
UNIT 5 DRAMA AND SERIALS

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5.0 INTRODUCTION

Drama is the reflection of life, society and people. In every form of art, drama pulsates with life by giving it an aura of reality. Radio plays have been popular right from the inception of broadcasting in India. Even though television is marching ahead with myriad shades of soaps, serials etc., radio plays continue to have a substantial audience. People enjoy listening to radio plays and create pictures in their minds with colours and shades entirely of their own choice. The sound medium has a great advantage that it can create any scene, any character, any atmosphere with immense variety as it impels the audience to imagine their own pictures. Sometimes multi-channel crowding on small screen weans away many viewers and makes them take refuge in a quiet corner and enjoy the radio play. As compared to theatre and television, radio drama is less expensive and writers can experiment with this format. Radio drama has been found effective in disseminating developmental messages as well. Radio plays in regional languages have been found to be very popular.

In this unit, we shall discuss various aspects related to the art of radio drama and acquaint ourselves with the skills required to write a script and produce a radio play.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- describe the elements of radio play;
- explain the importance of dialogues and a good script in radio play;
- discuss the role of sound effects and music in a radio play; and
- describe the steps to be taken in the production and editing of a play.

5.2 RADIO DRAMA

In radio, as you are aware, there is only one dimension to be exploited i.e. the sound. The reverberating magic of sound can only be heard and felt as it reaches the inner depths of a listener's mind. It takes him/her away from the three dimensional world to the mono dimensional world of sound. The radio audience, on listening to 'disembodied voices' and sound effects, has to conjure up a mental picture of the characters in the play.

Radio plays constitute by themselves a separate genre of drama. Radio plays became popular from the very early days of radio broadcasting. AIR Lucknow undertook a series of plays entitled 'Moonshine Theatrical Company of Kathgodam' in the year 1938 underlining the difference between stage plays and radio drama. The programmes became very popular and

the listeners wanted to listen to more such plays. Radio plays then were 'live' programmes and generally conformed to the unities of time, place and action. The mistakes that occurred in reading the dialogue by one artiste were covered up by another.

Initially, sound equipment were in a primitive stage. Sound effects were collected by the producer and recorded on gramophone discs. Then came the period of magnetic tapes on which the producer preserved a variety of sound effects. This facilitated pre-recording of plays and post-production leading to greater perfection. The provision of echo chambers etc. further led to a qualitative improvement in the technical production of radio plays.

5.3 PLANNING A RADIO PLAY

Basically, radio drama has a story to unfold like other literary forms using different manner and method. It should have elements of emotion and conflict to sustain the interest of the listener, who, unlike a theatre lover is not a captive audience and may switch off the radio the moment s/he finds the presentation boring. The emphasis in radio drama is on dialogues and sound effects. The scenes in a radio play are generally kept short and the number of characters limited to avoid confusion. A radio playwright tailors his/her script to meet the requirements of the medium in such a way that the listener is able to identify each character, the place of action, the mood and the ambience.

The production team comprises besides the producer, a production assistant or effects man and an engineer. The producer plays the key role in production. S/he is the kingpin, who decides the objective of the play, selects the theme and the script and vets the dialogue. S/he does the casting on the basis of voice-age and tonal characteristics of the artistes, rehearses them and modifies the script, advises the artistes on microphone perspectives, selects appropriate sound effects, music and undertakes production. Let us take a look at each of these steps in some detail.

5.3.1 Selection of Theme

Defining the objective of the drama with clarity is the first essential aspect the producer has to take care of. It may carry some message, explain a topical development, convey some constructive thought to make the listener sit up and think, or it may be purely entertainment based. Radio play can also impart information even while entertaining the listeners. It can educate the listeners regarding social discipline, moral values and national integration. However, the playwright has to be careful that the programme remains a drama and does not turn into a campaign feature. In addition, the producer takes care to choose a theme which does not propagate anything frivolous, antisocial or hurt the feelings of any community, caste or creed. It should also not hurt a person with any kind of disability or a victim of circumstances.

The objective and theme of the play are finalised keeping the audience profile in mind. Listeners have specific choices, tastes and interests, some may be keen to acquire knowledge who require authentic and credible information which is close to reality, while others may be interested in tales from mythology, history and local legends. Some may be interested in pure entertainment, hence, it would be appropriate to understand the needs of the audience and provide them with the required information. Often, developmental messages relating to literacy, health, gender equality etc. have to be conveyed to the listeners. Such messages need to be woven carefully in the dramatic structure of the programme.

