UNIT STRUCTURE

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- define what is a play,
- discuss the history of the play,
- state the constituent parts of a play,
- Analyze the preparatory stages of writing a play.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

You must have surely heard the word 'play' in your lifetime. Here 'play' is not what you mean in the simple sense of the term i.e. taking part in game or sports. So, in its literary context its

meaning is to act on a stage, to perform a role of a character. We can also say that a play is a dramatic composition that tells a story by means of dialogue and action to be performed on the stage. So in this unit, we will help you to understand the concept of a play. We will also provide you the history of the play along with play's constituent parts. We have set simple comprehensive exercises to test your understanding of the unit. After completing this unit we feel that you will be able to recognize the constituent parts of the play, appreciate the history of the play and be able to write a play. So now let us move to the concept of the play.

4.3 WHAT IS A PLAY

In the introduction, I have stated that to play means to take part in games or sports. But its meaning in the literary context is to act on a stage, to perform a role of a character. From this we can say that a play is a dramatic composition that tells a story by means of dialogue and action to be performed on the stage. It is thus a dramatic representation and its equivalent word is drama. In Greek language, drama also meant simply to act or perform. So, the ***good old name for drama*** is *play*.

Plays are fundamentally different from other literary forms. Stories and poems are written only for reading. But plays are designed for performance, not for reading alone. Words are written to be spoken by actors and heard by an audience. So it has both the aural and visual aspects. Actors are the vehicles as well as the instruments for the playwrights. The word '***Playwright***' is etymologically to be noted. It falls in the same line as that of a 'shipwright', a 'cartwright', or a 'wheelwright', carrying the sense of a craft person, a maker of crafts. Similarly, a playwright is also a maker of a script for the stage-a text. But that does not mean that it will not carry literary elements or aesthetic complexity.Let me tell you that a play should contain a story, usually of human conflicts, and fully exists in production and should have its access to the theatre at the stage. This is crucial to the structure of the play.

You should note that a play is to be acted before an audience. We cannot conceive of a play without an audience. The author has both actors and audience in view when he is penning his lines. No doubt it is a story or fiction or fact told to an audience, but ***it is in essence a story or fact interpreted before an audience by a body of actors***. A Play has thus a plot, characters, dialogue, an atmosphere, an outlook on life. Its full qualities are revealed in presentation on the stage before an audience.

Considering all these aspects and features for distinguishing Drama as an art- form from other arts, Allardyce Nicoll in his book ***Theory of Drama*** has framed its rough definition in this way.:

'Drama is the art of expressing ideas about life in such a manner as to render that expression capable of interpretation by actors and likely to interest an audience assembled to hear the words and witness the action.'

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is a play ?

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2. What is the good old name of drama ?

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4.4 HISTORY OF THE PLAY

Now that we have some idea of the concept of a play, let us now discuss the history of the play at length. I must mention here that in

almost all the countries plays took their origin from the religious ceremonies and rituals and had histories of their own.

4.4.1 Origin in Greece and Rome

We all know that in ancient Greece, Dionysus, the son of Zeus, was the greatest God of vegetation, creativity, wine and ecstasy etc. Centring round this God many kinds of worships and festivities were prevalent. Dancing and Singing were practised in his honour at festivals. A poet wrote verses in his praise and these were sung by Chorus-a band of boys with a leader. These chorus-chants were called dithyrambs, meaning twice-born referring to Dionysus. Around sixth century B.C. Thespis, a chorus -director developed dialogue and acting and he himself acted in different roles. Dithyrambs were, thus, seen as the basis of Greek drama.*

* The Theory of genesis of Greek drama in Dionysiac dithyramb has now, of course, been challenged by some critics who maintain that the tragedy in fact arose out of ancestor-worship or the cult of the dead. But it is still accepted that Greek drama is choric in nature.

The wine-flushed devotees dressed themselves in symbolic garments led the way to the growth of satiric comedies. But the more stately worshippers at the altars showed men the possibilities of tragic emotions. Thespis's plays are not available now. He is said to have invented the tragic mask for wearing by the Greek actors. But after that the Greek tragedies had fully developed in the hands of Aeschylus (525-425 BC.), Sophocles (495-406 BC.) and Euripides (480-406 BC.). Comedies developed in the hands of the great dramatist Aristophanes (445-385 BC.)

