



The Representation of Social Class and Inequality in English Drama with a Special Reference to Indian English Literature

Dr. Vipin Dahiya

PhD (English), CMJ University

Jorabat Ri-Bhoi District Meghalaya

Corresponding Author: vijaydahiyaeng@gmail.com

Abstract

Social class and inequality constitute enduring concerns in English drama, shaping its engagement with power, representation, and social critique. Dramatic literature has consistently reflected the hierarchical structures, economic disparities, and cultural tensions embedded within specific historical and political contexts. From early modern English theatre to contemporary Indian English drama, the stage has functioned as a site where class relations are articulated, contested, and reimagined. English drama records transitions from feudal hierarchies to capitalist formations, foregrounding issues of labour, privilege, and social mobility, while Victorian and modernist plays intensify debates around poverty, industrialisation, and exclusion. In the Indian English context, class representation acquires added complexity through colonial legacies, caste hierarchies, urbanisation, and globalisation. Playwrights engage with the intersections of class and caste, rural–urban migration, diasporic capital flows, and the anxieties of the emerging middle class. Language, space, performance, and reception operate as key dramaturgical strategies through which inequality is staged and interpreted. A comparative approach reveals both continuities and divergences between British and Indian theatrical traditions, highlighting how drama mediates socio-economic realities within postcolonial frameworks. Examining social class in English drama thus deepens understanding of theatre as a socio-political practice that interrogates structures of inequality while amplifying marginalised voices across historical and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Social Class; Inequality; English Drama; Indian English Theatre; Post colonialism; Caste; Representation.

1. Introduction

Representation of social class and inequality in English drama has received relatively limited scrutiny, yet it holds considerable significance for both theatre and literature. Recognising its socio-political dimension, the present study applies a comparative lens to examine class representation across the Anglophone and Indian English stages. It investigates the contested dynamics of power, status, and value in widely circulated texts, performances, and adaptations, addressing the broader theme of representation while foregrounding playwrights and practitioners from marginalised or diasporic backgrounds. The inquiry proceeds in three stages. First, it delineates a preliminary

framework of key concepts, socio-political trajectories, and evaluative criteria; second, it maps the emergence of social-structural representation in early modern English drama, the ensuing Victorian focus on class, labour, and poverty, and the modernist critique of representation; and finally, it shifts to Indian English drama, tracing colonial legacies of privilege and the topologies of land, labour, and remittance in different urban-centred plays, the intertwining of class and caste in city-based scripts, and the diasporic articulation of capitalist flows and identity (Friedman et al., 2016).

Class, largely overlooked in contemporary scholarship, remains a crucial and contested category for understanding social dynamics in a postcolonial context. Varying versions of a four-fold model—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—are widely acknowledged, with the importance of habitus and distinction noted (Adi Nugroho, 2018). Dramaturgy, premised on an elite stage addressing a mixed audience, directly engages with the two key categories of economic capital and social status. The staging of social distinctions, enabling exploration of class relationships, constitutes a further significant feature, while the orientation of plays towards critique, contestation, and exclusion informs evaluation. Central to the consideration of class, inequality, caste, and democracy, the representation of these factors in theatre becomes of paramount interest.

2. Theoretical Framework

Class, social stratification, and economic inequality are prominent concepts in sociological analyses of society and its members. In social stratification, class indicates the distribution of individuals in a defined hierarchy of social status and the social privileges attached thereto. The term "class" is identification of social groups according to their economic status, authority, or power and has a number of subsets, including upper class, capitalist class, middle class, working class, and lower class. In general, class structure is associated with social mobility, which often indicates the movement of individuals from one social stratum to another or from one class to another.