Activity

- Listen to radio plays in any language for a week.
- Identify their objectives, themes, target groups and messages.
- List the points which you like or dislike about them.

5.3.2 Script Development

Once the purpose and theme have been selected and target group finalised, the next step is to develop a good radio-genic script. Writing for broadcast is a specialised art and there is no scope for amateur approach in preparing a radio drama script. The writer of a radio play has to be a professional craftsman; however, a new entrant can also develop the requisite skills.

The broad outline of the story needs to be sketched before writing down the script. The various characters and the part played by them in the story need to be vividly brought out. It is important to sketch the portrait of each character to bring them out as real flesh and blood characters. The listener should keep guessing about the climax by intricately weaving the elements of emotions, conflict and action in the script of the play.

The story of a radio play is unfolded straightaway as radio operates within the constraints of time. Events having direct relationship with the story are included and the remaining are obliquely referred to through dialogues of the characters. Too many sub-plots are avoided and pace to the drama is provided by short scenes and inter-cutting. Val Gielgud, former Head of Drama, BBC, in his book *The Right Way to Radio Playwriting* writes, "the shorter your sentences, the crisper your dialogues, and the faster your tempo, the more effective your programme will be".

The script of a radio play contains clear cut detailed indications regarding the following elements:

- opening-closing music
- interludes
- linking music
- background music
- flashbacks
- characters
- specifications of voices to be used
- entry and exit of each character
- specific sound perspectives of exit and entries
- sound effects
- fading-in
- fading-out
- super-impose
- use of technology to achieve the desired mental picture.

5.3.3 Dialogues

Radio Drama can discuss ideas also. In a stage play two characters cannot just sit and discuss an idea in detail because the audience may get bored due to lack of action. However, in a radio play, listeners may listen to the dialogues carefully. Hence, dialogues constitute an important element of radio drama. It is through dialogues that the scriptwriter establishes contact with the audience. Dialogues unfold the personality traits and characteristics of each individual character, help to move the story forward and reveal the theme. Dialogues help to establish the identity of the characters and their relationship with each other.



Artiste delivering dialogues

Dialogues must be natural consisting of lines which the actors can speak easily. Simple sentences convey definite ideas and bring out the meaning directly. Long-winded and convoluted dialogues stop the natural flow of conversation. However, it does not mean that dialogues should consist of dull, weak and poor expressions. Dialogues should sound informal, consisting of colloquial expressions used in our day-to-day conversation.

Economy of words, proper choice of phrases and expressions help to stimulate the listeners' imagination. While writing dialogues, the background of the character should also be kept in mind to lend credibility to it. The best way to write dialogues is to observe the situation in real life and what people actually say to reflect it. Since drama presents what is happening at that point of time, the dialogues are kept in the present tense. Dialogues should also indicate the background of the story and try to establish the local ambience and venue of the scenes.

5.3.4 Casting of Drama Voices

Once the producer has selected a theme and developed a good script for the play and written dialogues, s/he needs suitable drama voices to put flesh and blood on the skeleton. Every broadcasting station auditions drama voices and prepares an inventory of voices as per their specific qualities, age and character. While casting the artistes, the producer goes by the remarks recorded about each voice and also banks upon his/her personal experience.

The sound world is entirely different. In sharp contrast to stage plays, in radio drama, instead of the physical appearance of the artiste, the 'voice personality' is considered important. Many good looking artistes may have a harsh and unpleasant voice, whereas people who may not be good looking may have sweet and pleasant voices. Similarly, 'voice-age' is also different. Many people are gifted with young vibrant voices for a long time. An elderly artiste may not necessarily have an old and shaky voice. Some artistes take special care to cultivate and groom their voices, whereas others may sound older than they really are. The producer casts artistes keeping in view their voice personality and voice-age as per the requirements of the play.

In addition, care is taken to avoid casting voices similar to each other in one scene. They may confuse the listener and hamper establishing the identity of one character. Too many voices crowded in one scene tend to irritate the listener. Long monologues or dull discussions between two artistes are avoided. Caricaturing or artificial projections of voices is strictly prohibited as it becomes difficult to sustain the artificial voice for long and makes the play lose its credibility.