4.4.2 Origin in Indian

The ancient Greeks and the Romans believed that the dramatic poets had the power and the duty to '***teach***' and to '***please***'. So

was the belief in the divine origin of the drama in India also. It is said in the Bharats's ***Natya Sastra***-a monumental and brilliant document of dramaturgy in Sanskrit, like Aristotle's ***Poetics***, written as early as 2nd century BC.,-that the Gods urged before Lord ***Brahma*** that they wanted to see and enjoy a play ***(Kridaniyaka)*** which should be audio-visual and should be open to all-for gods and common men irrespective of caste, creed or colour. The sage Bharata was given the task of writing such a play and the rules to be prescribed for acting. Thus the ***Natya Sastra*** which was called the fifth ***Veda*** is said to have come into being. Bharata wrote down here in great detail the theory and principles of the Art and Drama and the practical aspects of staging and acting.

We can say that historically in India, the dramatic dialogues with brief anecdotes can be traced in the ***Rigveda*** itself. Let me tell you that the ***Ramayana*** and the ***Mahabharata*** also contain germs of dramatic dialogues. The major classical dramatists of the ancient period in India are Bhasa, Kalidasa, Sudraka, Bhavabhuti, Bisakhdutta and others. Bhasa was the greatest playwright before Kalidasa, whose thirteen plays have so far been traced and published. The date of his life and compositions has been assigned between 1st century AD and the 3rd century AD.

4.4.3 Origin in Egypt

Having looked at the origin in ancient Greece and Rome and in India , now let us look at the origin of drama in Egypt. The great Egyptian civilisation before 2000 BC. contained religious ceremonies to ensure their immortality. Pharoahs ruled as God-kings in beautiful palaces and built the pyramids. One of their fascinating ceremonies was theatre, though of a primitive type. The grave-stone of a king of the 12th dynasty (about 1800 BC.) carries an inscription to the effect that he rebuilt an old temple and arranged the performance of certain rituals connected with the story of Osiris, the great God, the elder son of *Ra*. From the

descriptions it is clear to you that these rituals were of a dramatic or at least pantomimic nature. One of the earliest plays was ***The Adydos Passion Play*** which enacted a religious theme of the great God Osiris and His resurrection.

It can, however, be said that the evolution of the drama in Egypt from ritualistic beginnings to a full-fledged literary form did not take place till the advent of the Greeks.

4.4.4 Origin in England

After having looked into the origin in Egypt, now let us move on to the origin of drama in England. I must tell you that it will be an interesting reading for you to know the origin of the play in England. The growth of drama in England was not only religious but was also indigenous to the soil. In the middle ages, Church-services were conducted in Latin were not understood by the most of the congregations. The clergy therefore, tried to explain things in the form of acting episodes from the life of Christ and other scenes of the Bible. The Latin dialogue was gradually replaced by English. Initially the actors were all priests and monks. As more characters were introduced and performances became more elaborate, they moved out of the church into churchyards and then into the streets. Thus in the height of the process of spreading of Christianity, the English plays started with ***Mysteries*** and ***Miracles*** and after that sprang up ***Moralities*** and the ***Interludes***.

These were later developed into the full florescence of the Elizabethan drama in the sixteenth century. At the earlier time the direct influence of the Greek drama was not visible. But the *Revival of Learning* naturally led to the performance of Greek and Latin plays in schools and colleges. So the English plays were also modelled on the Greek classical traditions. But soon , with the gradual rise of new spirit and new movement in the native awakening during the Elizabethan period , the genius of

Shakespeare emerged, who enthralled the dramatic world with his immortal plays and its growth became all-comprehensive. Thus you can see that germs of the play originated in religious ceremonies and rituals and had a history of its own.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Say true or false :

1. Greek tragedies had fully developed in the hands of Aeschylus (525-425 BC.), Sophocles (495-406 BC.) and Euripides (480-406 BC.).
2. Comedies developed in the hands of the great dramatist Aristophanes (445-385 BC.).

4.5 TYPES OF DRAMA

I have already mentioned about the origin of play, so now let us delve into the different kinds of play. From the earliest times, drama has been broadly divided into two kinds, namely, Tragedy and Comedy. The tragedy and the comedy of the ancient Greeks are still accepted as the prime and model achievements in this form of art.

Tragedy is a sad or unlucky event in human life in the ordinary sense of the term. In drama it deals with the tragic and dark side of life, aiming at inspiring the people with a sense of pity and awe. Characters are faced with tragic situations and finally there is catastrophe and an unhappy fate.

Generally speaking, tragedies are classified in two forms-Classical and Romantic-the former is based on Greek conventions, the latter on its own standards.

The word ‘comic’ or comedy, as you know, is ordinarily used for something which is funny or laughable and deals with the lighter side of life. It has a pleasant atmosphere and is entertaining. In some cases, you can see that there are some tragic situations, but ultimately, there is happy ending. Some are again, satirical. Satire and Comedy are closely related.

