

In mystery and miracle plays, incidents from the Bible and episodes from the Lives of the Saints were turned into dramas and these were performed on the occasion of religious festivals, which under the Catholic Church were as numerous as in the Hindu Calendar. The mystery plays began with a simple pageant of the Christmas or Easter story in the church itself. These plays were at first written and performed by the clergy within the precincts of the church. But as laymen gradually began to take greater interest in those performances, non-religious themes, gradually found place in them and these dramatic representations gradually assumed a secular aspect.

Miracle plays are medieval dramatic presentations of the miracles of Christian Saints. They developed from the earlier Biblical mystery plays and the term 'miracle' is sometimes used to include both. The English mystery plays have been preserved in four important cycles - The Townley, York, Chester and Coventry plays, named after the towns where they were enacted. The line between the mysteries and the miracles which dealt with the miracles of Christian saints, is not always clearly drawn, and the mysteries are sometimes included in the term 'miracle plays'. Dramatically, these plays are loose in construction and had no sense of proportion. Yet they certainly gave to the English drama its distinctive character, stressing unity of character rather than of action.

Dr. Anand Kumar
18-09-2020