Radio play is a team effort in which a number of persons are involved - the scriptwriter, producer, actors, and the technical persons. A proper team effort contributes towards the success of the play. The script writer of radio drama should have a thorough understanding of the medium and an idea about the production process. The producer also needs to have a good grasp of requirements in the script to make it effective. A painter cannot create a masterpiece if the canvas is old and weather-beaten. Similarly, a good play cannot be produced on a weak script, poor acting and inadequate planning. Hence, the need for strong collaboration between all the partners.

The producer needs to consider the infrastructure required and the available resources etc. while planning a radio play. Many a time, there is a gap between what is required and what is available and it becomes quite difficult to reach an ideal situation. The time-frame also places certain limitations. Thus the producer has to operate within a number of constraints.

Check Your Progress I

Notes: Use the space below for your answers.

7. Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. What points should be kept in mind while selecting a theme for a radio play?

2. What is the importance of dialogues in radio drama?

3. What are the things that should be kept in mind while selecting voices for radio drama?

5.4 PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

The basic structure of a radio play starts taking shape in the studio as life is infused into the script with sounds and voices. After proper voices have been cast, the rehearsals are conducted in the studio. The drama studio usually provides a floor area of about 30 sq. metres with an action area of about 2 metres radius around the microphone. The acoustics of the studio are used creatively. The studio provides a basic set of acoustics for the producer to work with, and if possible, to adapt it to suit the requirements. The studio is divided into areas of different acoustic properties. Often the same microphone is employed in all these areas and the actors can play their parts by moving between the live side and the dead side of the microphone. Before initiating the recording process, microphone (mike) perspective is taken into consideration.

5.4.1 Mike Perspective

Mike perspective is an important element, the voices have to be careful about besides 'acting'. Microphones used in drama production are so sensitive that they catch whispers and even breathing. When it is said that an artiste is 'on the mike', it means that s/he is in direct line of the recording path of the mike which captures the voice in all its fullness. Suitable distance has to be maintained from the mike and the producer guides the artistes regarding their position near the mike. Only those actors who are in the current scene come close to the mike. Those who are meant to be in background or in another room or outside the house etc. have to maintain distance. Relationship with the microphone is a fascinating experience for the radio drama artiste wherein s/he learns the best angles and the most effective distance to bring out the best in his/ her voice. Each actor has to maintain a proper distance from the mike as suited to his/her individual voice quality. Full throated dialogues are avoided as they lead to voice distortion.

In addition, mike perspective helps in establishing entries and exits. A performer speaking the dialogues from a distance enters the scene to depict the entry, similarly, dialogue delivery while going establishes the exit. Many a time, dialogues between different characters are spoken from floor to floor, from balcony to the hall or from the cellar to the stair case. It depends on the producer's innovative capacity to determine the placement of the performers. Many a time, chairs and tables are used to provide elevation and card-board dividers are used to generate the effect of different rooms. The performers have to convey expressions and actions through their voices only.

Keeping the mike perspective in mind, live sound effects can be added while recording the dialogues in the studio. Effects like sound of cup-plate, water etc. for drinking, rustling of paper, jingle of bells and bangles can be added in the studio itself. However, the script should have clear-cut instructions regarding the mike perspective and these sounds.

5.4.2 Use of Modern Technology

These days gadgets like reverberation /echo units, distortion boxes, compressors, dynamic filters, vocal intonation processors, dynamic equalizers, sound replacers etc. are becoming commonplace for facilitating improvement/enhancement of sound/ voice quality. The same studio can be used to represent a courtroom or a public hall by simulating the acoustic effects with the help of reverberation units and graphic equalizers. Small rooms sound small because certain frequencies are picked out and emphasised in the dimensions between the walls. For example, a bathroom is signified by the acoustics of a small room with strongly reflecting walls. The very same acoustics can be simulated in the studio using the reverberation unit and graphic equalizer.

The human voice is more versatile than any music instrument. A woman may have deep toned voice, but its quality is likely to be thinner than man's. That means female voices have more emphasis in the high frequency areas. As we grow older, the emphasis in the high frequencies starts diminishing and the voice becomes heavier i.e., a voice with lower frequency content. It is possible to make changes in the voice quality and make it richer by passing speech through a 'graphic' filter/ equalizer.

