UNIT-2 THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Structure

2.1 Introduction

Objectives

2.2 Different Specialists Involved in a Theatre Production

2.3 The playwright

2.4 Different Forms of Drama

2.4.1 Tragedy

2.4.2 Comedy

2.4.3 Farce

2.4.4 The Realistic Play

2.5 The Actors

2.6 The Technicians

2.7 The Director

2.8 The Audience

2.9 Why Should the Audience Go to See a Play?

2.10 Questions

2.11 Answers

2.1 INTRODUCTION

'Theatre' consists of two components: the written text and the performance text and the nature and function of all the people involved in the production—especially the playwright, the actors, the backstage technicians, the director and the audience. Along with a short introduction about the nature and function of these members of the production team, a question regarding the need for seeing a play is discussed. While dealing with the nature of playwriting, short notes on the major dramatic genres are included.

Objectives

After an introduction to the basic functions of theatre, this unit explains the role of the important members of the play production unit. It also gives an introduction to the major genres (a literary or artistic type) of drama. The candidates will be introduced to the basic ideas regarding the work of various artists and technicians of the theatre. It also discusses the role of the audience in play production.

2.2 DIFFERENT SPECIALISTS INVOLVED IN A THEATRE PRODUCTION

Several people, belonging to different occupations and professions join together in making a theatre production possible.

1. Persons who see the play: spectators/audience

2. Persons who present the play: actors/performers

3. Person who writes the play: playwright/dramatist
4. Person who provides lighting: lighting designer
5. Person who provides the background, the curtains and sets: stage/set designer
6. Person who makes the costume: costume designer

These and many more experts including the make-up man, the music director and other persons are needed to run the show smoothly and quickly. If all these people partake, in one way or the other, in the play production activity, there is one person whose vision and overall supervision makes the show what it is: he/she is the "director" of the play. Except the actors, none of the others appear on the stage. But they work unitedly for the success of the play by timely operation of their duties when the actors on the stage act out a story.

Let us acquaint ourselves with the nature and work of each one of the important functionaries in play production - namely, the playwright, the actors, the director, the backstage technicians and finally the audience.

2.3 THE PLAYWRIGHT

The word ‘wright’ means ‘a maker’. So a playwright is a play-maker. He weaves a story - either known or unknown or partly known - into a play with characters who ‘look’ real. When we say that the goal of all theatre is to provide an imitation of an action” (as Aristotle said), we know that the word “imitation” implies that what the audience sees can never be literally the real thing as in life; something must have been altered. That something is the playwright’s creativity and the artists’ imagination.

The emotions experienced in life and those experienced in the theatre are essentially the same. But the methods of obtaining them and expressing them and the effects they have, both on the audience and the artist, greatly differ. In a theatre the audience are aware that the playwright offers an illusion of reality; what they are seeing is a ‘makebelieve’ world; an imagined situation as though it is a real one.

The playwright chooses a story or some substance and moulds a plot out of the substance by ordering and arranging some of the most “dramatic” elements in the story and creates a ‘form’.

Thus the playwright is involved in three things in the process of “making” his/her play: he/she chooses his/her subject-matter, chooses the form (the shape or structure within which he operates) and chooses the proper technique (which is the method of blending the substance into the form). By his choice of the form a play becomes a tragedy, comedy, farce, etc. How he/she transforms the chosen subject into a form that suits his/her subject is the technique. (that the tragedy is serious, a comedy has a happy-ending, etc).

The playwright creates actions which suit his/her form, characters to suit his/her actions, dialogues that suit his/her characters and creates an imaginary world. So theatre is not mere words of the play; it is not a visual image he/she creates - it is all these and more than the sum of all its parts.

2.4 DIFFERENT FORMS OF DRAMA

The playwright’s choice of the subject matter and his choice of an appropriate "form" for his subject-matter result in several forms of drama such as tragedy, comedy, etc. There are four such major forms - tragedy, comedy, farce, and the realistic play. Several other types of drama came into operation from time to time, but these are the most important ones.
Ancient Indian drama recognised ten different kinds of plays as ‘rupakas’ (‘rupaka’ is a Sanskrit equivalent of drama). They are called ‘Dasa Rupakas’ (Ten kinds of plays), created on the basis of the hero chosen and the major subject matter the play deals with. Nataka, Prakarana and Prahasana are the most important among them.

