
IJNT 4 PLAYS AND SERIALS

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Factors Favouring Television
- 4.3 Similarities between Television Drama and Theatre Play
- 4.4 Structure of a TV Play
 - 4.4.1 Characterisation
 - 4.4.2 Dialogue
- 4.5 Similarities of Television to Film
- 4.6 TV Play and Radio Play
- 4.7 Scripting a Play
- 4.8 TV Serials
- 4.9 Series and Serials in Relation to TV plays
- 4.10 Characteristics of Series, Serials and Soap Operas
- 4.11 Thematic Shades and Hues
- 4.12 TV Writer in the Creative Team
- 4.13 The Script
- 4.14 Formats and Themes
- 4.15 Summing Up
- 4.16 Self Check Exercises
- 4.17 Aids to Answers
- 4.18 Glossary and Bibliography

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

At the end of your study of this unit, you will:

- understand the essential requirements of a television play
 - learn to distinguish between a TV play, a stage play, a radio play and a film
- learn to analyse the structure of a TV play and
 - be able to write a TV play on your own
- understand the format of TV serials and develop analytical capability
- indicate broad guidelines for scripting; and
- appreciate TV serials.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units of this **Block**, you studied about the various TV formats and essential production techniques. In this unit, we will discuss TV plays and serials. There are two commonly held beliefs regarding television plays. Many opine that TV is a cold, mechanical medium to work in and, secondly, that it has no thrill, because there is no live audience as compared to the theatre. Television does make use of vast technical and mechanical apparatus, but in no way can it be termed a cold medium. As on stage, there is a **first night** for somebody, every night, and the audience, though they may not be all sitting under one roof, are certainly 'live'. Because of its visual impact, even small mistakes are easily noticed and not forgiven by the viewer. When TV stations put up historical plays, for example, great care is needed not to distort historical facts and personalities as represented by renowned historians.

In this unit we will tell you how different writing plays for television is compared to

writing for radio, stage or film. In the earlier Block, in the Unit on Radio Play (Block 2, unit 4) we spoke of writing for sound. But for a television play the writing skills needed are quite unique, for the writer has to match every visual with whatever he writes.

We will also discuss here the origin of TV plays. How did plays figure on the television screen first and foremost? Were they adapted from the theatre and stage? What were the real problems faced in trying to adapt them for television?

We shall also discuss how to write a play: and how to develop a story into a play script. No drama is possible without dialogue. We will discuss how to write a dialogue between two characters in a particular situation. Last, but not the least, we will try to stimulate your analytical powers so that you are able to render a critical appreciation of a TV play that you have seen.

We shall look at TV serials in the final sections of this unit and discuss the skills required for writing and appreciating TV serials.

4.2 FACTORS FAVOURING TELEVISION

The biggest factor favouring television is that it is a visual medium, and in a country like ours, is slowly but steadily extending its reach to more and more viewers outside the big cities. With the increasing number of television transmitters being set up, programmes originating in a big city can be beamed to towns far and wide.

Being a visual medium, it has the appeal of cinema to the viewers in general. Many regard it as a mini cinema in the home and any variety programme or entertainment is very popular with the audience at large. This is why many TV plays and serials have an extremely high rate of viewing. It is by all means a great source of entertainment.

The frequency with which it can be used as a source of entertainment is immense when compared to going to the local theatre or cinema. Its daily scheduling of programmes offers a wide selection for different kinds of audience i.e. children and adults.

4.3 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TELEVISION DRAMA AND THEATRE PLAY

In dramatized and semi-dramatized programmes, as well as in television plays, the actors give a continuous performance as they do in the theatre.

The actors rehearse their lines as a whole as they do for a stage presentation. In this respect, a theatre artist's work is different from that of a cine star, who does just a few shots a day and is not required to know all his lines at one time. He does not also need to know his role in relation to the other actors in the film. It is for this reason that television dialogue demands an easy pace and flow as does a theatre dialogue.

In theatre the audience feels that the actors are performing especially for them. This is unlike the cinema where the actors do not appear live before the audience. There is thus a deep sense of immediacy in theatre which is also shared by a television play. Even though the viewers know that they are watching a recorded TV play, the play has the generic quality of always taking place in the present and this gives the TV theatre that extra touch of intimacy which is absent in the film.

Television uses more action and less dialogue than the stage play. It has its own subtle way of conveying meaning by means of its camera close-up on a face or a hand gesture which in the theatre is often conveyed by words.

Though the use of the symbol has been known in the theatre since the very early days, the playwright of the stage play is still under the disadvantage that his audience remains at the same distance from his play throughout. The TV playwright can, by means of his direction, focus the audience's attention to any one particular part of the stage or on any one actor or on any object by the unique technique of a close-up, whereas the

playwright for the theatre has to fall back, more often than not, on the use of words.

