UNIT PLAY PRODUCTION

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3.1 PLAY PRODUCTION: INTRODUCTION

After learning about the play and performing team, this unit introduces to you the various factors concerning play production. One of the most important factors in play production is the stage and its various components. Similarly stage geography, a basic need for moving on the stage, is introduced.

Objectives:

The needs of play production are discussed in this unit. The physical and aesthetic requirements in play production are also explained. Different kinds of stages now commonly used are also described.

3.2 WHAT IS PLAY PRODUCTION?

Play production is the assembling of things and people together in a delicate balance of believability in order to bring the artistic creation of a playwright to life. A play in the form of a script is not a play. A play is life relived. To bring this life to the experience of the audience, and allow them to relive the emotional experiences, the director, the actors and the technicians interpret the text through their respective communication skills. Play production, therefore, intends to translate the written message of a creative writer into images of experience - through talking, crying, laughing, fearing and so on - in short, living. The excitement of play production is involved in the actions and reactions of the characters, engaging themselves in the sharpest possible emotions, as we possibly do if we are placed in similar circumstances. This equation of the theatrical emotions with our own imaginably relevant emotions is what makes a theatrical experience so dear to us.

3.3 CREATIVITY IN PLAY PRODUCTION

Creativity in theatre differs from creativity in other art fields. In other fields, creativity is related to an individual’s efforts and individual’s success. But in theatre, it is a group
effort and a group’s success. Further, each one of the participants in theatre production might have different individual ideas about the work they are doing, but they have a common goal of reaching and fulfilling the creative urge of the playwright and the creative vision of the director. Each ‘crew’ chief and his or her staff hope that what they have done individually will ultimately fit into the wholesome production plan. Theatre is the only multi-branched, constantly blossoming tree in which each branch’s blossoming will enhance the brightness and greenery of the tree as a whole.

3.4 REQUIREMENTS OF A PRODUCTION

A stage production needs excellent software as well as hardware potentialities – the software being the creative work put into the production by the actors, technicians, and the director. The hardware consists of the stage and its several requirements. In order to produce a successful play, a stage that fulfills all the requirements of a play is a must.

3.5 THE STAGE

Even from the ancient days, the place designated for acting has an important role to play in the production of a play. A stage is usually a raised platform or any demarcated place where actors perform. The audience may be seated around them as in festival performances in villages; or they may sit opposite the actors as in a modern auditorium. Directors have visualised different kinds of stages to put on their plays. Out of several such kinds, three kinds of stages are presently in use.

The Proscenium Stage

The Arena Stage

The Thrust Stage

3.5.1 The Proscenium Stage

This is also called the ‘traditional stage’ as it is more widely used all over the world. The word ‘proscenium’ comes from the Greek word ‘proskenion’, which is the stage area of the ancient Greeks, with a large stage and a covered place on either side. It is actually called the ‘Proscenium Arch’ theatre, or the ‘picture-frame stage’ because the stage resembles a picture-frame through which the audience watches the play. The audience sits within a square or rectangular building, in straight or slightly curved rows on one, two or three levels, facing a large opening in one of the four walls of a raised platform in front of them. The opening is usually surrounded by decorative furnishings. Within this opening, as in a frame, the actors perform on a raised level, a considerable distance away from the stage. The audience are further distanced by the ‘apron’, the semi-circular extension of the stage. Surrounding this acting area there is space above (called ‘flies’ where curtains and hanging pieces of cloth are stored). On either side of this stage (which is actually called the ‘acting area’) and in the rear painted canvas and other kinds of scenery are hung to store and hide further pieces of scenery for the coming scenes. The narrow side cloth pieces are called ‘wings’ and the space behind is the ‘wing space’ for actors to wait for entry and also for scenic pieces to be brought onto the stage. These canvas pieces also hide the various sources of artificial light. This sort of theatre is called picture-frame theatre or proscenium-arch theatre. The proscenium arch frames the action of the play as a picture-frame frames a picture. Since the last one hundred years, this kind of theatre was found to attract several new technical innovations in lighting and scenic design and hence the picture-frame stage was by far the most favoured theatre. But modern directors preferred
other types of theatre for their flexibility, out of which two types stand out prominently - the Arena stage and the Thrust stage.