2.4.1 Tragedy

A play that deals with noble sentiments (of noble persons in the ancient period, but commoners now) A play presenting a clash between a power outside the hero and a power from within. A play that deals with the fall of a person due to a fault of his own A justification of divine justice.

2.4.2 Comedy

A play that deals with common people’s aspirations and pitfalls and laughs at their frivolities. A play about the society and its imperfections. A play that contains imperfect heroes, romantic escapades, cruel fathers and faltering servants.

A play in which marriage and man-woman relations are questioned, ridiculed and ultimately accepted.

A play in which stock characters and stock situations abound.

A play intended for the lovable enjoyment of the audience.

2.4.3 Farce

A play usually about heroes in love in conflict with villains who are engaged in physical actions and lewd verbal encounters, solely aimed at winning a laugh.

2.4.4 The Realistic Play

Contrary to the old types of plays, this form, developed in the mid-nineteenth century, can be a tragedy or comedy, but it reflects life’s immediate concerns. Man confronting his environment, social relationships, contemporary world of miseries and hopes - all of them form the subject-matter of realistic plays, expressed in a manner which mirrors our own daily lives. The realistic play mainly deals with problems common to us or nearer to the living experiences of many and it relies on a form that accentuates verifiable facts and sensory experiences. There are many new forms which emerged during the last fifty to hundred years - all of them as reactions to the realistic play, but the realistic play is one that continues to be the playwright’s choice though with several modifications.

2.5 THE ACTORS

Theatre ‘happens’ whenever a live actor communicates with a live audience. The actor is the chief “communicator” in successfully taking the meaning of the playwright’s words to the audience. That is why the actor’s technique is called abhinaya by Bharata in his Natyasastra. Abhinaya means just that: ‘abhi’ means “towards” and “ni” means near. The art of taking the ideas (of the playwright) nearer to the audience - communicating, so to say- is the major function of the actor.

“Acting” is what the actor does, which may be roughly defined as “any sort of human response - physical or mental. It involves both words and gestures. We can perceive both the character and the range of human emotions in tracing the graph of the characters’ actions. Since these emotions reflect those in our daily lives, theatre resembles life.

An actor hides his/her own personality and puts on the personality of the character he/
she is portraying, living the other’s man life for the present and making it look real. In making his/her new role believable his acting must show the best of his communicative skills – angika vachika, sattvika and aharya - as Bharata so rightly mentioned.

The actor finds his substance in his role itself. His chief source of how to deal with his actions lies within the text, his own and other characters’ dialogues. The situations give him clues of the moods which lead to the tensions in the play; tensions lead to crises and those create clashes between personalities which we call ‘conflicts’. Frequently, the playwright must have given clues to these emotions in his/her text itself. The director adds some more. Ultimately the actor must come to grips with his character and be able to communicate, using all the tools of expression that he/she is equipped with.

Interestingly, the actor, as an artist, becomes unique, for he/she is his/her own instrument. Unlike other artists, he/she must work with his own body, voice, expressions and appearance. In order to make proper use of these tools, he/she must have the unique ‘talent’ - a combination of imagination and sensibility and an ability to project himself/herself and his/her voice so that the audience would see and hear him/her clearly and distinctly. A good actor must also have the ability to understand his character, not only by itself, but by its association with other characters, because all drama is a conflict of ideas and a play of emotions, both his/her (his/her character’s) own and of the others.

2.6 THE TECHNICIANS

Though in the early days of the theatre, the script and the actors were enough to present a play, today several people work behind the stage to help the director and the actors for the success of the play and assist its proper interpretation. ‘Scenery’ was the first one of these new techniques added. Scenery added beauty to the scene; but, more importantly, it defined the locale - the place where ‘action’ takes place. When the locale is set, there came articles that filled in the stage, many of them serving as utility pieces. It has also become necessary that the back stage areas are to be concealed. Thus came the curtains and the side wings. In the early days, plays were performed during the day. Lighting was provided by the sun. When drama moved indoors, candles were used. When, during the mid-nineteenth century, gas was discovered, illumination became important. Real artistry in stage lighting was introduced when electricity came into use. The lighting technician has become an asset to stage productions because lights not only indicate the ‘time’ changes in the play, but also sets the ‘mood’ of the play. Another important area that requires special attention is the make-up and costume of the actors. Though traditional colours of make-up were used for long, today factory-prepared, soft and harmless colours in different shades offer many variations. Makeup, dress and ornaments decide the character’s background, his age, his social and economic status. Thus it provides the actor with the entire external personality and indicates his state of mind now. These are the major technical people that help a production’s success. Besides, there is the music director if the play requires elaborate musical score; a choreographer if dance sequences demand one; and a sound technician if sound effects need the attention of a separate expert. There is often a ‘stage manager’ who coordinates the work of these different ‘specialists’ who works under the directions of the director.