Like tragedies, comedies are also of several types. There are some 'romantic comedies' as recognised by the critics, like Shakespeare's romantic comedies. There are also comedy of 'humours', comedy of 'manners', sentimental comedies, black or dark comedies etc. Apart from these, there are tragi- comedies, containing comic relief and at the some time possessing some potentially tragic background. Since we have now discussed the various types of drama, so let us now analyze the concept of tragedy in the Indian context also.

4.5.1 Indian Conception of Tragedy

It has been maintained that because of the distinct nature of Indian philosophy the classical Indian theatre did not have tragedies. Nor is severe violent action, such as murder, shown on the stage. The characters underwent pain, suffering and they experienced sorrow in the middle portion of the drama, but ultimately there is joy and happiness and a happy ending. The end is non-tragic. The purpose is to achieve bliss or ***Ananda***-oneness with the Absolute-the essence of all being.

This dramatic art, according to the Indian classical view, is meant or used as a means of understanding the Absolute and attaining bliss. Of course, one or two tragedies are available in Sanskrit literature.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is a tragedy?

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2. Does tragedy exists in classical Indian concept ?

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4.6 THEORY OF DRAMA

As you know that since drama is an art, so like all arts it must have its conventions, principles and some theories. A play must deliver the whole message within a very few hours. A playwright has to exercise great economy in the handling of the plot, in the delineation of character, in use of choicest words rejecting all superfluous and unnecessary details. Only those essential materials are required which lead only to the growth of dramatic characters and situations and which are conducive to the intended dramatic effect. So you can see that from the point of view of structure, a play must have some divisions as shown below.

(i) An Exposition :

This forms the introduction, explaining the circumstances or situation from which the action is to start. The exposition gives the audience an idea of when and where the action is about to take place , who are the characters involved , what is their relation with each other and what has taken place before the curtain goes up.

(ii) The complication or Rising action :

After the exposition is developed, the play gradually involves in complication or in progress of the story which must be resolved in the play itself. This is called the complication.

The complication creates suspense. The action then proceeds to the point of greatest emotional impact, which is called the

(iii) Climax (or Crisis):

Then it takes a turn for the better or worse (according to the kind of play-comedy or tragedy). It is called, then, the

(iv) Denoument (or Falling Action):

The falling action unravels the solutions to the problems raised and helps the movement towards the resolution of the conflicts presented in the play, which is called Resolution.

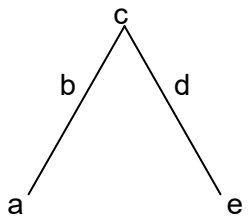
Then it is–

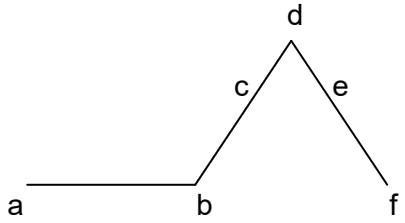
(v) Solution or Catastrophe:

Here the problem of the play is solved, outcome of the situation is made clear, and the fate of the characters is decided. In case of comedy it is ***solution*** and in the tragedy it is ***catastrophe.***

These constitutional parts in the composition of a play is proportionately structured according to the length of the drama. In a five-act play the ***Exposition*** occupies the first act or so; the ***Complication*** the next two acts or so; ***the climax is a part of the third act;*** the ***Denoument*** and resolution is in the rest of the third act, the fourth act and a part of the fifth; the **Solution** or **Catastrophe** is in the rest of the fifth act. In shorter plays it is reduced accordingly. In **one-Act plays** these parts are further reduced. The first three or four speeches form the exposition after which it moves into conflict or complication. The action proceeds to the climax and then quickly goes to denoument and then to the final solution.

The five-fold divisions are almost universally accepted and can be shown in a diagram in the following way. Let us now look at the diagram :





A. a = Introduction or Exposition
b = Complication or Rising action
c = Climax, crisis or turning point
d = Denoument or Falling action or Return
e = Catastrophe or Solution

B. a = Exposition
b = Initial incident
c = Growth of action to its crisis
d = Crisis or turning point
e = Resolution
f = Catastrophe

Here in the diagram B we have seen that there are six divisions. Diagram A is a pyramidal structure for five-fold divisions, as symbolised by Gustav Freytag (1816-1875), a renowned German critic and dramatist. But W. Hudson in his book, An Introduction to the Study of Literature provided another minor division after introduction or exposition. To him, there are certain conditions or certain relations of character which are to be explained to the audience for better intelligibility and this distinguishes the introduction of the dramatic plot. This is called the **Initial incident**.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is an exposition in a play ?

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2. Explain denouement ?