Modern Western theories typically adopt either the Marxist or the Bourdieusian understanding of the distribution of power, authority, privilege, and prestige in society. Marxist theories tend to divide society into two classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—where capital, authority, and power characterize the bourgeoisie, and vulnerability, oppression, and subservience signify the proletariat. Within the Bourdieusian framework, one can discern various forms of capital: economic capital (which encompasses money, assets, and property), cultural capital (education, skills, and aesthetic dispositions), and social capital (social networks and support). The possession of these capitals defines an individual's social standing. By creating a framework that delineates class and the distribution of power and authority within society, one can evaluate the representations of social stratification and economic inequality in dramatic works. The relationship between class structure and social mobility inherently intertwines with the socio-political themes present in dramatic works. Class formation, remain at the centre-stage of economic and cultural developments, become significant conditions and motives for dramatizing social inequalities. Numerous colonial and postcolonial playwrights emphasize this aspect in their works. One may argue that the social dynamics exhibited on the official stage, mirrored by the off-stage preoccupations pertaining to drama itself serve as powerful metrics to evaluate class and obscured beyond-class discourses in these cultural productions (Friedman et al., 2016)

2.1. Class and Inequality: Key Concepts

The term social class can take on different meanings in various countries. Specifically, in British literature up to the nineteenth century, 'class' was applicable to Categories such as royalty, aristocracy, landed gentry, middle class, and working class. Moreover, in the case of Indian English drama, class is proliferated into higher class, upper class, middle class, and lower class. Due to these variations, one needs to understand the meaning of the term class and how it reflects in one's literature. Since the advent of English theatre, drama has been showcasing the social condition of people for the purpose of identifying the cause of their suffering and helping them in getting them liberated from the same. Major themes, like the struggle of slave and downtrodden female, the common man's fight against oligarchy, the rising middle class, the plight of working class and

oppressed peasants, and so on has been put on Indian coach on the Indian stage. Drama exposes the conflict of class structure which hampers the overall development of the individual, civilization, and society (Adi Nugroho, 2018).

2.2. Drama as Socio-political Commentary

From the time of Greek theatre onward, drama has been employed to comment on, and critique, the social order. Theatrical representations of structures of power, and the inequalities they engender, have initiated important debates about how power functions, its actual effect on the “people”, and the manifestation of the “political” on the “social” stage. Drama contributes to the understanding of power, its expression, and exercise in society. The elements of “performance”, “audience”, “spatial configuration”, and “form” that come into play when making a performance about power relations determines the choice of theatrical material from many traditions. In the Indian context, Indian English drama deals with similar themes in theatrical configuration. The Indian stage indulges in debates about the role of globalisation, urbanisation, class inequalities, and currency circulation. Simultaneously, constraints are engaged in further unravelling how urbanisation, out-migration, unequal wealth distribution, and dominant classes reflect patterns of converse on the social stage. The same lens remains inquired to discover the nature of economic power and class representation on the English stage, the offering of a larger scope to examine how the political is represented on the social stage. (Modupe Elizabeth, 2014)

3. Historical Trajectories of English Drama and Class Representation

Class representation in English drama travelling from the early modern period to the dawn of the postcolonial era is a frame for identifying the influences that inform contemporary Indian English drama. Class metaphors—from the ‘great chain of Being’ to social contract theory, from economics to moral virtue—structure early modern dramatic texts from *The Tempest* to *The Duchess of Malfi*, while the status of the female voice and the ethical dimensions of disparate levels of language are at stake in later works from *Egdon Heath* to *The Silver Box*. Current Indian English plays inherit colonial legacies of privilege associated with land, labour, and remittance, and the social topographies of these texts betray similar gradients. Urban-stage representations of caste-inflected hierarchies, class mobility, and spheres of negotiation (taxis, homes, public mean) echo condition-of-England discourse, while diasporic drama critically interrogates the transnational flows of capital, privilege, and identity underwriting forms of British citizenship and otherness.

The classical canon engages other patterns of class representation and social stratification. In the early modern period, differential patterns of status marking (banner, accent, spectacle) invite comparisons with contemporary plays. Disparate registers of utterance (*Titus Andronicus*, *King Lear*) and social punishment (*Years of Rice and Salt*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*) provide additional touchstones although reception environments have shifted. Contemporary debates on the importance of the vernacular and the favouring of mirror-characters after the birth of English Romanticism find complex reflections in Indian English drama (Singh Thakur, 2012).

