Shankarseth and Framji Cowasji to found Grant Road theater, which was located in the Fort area of the native town, to cater to the need for non-English language Indian plays. Until 1853 all performances in Grant Road theater were in English. Between 1865 and 1890, English was sidelined and the rivalry was between Gujarati and Urdu plays. All these information can be found in Kathryn Hansen's essays on Parsi theater.

Grant Road was later supplemented by enlarged ones such as Gaiety and Novelty near Victoria Railway Terminus. Established theater companies like Elphinstone, Victoria and Alfred left behind their roots in amateur theater and became more profitable for their Parsi owners. Shakespeare's plays were adapted in these performances.

There was an attempt by Parsi writers and intellectuals to build a history of their own in Gujarati that they traced back to Firdausi, the ancient king of the Parsis. They performed tales from the Shahnama, Rustom and Sohrab, and so on, which equated the Parsi theater to the mythical history of the Persian homeland.

There was also the presence of the so-called Hindu theater in Bombay which was driven by the notion of theater for the Hindu people propagated by William Jones and H.H. Wilson's translations from Sanskrit drama. These plays adopted regional folk styles.

.The Parsis were thus not Anglophilic as was assumed as they were keen on carving a distinct cultural identity for themselves through theater.

Dadabhai Sohrabji Patel or Dadi Patel, M.A., was a wealthy intellectual who became the secretary of the Victoria Theatrical Company in 1869, who commissioned the first play in Urdu, although knowledge of the language was initially lacking among playwrights, actors and spectators. He popularized opera and professionalized theater, with full-time salaries and introducing so called scientific' stagecraft. Urdu plays were initially written in Gujarati script. Urdu was favoured also because of its traditions of poetry and music and song. The most important Urdu play that set off a new tradition of play writing in Urdu was Indar Sabha by Agha Hasan Amanat in 1853.

Although Hindu women were largely forbidden from acting on stage, there were male impersonators who played women and Anglo-Indian and Jewish actresses on stage. The performance of femininity on stage was a visual construction of bourgeois respectability on stage that contained her sexuality and created a new interiority identifying the ideal woman with her capacity to suffer. Again these observations that Kathryn Hansen makes on female impersonation on the Parsi stage.

Parsi theatrical companies traveled far to Ceylon, Calcutta, Rangoon, Peshawar and Sindh. Writers, actors, company managers, musicians, etc. belonged to a mix of caste, class and religious backgrounds.

Much of the anecdotal evidence of female impersonation is drawn from Kathryn Hansen's translation of Somnath Gupta's scholarly Hindi monograph on Parsi theater, which was based on the theater notices of on time actor and photographer Dhanjibhai Patel and the autobiographical pieces of female impersonators like Narayan Prasad Betab, Fida Hussain. With the establishment of the Victoria Theatrical Company in 1868, Parsi theater became more professionalized when compared to the earlier nautch performances by feudal aristocrats.

Men with a pleasing figure and voice were required. When the Victoria Theatrical company split, the former manager, Dadi Patel, took all the leading female impersonators with him to form the Original Victoria Theatrical Company, leaving the next manager at a loss. Again anecdote quoted from Kathryn Hansen's essay on female impersonation in Parsi theater.

Female impersonation continued into the 20th century. There are few records of these actors' lives, with the exception of the non-Parsi actors like Jayshankar Sundari (1888-1967) and Bal Gandharva (1889-1975) and Kathryn Hansen discusses these different male actors who played women in greater detail in her book called Stages of Life, where she has fairly lengthy introduction to the life of these actors along with a translation of their autobiographical pieces of their experiences of playing women on stage.

The female impersonator averted the potential slander and criticism directed to a transvestite. It thinly cloaked an aggressive heterosexual masculinity, and by performing the wronged woman, the female impersonator was rendered harmless and worthy of sympathy. This was again Kathryn Hansen observing observation of how female impersonators managed to actually tame and domesticate their masculine vigor and aggression by performing a wrong women. Water women who was stigmatized and oppressed by her social norms and also by making her suffer infinitely made her into an object of public sympathy.