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4.6.1 Classical Divisions of A Dramatic Plot

In ancient Greek dramas these divisions of the progress of the dramatic plot were known slightly in a different way. John Dryden (1631-1700), a dramatist and critic of the Restoration period of English literature wrote in his An Essay of Dramatic Poesy that Aristotle divided the integral parts of a play into four.

i) The *Protasis* (Entrance) : Some lights are given here only to the characters of the persons, and proceeds very little to any part of action.

ii) The *Epitasis* : (Working up of the plot)	Here, the play grows warmer, dramatic episodes gradually rise into action. spectators see something promising that it will come to pass.
iii) The *Catastasis* : (*Status*; the height and the full growth of the play)	Here is the counter-turn destroying the expected expectation, embroils the action in new difficulties etc.
iv) The *Catastrophe* :	Here, the discovery or the unravelling of the plot.

Though Dryden referred to Aristotle for this division, but this is not found in 'Poetics.' Yet these vague divisions, however, existed in Greek dramas, though division of plays into acts were not known to the Greeks.

Later on, you can see that the Elizabethan dramas did not, however, follow these divisions. A.C. Bradley, the great critic of Shakespearean Tragedies of the twentieth century tried to divide the dramatic constructions of the tragedies roughly into three parts:

i) The Exposition:	It sets forth or expounds the situation, or the state of affairs out of which conflict arises.
ii) Definite beginning:	The growth and vicissitudes of the conflict are exposed here. It forms accordingly the bulk of the play.
iii) Catastrophe:	The issue of the conflict ends in the result, here is catastrophe.

Bradley admitted that this scheme of division was naturally more

or less arbitrary; the first part glides to the second, the second into the third. Difficulties may however be there in drawing the distinct lines between them. Bradley himself was aware of the pyramidal divisions shown by Gustav Freytag in his famous book, *The Technique of the Drama (1863).*

Coming to the recent times again, George Bernard Shaw, the famous dramatist, commented that formerly one had in a well-made play an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second and unravelling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation and discussion, and the discussion is the test of the playwright.

The three-fold divisions are basically applicable in dramas which are primarily short in magnitude or length. But the plays which comprise of 5-Acts or more, the five-fold division as shown by Gustav Freytag appear to be more suitable or valuable.

4.6.2 Dramatic Division According to Indian Dramaturgy

Let us now discuss the dramatic divisions according to Indian dramaturgy. Sanskrit dramaturgy also holds that there are five stages in the development of a dramatic plot. The Indian rhetoricians state that every play has a primary object. The dramatic action is utilised for achievement of the desired objects. What is desired, what is achievable, for what end the endeavour is undertaken and for what success the play concludes is made up of the dramatic action. Keeping this end of the desired success in view in the affairs of the hero(such as acquiring of love of the beloved or the defeat of the enemy, or achievement of the ordained duty), the movement of the dramatic action starts from the beginning. This action or the movement has been divided by the rhetoricians in the following five stages:

i) The Beginning: (Prarambha) This is the part in which the interest for getting the main result is reflected, is the first

stage in the development of the dramatic incident or the source.

ii) The Struggle (Prayatna) — The part in which the rapid progressive action in the interest to achieve the main result against trial and adverse situations is shown.

iii) The Hope and possibility (Praptyasa)

The part where hope is raised for getting the fruits in the midst of surpassing obstacles in the path. This stage becomes exciting for the conflict between favourable and adverse circumstances.

iv) Certainty of success (Niyatapti)

The part where the attainment of success of result is ascertained. In the earlier stage i.e. during praptyasa possibility emerges for attaiment of the desired fruit. But obstacles are met again and crisis deepens. In this part ultimately all hindrances are removed fully and the possibility of result is affirmed.

v) Attainment of the result (Phalagama)

At the end of the dramatic action the result is achieved. This portion is the last stage.

These stages in the Sanskrit dramas are mutually knit in a very intensive manner.

Studying thus the different stages of development in the dramatic plot in a play from both the Western and Indian aspects, we can analyse the points of similarity and differences. In cases of the divisions under discussion the similarities are obviously discernible.

4.7 THE COMPONENT PARTS OF A PLAY

After giving you a brief discussion on the theory of drama , let us now look at the most important aspect of drama i.e. the component parts of a play .

A play has a plot, character, dialogue (or language), an atmosphere, thought and song. Aristotle long back in his book ***Poetics*** mentioned about six main parts in a play–***Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle*** and ***Song.*** Of course, he referred to these elements in case of a tragedy only, though in general these are applicable in all types of play.