The other major difference between theatre and television dialogue is that television being an intimate medium, by which we mean, a medium that finds its presence in every home, it needs a simpler and a more realistic style; and a style that is close to the people it caters to. Theatre, on the other hand, could resort to a style that is archaic and artificial and yet entertain people because it is a little more distant from the audience, than the TV.

Let us take two examples — one from a play written for television and the other from a play written for the stage. The TV play is by Samuel Beckett while the stage play is by Shakespeare. Compare the lines from these two plays and see for yourself how the language of the TV play is direct, precise and without any flourish, while the language of the other is poetic and ornamental. Excerpt from *Eh Joe* by Samuel Beckett.

WOMAN'S VOICE:

Joe....

(Eyes open, resumption of intentness.)

Joe....

(Full intentness.)

Thought of everything?... Forgotten nothing?....

You're all right now, eh ?.... No one can see you now...

No one can get at you now... Why don't you put out that light?... There might be a louse watching you... Why don't you go to bed?... What's wrong with that bed, Joe?.... You changed it, didn't you?... Made no difference?.... Or is the heart already?... Crumbles when you lie down in the dark.... Dry rotten at last... Eh Joe?

Now let us turn to an excerpt from *Macbeth* by Shakespeare:

First Witch: When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch: When the hurlyburly's done,

When the battle's lost and won.

Third Witch: That will be ere the set of sun

First Witch: Where the place

Second Witch: Upon the heath

Third Witch: There to meet with Macbeth.

First Witch: I come Graymalkin.

All: Paddock calls. Anon!

Fair is foul and foul is fair.

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

4.4 STRUCTURE OF A TV PLAY

Ideas for TV plays can emanate either from life around us or from history, mythology, day to day social problems, or even pure fantasy. It could even rotate around an event that takes place on a certain day. But it is the television writer's responsibility to see that the idea, having originated thus, must be fashioned into something dramatic that is of absorbing interest and includes characters that seem to be drawn from real life.

Remembering that the medium is one that is intimate to the viewer, the writer must bear in mind his (the viewer's) expectations. No time can be wasted in trying to establish the theme. The opening scene of the play must immediately draw the attention of the viewer. From beginning to the end, the tempo has to be maintained.

There are 2 kinds of plays based on situations — one dealing with individual problems, and the other dealing with social problems in general. The selection of material for the play has to limit itself to an interesting episode. The interplay of characters, involving complications and crises, form the core of the situations. It is the development of these complications and crises that leads to the climax in a play whether it is on stage or on television.

Again, development of characters and situations along expected lines will create no surprise in the audience **and** will fail to keep them absorbed. It is the playwright's skill that leads the audience to expect one thing and then land up with quite a different feeling. The audience should be kept constantly expecting something to happen and then, in the end, when it **does** happen, it should surprise them with the result. If a play has to be dramatic, **there** should be a **building** up of tension and its release.

4.4.1 Characterization

Recall what you had read about radio plays in Block 2, Unit 4. In radio plays, a playwright would **choose** his characters keeping in mind foremost what his characters would sound like, since **the** play would be enacted in a radio studio **and not** witnessed by an audience. While **producing** the play, utmost care would be taken to **choose** characters according to their tonal quality, and regional accents. In television, the playwright will concentrate on the appearance of the actor since he will be appearing on the screen. Will his character sport a beard, and if so, why? Is he a middle aged man, doing a white collar job? **The** playwright would have to ask himself a hundred questions before he puts pen to paper to explain how his character looks. The description of his character will be read by every one, from the costume designer to the producer, director, make-up man **and** of course the actor himself. Let us see how in *Eh Joe*, Samuel Beckett gives a detailed description of this character.

Joe, late fifties, **grey** hair, old dressing-gown, carpet slippers, in his room.

1. Joe seen from **behind** sitting on edge of bed, intent pose, getting up, going to window, opening **window**, looking out, closing window, drawing curtain, standing intent.
2. Joe **do** (= from behind) going from window to door, opening door, looking out, closing door, locking door, drawing hanging before door, standing intent.
3. Joe **do** going from door to cupboard, opening cupboard, looking in, closing cupboard, locking cupboard, drawing hanging before cupboard, standing intent.
4. Joe **do** going **from** cupboard to bed, kneeling down, looking under bed, getting up, sitting down **on** edge of bed as when discovered, beginning to relax.
5. Joe seen from front sitting on edge of bed, relaxed, eyes closed. Hold, then dolly slowly in to close-up of face. First word of text stops this movement.

Since television plays **are restricted** by time and not run as long as a film, the playwright has to choose certain **important** aspects of a character in a play and highlight them, so that it has the desired **effect**. So the characters should come through in a clear crisp manner, full of vitality and interest. Some of their characteristics could be portrayed visually by their appearance, while other qualities could come through the skillful use of dialogue, actions and reactions.