The belief that men could 'do' gender better than women, perpetuating the control that men had over the theater system, and the public control over the female body and its representation. So again this is again the fact that only men performed for the longest time of off her most of the times and that itself became a way of perpetuating the control that men had over the theatrical apparatus and the female body and the representation of female femininity and suffering.

The Anglo-Indian and Jewish actresses who played women, passed off as Indian while embodying modernity through their fair skin and modern ways. So you also had women who played women on stage but there were not Hindu women. They were angle Indian and Jewish actresses who had fair skin but nonetheless tried to pass off as hindu women on stage.

There was an opposition to the participation of women on stage by the eminent Gujarati playwright K.N. Kabra who formed the Natak Uttejak Mandal in opposition to the Victoria Theatrical Company that encouraged female involvement. But he also encouraged women to watch plays. The New Alfred Theatrical Company, which split from the parent company in 1891, again opposed the presence of women on stage. Dadi Patel employed many Muslim women in his production of Indar Sabha. The Anglo-Indian women who began acting in Parsi theater adopted Hindu names, which signified an act of subordinating the Anglo-Indian actress, the feminine embodiment of the West, to the Indian male gaze. The actresses were cast in the image of the houri or pale fairy, a familiar Indo-islamic trope.

So you have the Anglo-Indian women playing Hindu women adopting Hindu name and signifying an act of subordination of the Anglo- India actresses to the gauge of the Indian male.

The photographic image of the actresses on billboards and magazines were titillating in their impact, leading the public to believe they would witness foreign actresses perform. The Anglo-Indian actresses were thus both native as well as exotic other.

Indian modern theater drew from local folk traditions like Yakshagana, Tamasha, Ras Lila, Nautanki, Bhavai, Jatra and Khayal. Many of the post Independence dramatists like Habib Tanvir and Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar turned to folk traditions as what they thought was the essence of Indian theater. The aim was to establish the importance of the actor as opposed to the urban playwright and the communal involvement and ritualistic action of rural societies. Hindi and Urdu theater traditions drew from primarily religious, Ram Lila or Ras Lila traditions or secular ones like Nautanki or Svang.

Again Kathryn Hansen has a longer study on the Nautanki in her book on the Nautanki traditions of theater acting.

Now let's just turn to an introduction to some of the major pre-independence playwrights in India. The early pre-independence playwrights like [00:16:39] Harish Chandra 1850 to 1885 Hindi, Jayshankar Prasad, 1890 to 1937 again Hindi and Rabindranath Tagore 1961 to 1941 in Bengali were influenced by mortals of classical Sanskrit theater. Prasad and Tagore shunned commercial theater which they believed was antithetical to the aesthetics and undermine the literary merit of the play. Most of Tagore's plays performed in the privacy of his home and Tagore acted as well as directed his own plays. Bharatendu Harishchandra was highly impacted by a German playwright Bertolt Brecht in her book on Harishchandra Prasad poetics, plays, and performances the politics of modern Indian theater. Vasudha Dalmia reveals the impact that Sanskrit theater had on Harishchandra. Dalmia observes the National Indian theater of the Hindus drew from the understanding and adaptations of Sanskrit theater and Shakespeare. Unlike the metropolitan centres of Bombay where Parsi theater had become hugely popular and Calcutta the capital of British imperial India where the earliest houses were set up. There was no such metropolis in the Hindi Urdu belt of North India. The scene of Urdu Hindi theater which is becoming the new literary language of the country shifted from Awadh after [00:18:03] end to Banaras. Harishchandra belonged to a merchant family of Banaras which has become one of the most important banking and trading centres of northern India. Harishchandra belong to Naupati