The time taken by a sound to die away to a millionth part of its original level is known as 'reverberation time' (R/T). A typical radio drama studio has an R/T of about 0.4 - 0.5 seconds. Large rooms generally have longer R/T as compared to smaller ones. When R/T goes beyond a limit, an echo sound is heard. The R/T and quality of reverberation play an important part in drama. The acoustics of a large hall or concert hall or a small bathroom can be simulated in the studio using the RT unit and graphic equaliser. Echo effects can be produced likewise.

5.4.3 Selection of Sound Effects

The sound effects in a radio drama help the listener to visualise the scene. The producer can create any location, climate or period by judicious use of sound effects and dialogues. Selection of sound should be based on the specific requirements of the play. It should help to make the drama clear, add a realistic touch to the play and enhance the mood as well as the atmosphere. Effects merely for the sake of having effects should be avoided. If the sound of a door opening is necessary in the play, one has to choose the effect keeping in view the location of the scene. For example, old fashioned, creaky door with rusty hinges cannot be used in a modern bungalow or house, similarly, door noise of an office, factory or home will be different. The sound of steps indicates the type of shoes worn by the character. Selection of effects is done as per the requirements of the scene. Val Gielgud, in his book '**The Right Way to Radio Playwriting**' writes "too many effects only distract the concentration of the audience". He further advises the drama producer, "don't use any sound which creates confusion in listeners' ears. Sound effects are always important but use them with balance,



Recording of sound effects for a play

The script writer must add guidelines for the proper sound effects to be used. The fact that the play is meant to be 'heard' and not 'seen' should constantly be kept in mind while writing the play. Nothing should be left vague to avoid confusion at the time of production.

To bring freshness in the production a batch of new effects should be recorded from time to time. Every producer must contribute towards building an effects' library. Each recording should be listed in the tape-cue sheet and the recording register. Whenever the effects and musical pieces are required, these can be easily traced if a proper inventory is made.

5.4.4 Music Selection

Music is another important element of a radio play. The opening music or the title music establishes the opening of the play and prepares the listener for the programme. The music highlights the mood of the play in different scenes, indicates change-over, projects time lapse or a flashback. Music not only has to be according to the theme and mood whether light, serious, sad, etc. but also has to synchronise with the period, locale and sequence of the play. If the play is historical, music of those specific instruments which could have been used at that particular time have to be selected. A recording of clarinet in *Shakuntalam* of Kalidas will not be appreciated. Similarly, a heavy classical piece on veena meant for a modern crowd would be totally out of sync. Music in the end helps to establish a perfect closing. However, like sound effects, music also needs to be used with care. Continuous background music during dialogues irritates and distracts the listeners from the spoken word. Different types of musical pieces such as title music, linking music to bridge scenes, background music etc. are usually shared by broadcasting organisations. However, to meet the specific requirements, music composers are commissioned from time to time to compose music.

5.5 POST PRODUCTION

Radio play matures in the dubbing rooms where crisp editing, proper mixing and precise fading-in, fading-out, cross-fades and super-impose, mixing of music, sound effects, change-over, flash backs, complete the production process. This is done as indicated in the script of the play. Smooth blending of the dialogues and sounds without jerks or gaps is ensured. At least three recording machines are required for making the final play. The following steps are undertaken for preparing the final copy:

- The spoken word is recorded separately. If time permits, a clean copy of spoken word dialogues should be prepared by removing fumbles, repetitions or any other extra sound or words which are not required.
- The required music and effects is selected and dubbed on a clean tape sequence-wise. It saves unnecessary hassles while preparing the final copy.
- The spoken word dialogues need to be mounted on one machine, the effects and music on the second and both machines should be connected to the third one in the centre. Full control of volume needs to be obtained to keep a balanced level of the recording.
- Since well begun is half done, adequate attention has to be given to the opening scene. After the opening announcements, the music should be quickly faded in with full force to catch the attention of the listener then reduced slowly after establishing the opening for a minute. It can be kept softly in the background and scene sounds should be slowly mixed along with the opening words.
- Change-over music, interludes, flash back indicating music etc. should be mixed in smoothly without giving a jerk or leaving a pause. Since pause over radio is more vocal than words, it should never remain in the recording unnecessarily.
- To wind up the play, the closing music should either finish in a crescendo or taper down according to the mood of the ending. Happy, hilarious music cannot do justice to close a sad play, similarly, mournful tragic music will ruin a happy ending.
- Care needs to be taken while super-imposing dialogues over long pieces of music or effects of running car, train, plane etc. so that dialogues are not drowned. The sounds of tempests, hurricanes, floods, roaring sea etc. also have to be used judiciously.
- As we have mentioned earlier, if the quality of sound effects is not good or available pieces are not perfectly matched they should be avoided. The moods, locales, scenes can be created by the expressions of seasoned voices and effective dialogues.