4.4.2 Dialogue

On stage characters **cannot** remain silent for a long stretch of time, without speaking to each other or, in the case of a single character, without being engaged in a soliloquy. In television one may see long moments when not a word **is spoken**. In fact, any sound or speech at certain crucial moments in a TV play may prove detrimental to the dramatic effect, because the **visuals** speak for themselves. The appearance **and the** action of a character on the screen may convey a whole range of feelings. Dialogue is used only when absolutely necessary. At the same time a playwright cannot use long sequences without any speech **at all**, because this would confuse the viewer as to what the playwright wants to **convey**, and also hinder the progress of the flow. Dialogue is used **to clear** up such **confusion** and guide the viewer so that he can follow the story lined and the actions of the characters. Otherwise the viewers can get lost in a maze of visual images which could be pleasing to the eye but convey no particular meaning.

In a short play. *Come and Go*, called a dramaticule, which runs for three minutes only, Samuel Beckett uses just 121 words, 23 speeches interspersed with 12 silences.

Similarly in *Eh Joe*, **we** hear the voice of a woman assailing the protagonist Joe who is seen in his room in an old dressing gown and carpet slippers. The whole play is punctuated by pauses, during which the camera moves in upon Joe until finally it achieves "maximum close-up **of his face**" then voice and image are both extinguished.

4.5 SIMILARITIES OF TELEVISION TO FILM

The subject matter of both a TV play and a film is viewed through the lens of a camera. This is the most common factor in both TV and film. Though the television camera is different from the cine camera, both use a range of lenses and shoot their subjects at various distances according to the demands of each visual. The television writer need not go into the minutest detail regarding every shot. However, it is important that the writer, while scripting, should keep in mind that his work will be seen through cameras which can capture different objects at different angles, giving enough scope to 'pan and track' and present the dramatic effect that he wants in the play. Though the producer may not use all the writer's suggestions, he will be able to get some idea as to what kind of effect the writer has in mind by **way** of treatment.

TV play is viewed on a screen. And because of this television has borrowed a good deal of the grammar and punctuation of the film.

The television screen is smaller than the cinema screen. But the TV screen is more intimate. It is present in our homes. It can come on as and when we wish, at the turn of a knob. But being a smaller screen it cannot show anything on a magnificent scale like the cinema screen. Films like 'Ben Hur' or 'Quo Vadis' would lose their spectacular effect when seen on television. The nature of the TV medium is different in this sense. Television can handle small groups and individuals in smaller frames and portray their feelings, emotions and thoughts powerfully rather than concentrate on big scenes and settings. Television plays are usually concerned with people rather than things. Where they are concerned with things, it is usually in their relation to people.

Unlike the stage, both in television and in film, **action** is not confined for long periods to one set as we would see in the theatre. The action is mobile — difference being that in film, the action is more mobile than on the television. In television the number of sets is limited and the action can flow from one set to another. Limitations are set by factors such as time and space.

One area where television and film closely resemble each other is in the use of sound and vision simultaneously. Television can use sound creatively like the cinema to comment on the vision, or combine with it to establish an emotional situation. The main difference, however, is that whereas in the film sound is completely recorded, the various tracks being dubbed together to form the final sound track, in television, the music and effects are usually recorded and the dialogue comes over live. But there may be variations in production. The programme may consist of sequences of film with all the sound already dubbed on.

Television uses the same grammar and punctuation as in the film. It uses shots and sequences, somewhat like the cinema and links them as required by cuts and mixes. The production techniques may not be as sophisticated as cinema because of the highly advanced technology in cinematic production. The production work of mixing, fading and other optical effects for the cinema are usually undertaken in the laboratory. In television they are done manually by the vision maker, and the same **precision** cannot be expected.

Like in the cinema — the television writer must be able to work out his synopsis, how he plans to get from one scene to another and from one sequence to another. The television serial or play is shot at one time, one shot following the other in real time. The film is made one shot at a time, without a sequential order, which **gives** ample scope to cut, edit, and mix in the lab before it takes its final shape.

While a television programme may be produced 'live', which **means** it is being transmitted while it is being produced, it may also be recorded on video tape or film for telecasting at some time in the future. Some are produced without halting the flow of the programme and then presented without any editing, or alteration.

The second method of video taping involves recording in sequences, and then all put together by the editor.

4.6 TV PLAY AND RADIO PLAY

Like radio plays, **television** plays and serials are transmitted by means of wireless waves to a mass audience **grouped** in small numbers.

