

### Modern Verse Drama

In ancient times poetry was synonymous with drama. The Greek dramatists wrote their plays in verse. Shakespeare's dramas are verse dramas. The great Jacobean tragedians wrote verse drama. But this verse came to an end after them and it is towards the end of the nineteenth century that Eliot came forward with a firm determination to revive verse drama. He wrote a number of essays in favour of poetic drama. In one of his essays he declared "I believe that poetry is the natural and complete medium for drama that the prose play is a kind of abstraction capable of giving you only a part of what the theatre can give and that the verse play is capable of something much intense and exciting". T.S. Eliot must be given most of the credits for a new orientation of England towards



verse drama. Prof David Dai-ches had said about him in 1963 in Delhi that he was a great minor poet of the present century. He may be a minor poet, but so far as verse drama is concerned, he has been a major force. His verse plays are 'Murder in the Cathedral', 'The Family Reunion', 'The Confidential Clerk' and 'The Elder Statesman'. These dramas show that Eliot had taken a ~~deep~~ deep ritualistic path. The success of 'Murder in the Cathedral' shook off the prejudices of the critics against verse drama. Emboldened by the success of his first drama he wrote 'The Family Reunion' which has a different theme with something of the murder element. It deals with the problem of sin and expiation. The author says that the drama is about contemporary people speaking contemporary language. A.C. Ward has opined that



'The Family Reunion' is an example of material pushed into an alien mould and showing up of the fallacy that poetic drama could be forced into existence." 'The Cocktail Party' has been described as a comedy but whoever has said this must have said this ironically. It is a very depressing play which is concerned with the breakdown of a sick society and an individual's inability to find a way out of the super civilised maze without taking the help of a psychiatrist. The crucifixion of Celia and the subsequent eating away of her body by the ants make the play a grim tragedy. Two dramatists who collaborated to write verse dramas are W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. Their joint plays are 'The Dog Beneath the Skin', or 'Where is Francis', 'The Ascent of F6'. 'The Dog Beneath the Skin' has a



mythical theme, an old story read and seen in present content. 'The Ascent of F6' shows the writer's endeavour to create mythical atmosphere out of contemporary elements. The writers have raised social issues to mythological heights. 'The Dog Beneath the Skin' is rich in symbolic imagery, characterisation, stage direction etc. 'The Ascent of F6' presents the British expedition on the mountain marked F6 to hoist British flag.

Christopher Fry is another great verse dramatist of the present century who introduced the theme of philosophy in his plays. He was the first dramatist to show that verse dramas need not be fettered with tragic and religious themes only. 'Lady's not for Burning' is ~~another~~ another milestone. The play deals with a young girl's condem-



nation as a witch, sentence of death by burning alive, a young man's offer to immolate himself in her place and her refusal to accept his sacrifice and finally the appearance of the victim of the supposed witch whom, people believed, she had turned into a dog. The girl is set free as the cat was out of the bag and thus, Katharsis is effected. According to Fry "poetry was an appropriate medium of philosophy because it directly made an appeal to our intuition". Two more names that must not be left out are Stephen Spender and Sean O'Casey. Stephen Spender is a Communist playwright. The theme of his well-known play 'The Trail of a Judge' is the fate of Liberals and Communists in the hands of Hitler's Nazism. He represents the frustrating conditions which produced Nazism in Germany. Sean O'Casey's



Plays 'Glow of Humour', 'Juno and the Peacock' and 'Plough and the Stars' have thrilling themes. The plays show common slum dweller's heroism in the face of hardships of life.

W. B. Yeats, who founded a theatre in Dublin, wrote a number of plays. The plays have the same delicacy which his poems have. His important plays are 'The Countess Cathleen', 'The Land of Heart's Desire', 'Deirdre' etc.

The merit of the dramas consists in the presentation of characters "in a tender or tragic symbolism enveloped in an atmosphere of dream."

The end.

Munir Bhushan Sinha  
Deptt. of English  
S. S. College, Jehanabad