5.6 DRAMA SERIALS

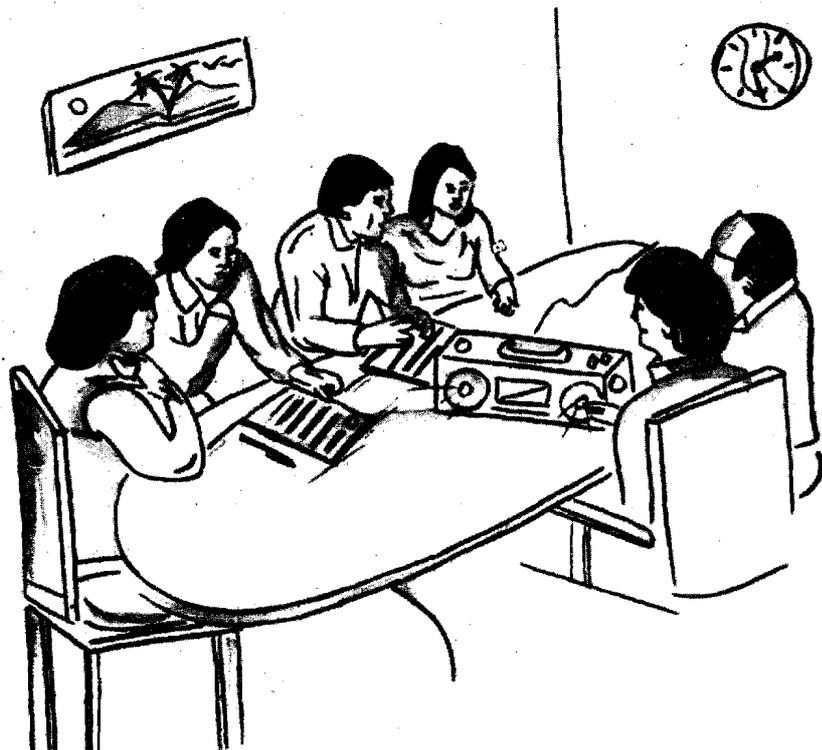
Serial are the extensions of a story in a larger canvas spread over multiple episodes over a period of time. Serials revolve around a theme, character or a location and contain several plots which develop side by side with each episode and end on a note of suspense.

All India Radio mooted the idea of serialising family dramas to create greater impact on the listeners. It also helped to build a bond between the broadcaster and the listener as the latter got hooked to serials who would wait for ones favourite drama serial on a specific time and day. Naya Nagar, Khalifa Shaddu, Dhol Ki Pol of AIR, Delhi, Zoon Dub of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar, Loha Singh of AIR, Patna, Master Bhola Shanker of AIR, Jaipur, Punah Prapanch of AIR, Bombay, Dubesh Veedu of AIR, Madras created history and had successful run for decades, Vividh Bharati Service also successfully broadcast serialisation of dramatic adaptation of well-known classics of various Indian languages. Recently, efforts were made to disseminate scientific information through marathon serials like 'Tinka Tinka Sukh' of more than 100 episodes each by AIR. Many socio-economic issues and current problem were discussed in these drama serials.

Some novels are serialised in popular journals. There is only one author who writes the entire serialised novel. However, in the case of radio serial, a number of writers can also contribute. It is the responsibility of the producer to ensure that consistency in characterizations and dialogues written by a number of writers is maintained. Frequent interactions between the writer under the guidance and coordination of the producer help to achieve homogeneity and continuity.

Drama serials have proved very effective in carrying messages to the audiences. However, it is essential to be subtle and discreet. The serial writer has to convey the messages, situations and incidents woven into the basic fabric of the play. There should not be any sermons or preaching. Events should unfold in which characters go through situations to bring alive the dos and don'ts of life. Each episode of the serial should leave the listener wanting more. Humour has tremendous potential in carrying messages to the listeners and some drama serials in lighter vein have proved to be very popular.