Mahajans aristocratic bankers who arbitrated disputes among merchant classes and mediated between British and the people of the city. Harishchandra's friendship with the Maharaja contributed to the expansion of the Ram Lila or Ram Nagar. He organized many gatherings of poets and musical evenings and maintained relations with the Asian Society of Bengal in Calcutta. Although his lifestyle was rather extravagant and elite his theater addressed heterogeneous audience and reading public of Brahmins, mobile artisans and merchants had formed a political and socially operative public sphere. Even as he drew from Sanskrit categories he also took Rico's to popular forms and music and avoided the vulgar and the low to minimize the stigma of theater. His early plays at translations of Sanskrit Prakrit, Bengali and Shakespeare. Dalmia argues that Harishchandra's lively social, religious, and political satires coexisted with a future mission of the nation to be which fell back on Rajput models of sovereignty. His radical critiques of existing structures of authority Dalmia notes were tempered by the very structures of authority that he was a part of. The merchants Rajput Nexus [00:19:33] linked up with romantic orientalist visions of the past such as that [00:19:38], military critic. From her reading of Harishchandra's long essay on drama called Natak, 1883 Harishchandra believed Sanskrit theater had to be renewed to assimilate the new and traditional goals and conventions of drama had to cater to the interests of contemporary politics in aesthetics and thirdly there had to be an appraisal of progress and the prospects of vernacular drama and the fraught questions of patronage in the creation of an incipient National theater. For Harishchandra drama was Trisha kavya or visual poetry whose authors were Brahma, Shiva, Bharata, Narada, Vyasa, and Valmiki the words first exponent was Bharata. According to Harishchandra drama has three divisions; poetry mixed or poetical, Mishra Kavya which is further sub subdivided into ancient and modern. The ancient was Sanskrit drama which according to him was not a lowly form of art but performed by all social groups for all. He tries to stretch Sanskrit categories into the present in the modern category included plays modeled on European drama which are characterized by the repeated change of scene which is implemented by the change in backdrop. Modern plays were further divided into natak or drama where narrative is predominant and Giti rubak of musical drama where narrative is punctuated by song. These plays can have a tragic or comic or tragicomic ending. The second category of drama was pure spectacle or curiosity or sudha kautak and the third category corrupt or bhrasta.

The second category includes puppetry mime and feats of skill and the third category of comprises includes those forms that once had theatricality but have now degenerated and become devoid of poetry. These include popular forms like bhand, Indra Sabha, Tamasha, Yatra and traditions like Rasa, Lila, and Jhanki. These are all taken from Vashu Dalmia's book on Harishchandra and Jayshankar Prasad and the impact Brecht had on these early 19th century playwrights.

For Harishchandra drama had five goals; comic, erotic, spectacular, social reform, and patriotism. The last two are discussed for which old tales have to be reinterpreted. A public forum for the discussion of issues should be created and where love for the country can be created.

Harishchandra believes his play should be educated. The play can become a model of corrective ethical and political action if it becomes a metaphor for reformative practice. This Shakunthala, Ratnawali and [00:22:28] Hamlet and Macbeth were exemplar since regard because the actions in these plays best brought out the characters in a state of mind. So the emphasis for