The composition of the **radio** and the television audience is obviously very much the same. The audience is **not** assembled in one building, as in the theatre but scattered over a million or more **buildings**. But there are differences between the two audiences. People listening in to **the** radio could be engaged in a variety of other activities, while they are tuned in to a **programme** and would need only to devote a part of their mind to concentrate. The sound medium has often been referred to as the blind medium. But the television viewer **must** give all his attention because in the subdued light that he chooses to watch his programme it is impossible for him even **to** read while viewing. Moreover, television **may** communicate many of the emotions and feelings of players in a TV play through expressions which have to be viewed to enjoy the experience. The fact that viewers must **give** all their attention gives the TV writer **a great** advantage. He can choose to use a great deal of subtlety in his treatment without overemphasising or underlining.

Like the radio plays, television plays, form part of a daily programme. They both have a time limit during which **they** must be transmitted. They must be produced on a definite budget.

The writer of a television or radio play has to bear in mind the limitations of time. Unlike the stage play, **the** writer for the electronic medium has to be able to write for a slot which could run for 15, 20 or 30 minutes or at the most one hour. Dramatic construction will have **to be clear, precise** and pruned to suit the allotted time given to the writer.

Because it is listened **to and** viewed at home, television like radio is an intimate medium. It is at your service in **the** privacy of your home. Because of this intimacy the viewer expects a great deal of **sincerity** and personalised approach. This factor has a distinct effect on the type of writing needed.

Another point of similarity is that both television and radio can be either live or recorded or both. The practice of using sound effects in radio is an old one. This is often done and cued into live dialogues and narration on radio programmes to create the desired effect. Another example is the 'actuality' feature in which a narrator links interviews recorded out in the field. Just as radio uses recorded sound on tape television employs recorded sound **and** vision on film or on tape and film. Both these media can make use of **pre-recorded** sound, with television having the distinct advantage of pre-recording vision as well. There is however one basic difference. While pre-recording for the sound medium is relatively cheap, television cannot run the camera indiscriminately and spend reel after reel to capture images which may or may not be used in the **programme**.

Both, radio and **television** programmes can be either produced in the studio, outside it or both. This is evident from the number of programmes we are able to watch live as they take place in our **own** country or in some corner of the world. This is particularly true of ceremonial and sporting events. Television does have **the added** advantage of satisfying the viewer by transporting him back and forth from the television studios to the scene of action as is **so** often done during the time of the general elections and the presentation of the budget. This technique will, in future, become more frequent, as outside broadcast **machines** get lighter and more mobile.

Difference between Radio and Television

The radio writer can use **his** imagination and let his story wander where it will. The scenes could be set in far away places, across the oceans. There is absolutely no limit to the **variety** of scenes the writer may create. The action in his programme can take place in differedt surroundingseach time. He can use cars speeding down highways and through tunnels. In **short**, a writer for radio can use unlimited ways to create the desired effect in the listener's **mind** and all this will not cost him anything extra. But in

television, the writer must be careful and certain about where his story is going to take him.

In visualising characters, the radio writer has to think in terms of voice — international, regional accent and vocal mannerisms. Not much attention is needed for the physical appearance of the actors since they will not be seen, only heard. In television the writer must know his characters in minute detail. The writer must part with the information he has on each character to the designer, actor, **make-up** and costume people, so that they know that he does have a complete idea about his characters.

Radio programmes often use a narrator to guide the programme to take it along its course. The narrator transports the action through space and time, introduces new characters, sets the scene and generally helps the author link up his sequences in the programme. Listeners, by and large, are quite used to the presence of a narrator in a radio programme. Since television is a visual medium, using both sound and vision to get **its message** across, it is usually preferred to make a visual link and the narrator, who is invisible, **can** be done away with altogether. Television does at times use a narrator who does not appear on the screen, but the writer does not use him unless he has very strong reasons for doing so.

Let us take two plays written by Samuel Beckett, one exclusively for radio and the other for the TV. The short play **Cascando** is a radio piece for Music and Voice. The play, Beckett says, is "about the character called Woburn who never appears". This play is essentially an experience in sound and tempo, not sight and sequence. It consists of words uttered by a voice and music. This play cannot be presented on the TV as there are no visuals. Let us just take an excerpt from **Cascando**. You will recognise that there are no actions, no physical movements, no gestures, but only verbal utterances that register the flow of the play.

MUSIC :

OPENER: (With **MUSIC**) God.

MUSIC:

(Silence)

OPENER: God God.

(Pause)

There was a time I asked myself, What is it.
There were times I answered, It's the outing.

Two outings.

Then the return.

Where?

To the village.

To the inn.

Two outings, then at last the return, to the village, to the inn, by the only road that leads there.

An image, like any other.

But I don't answer any more.

I open.

VOICE: (Together) - don't let go ... finish.. it's the

MUSIC:

right one... this time... I have it... we're

there

Woburn... nearly -

.....

OPENER: (With VOICE and MUSIC) As though they had linked their arms.

VOICE: (Together) - sleep ... no more stories.....

MUSIC: come on

...**Woburn**... it's him... see him... say him

to the

end..... don't let go -

OPENER: (With VOICE and MUSIC) Good.