### 3.5.2 The Arena Stage

Arena Stage is also called the "theatre-in-the-round" because the audience sits around in a circle (or sometimes in a square), while the acting area is in the middle. The seats of the audience are raked so that everyone can see the actors clearly. The isles in the four corners edging the seats are left out for entries and exits of both the actors and the audience. The acting area is relatively small, and so elaborate setting is out of question. Settings are not used elaborately since they also hinder the audience's clear view of the stage. This is an intimate theatre and audience are seated close to the actors and so can easily comprehend the excitement of the play and the actions. It is also for smaller audiences. Another advantage in arena staging is that it cuts the cost of elaborate sets and complex lighting gadgets. It gives scope to the actor for 'opening up' and showings his historicon talents. Another important factor is that the grouping and movement of the actors can be seen from all the sides. Unlike in a proscenium stage, which provides different acting places based on the importance given to an actor at a time, the arena stage has only one basic place for dramatic action. Each actor is important unlike on a proscenium. In the proscenium importance of an actor is gained by his position at a particular advantageous position on the stage. Arena stage eliminates such an importance to one actor since all of them are placed on equal plane.

### 3.5.3 The Thrust Stage

The thrust stage is often called the 'open' stage, though there is some difference in the nature of actor-audience relationship. This is a recent development in staging. The 'apron' of the proscenium stage is extended into the house in this theatre. The audience sits on three sides of the thrust stage. The acting area is moved forward on to the extended part (the 'thrust' part) of the stage so that most of the action takes place on the 'down front'. Unlike in an arena stage, there is space for settings here, which are placed on the rear side of the stage. The Thrust stage can be used with modifications and can be created on any platform stage by building an extension of fifteen to twenty feet onto the apron. A thrust stage brings the audience still closer. By manipulating the seats of the audience into tiers, the thrust stage can be used more profitably. Since the audience sits on three sides, the fourth side is used for setting, thus combining the benefits of the proscenium and the arena stages. Group activity easily holds attention and the individual actor will have to use his qualities of performance to dominate the scene. Besides these three major forms of theatre now being used, there are many other possible variations of the three basic elements required of a stage - it should have a large enough place for the actors to freely move; a comfortable place for the audience; must provide perfect sight lines of the entire stage and also has place for settings. The simplest theatres in the olden days were some planks or platforms raised, or a space cleared in the centre of a hall while the audience sat on the ground and enjoyed the show. Sometimes a curtain screened off a small backstage area in which the actors did their make-up and changed their costume. Most of these forms were suitable for popular drama because they were both cheap and could be improvised anywhere, any time. With the changed conditions after the emergence of the realistic drama and along with it, the enhanced techniques in presentation, drama came indoors. Elaborate settings, lights, costumes and the like were introduced into theatre to heighten the illusion of reality. Directors have been always trying to come out of the proscenium arch theatre and to find newer and freer ways of dramatic presentation. The search will continue as theatre is always in search of newer and more effective ways of presentation.
3.6 STAGE GEOGRAPHY

The proscenium arch stage or any empty space used for performance is divided into various imaginary areas, demarcating it into smaller units for the director to instruct the actors while ‘blocking’ or for the actors to take positions. There are three broad spaces vertically - ‘Up’, ‘Centre’ and Down. There are also three divisions horizontally - stage right, centre and stage left. The ‘right’ and ‘left’ indications are always from the point of view of the actor and not from the audience’s point of view. Thus there are nine smaller segments:

- Up Right (UR)
- Up Centre (UC)
- Up Left (UL)
- Right Centre (RC)
- Centre (C)
- Down Right (DR)
- Down Centre (DC)
- Down Left (DL)

3.7 QUESTIONS

I. Answer the questions in not more than 5 lines

1. What is a play production?

2. How many major kinds of theatre are in use now? Which type of the theatre do you prefer? why?

3. What is the significance of stage geography?

II. Fill in the blanks:

a) Arena theatre is an _________ theatre, for it holds smaller number of spectators, who sit in a _________ close to the acting area.

b) Since in a thrust stage, the audience sits on _________ sides, the fourth side is used for _________.

c) The right and _________ indications are always from the point of view of the _________.

3.8 ANSWERS

I. 1. Play production is the ultimate result of the work done by actors with the author’s text as the basis. The director is in charge of the entire production. He is assisted by a team of technical experts. The audience for whom the play is performed is an important component of this team.

2. There are three types of stages: The Proscenium Arch; the Arena and the Thrust. The Proscenium Arch is the best because it provides lots of opportunities for technical innovations. (Similarly, the candidate is advised to suggest the advantages of the other two kinds of theatre also).

3. ‘Stage Geography’ is useful for the director to ask his actors to move to DL or DR (Down Left or Down Right) and so on. The actors also know what areas on the stage are ‘strong’ positions and what are ‘weak’.

II. a) intimate, circle

b) three, settings

c) left, actors