Harishchandra was on capturing the psychological states of mind and the transformations in their psyche in order to enable corrective ethical and political action and so for him Shakuntala, Ratnavali, [00:22:54] Hamlet and Macbeth are the exemplars of plays of the social reformative and patriotic function of modern Indian theater. Harishchandra's plays were written in a mix of languages the verse passages were almost entirely in [00:23:14] Basha which resonated with Urdu or [00:23:16] and was a style that was popularized by Amanath's Indra Sabha. His most important contribution was his translation of [00:23:25] Sanskrit Mudrarakshasa that had been translated earlier by H.H Wilson and to whose historical scholarship he is indebted but in the process of adapting older plays including the famous Satya Harishchandra and writing his own Harishchandra contemporizes them by setting them in Banaras and psychologically elaborating the characters and scenes in the form of popular street performers. Many of his plays were dealt within a Shakespearean manner in terms of irony and symbolism. Harishchandra was also known for his play Andher Nagari written in 1881 in the form of a folktale there was no plea critique of the tyranny of the British. Even the passing of the dramatic performances act in 1876 playwrights and performers had to devise subtle and creative methods of critiquing the government. Some of Harishchandra's later plays like Nildevi were free of Sanskrit models are written in a more Western mould as a political satire that offered a Hindu Aryan view of history told from the perspective of Rajput commanders of the Delhi Sultanate when Muslims were perceived as aggressors and foreigners. With Harishchandra's demise and the consolidation of the British as an administrative power was hardly any patronage for Hindi theater in a region that did not have the political or economic capital of the metropolitan cities of Calcutta or Bombay. Urban Hindi drama became increasingly divorced from folk forms and underwent a renewal only after the official support of Hindi as a national language after independence. However, as Dalmia observes Hindi theater also emerged as a literary form divorced from local and folk forms an official patronage that was perfected by Jaishankar Prasad.

Jaishankar Prasad, 1886-1937 was also from Banaras and also belonged to a wealthy merchant family and was initially educated at home where he learned Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi and Urdu. His education improperly ended with the death of his father but he acquired knowledge of a variety of Sanskrit texts on his own and had a contradictory relationship to the traditional past. If on the one hand his relationships with women was framed within the patriarchal mould she would also fiercely demand equal rights for women. Although Prasad wrote plays and stories he was best known for his lyrical poetry written in Sanskrit and Hindi that established him as one of the major figures in the new romantic movement of Chayabad poetry. For Prasad Chayabad embodied the fine ideals of Sanskrit literature which provided poets with a repertoire of emotion and feeling that marked a new form of intimacy and portrait women with a new dignity in the relationships with men. Hindi had to acquire a new terminology to be able to express the obstruction of emotions of characters and the inner states and the rhetoric of Chayabad poetry emerge in Prasad's plays at moments of emotional intensity. Chayabad was opposed to Yatharthvad or realism in Hindi that came to be associated exclusively with the pain and suffering of the common masses under colonial rule. Prasad believed this exclusive social realist focus on societal obstructions to intimate relationships was pessimistic and fatalistic and did not represent characters and all the human dignity and subtlety. He held Harishchandra's plays responsible for this among what he thought was an imitation of western realist strain of theater that reduced individuals to their conflicts with society.

The role of literature according to Prasad Dalmia notes was to create characters as a medium for creating Rasa or emotion that did not necessarily correspond to but could be indicative of the

subtle workings of the psyche. Literature had to fill the deficiencies in both Yatharthvad or reality and aadarshvad or ideality for there was no gap in between them. Sanskrit drama for Prasad fulfilled the function of literature to be beyond representing history of promulgating social codes. Drama had to be renovated to create optimism in respected about the future. Prasad insisted on the creative experience of the self as the soul of poetry and drama which opened up the possibility of focusing on the subjectivity of the dramatist and his characters.

Prasad rejected Parsi theater for its vulgarity although as Dalmia argues his plays were formally drawn from the frames of Parsi theater. In the absence of any urban theater movement Prasad's plays have meant to be read rather than to be performed and [00:28:11] drama should adjust itself to the limitations of the existent stage rather than the other way round.

Prasad had great love for the Bengali stage and its tasteful and aptations of western modes of theater and simple statecraft. He believed Hindi dramatists would have had the potential to build on the formal possibilities of Parsi theater had it not been taken over by cinema and the talking film.