VOICE: (Together) - nearly.... just a **few** more

MUSIC: a few
 more.... I'm there ... nearly.... Woburn.. it's him.... it
 was him I've got him.. nearly -
 OPENER: (With **VOICE** and MUSIC, fervently) Good!
 VOICE: (Together) - **this** time... it's the right one
 MUSIC:
 finish..... no **more** stories.... sleep we're there... nearly
 just **a few** more don't let go.... Woburn ... he clings
 on..... come on..... come on -
 (Silence.)

Now let us turn to **Krapp's Last Tape** which presents an old man, grey-haired, **dishevelled, near-sighted**, hard of hearing, sitting in front of a table where you find a tape recorder, a **microphone** and some **boxes** containing spools of tape. There are 3 tapes played — Krapp at 39, Krapp at 69 and the new one which Krapp now attempts to make by speaking into the microphone. Let us take an example.

<p>TAPE: bench by the weir from where I could see her window, There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she were gone. (Pause.) Hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs. I got to know them quite well— oh by appearance of course I mean! One dark young beauty I recollect!particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her— not having been introduced, she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue! (Laugh. Pause) The face she had! The eyes! Like.... (hesitates),... chrysolite!</p> <p>(Pause.) Ah well... (Pause)</p>	<p>Detail of sensation. Narrative. Lyrical. Mood changes. Quickening to narrative. Sardonic. Lyrical. Attention to colour. Quickening through narrative to sardonic. The sound of the laugh marks climax of the sardonic movement. The pause is essential for the change to lyrical. Note how much is achieved from the laugh to the resumption of the narrative —only ten words are used. Krapp recognizes rejected opportunity.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The TV play presents **Krapp** in action, playing his tape recorder. The left column indicates the tape recordings and the right column gives the direction for the camera as it focuses on Krapp. This play is thus essentially a TV **play**.

Similarly in Eh Joe, **Beckett** gives instruction for the camera movement.

Joe's opening **movements** followed by camera at constant remove, Joe full length in frame throughout. **No** need to record room as whole. After this opening pursuit, between first **and final closeup** of face, camera has nine slight moves in towards face, say four inches each time. Each move is stopped by voice resuming, never camera move and voice together. This would give position of camera when dolly stopped by first word of text as one yard from maximum **closeup** of face. Camera does not **move** between paragraphs till clear that pause (say three seconds) longer than between phrases. Then four inches in say four seconds when movement stopped by voice resuming.

4.7 SCRIPTING A PLAY

Construction of a T.V. play requires a string of scenes, just as a wall would need bricks

and a bridge, steel girders. The scene could be live, it may have been filmed or it may be a mix of live foreground with filmed background; but whatever the composition the scene still remains the unit of composition.

It is by linking scenes into sequences and setting the sequences one after the other in a mounting rhythm that the script is built up.

What is a Television scene? The word scene figures in theatre, film and even in the novel. In each of these it has a different meaning.

In Television 'Scene' has a definite meaning.

A scene is one in which a continuous piece of action takes place in one set.

The word **continuous** is important. A set may have a dozen or more scenes played in it, but each time the action moves out of the set to go elsewhere, the scene ends. When the action returns to the set the new scene is numbered accordingly.

In some ways the Television scene is very much like the theatrical scene, at least as it was used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

The action in the scene, as in the theatre, is continuous within the confines of one set. A great difference however is the length. A theatrical scene may last from five to fifteen minutes whereas a Television scene is of a short duration and may last from one to five or six minutes. The action in the television programme moves from one set to another set marking scenic change, or from set through a number of scenes to another set. This is one of the main reasons why the movement in the production is jerky and limited in scope. It must not appear to the viewer as if he is watching a stage play, while **watching** a televised play. This will ruin his appreciation completely. Yet the truth is that action is confined mostly to a dozen sets..

One of the best methods to overcome this problem is by writing in a manner so that the **action** makes its way from one set to another in a varying pattern and does not dwell long in each set. The scope for movement in a limited number of sets is then **ensured**— a good script has its advantages. You can see this quick change of sets in TV serials. **Hum Rahi**, illustrates this. Within **20 minutes** of its allotted time, **you can** see at least 10 to 12 sets, marking quick change of scenes.

A sixty minute play or a serial may have as many as 45 scenes and though the length of each scene may vary, the average must be only a few minutes.

Linking the scenes after having written them is obviously extremely important. This is **often** referred to as the 'grammar' of TV Writing. This technique has been borrowed from the films. There are no hard and fast rules as regards linking of scenes. It could be compared to the semi-colon used in the English language composition. One can only sense when a semi-colon is to be used, similarly in television the techniques of CUT and **MIX** are used in relation to the requirement of the scenes without being governed by specific rules.