3.1. Early Modern to Romantic Conceptions of Class

In the early modern period, the dominant social order in England was feudalism, epitomized by the Great Chain of Being, a hierarchically structured conception of society in which the status and land-holding of the nobility were divinely ordained (Van Renen, 2017). The rapid rise of a national and international commercial economy, which reached its zenith with the expansion of a colonial empire in the late seventeenth century, gave rise to a propertied bourgeoisie and accelerated the dismantling of feudalism, foreshadowing the emergence of a capitalist social formation and the transition to early industrial capitalism. The middle class began to appropriate the economic and social life of women and the lower orders while concurrently claiming to disown those connections. As a result, groups on the fringes of society, including beggars, vagabonds, and the urban underclass, became crucial to domestic modernization and commercial expansion while representing both nostalgic remnants of feudalism and emerging economic forces. The class of laborers, impoverished through land enclosures and the

mechanization associated with proto-industrialization, whose appropriation P. W. M. Freeman terms Morton and Haywood's "terrible omission," also supplied funds that sustained England's creative and performative activities. The early-modern and Romantic periods, projected onto the natural worldview of human life, witnessed considerable economic progress, despite the unobtrusive contributions of women and the working poor.

3.2. Victorian and Edwardian Debates on Social Stratification

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the effect of the industrial revolution in Britain, with the rise of factories, a significant working class, a plethora of cheap literature, and new types of magazines, changed the established ideologies and created new commentaries on social stratification and class shifting. The changing views on class division permeated into the literature of the time. The spread of Dickens's novels helped in creating an artistic exploration of the division of a metropolis into poor and rich, the social issues faced by the poor, and the proposed remedies for their problems. Ibsen's dramas similarly depicted the financial quandaries of a family and the lamentos of a woman deserted by society because the man, the sole breadwinner, had succumbed to death.

The emergence of the middle class, due to the establishment of large-scale factories and convert propagandas regarding education, was a critical turning point in Victorian literature. The role of the working class was also fast attracting the eye of contemporary artists. Many satirized the shift of political tone from the reform of the working classes into a tenor which guided its political, economic, educational, and social processes. The pen-drawn opinions of Mr. Punch in "The British Working Man" and the anti-reform wave gathering effect among the middle classes when the trial of a police sergeant, who jumped into an expansion mind-sink to save the life of an urchin regardless of personal safety and lost his position because the remnant lost such a prestige, met an acute flood of opinionations (Friedman et al., 2016).

3.3. Twentieth-Century Anglophone Theatre and Structural Inequality

Class and inequality have been foundational topics in Anglophone drama from the early modern period to the present, with representations just as prevalent and compelling in Indian English works. Twentieth-century English-language theatre in both colonial and postcolonial contexts, however, has underscored processes of social exclusion and the modern, urban experiences of alienation they engender. In modernist and postcolonial texts, class conflict emerges as a primary structuring principle of the dramatic work, yet the trajectory of exclusion extends far beyond economic or cultural capital. Situating expressed social preoccupations with, for example, labour, poverty, and urbanisation against a backdrop of restrictive entitlement geometries and continental European developments in the treatment of class and conflict—especially in respect of modernism, theatre of the absurd, and a more recent prioritisation of postcolonial approaches—multiple British and Irish plays elucidate a distinctive dramaturgical approach to these topics. Postcolonial works from the subcontinent that engage with similar issues frequently do so in a manner informed by metropolitan performance traditions and preoccupations, yet a constellation of several distinctively local socio-political factors inspires a range of highly Indianite versions of both the dramatic situations and the broader conditions underpinning effective class conflict (Friedman et al., 2016).

4. Indian English Drama: Postcolonial Contexts and Class Narratives

The patronage system established during British colonialism has shaped the trajectory of Indian English plays by creating and perpetuating various hierarchies of class (Pillai, 2015). Economic structures based on the unequal distribution of land and labor, the movement of remittances from abroad, and privileges inherited through generations of wealth and status are not only evident in contemporary society, but they are also echoed in the social topographies of the scripts. Rapid urbanization has resulted in the relocation of rural populations to cities in search of better opportunities. Hence, the increasing visibility of urban spaces, where caste-inflected hierarchies coexist with aspirations for class mobility, and the activities associated with negotiating identities and

statuses in workplaces, public spaces, and other venues have attracted the attention of Indian playwrights.