Cinema had enabled the possibility of women acting which is something that had not been the case with Parsi theater. He made several references to Harishchandra in his writings as the only Hindi playwright worthy of note but was ambivalent towards Harishchandra's devotionally aesthetics that he drew from [00:28:56] traditions in Bengal. Most of Prasad's plays were taken from the Puranas and ancient history with protagonists who had divine origins. Dalmia shows how Prasad in his place addresses women's rights to independence and romantic choice and challenge Brahminical orthodoxy particularly practices like Sati. For this Prasad deployed his own readings of historical sources of Hindu law like Kautilya's Arthashastra and Manu Dharmashastra which had to be read for the emancipatory possibilities. Thus Prasad at once seems to uphold an undermined Brahminical law and his inherent misogyny or most of his plays borrowed some of the conventions of Western theater Parsi theater in terms of the narrator melodramatic songs and cinemagraphy.

Another important early period was Rabindranath Tagore, 1861 to 1941 whose plays underwent many transformations. His only place were influenced by his reading of Shakespeare and the romantic poets especially Robert Browning but his later plays which focus on man's quest for union with the universe theater scholar Anand Lal argues is his own product. This is man's quest for union with the universe was Tagore's own product. Lal suggest that the scholarship and literary critics have insisted on the influence of Western theater undergoes plays which Lal rightly argues is itself a legacy of colonial education and thought that considers anything that possesses merit to be derivative of the West. So Anand Lal actually arguing against many of the scholars who have criticized Tagore for not being a merit worthy playwright because he does not imitate or does not entirely draw from Western forms of theater.

Most the scholarship on Tagore as a dramatist considers him to be a second-rate and he's better known and appreciated for his fiction and poetry his plays were considered to be unstageable and meant to be read some scholars thought. Although Lal points out his plays were performed within the privacy of his home and in specific theaters. Tagore symbolic plays were considered to be better at a short stories then performed as plays. Anand Lal suggests that it was the emphasis or naturalistic theater that made it difficult for critics to accept Tagore's more complex symbolic plays to be accepted as plays worth staging. A lot of the damage done to Tagore's reputation as a dramatist had to do with his weak translations of his own plays that did not

succeed in capturing the spirit of his plays or often recreated his plays to read like original works in their own right.

Translations of his plays into other Indian languages were also mediated by his own English translations. Tagore grew up in a Bengali world of theater that had adapted and incorporated Western conventions of theater had begun to look down upon folk forms like Yatra or Jatra. The first Bengali playwright Tarkaratna 1828 to 1886 had written plays on the plight of Hindu women. Michael [00:32:03] 1824 to 1873 wrote satirical comedies and Dena Banda Mitra 1832 to 73 produced polemics of the colonial regime especially Nildarpan and have been banned for attack on the British indigo planters and the exploitation of helpless Bengali peasants. And Girish Chandra Gosh 1844 to 1912 was another author of more than 70 mythological historical plays who was another important figure in the field of Bengali theater. Tagore's earliest plays included the musical play Valmiki-Pratibha which he wrote when he was 20 in 1881 and has performed his family home. His early poetry dramas Raja aur Rani 1889 and Visarjan 1890 were tragedies modeled after English restoration. Chitrangada 1892 was [00:32:57] play about human beauty in love and was inspired by Tagore's observations of the Bengali peasant and his mystical relationship with nature during his stay at his family estates in East Bengal.

He later tried his hand blank [00:33:12] to produce short comic skits and one-act plays. After a series of tragedies in his life and included the loss of his wife, son, daughter, and father Tagore went on dramatizes earlier works of fiction and write some of his most well known place like Raja, [00:33:29] Darker and Phalguni which were part of a seven cycle of season plays that began which [00:33:37] Tagore further rewrote some of his earlier place to make them more stage worthy and towards the end of his play produced two symbolic plays Muktheadhara and Raktakarabi which satirized the political oppression of subjugated people and exploitation of natural resources. Tagore [00:33:56] incorporating dance especially what were considered rigid classical forms of Indian dance into his plays to loosen the classical style to express the emotional intensity of the characters [00:34:09] disapproval of music and dance puris. His later plays gestured his interest in Buddhism and his dissatisfaction of the spoken word which compelled Tagore to draw from diverse dance traditions both within and outside India. So again I draw a lot from [00:34:24] introduction to his translation of three of Tagore's plays.