The Cut: The cut is used within scenes to link shot to shot. **The** writer does not often **need** to detail individual shots. The cut is mainly the concern of the producer. It is also **used** to link scenes where the action flows without any break in time.

The Mix: This is used to link scenes where there is break in time or where the time factor is not spelt out in detail. The mix may be carried out at different speeds and therefore not only link but change the tempo of the action. It can also be used to suggest similarities or contrasts or to point at a particular mood.

The Fade: This is used to end sequences.

The Wipe: Wipes are mostly used in magazine programmes as well. At the end of each **scene** a box closes down over the scene and then disappears to make way for the next.

Construction of sequences: Sequences are a group of scenes. The group, consisting of more **than** two scenes and less than a dozen, covers a definite phase in the action. Many people have drawn similarities between the sequence in a televised film with a chapter in a novel or the movement in a symphony — though in reality, the chapter in a novel

contains more material **than** the sequence. Television, one must not forget, has the double means of communication with sound and vision against the single means of the written word. But the sequence, like the chapter in the novel, does have a unity and it carries the action one **complete** step further on.

One important aspect of **the** sequence is that it helps the scriptwriter to get over some of the problems of time. Very often the writer may want to suggest a passage of hours, days or even months **between** scenes. In one television script there may be as many as twenty or more **changes in** time and they cannot all be done by mixes. But, at the end of each sequence, the **vision** is faded out and for a second or more, there is blank screen. Then the vision is faded **up** again and the next sequence begins. The viewer subconsciously accepts the fact that there has been a passage of time, though of how much deviation, he does not know.

The sequence has other **useful** elements. It allows the writer to introduce and develop new themes and start **action** moving from different places. This is particularly useful in a television plot. Unlike **stage** plays, where **one single** theme is developed throughout the play, several stories are developed, working towards a central theme. Each one of these stories must be introduced and developed to some length before it can merge with the others. The sequence provides the opportunity to do this. This does not necessarily mean that each sequence **should** start a new **thread** of the plot; but where one finds the need to start a new **development**, the beginning of the sequence is the best place to do it.

4.8 TV SERIALS

In the previous sections, **you** learnt about the technique of writing a TV play, keeping in mind its basic structure, format and components. Now let us **turn** to TV serials and see what skills you **require** for writing and appreciating a TV serial and a soap opera. Serial broadcasting is **more** than half a century old. But for the Indian audience, however, it is new. **Episodic** series started first in radio, around the 'thirties'. It must have started as suspense **drama** through adaptations, and later through original scripts. Soon, one of its forms **got** a new name — the Soap Opera — not because of its own soapy qualities, but since the soap manufacturers sponsored this new format. It was a rage on radio till **television** started taking it over.

On the Indian **scene**, the **only** broadcast that could boast of longevity is 'Zoono Dab' of Srinagar Radio. On our TV screen 'Hum Log', 'Buniyad' and 'Ramayana' have held sway for long periods. Longevity is just one of the characteristics of a serialised broadcast. But its repetitive quality is near infectious, leading to addiction. Each week, the same characters tackling one or the other problems attract, win friends and become almost a part of the **watching** household. The sameness is magnetic because it tempts the viewer to return to **the** serial each week with greater enthusiasm.

4.9 SERIES AND SERIALS IN RELATION TO TV PLAYS

While series and serials **are** recent, plays **are antique**. It is true not **only** for Indian Television (which is **rather** young), but also for television in the West. Television drama started as a live-show before its filmed parts stepped in. Hard work, spread over weeks and months, was invested for just one evening — one viewing. Later, bigger plays and major works stretched **over** weeks in the form of episodes, were serialised.

A serial is a prolonged drama punctuated by regular comments of truth at the end of each episode. Each episode of a series is virtually a complete play. At least it gives us that feeling. The **change** in format from series to serial is the result of the quest for the new. Besides, the **compulsions** of the changing times and trends and the advances in broadcast technology **have** contributed to this transformation.

Besides other things, **serialised** broadcasting is a tool to carve out a place in public memory. It may be a **compromise** on creative quality, but it has its own intrinsic merits. Therefore, episodic **series** and serials have come to stay in the world of broadcasting, at

least till the turn of the century. These may be supplanted by some other format, invention or device — more attractive, more engaging, more infectious — to cause a new and deeper addiction.

4.10 CHARACTERISTICS OF SERIES, SERIALS AND SOAP OPERAS

Serial broadcasting has many faces. Its two sub-formats, **series/serials** and soap operas, have their own distinct complexion and structure. Though apparently similar, they are distinct in terms of frequency, content, structure, pace and duration.

During the seventies, British Television carved out a compromise. They called it **Series-al**. Series-al is a long running series, each episode offering a complete story.