In addition, migration across national borders has facilitated the flow of capital on a transnational scale and spawned a new Indian diaspora. Such movements, coupled with the global reach of the internet, have given rise to interactively motivated modes of identity formation that traverse geographical, political, social, and cultural boundaries. These contemporary realities of diaspora find resonance in a segment of Indian theatre that addresses capital accumulation for personal and collective advancement in the wake of postcolonial liberation movements, the scramble for integration into the global market, and the influence of globalisation on local capital through high-tech channels. The resultant modes of critique have also come to register an awareness of the diasporic experience, as signals and signs of capital and identity formation become transactional commodities mediated by geopolitical concerns, individual aspirations, and artistic self-expression.

4.1. Colonial Legacies and Economic Hierarchies

Several colonial legacies contribute to the reproduction of privilege and economic stratification in contemporary India. Titles to land, ownership of buildings, salaries paid to domestic helpers, influxes of foreign remittances, and connections to the Indian diaspora collectively lend a degree of economic security to certain urban upper classes and upper middle classes. Indeed, certain Indian English plays map distributions of privilege according to such colonial topographies. India's economic transformation since liberalization has continued to generate wealth. Nevertheless, various scripts still dramatize the anxiety of the new rich since the newly rich can be labeled parvenus (Singh Thakur, 2012).

Anxiety about economic security stemming from privilege accompanies upward-mobility concerns. Aligning with Bourdieu's distinction between the preservation of capital and the accumulation of capital, Indian English dramas suggest that non-privileged individuals tend to pursue upward mobility while the privileged strive to safeguard privilege. Such hierarchies persist despite formal political independence. Hindi theatre similarly grapples with the colonial legacy of economics.

4.2. Urbanization, Caste, and Class in Indian Stage Traditions

The city is prominent in modern Indian English drama, and its representation points toward social experience. The expansion of metropolitan settings corresponds to the heightened movement of people and ideas towards cities. The contact of actors and audiences from different social domains has been a key feature of theatre in India since the sixteenth century, making it a site of social negotiation. While numerous plays refer unequivocally to caste, and others evince a preoccupation with class, such engagement is less widespread at the level of idiom and form. The representations of urban space depict predominantly Hindu hierarchies built upon the discourse of caste and positioned within a Christian-Liberal economy. Where class appears as a distinct phenomenon, it mostly takes the shape of mobility in and out of the middle classes. Class, furthermore, emerges at the intersection of other forces that shape the subcontinent. Yet class preoccupations are by no means absent in the plays, which comment on the city and its environ as a site of movement, a psycho-spatial distancing that germinates imitation, and a metropolis of longing.

The hierarchical and exclusionary structure of the caste system has continued in modern times and still plays a dominant role in the lives of the Indian populace, irrespective of their religion or community. Caste-inflected operations have also affected many aspects of social functioning—hinterland, environmental ecology, demography, health, culture, city life, literary and artistic work, regional and national politics, scotocultural production and consumption, economic activity and class relations. Caste appears to be closely related to land ownership and its contiguity with poverty, prevailing economic inequality, economic exploitation and social injustice.

4.3. Diaspora, Global Capital, and Class Consciousness in Indian English Plays

Chaudhuri's English-language plays evince both a concern with the effects of transnational capital flows on contemporary identity formation and a critique of prevalent understandings of class in radical Indian theatre (Lerche & Alpa, 2018). The gradual emergence of an Indian middle class invested with agency—together with the associated theorisation of the middle-class subject as the agent of social change—profoundly influences the elaboration of a class-based critique on the Indian stage under the hegemonic paradigm of globalisation. A number of plays consider the consequences of the Indian diaspora, with characters moving to Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Globalisation endows particular characters with vast financial resources while conferring access to leading job positions in multinational corporations or governmental institutions. Indian expatriates residing in these locations remain obsessed with potential returns to both home and motherland; the emphasis on money and significant remittances enables the consumerist Indian middle class to claim full participation in the ever-expanding global economy.

Globalisation, equated with modernisation and development, becomes a universalised praxis; various funds, from the World Bank to the International Monetary Fund, increasingly support its implementation. Purely economic definitions of modernity, abstraction, wealth, glamour, and speed ultimately dominate the discourse on globalisation. In this context, the “underdeveloped,” “developing,” and “newly industrialised” countries, together with “growth” and “modernisation” as paradigmatic manoeuvres for re-colonisation, basically become endangered; diaspora, remittance, and return emerge as centralised tropes, fetishised by the comparatively well-off Indian middle class, thanks to the roles played by global television channels, print media, and the Internet.