THE PLOT : The plot is the most important and unavoidable element on which the narrative or the play is constructed. It is the frame-work of the incidents or chain of events in a story, simple or complex, which are knit together. When the incidents or episodes of life are linked through some principle, this becomes a plot. To achieve a certain objective, the playwright binds with a principle, these events of human life. In life there is variety, inconsistencies and disorders. The ancient Greek dramatists connected these formless varieties or inconsistencies with the theory of fate or destiny and linked them with a chain of order and unity. This application of form to human life is then, the plot.

In India, Bharata's **'Natya Sastra'** also gave much importance to the plot. It is mentioned in the book as *'Itibritta'*, which is the body of the drama *(Itibrittam tu natyashya sariram parikirtitam)* The latter rhetoricians called it the matter *(Vastu)*

CHARACTER : If some actions or incidents and the ideas they contain are to be made lively and breathing before us through dramatic situation, then some free human personality is needed. In other words, it needs something that will function as its motor characters. So character is the important element of a play. To some critics, characters constitute the soul of a play because they are the agents that enact the story of the plot.

Aristotle described four characteristics for a character. First and foremost is (i) *goodness*. The good characters will be good, but even the bad characters should posses some goodness. Secondly, character should be appropriate, (ii) *appropriateness or propriety*. The hero or the king must be courageous, he should not be otherwise. Women are supposed to be soft and sweet. Slaves are meant be loyal and respectful. If these traits are available accordingly in them, then they are appropriate. Otherwise they will lose propriety.

Thirdly, characters must be true to life (iii) *likeness*. They must not be created on unreal elements. This is, however, not the same as making characters good or appropriate as said by Aristotle.

The fourth point is (iv) *consistency*. If the subject of imitation is inconsistent, then even consistency of inconsistency must be maintained. Aristotle observed in this way.

Again the characters must be presented as necessary and as probable.

Though in modern dramas, today, these rigidities or rules are not strictly adhered to, theoretically and primarily these points were taken as fundamental in those days.

DIALOGUE (DICTION) : In a sense dialogue is the soul of the play. Dialogues given to the characters give movement to the play and allow it to advance. Whether the dialogues thrown by the characters mutually in different situations are natural, relevant or shortened or not, whether these are pertinent or favourable to arouse dramatic curiousity or not, all these should be considered in the framing of dialogues.

There has been a lot of discussion regarding dialogues. Aristotle has included in it diction, which refers to the spoken rhythm of the language in general.Through words, the meaning or purpose becomes expressive. The style will be dependent on the kinds of dramatic themes and according to the types of characters. Grand style is not applicable in all cases. He has also analysed the parts of speech, and other grammatical details–the words and modes of speech including metaphor. He has shown how poetry combines elevation of language with perspicuity. Similarly , Bharata in the *Natya Sastra* has also directed as to what type of language and in what style should be spoken by certain type of characters. That this should be separate and distinct from our daily use has been emphasized by both the rhetoricians.

But in accordance with the changes of time, reasoning and ideas in subsequent ages, the language of the dialogue is also undergoing changes–from poetry to prose, prose to poetry and then again, to prose in modern times. Thus language has been the distinguishing feature in today's theatre.

A critic has justly said that *'in most effective plays, the dialogue is not only suited to the speaker, but carries along the conflict more than any physical action on the stage.* Even in Shakespeare's *'Hamlet'*, Hamlet himself told his players how the dialogue should be suitable to the action.

'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action. With this special observance, that you overstep not the modesty of nature'.... 'The end of the play is to hold the mirror upto nature'. [Act. III. Sc II]

Thus, dialogue must an indispensable link with the plot, character and action.

You must note here that Aristotle has not discussed so much about 'thought' in the *Poetics*. According to him thought is very much internally linked with character and dialogue. The matter is included in 'rhetoric'. When a character in a play discusses an aspect of a matter, when a character likes to prove or disprove some action through reasoning

or by creating sensations of pity, fear or anger,-all these are revealed by 'thought' through dialogue. If something is to be exaggerated or to be ignored or demeaned, the character expresses thought and purpose. When the character is in the midst of perplexities for taking a final decision, the decision is reflected through the action and thought of the character. Aristotle laid down similar precepts , while discussing the element of thought in the composition of tragedy.

SPECTACLE : The next element of a play is *spectacle*. Aristotle wrote that s*pectacular equipment will be a part of tragedy.* He actually referred to spectacle as the stage-appearance of the actors. Since the play is visible and spectacular, so it is very important as to how actors through their dress , costume and make-up create the scenes . Through their make-up, gestures and postures and movements they can very easily create the desired effects in the minds of the audience even without their dialogues. Aristotle perhaps meant this when he mentioned about 'Spectacle'.