- i) The series have generally a weekly appearance, whereas the soap opera is telecast two to five times a week. Indian television, however, has so far kept it down to twice or thrice a week.
- ii) In structure, each series has a beginning, a climax and a set end. The soap opera, on the other hand, is quite flexible without any well-defined beginning or end. It has just 'an endless middle'.
- iii) The on-going business of the soap opera slackens its pace, whereas the series have a comparatively faster pace and more action.
- iv) The series have a finite number of episodes. Others, like South American Telenovels (which last for **eight** to nine months), are likely to be mistaken for soap opera. They are, in fact, episodic series. In contrast, soap operas have the on-going quality with no fixed number of episodes. They just go on and on, and then may suddenly disappear. In other cases, they may overstay.
- v) In our country both series and soap operas are telecast at the prime time. In the West, soap operas were shown during daytime, whereas **series/serials** are programmed for the evening — the prime time. Therefore, the soap operas entertain primarily housewives. In comparison, a heterogeneous audience watches the **series/serials**.
- vi) The most important difference between the two sub-formats is in their content — soap operas are serious, not satires or comedies. The serials, on the other hand, may have any face whatsoever.
- vii) Another point of distinction is the habit-forming quality of soap operas. Serials engage and hold viewers only for a given period of time. They offer entertainment and information without addiction.

4.11 THEMATIC SHADES AND HUES

Serial broadcasting started in the form of serial drama. Gradually it took on many shades and hues. Most of the experiments which the western TV went through in decades, Indian TV has recapitulated in less than four years or so. In some cases, it has even struck new ground. It has experimented with both adaptations and original writing.

Amongst adaptations may be mentioned old classics, contemporary outstanding novels, short stories and even non-fiction writings. **Serialisation** of the **Ramayan** and the **Mahabharat** deserves special mention in this context.

TV serials are not limited just to **serialised** drama. Their thrust may be information, dealing with social issues, sports, culture, etc. Their approach may also be investigative and probing.

The original writing for TV reflects an impressive variety of themes like the freedom struggle; national integration, issues of contemporary social relevance, thrillers, mystery, detective stories, adventure, science fiction, family situation comedy, culture, performing arts, sports etc. Science fiction has got representation mostly through

Serials borrowed from the West. However, this vacuum now seems to be attracting attention. Some TV serials have been addressed specially to children.

The initial experimental phase of our serial broadcasting does deserve a mention here, if not for creative quality, at least for its historical value. Out of the serials of that phase, **Reoti** Saran Sharma's 'Aur Bhi Gam **Hain** Zamane **Mein**' and **Chiranjit**'s 'Dadi Maa **Jagi**' stand out.

As regards the number of episodes of a serial, the most suitable package is of thirteen, which conveniently fits into a quarter. Four such packages can take care of a particular day of the week, for one whole year.

A list representing various possible themes and shades is given below. It also includes some serials that may reach the small screen in due course.

TV SERIALS

Soap Opera

HUMLOG BUNIYAD

Adaptations

i) Fiction:	:	Sharat Chandra's SHRIKANT
Major works	:	Shree Lal Shukla's RAAG DARBARI
	:	Asha Purna Devi's PRATHAM PRATISHRUTI
	:	RAMAYAN
	:	MAHABHARAT
	:	VIKRAM AUR BETAL
ii) Fiction: stories	:	MALGUDI DAYS
	:	EKKAHANI
	:	SATYAJITRAY PRESENTS
	:	Mrinal Sen's KABHI DOOR KABHI PAAS
	:	KATHASAGAR
iii) Nonfiction	:	DISCOVERY OF INDIA
Freedom struggle	:	RAJSESWARAJ
	:	KAHAN GAYE WOHLG
National Integration	:	YATRA (Travelogue)
	:	PRADAKSHINA
Special issues	:	NEWS LINE
	:	SACH KIPARCHHAIN
	:	RAJNI
	:	SUBAH
	:	NUKKAD
Family situation comedy	:	YEH JO HAI ZINDAGI
Science fiction	:	STAR TREK
	:	BAND DARWAZE
Crime and mystery	:	KARAMCHAND
	:	KHOJ
	:	POLICE FILE SE
Sports	:	THAT'S CRICKET
	:	SUNIL GAVASKAR PRESENTS
	:	ALL THE BEST (10 episodes on major sports)
Culture	:	Prakash Jha's DANCES OF INDIA
	:	Amjad Ali Khan's DASTAAN-E-GHAZAL
Children's serials	:	EK DOTEEN CHAR
	:	KHEL KHEL MEIN
	:	AZADI KI KAHANI

4.12 TV WRITER IN THE CREATIVE TEAM

TV programme-making is essentially a cooperative operation. Its technical complexity makes it inevitably so. The crest of the creative team is the trio, **Producer-Writer-Director**. In serial broadcasting, the writer has a pivotal role to perform. His role starts with the selection of the subject. The quality of the subject and the script are vital in every serial. The script is the blueprint that guides the programme-making process.