Tagore took liberties with his old scripts constantly modifying it to suit every performance. In fact his scripts as loyal observes were only skeletons for the performance and took diverse forms. According to Tagore theater best captured the imagination of the actor and spectator when it was devoid or made minimal use of scenery and the stage and relied more on the abilities of the actor to mime surroundings. The minimal use of stage craft and the scenery and the emphasis entirely on the actors ability to mime her surroundings. This is unlike the European who accounted Tagore needed to see concrete truths and realistic representations of reality. This came through in the players he directed and performed in a school Shantiniketan in the 1900s and 1910s. Not only Tagore enables the possibility of the men acting alongside men on stage he also wrote plays that had a woman only cast. Even when his place was stationed in Calcutta they retained a minimalist stagecraft. Some of his plays had a chorus of singers who sang offstage to sing for the actors on stage. Tagore mostly avoided professional theater for its commercial pressures and stage restrictions although few of his plays did go on to become box-office hits. After Tagore's death [00:35:51] theater group Bahurupi went down to perform some of Tagore's later plays in Calcutta and outside bengal.

So that was a very brief overview of these three important 19th century playwrights. Robindranath Tagore, Bharatendu Harishchandra, and Jayshankar Prasad.

Now for a brief overview of post-colonial Indian theater. Theater scholar Aparna Dharwadkar locates the beginnings of post-colonial Indian theater in three events. The formation of the Indian People's theater Association or IPTA in 1943. The deliberations of the first drama seminar organized with newly constituted Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1956 and the two-week Nehru centenary theater festival organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1989. The IPTA EPA was the first national level theater movement in India and operated as the cultural front of the Communist Party of India which sought to combat fascism and imperialism drawing from several similar international movements. The formation of IPTA paralleled the progressive writers association that was established in 1936. The IPTA was against the commercial glamour of contemporary theater and relied on local performative forms to reject colonial commercial forms of the 19th century. As Mananiya Bhattacharya states, IPTA had two objectives to develop experimental forms outside the naturalistic confidence of commercial theater and to present real contemporary struggles against fascism, imperialism, and economic exploitation by drawing from India's traditional arts. The most successful example of IPTA's plays was Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* or the new harvest 1944 first reduced by Shambhu Mithra which is the beginning of post-colonial theater in India. In practice however, IPTA kept social realism as its aesthetic focus and experimented with both indigenous and Western forms. The IPTA movement was ignored if not dismissed in nationalist histories and statements in Indian theater as a form of theater that had paid no attention to aesthetics or the aesthetic unity of Indian culture and instead sought to harness art for its political ideologies or propaganda.

These thinkers were of course oblivious to the class differences that that undermined any notion of a national consciousness. Finally, it was a geological differences between the Communist Party's political program and Nehru's fabian socialist democracy, Dharwadkar argues but undermined the radical nature of the IPTA and chants from the CPI the Communist Party of India and his cultural front into a more [00:38:36] party. In it's five-day seminar on drama Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1956 saw theater as a medium of cultural reconstruction and social reform. Notable writers and playwrights and directors like [00:38:49]. Shambhu Mithra, Ebrahim Alkazi, Balraj Sahni, Dena Gandhi and so on critique the absoluteness of colonial theater and felt that the future of Indian theater lay in its folk traditions and not its commercial theater that was restricted by the proscenium arch. Thus serious non-commercial theater they felt was a future of Indian theater. Shambhu Mithra's Bahurupiye and Ebrahim Alkazi's theater group were examples of non-professional but artistically serious groups that set the trend for post-independence Indian theater. The seminar further recommended that the Indian government repealed the colonial law of censorship against seditious theater, exempt theater from entertainment tax to allocate funds for new and struggling theater companies and set up a social institute for comprehensive training and theater and in 1989 festival marking Nehru's 100th birth anniversary the Sangeet Natak Akademi came up with a list of notable plays and playwrights that anticipated the emergent drama [00:39:53] but from the seminar what emerge was the fact that despite the urge to build the gap, bridge the gap in urban and rural theater most of the theater groups were open based and employed urban actors. Parsi theater drew from Western conventions of theater including lighting and scenography and drew from Perso-Arabic performance poetic and musical traditions in the Shahanama Arabian Nights, the singing in performance traditions of 19th century Indian courtesans, Victoria melodrama from Shakespeare as performer western touring companies. European realistic narrative structures. British armature theatricals and the visual regime of Raja