During the developmental phase, several prominent questions about the aforementioned parameters arise: Who constitutes the diaspora? Which groups are considered part of the middle class? What conceptual regions or sectors are covered by the term “globalisation”? Such interrogations hint at class and non-class overlapping paradigms ultimately determining the trajectory of socio-political movement and, thereby, the type of patterns and forward or backward routes of arrangement on the Indian stage. Specific forms of performative enactment hinge upon such configurations and the particular location in English in which the play is originally scripted.

5. Comparative Analyses: Classical English Drama and Indian English Drama

The functional concept, as understood in Aristotelian poetics, is one of impersonation, distinct from the word ‘theatre,’ which refers to the place of these acts. In imaginative literature artificiality and abstraction relegate this definition to the mere level of implicit or tacit understanding. Theresa Tinkle describes the mode of theatre as the relationship of metadramatic information at work when narrative discourse concerns itself with “the making of a narrative” (Singh Thakur, 2012). Modification of the representation of the constructed drama is the origin of all other interference with the story, including self-consciousness. A performative dimension may occur whenever a creator produces another creator daring to refocus attention on the fictive codes and conventions guiding the joint or collective story experienced. The use of self-consciousness focuses on the act of representation rather than the nature of ultimate intention in a manner analogous to “metafiction.” Interpretation looks for the reproduction of the collectivity beyond the narrative to embrace the wider collaboration involved in the shaping of the dramatic narrative.

Shakespeare's engagement in various play settings retains the ambitious character of literature when even the fictive Predicate Language reaches out to engage in conversations on that topic. Ambition sits at the foundation of the official rationale for Shakespeare's Shakespeare with the intended focus on reception spanning viewership to much broader cultural impact. Such enterprise conveniently bears the advantage of remaining congruous with the driving aim of assessing appropriations of Shakespeare within Indian English drama notwithstanding official definitional paraphernalia that evolute the term “appropriation” onto a vantage point displacing the axis onto directly linked originals. Comparative yardsticks for measuring Shakespeare's Indian reproduction similarly prosper by being framed into colourations without sacrificially contorting the Dickiean norms stipulating the jocular and non-pragmatic or literal substantiation of “Shakespeare” set in place for this undertaking portrayals thusly.

5.1. Representational Strategies: Dialogue, Space, and Symbolism

Dialogue in English drama reveals its class hierarchies through differing registers and stimulation of varying registers and stimulation of higher faculties in the audience. Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists employed a broad range of expression that reflected thematic concerns and supported meaning. Shakespeare reserved prose for clowns, fools, and those in love, juxtaposing the double-weighted speech of the educated elite with the crude portents of the unlettered. The language of his comedies, laughed at by the lover and admirer of what is termed good English, as well as by the critic who, with genteel superiority, disdains the comic grace of that tongue which current tradition has christened correct, the prattle of Hamlet's childish innocence, the grandiloquent simplicity of Mark Antony, and the mercenary affections of the merchant princess whose luxurious environment may excuse her gentle yet clumsy mockery of the vernacular — these are but a few instances that suggest Mr. Saintsbury is perhaps serving a little less than the ideal of a critic of genius when he implores King Lear in the Santa Cruz of William's imbecility of pain (though God knows the satire is good enough) to "pour out the rime of the no-whither herd that loved thy daughter".

The spatial dynamics of English drama articulate social topography and symbolize class relations. Public scenes depict top-down power, hierarchies of authority and influence, and are especially prominent when the king is in council. Domestic scenes are more private than public places, but less private than bedchambers or privileged spots relatively. Characters in these private yet public locations lack the public aspect of domestic privacy which the dramatist places delicately in the joint-scene, the double-scene, and the sonnet above all — and they therefore seem to speak from the innermost sources of the moment. On that principle Abelard unveils the innermost depths of the soul, murdering all its so-called peace, else it cannot be within that chamber that men suffer death's fears.