Writing a serial for radio is very challenging as the listener like a demanding child, always looks forward to new stories and new ideas. The moment the listener is bored or disappointed, one is likely to lose him/her. Hence, the ever growing needs of the listener have to be constantly met. The popularity of television serials has placed further pressure on the radio drama producer. A great deal of planning, formative research and pre-testing has to be undertaken before starting the broadcast of a serial. The success of a drama serial lies in the listener's identification with the characters and following every episode with keen interest.



Pre-testing of a radio serial episode

While planning a radio serial, a broad outline of the story or synopsis should be drawn in the beginning itself to keep the play within the credible story line. Characters should be well defined so that their characterisation does not vary in different episodes. Consistency of a character helps in keeping a realistic profile. However, various shades of the personality can be unfolded in different episodes.

The central characters of a drama serial should be limited. Some supporting characters and additional fresh characters help to add variety and pace to the drama. Apart from scripting, the producer can sustain the interest of the listeners by realistic dramatisation and maintaining the element of suspense in each episode. A drama serial should unfold layer-by-layer in each episode to sustain the listeners' interest. A touch of suspense, expectation or thrill has to be woven in the script to keep the listeners hooked.

Check Your Progress: 2

- Notes: 1) Use the space below for your answers
2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit

1) What do you understand by mike perspective?

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.....

2) It is better not to use the effect rather than use a sound track. Comment intelligently

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.....

3) What steps should be taken while planning a radio serial?

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

Radio plays exploit the elements of voice, dialogues, music and effects. Radio plays can be on any theme - tragic or comic, historical, contemporary or social. It can be used to disseminate development themes for social change.

While writing a radio play, the writer has to take into account various limitations of the medium. Operating within the constraint of time, the story is built up rapidly. There are only a limited number of characters in each play and emphasis is laid on crisp dialogues and effective 'acting'. The selection of artists is done on the basis of the voice-age of the characters and their tonal characteristics. Sound effects in a radio play help the listeners to visualize the scene of action. Post-production involves editing of dialogues and judicious mixing of music and sound effects. Strides in technology help the producer achieve perfection in production. Several gadgets are available which help in simulation of effects, ambience and voice-quality enhancement and improvement.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Change over music	:	Small piece of music establishing the change of scene
Clean copy	:	Final recording where all pauses, extra, unwanted sound and words etc. have been removed
Cross-fade	:	To simultaneously mix two sound recordings
Fade-in	:	To gradually mix one sound recording into another
Fade-out	:	To gradually phase out one sound recording from the other
Flashbacks	:	Bringing up scenes and incidents happened in the past
Jerk	:	Any discordant sound in the recording due to bad tape joint or any other flaw
Sound effect	:	Sounds and not words that establish a scene, its timing and ambience. It also suggests the action being done. It creates the background necessary for the scene.
Superimpose	:	To suppress one recording and put the other recording more prominently over it

5.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

- 1) While selecting theme for a radio play, the objectives and the target group of the play should be kept in mind. In addition, the facilities required, the resources available and the team to be involved with the play also need to be considered.
- 2) Dialogues help to establish contact with the audience. They move the story forward and reveal the theme. They also unfold the personality traits of each character and their relationship with each other.
- 3) While selecting voices for a radio play, the voice-age and voice-personality of the 'actors' should be carefully considered. Voices similar to each other should not be used to avoid confusion in the mind of the listener.

Check Your Progress: 2

- 1) Distance and placement of the performer from the microphone, establishing his/her position is known as mike perspective. It suggests whether the performer is sitting, standing, running, how far/near is s/he from the action and from where is s/he speaking. Mike perspective also establishes exits and entries.
- 2) A wrong effect may mar the impact of the entire play. It may create confusion in the mind of the listener or may distract him/her from the play. It should add to the overall quality of the play by giving it a realistic touch, enhance the mood and the ambience.
- 3) While planning a radio serial, a broad outline of the story should be drawn. The characters should be defined in the beginning itself to provide consistency to their profiles. The story should unfold layer-by-layer in each episode to sustain the listeners' interest. The elements of conflict, suspense and thrill need to be intricately woven to keep the listeners guessing till the climax.