Ravi Varma. But later post-independence playwrights are more keen on incorporating folk traditions which step of transformer and adapted in their own place. Both folk traditions as well as Puranic myths. The playwrights [00:40:48] included Yakshagana on northern Karnataka tradition of folk theater which included the use of masks, singing and percussive instruments along with dancing. The first generation of post-independence playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and Bal Sarkar came to [00:41:08] what was called the theater of roots that was prominent from the 1960s to the 1980s. So also [00:41:16] book on the roots of - on the theater roots which is also the important source for this introduction. The objective of this style of theater was to recover and revive pre-modern theatrical forms. It was said to be free of the contamination of the colonial encounter and to get rid of the proscenium theater in order to enable a greater intimacy between the actor, the spectator. Some feeble attempts were initially made the 1960s and 70s by making actors sit in the audience such as crowd or processional scenes in the auditorium. This was a process of decolonization of Indian lifestyle, values, social institutions, creative forms and cultural modes. Ebrahim Alkazi as Director of National School of Drama used a variety of spaces to perform his plays also because the school never had a proscenium theater. The Bengali playwrighter Bal Sarkar used ordinary halls in public parks and rejected proscenium theater to form something that came to be called third theater. Thus theater was used to create its own space rather than the other way around there's blurring the very distinction within the performance space and the space of the audience.

This may clearly seen the traveling performance at the Leela tradition. And after breaking away from western realism the new theater took to stylization to transform the dramatic text in the performance and performative space. As theater scholar Suresh Awasthi points out the staging science and realistic theater was kept to a minimum to retain the integrity of the verbal science but in stylistic theater stage directions were maximized that considerably lengthened the duration of the performance. The emphasis in the theater of roots movement is on form, form as integral to the content. This form involved the art of the actor and not the dominance of the director as Awasthi argues and this can be seen the place of [00:43:14] who used Kathakali and [00:43:15] and use of Manipuri martial arts and B. V. Karanth who deployed Yakshagana. The role of the actors to decode the stylized goals of the script Awasthi says and encode it in the production. There is no rehearsal but rigorous training and the actors required in traditional dance forms while each performance of the text is unique and to an extent extempore. It was a stylus quality of Sanskrit dramas and [00:43:44] to the Sanskrit classics I need to director produced a new style as adaptation of the classic. There was a new performance in his own right. Music and dance is more functional and integral to the performances and the actors often step in and out of character. Like Harishchandra earlier [00:44:02] decisive influence and [00:44:04] who often imagined the actor maintaining and distance from uniting with the character he plays to create de-familiarizing effect.

Other playwrights like Ratan Thiyam drew from the theater of roots as practiced by [00:44:18] Gandhi, Habib Tanvir, K. N. Panikar to make theater into a spectacle which is mostly shown of language and emphasize the ability of silence and the movements of the actors body to communicate to the audience. He drew from Manipuri martial arts and the lyrical maestro traditions of Manipur thus exposing the very idea of traditional theater as an ideological construct that critiqued modern societies and unitary spirit of nationalism attempted to erase all difference and the very presence of colonialism but the very process of self conscious recovery was in itself conditioned by colonial knowledge which irreversibly transformed folk elements of Indian theater to cater to the needs of urban theater much of which is performed within the stage

duty enclosed space of the proscenium theater. So this is a very important point that these theater scholars make which is that the very process, the very act of trying to revive and recuperate earlier folk forms was itself inflected mediated conditioned by colonial knowledge. So that it was no longer possible to actually recover an innocent form of pre-colonial theater which had not been touched by the lens of colonial urban theater.