5.2. Performance, Reception, and Ideological Contestation

The dynamics of reception, censorship, and critique marked by class participate in the larger performative site of ideology in the Indian English theatre. Reception and censorship diverged notably within the avant-garde western and the subsequent Indian international and modern periods, given the potentially more heterogeneous and contested character of the Indian English public. At the level of production, a stronger sense of ideological contestation is discernible. The audience inhabiting English drama in India often involves inclusion and exclusion beyond the literary, where a wider language horizon—Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Assamese, and their vernaculars —along with modes of mass communication, cultural institutions, and economic class impinges upon the scope and articulation of class. Arguments regarding class do not dwell solely on the demographic contours basic to early British statecraft and the implications of the nation's language choice, able to extend toward broader geo-political debates on the absence of culture and religion within the modernist canon even in the colonial period, yet elaboration might continue elsewhere (Friedman et al., 2016).

6. Methodological Approaches to Studying Class in Drama

Class scrutinizes the socio-economic structures underlying oppression, domination, and violence (Friedman et al., 2016). Class and caste mediums of analysis transcend orthodox dominant class social stratification. Caste—cultural, socio-political difference—continually redefines at multi-layered levels but determinative to culture formation, assimilation not in Gramsci's subaltern class sense. Colonialization reverse ensure indirect rule via culturally capable hybrid populace, ambivalence-induced differentiation cannot be suppressed through positive locate inherently colonial dependency.

Marking via Brahmanic terms "upper castes" (land-labour relation) vice "subaltern" describing adivasi, dalit (labour-extract/demolition) remains dominant in privileged urban cosmopolitan analysis (Thidemann Faber, 2012). Classical English drama texts reveal performing modes generating, reinforcing social class discussion post-colonization, performativity confluence by stage, theatre, city format (text—space—performative system)—reading dependant tradition : textual surface

performative site residue city-urban site classification collapse with class dominant-influenced spatial dimension.

6.1. Textual Analysis and Performance Critique

The representation of social class and inequality in drama has received sustained scholarly attention. Numerous generative theoretical perspectives and critical approaches have emerged over time. The present study narrows its focus to textual analysis and performance critique, examining the role of language and stagecraft as indicators of class relationality. As a preliminary step, a specification of the social dynamics invoked by theatrical oration and a survey of the performative expression recorded in written drama are informative.

Working-class speech necessarily appears with differing frequency across class-specific texts. Engagement in the upper and middling ranks tends to invite rhetorical embellishment, while operatic extravagance—and even the elevation of blank verse and rhyme—often accompanies figures of authority. By contrast, the poorer strata frequently surrender narrative to representatives from adjacent classes. Such preoccupation resonates with longstanding debates about voice and the polity that inform the analysis of socio-political theatre within the study. A further delineation of the formal register assumed by a socially subordinate speaker serves as a complement, connecting more broadly to the differing dialects of vernacular literature.

One major feature of socio-economic parameters concerns the spatial or topographical dimension they comprise. Commentary within the field of architectural criticism frequently accounts for the distribution of private space and the correlate invitation to observe the private conduct of others. As in augmenting an upper-middling drawing manner with quotations from Chaucer and Bunyan, the play of stage, space, and direction may correlate with comments on the restrictions of public and private observability. The preponderance of the drama, particularly in English and French, reverts to topographical or expository selection, determining the validated attitudes and values of society at large. The referral of citizenship remains of constitutional and parliamentary significance; increasingly, the notion of class representation was set to displace the concerns of property qualification and conventional pathologies of extravagance, debt, and vice evident in the later plays discussed.

6.2. Sociological and Postcolonial Readings

Representations of social class in Indian English theatre reveal the enduring nature of colonial legacy and the complexity of class and caste in India. Sociological and postcolonial readings illuminate how class—systematically framed by establishment theorists as a new phenomenon in independent India and as a declining concern within the diaspora—evolves in these plays.

The historical legacy of class and its specific indexing may vary, but major themes recur. Privilege and power based on class remain unaddressed in endless texts. Specialization in class centred study of the ongoing links between socio-political, economic, and cultural phenomena provides enduring insight. Reference to external authority grounds class theory beyond national and diasporic constraints, while synergy with a rubric approach helps pinpoint links within urgent cross-national and inter-regional class analyses (Pillai, 2015).

6.3. Interdisciplinary Frameworks

In approaching the study of social class in drama, the methodological framework can be broadened through the incorporation of anthropological, historical, and cultural policy perspectives. Such interdisciplinary engagement enhances the interpretive possibilities afforded by sociological and postcolonial lenses. Anthropological analyses of community, collectivity, performativity, and ritual allow for an exploration of dramatic texts and their wider societal resonances beyond the concept itself through modes of enunciation, expression, and relation. Accordingly, drama remains a crucial idiom for negotiating class dynamics, social hierarchies, and structural inequalities, closely entwined with scholarly, mediatic, and public debate (Pillai, 2015).