In ancient Greece and in India too , scenes were not available in the stages. Scenaries were also absent. So actors had the great responsibility to express the dramatic situational descriptions through their costume, dress, make-up and movements. The audience visualised these features and reacted accordingly.

Even during Shakespeare's time in England in the sixteenth century, the Elizabethan stage was a bare one without props , curtains or wings . Visual imagination was necessary for the spectators to realise, and our actors provided that by their spectacles and acting.Shakespeare wrote

'And so our scene must to the battle fly' (*Henry V.* Prologue to Act V).

Also, Shakespeare normally used beautiful and effective image laden language in the form of the dialogue for describing scenes of mountains, rivers or such other dramatic situations, whenever necessary. Sun-rise, nightfall, noon etc. were beautifully described through language; whereas in modern dramas, nowadays, light effects and technical

devices would have been applied to produce these required spectacles.

Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rocky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,

While night's black agents to their preys do rouse. [*Macbeth,* III. II]

The modern dramatists again, usually give instructions for producing detailed scenery and stage directions, which can be presented in today's developed stages.

When there were actions in the play so violent or distressing that they could not be represented on the stage, characters i.e. actors through their movements and gestures and acting tried to depict all the appropriate signs of horror and revulsion.

The Indian drama-rhetoricians were also conscious about the spectacular parts of dramatic representations. So they talked of and discussed about various types of acting-methods by the actors. They talked of four kinds of acting which were defined and explained in detail.

To-day, however, in the context of availability of developed stage and technical amenities, spectacle has been an important element in the production of a drama. Next comes *song* .

SONG : Music was the source of inspiration and basis for the birth of a play. Hence it was an important mark of a play. In ancient India acting was also accompanied with music and instrument. In Greek drama the role of chorus was very important and essential. Aristotle has said '*of the remaining elements song holds the chief place among the embellishment.' 'The chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors, it should be an integral part of the whole and share in the action.' (Poetics)*. Thus, song was to be found in the choric part of a tragedy.

But, gradually, as time elapsed , the chorus and music began to lose its importance. In different periods of dramatic history as in Elizabethan

Age, the Restoration period and in later times, in the Western dramas music was not the essential element. Of course in the *Operas*, in Indian *Jatras* and in moving theatres in lyrical dance-dramas, song and music still hold the premier roles . For instance in the Epic theatres of Bertolt Brecht, the music has retained its decisive place. Again, in Indian Sanskrit dramas 'Sentiment's (*Rasas*) were the soul of the dramas and each sentiment had its appropriate music.

Thus the role of music cannot be undermined outright. It relevance depends on the nature of the particular drama. In case of lyrical or poetic plays or in dramas which are mostly allegorical, symbolic or folk in nature, the dramatist utilises music in a creative manner. You must be aware of the fact that In India some dramas written by Rabindranath Tagore or Jyoti prasad Agarwalla, exist only on music.

Music is the medium of articulation of the human heart and drama is the imitation of human experience and situations presented in order to please and give enjoyment to human hearts; so the utility of music, as suitable to the type of dramas, will always be there.

We have thus discussed about the essential elements of a play as referred to by critics.But Aristotle divided these six elements of a tragedy in two ways :–

The external, namely *spectacle*, *song* and *diction*; and three internal, namely *plot, character* and *thought.*

Today in writing a script for the stage, a writer does not grammatically think of these elements, but cannot also ignore them because they are still relevant.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What are the major component parts of a play?

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2. What is spectacle ?

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3. What is the role of song in a play ?

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4.7.1 Quantitative Parts of A Play

Besides discussion on the elements of a tragedy, Aristotle also referred to some quantitative external parts in its structure. These are as follows:

(i) *Prologue* : It is that whole part of a tragedy which precedes the entry-song of the chorus i.e. *parode.* It is the song before the chorus, which indicates the advent of the chorus.

(ii) *Parode* (entry-song) : It is the first whole utterance, entrance song of a chorus, first statement after *prologue*.

(iii) *Episode* : This is the entire part of the tragedy between the whole chorus songs. It is the story of the drama.

(iv) *Exode* (Finale): It is the entire part of the tragdy after which there is no choric song. It is thus that part which exists only after the last chorus–i.e. completion of the performance.

(v) *Stasimon*: This is the choric song or *ode* not written in anapaests or trochaic tetrameters; a *dirge* is a lament sung by the chorus and the actors.

When the Greek dramas were performed on the stage, this order was maintained in performance and in all the tragedies these divisions were followed. But we must also understand that within these divisions the part of *episode* i.e. the plot-portion is kept separately distinguished.