2.7 THE DIRECTOR

The most prominent person in the theatre today is the “director”. He is the leader of the entire group; he/she is the chief co-ordinator of the different elements which go into the production; he/she is the guide. He/She is responsible for the selection, the organization and the design of the over-all production. The director chooses the script and edits it to
suit his/her actors. He/She chooses the actors according to their capabilities and their physical and mental fitness to take up particular roles. He/She trains them in the proper use of the body and voice and guides them in speech and diction. He/She is responsible for the 'blocking' of the play, which means he/she directs the physical movements of the actors on the stage. "Blocking" provides meaning to the script, by externalising the inner conflicts of the characters and also their emotional nature. He/She is responsible for an over-all selection of the various technical elements (as we have discussed above) that should go into the production. He/She is responsible for unifying the different technical aspects. He/She is responsible for conducting the rehearsals and he trains the actors in their respective roles. He/She is the sole interpreter of the text and is the sole organizer of the show and the sole artistic head of the group.

2.8 THE AUDIENCE

The audience are one of the two important elements that make a dramatic presentation meaningful, the other one being the actors. There is no play without the actors and the audience. Unlike in the case of other arts, the performing arts - music, dance and drama - requires an audience assembled at a given time and place to experience a performance as a group. In the ancient days, when there was no lighting, no stage design and no other technical help, it was enough if the actors and the audience were present.

2.9 WHY SHOULD THE AUDIENCE GO TO SEE A PLAY?

People go to theatre because it provides relaxation through entertainment. Some people think that theatre must provide proper instructions - what is right and what is wrong in a person's behaviour in relationship to others - about social behaviour. Some people may go to theatre for the exciting characters a play projects; some others for its poetry, still some others for its punch in the dialogues. People may go to theatre for the fulfillment of their personal tastes. But they also go to the theatre because it provides a 'community' fulfillment. Thus Theatre becomes a societal pastime. In order to reach the audiences, all the people concerned with the "making" of the dramatic presentation should mould the play in such a way that it easily pleases the audience both visually and auditorily. If the audience likes the thought presented in the play or the ordering and selection of the incidents into an emotionally viable plot construction, the play will be a success. The audience are an important influence on the play's success, because of their "word of mouth publicity" that draws more audience. Finally and most importantly, it is the presence of the audience which makes theatre a "live" experience - a direct interaction between the viewers and the viewed, face to face with each other. Good acting inspires the audience to applaud; proper applause at the right moment encourages the actors to do better. This 'mutual' relationship between the audience and the actors is the key to a play's quality of "immediacy". It is also the "live" presence of the audience that distinguishes theatre experience from that of television and cinema.

2.10 QUESTIONS

1. Answer the questions in about 5 lines.

   1. Who are the major participants in the production?
   2. What are the major characteristics of a tragedy?
   3. What is a realistic drama?
II. Fill in the blanks:

a) The playwright chooses a __________ or some substance and moulds a __________ out of the substance.

b) An actor __________ his own personality and puts on the personality of the __________ he is portraying.

c) The director is the sole __________ of the text and is the sole __________ of the show.

2.11 ANSWERS

I.

1. The major participants in play production are the playwright, the actors, the technicians, the director and the audience.

2. Tragedy is a play with a noble person or a commoner as a hero who is in conflict with major forces of nature and which ends unhappily.

3. A realistic play may be either a tragedy or comedy, but must be a mirror of the life around us, with characters that are familiar to us, with incidents which are based on verifiable facts and emotions that rely on our senses.

II. a) plot, story

b) hides, character

c) interpreter, organizer