7. Implications for Literary Criticism and Cultural Policy

The findings bear salient implications for both literary criticism and cultural policy. On the one hand, they call for a renewed scrutiny of the socio-political dimensions of English-language theatre, especially Indian English drama, in curricula and criticism. Certain theatre-makers and practitioners these days consciously foreground issues of class and economic inequality in their writing, practice, and outreach. They align the theatrical with social movements dedicated to actual social change and view theatre through the lens of empowerment. Yet existing scholarship seldom explores the diplomatic, ethical, or ideological concerns raised by these plays. On the level of pedagogical practices and avenues of inquiry, it becomes necessary to ask what elements, ideas, and spectacles may operate as class and economic commentary; how one prioritises some materials over others; and whom in the community the result serves. Analyses performed thereon are likely to reshape the contents and discussion of syllabi and the tenor of essays, notes, introductions, and criticism more generally (Pillai, 2015).

8. Conclusion

The exploration of social class and inequality in drama demonstrates an abiding interest in understanding society by examining its structures and the implications of this understanding as a form of moral inquiry. In addition to insights into the dynamics of production and reception of theatrical events, analysis of representational strategies and per formative site provide a framework for determining, categorizing, and interpreting social, political, cultural, and ideological commentaries on stratification in general and class in particular. Such a framework locates the values and assumptions shaping discourses on the material and structural realities of life, especially those whose voices and concerns have been least heard in the past, while simultaneously facilitating the understanding of a specific topic in greater depth. The findings support claims for class as a lens through which to study drama and theatre and for the dialogue of literary criticism with class theory, especially with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Because drama is simultaneously a literary and a per formative form, encompassing not just the text but also the staging, acting, audience, and site of performance, an analysis of its function as a means of social inquiry necessarily includes consideration not only of the play as text—its language, structure, and situatedness but also of the staging, the mode of acting, the nature of the audience, and the specific site of performance. Such inequalities of attention and analysis beg for rectification, both in the spirit of the dialogue and for obtaining a fuller understanding of the role of class in any society and its representation in a novel play or, for that matter, in any text.

References:

1. Faber, S. T. (2012). The disavowal of difference: Accessing class and symbolic boundary-drawing in interviews. *Qualitative Studies*, 3(2), 181–197. <https://tidsskrift.dk/qual/article/view/7309>
2. Friedman, S., O'Brien, D., & Laurison, D. (2017). 'Like skydiving without a parachute': How class origin shapes occupational trajectories in British acting. *Sociology*, 51(5), 992–1010. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516629917>
3. James, D., & Colman, F. (2017). Military class: Hearts and minds on the domestic screen. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 14(1), 61–79. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jbct.2017.0242>
4. Lerche, J., & Shah, A. (2018). Conjugated oppression within contemporary capitalism: Class, caste, tribe and agrarian change in India. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(5–6), 927–949. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2018.1463217>
5. Nugroho, A. D. (2018). The social classes and reflection of 18th century life in novel Pamela. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 1(4), 486–497.
6. Olawale, M. E. (2014). Ben Jonson's The Alchemist, as a social history. *European Scientific Journal*, 10(10), 1857–7881. <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/3425>

7. Pillai, M. (2015). Cultural studies and the reinvention of English pedagogy in India. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 46(1–2), 143–172. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/35676>
8. Thakur, V. S. (2012). From ‘imitation’ to ‘indigenization’: A study of Shakespeare performances in colonial Calcutta. *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, (25), 133–147. <https://doi.org/10.14198/raei.2012.25.10>
9. Van Renen, D. (2017). *The other exchange: Women, servants, and the urban underclass in early modern English literature*. University of Nebraska Press.

Cite this Article

Dr. Vipin Dahiya, “The Representation of Social Class and Inequality in English Drama with a Special Reference to Indian English Literature”, *International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Education, ISSN (Online): Applied, Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 29-38, October - December 2025.*

Journal URL: <https://ijlle.com/>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