4.8 DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS : THE CHORUS AND THREE UNITIES

There are also certain conventions in the making of a play as well as in staging it . Many of these conventions have relations with different ages, which were determined by the requirements and technical devices in different types of staging and situations of the auditorium. Some of them are still carried down in diverse forms almost to the modern times.

Introduction of the chorus and observance of the three units in the dramas are conventions which formed the basis for dramatic criticism for the past few centuries. The three unities in the dramas are **unity of action, unity of time** and **unity of place.** Let us now discuss what the chorus is .

CHORUS

In the Greek tragedies, the chorus was an integral element of its structure. Some discussions on it have already been made in the foregoing pages. The chorus was in full view of the audience from beginning to the end of the play. Though it was essential in the Greek tragedies, in reality, it is an incidental character. It was a part of the traditional origin of the Greek stage. The spirit of the chorus was, however, necessary in all high tragedy, apart from its lyrical quality. It presents some features of a kind essential to tragic expressions. Later on, in the Elizabethan age and in modern times the role of chorus has been performed by individual characters like Shakespeare's *Fool* (of '*King Lear*'), *Horatio* (of *Hamlet)* or Enobarbus (of *Antony and Cleopatra*).

In case of modern poetic drama, the convention of the chorus has given a new handle to the playwrights for applying classical materials

of the old themes in modern technique and in new conception. T.S. Eliot's famous poetic drama *Murder in the Cathedral* has been a highly successful and effective play in its use of chorus and other classical conventions in the modern technique. Similarly, coming to India, the one-Act plays of Assam written in the sixteenth century and first composed by Shrimanta Sankardeva called *'Ankiya Bhaona'* contained the character *'Sutradhar'* who performed almost the role of chorus. Performance in the stage was through the conventional way of dancing. The modern Indian dramatists have also adopted some techniques of these classical conventions and have produced modern plays very effectively. We have already discussed chorus as a dramatic convention. Now let us move to the three unities of play which occupies a significant place in drama / drama criticism .

THE THREE UNITIES

The unity of action has some association with the unities of place and time. The theory was based on the ideas of Aristotle as elaborated in some passages of *Poetics*. According to Aristotle , the plot should be an imitation of action, one and entire. Several events occurring to one man cannot be reduced to unity. So unity of action is necessary; there should not be any plurality of action and episodic plots i.e., no sub-plots are to be connected with the main theme. The plurality of action weakens the tragic effect, Aristotle held.

Epics generally deal with a lengthy period of time while drama normally is confined to itself for a shorter period. So, as a corollary to the *unity of action*, the neo-classicists of the dramatic theory of the sixteenth century emphasised the need of *unity of time* and *unity of place*, Aristotle however , did not mention about the unity of time and place.

The *unity of time* means that the time over which the plot is spread and the time that is taken in its representation on the stage should be same or approximately the same. The classicist-critics held that if events extending over several years were shown within a few hours on the stage, there would be no semblance of reality for the audience.

To some of the theorists, the length of time should extend to twenty four hours, and according to others , the duration should be twelve hours.

The *unity of place* means that the events of the plot must be confined to one place. A scene cannot be in Athens in the first Act and Alexandria in the next. In such cases a plot would be required for spreading the action over a long period, and this will violate the *unity of time*. So the scene should be conceived covering a short period for allowing the action of the plot to happen accordingly. The incidents should be logically connected.

In subsequent times, Shakespeare and other dramatists in the Elizabethan age and in the Romantic age did not follow these rules of the unities in their entirety.

The modern playwrights also, in general, do not observe these rules of time and place. But in some cases their search for new forms and techniques, modern dramatists do try to follow these rules in their attempts to write plays according to the ancient dramatic conventions. In Indian Sanskrit dramas the rules of these unities were not observed. But there were five essential knots or junctures, called *Pancha Sandhis*. Writers of Indian dramaturgy were conscious that the drama should not be unnecessarily long and that the plot should not be burdened with too many episodes and incidents and that it should be compact and short . They were conscious of the unity of impression rather than unity of plot.

4.9 CHANGES AND THE MODERN CHALLENGE

a) REALISTIC DRAMAS : DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEM PLAYS

The dramatic movement traversing a long path from the time of its birth to the present day has undergone changes in all matters concerning subject-matter, structure, design and technique so as to suit the contemporary tone and taste of the modern age. The playwrights

wanted to reveal the social human situations, their predicaments against the complexities and problems in the society.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), the renowned Norweigean dramatist, became the greatest force in bringing out the desired revival of the modern theatre. He not only brought about an epoch-making change in the subject-matter and in treatment, but also introduced new technique with detailed stage directions and cast aside the *Soliloquies* and the *Asides* substituting the subtle treatment of dialogue. His famous plays, ***A Doll's House*** (1879), ***Ghost*** (1881), ***An Enemy Of the People (1882), The Wild Duck (1884)*** are some of the masterpieces dealing with domestic problems, women's emancipation, individuals' conscience against the background of social forces.