This was a far cry from the mobile open air of Indian folk and street theater where natural light was used and there was no scenography and the plays have depended on the actor rather than the playwright or the director. They may not have been in his script in the first place. The idealism the new nation was followed by the disillusionment with the nation which set the tone of the dark social realism of the 1950s and 60s in the place of Dharamvir Bharati bin Hindi 1926-1997 Mohan Rakesh, 1925-1972, Vijay Tendulkar 1928-2008 who all shared an existential vocabulary and exposed social corruption.

Girish Karnad born 1938 reconstructed myths to a modernist idiom where characters were internally divided by their own desire for power and love. Another important figure who put in place the modernist realist idiom in Hindi theater was Ebrahim Alkazi. His staging of Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* or a day in the month of Ashadh and Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* or the blind age represented these plays in unprecedented realist detail. Alkazi paid more attention to stage pictures which are quite distinct from Parsi theater or B.V. Karanth experiments. Theater scholar Aprana Aparna Dharwadkar argues her new imagination Indian theater not a singular essence or as a multilingual disparity of performative text but as a network of interactive possibilities an aggregate of texts and performances mediated by aesthetic choices, institutions, and reception context.

She identifies three models of authorship among post-independence provides with a playwright simultaneously performed other roles as theorist and director. In the first group she includes Dharamvir Bharati known for Hindi play *Andha Yug*. Mohan Rakesh known for his Hindi play *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* and *Aadhe Adhure*, Girish Karnad and G.P. Deshpande, Mahesh Elkunchwar and Mohan [00:47:35] whose plays are primarily meant to be read as we read text rather than to be performed and whose plays approximated the earlier generation of playwrights Tagore, Michael [00:47:46] Jayshankar Prasad and Premchand. The second category of playwrights Vijay Tendulkar, Satish Alekar Chandrashekhara Kambara collaborate with resident playwrights directors and actors even as retain their literary identities.

The success of both these categories of playwrights and Dharwadkar argues lay in the publication of the playwright of their plays in the respective languages and a translation to other languages particularly Hindi and brought them to critical attention and enable the circulation and performance by other critical readers. This is first enabled by the Sangeet Natak Akademi to forge a modern canon of Indian theater where even playwrights translated each of those works to make them available to a wider audience. The third model of playwrights includes Utpal Dutt, Badal Sarkar, Habib Tanvir, K. N. Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam and Mahesh Dattani were authors, actors, directors, and founder managers of their own experimental theater groups. This lent them greater flexibility and skill and freedom as artists to create their own aesthetic. In an institutional culture of a directors have been trained over playwrights that have also been important collaborations between directors and the playwrights they choose to patronize but they have also made multiple choices or performance and in diversity theater culture when a playwright and the script write not the only determinant factors but coexist with many folk traditions for the performance itself for central. So we have any history of modern Indian theater has to take into

consideration these different traditions, these different forms and not try and assimilate them into any particular monolithic essence which suits or caters to the aspirations of nationalism.

The first historical movement and defied theater with a nation from 1870s to 1940s in regional expressions of Marathi and Bangla and national level organization for the Indian People's theater Association and Bharatiya Nataya Sangh the second developed an arbitrary account of theater and install and post independence India and the establishment of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. The third led to the proliferation of theater activity outside the radical position the 1940s and revisional discourses of the 1950's.

So this is a brief overview of the late 19th century playwrights and an overview of post-colonial Indian theater.

Thank you.