The English theatre developed in the manner of the prose-plays of Ibsen and the movement was advanced by English dramatists like George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), John Galsworthy (1867-1933) and many others.

b) POETIC PLAYS :

As a reaction to realistic prose-plays the movement of poetic drama came into existence in the early twenties of the twentieth century in the hands of some young dramatists like W.B. Yeats, James Flecker etc. and finally in the hands of T.S. Eliot (1889-1965) who was its greatest champion. To these dramatists, **poetry** *is the natural and complete medium for drama that prose-play is a kind of abstraction capable of giving you only a part of what the theatre can give, and the verse-paly is capable of something much more intense and exciting.* ***Murder in the Cathedral*** **(1935),** ***The Family Reunion*** **(1939),** ***The Confidential Clerk*** **(1949)** are some of Eliot's verse-plays that are most effective and successful. In the ***Murder in the Cathedral*** T.S.Eliot borrowed some classical methods like chorus, song and dance and placed them in the modern perspective . This proved highly effective.

C) BRECHTIAN PLAYS :

But the trends of modern drama did not end here. In the latter part of

the twentieth century social and political ideas began to inspire the creation of modern plays. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), the German poet and dramatist motivated by Marxian philosophy struck a new note and began to influence the dramatic world by his plays which dealt with the presentation of socialistic subject-matter in a new and easy technique combined with *alienation* effect-which is now commonly known as **Epic-theatre.**

D) THEATRE OF THE ABSURD : ABSURD DRAMAS :

Somewhat in a parallel way, on the basis of some ideas nourished from the philosophies of *Existentialism* and *Surrealism* and from the theories of Jean paul Sartre, Albert Camus etc., a kind of drama emerged which lack formal logic in subject-matter and is somewhat distanced from the conventional dramatic structure. This movement is known as the **Theatre of the Absurd**.

The playwrights mostly associated with the movement are Samuel Beckett (1906- 1989), a French-Irish dramatist, Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994), Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov etc.

In viewing these plays we must forsake the theatre of regular, developed and coherent situation; we must forget characterisation in a logical theme and forget natural settings that bear the realistic relationship of the drama; we also forget the use of language as a tool of logical communication and we also forget the cause-and-effect relationship found in traditional dramas. There are a number of puzzling devices used for the acting. The playwrights try to accustom the audience to a new kind of relationship between theme and presentation. ***Waiting for Godot*** (1953) by Samuel Beckett, ***The Chairs*** (1952), ***Rhinoceros*** (1959), ***The Bold Prime Donna***, by Eugene Ionesco are some of the most famous absurd dramas in this line in the twentieth century.

E) THIRD THEATRE :

A kind of theatre movement in between the city theatre and the village theatre (folk theatre) arose in the latter part of the 20th century to create a link between the two. It is a kind of synthesis both in thematic

and structural way. The term was, however, coined by Eugenio Barba to describe his own group. It was so called by analogy with the 'Third World'–deprived, neglected and short of resources. Similarly in production of those plays, expenses are kept low and plays are written accordingly to suit the technique.

A Polish dramatist J. Grotowski (1933-) had considerable influence in the creation of such plays and formation of a troupe. In India, Badal Sarkar was the first dramatist to espouse the cause of this theatre. Some of his well known plays (third theatre) are *Misill, Hutta Mullar Upare* etc. and some of his absurd plays are *Pagla Ghora , Abong Indrajit, Bhuma* etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What kind of play evolve as a reaction against realistic play ?

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2. What is third theatre ?

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4.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have given you a brief note on what is a play and its component parts. We have also provided you

- Types of drama
- History of plays
- a brief introduction to various dramatic conventions of a play
- theory of drama
- changes and the modern challenge

So, by now you must be able to analyse the chronological sequences of play and establish the unity of time, place and action in the play . You have also learnt to categorize the plays. I feel that this unit studied along with unit -4 will enable you to become a creative writer of plays.



4.11 FURTHER READINGS

Allardyce Nicoll The Theory of drama

Worth, Katherine, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London : G. Bell and Sons)

The making of Theatrical Reputations : Studies from the Modern London Theatre (Iowe City : University of Iowe Press , 2008).



4.12 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1) Write a short note on the history of plays .
2) Comment on the various component parts of a drama .
3) Explain the importance of chorus in the play .
4) What are the different types of drama . Explain each of them .
5) Write short notes on a) Realistic drama
   b) Brechtian drama
   c) Theatre of the absurd

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