Of the trio, Writer and Director, however, form a close and trusting partnership. With the completion of the script, the Director takes over as the Creative Head of the artistic and technical team. The writer has the pleasure of watching the skeleton of his script become the flesh and blood of the programme.

- The writer must have the basic skills and talent of a playwright.
- He must read a good deal.
- He should know how to write creatively in visual terms besides having the ability to maintain balance between form and content.
- He should be a combination of a writer and a script-editor.
- He should always be willing to modify or rewrite. This is because for TV serials the script is never final. The writer should not be too sensitive or sentimental about his script. Entire chunks of dialogue may have to be eliminated if they do not lend themselves to the visual or aural medium of the TV.
- The writer, while writing, should be able to imagine everything on the screen. Writing for TV is not the same as for print media.
- The writer should understand the basic techniques of TV production. He must be as comfortable working with images as with words, and he should know the art of combining both.
- His style should be natural; his sentences should be simple, direct and incisive. He should develop the capability of delivering **results** even under serious pressure of time.
- Television is a hungry medium. It consumes scripts and ideas. Here the writer faces the challenge of offering a fresh look every time.
- A writer should also find his own style of telling the story with visual images. His creative talent has to weave the subject into a story that could break into **episodes**. Therefore, in case of a serial, it must have the **inbuilt** continuing element.

4.13 THE SCRIPT

Selection of the **subject/theme** paves the way for developing the rough outline of the story and its principal characters. It need not be a tight **work**, since it should allow for improvisation and flexibility. For a series, the outline may identify **the** beginning, climax and the probable end. The next stage implies its division into episodes, each complete in itself. For **the serial**, episodes similar to those of a series, would be more in number, ensuring a longer telecast period. Developments and events in this case may not be so sharp and **chiselled**. **The** canvas of a series-al is larger, but a serial goes even a step further than the series-al. For the serial, the storyline is less **firm** as compared to series-al and series. Its ongoing quality makes it exceedingly flexible and manoeuvrable. To ensure that a serial or a soap opera does not drift away **too** far, the storyline should be kept in creative sight and check. Indian TV has so far included series, series-al serial, soap opera, all under one convenient category — **Serials**.

Episodes

The writer has then to **punctuate** the outline into episodes, and salient aspects of each should be jotted down. The first two or three episodes may be scripted to unfold the story in phases. The **Writer and** the Director may together discuss the outline as well as the scripts of the initial **episodes**.

Language

The language of the **dialogue** portion of the script would depend on the theme, story, environment, nature of **the event/events** and the individual characters.

The basic script, after due **Bmendments**, is written in two parts on each page, divided into video and audio components. Video portion includes setting, movements, action etc., while the audio part **includes** such elements as dialogue, sound, music. On this script is based the Camera **Script** which is further organised as Production Schedule. The TV writer should **understand** all these, though he is primarily concerned with the basic script. Given below is a sample of what a basic script looks like: this video, 'Dramatisation of ideas' is **at** your study centre already.

Sample

VIDEOSCRIPT OF 'DRAMATISATION OF IDEAS'

Visual

- 1) Dark stage. A man is walking back and **forth** with a book in his hand. The man is in limbo.
- 2) Camera pans to the presenter sitting also in limbo. Hamlet's **voice** fades as the presenter begins to speak.
3. Presenter
4. Caption:
Last Wedding Anniversary by Shiv K. Kumar
5. Cut to a presentation of the play

Audio

Hamlet: To be or not to be – that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer, The slings and arrows of outrageous **fortune**, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them? — To die, — to sleep',

Presenter: We are watching a **performance** of the famous monologue of the play, **Hamlet, Prince of Denmark**, by William Shakespeare. The monologue is a device used to articulate the inner conflicts of a person or dialogue that a person has with himself. Monologues are something we constantly have whenever we have to reach a decision. For example, when we go shopping and see something we like. We ask about price, look at the article and enter into debate. 'It's too expensive'. 'Do I really need it?' 'It's good for the **price**' and finally 'Yes' **I'll** buy it' or 'No, I'll give it a miss'.

Let us look at an excerpt of **The Last Wedding Anniversary** written by Shiv K. Kumar.

A scene in the play
Rupa: (Looking at him searchingly) Hiding away in your retreat? (glancing at the magazines and papers lying around pell-mell). Looking for...

4.14 FORMATS AND THEMES

Serial broadcasting initially **encouraged** adaptation of classics and contemporary major works. Written and **published** in weekly parts, these provided ideal cutting points.

The writer must respect the **work** he is adapting. Over-reverence, however, may become a serious handicap. **The** writer, by reading and re-reading the work, should thoroughly soak himself in it. Adaptation needs bold cutting, elimination of parts and characters, and transposition of parts. The most **important** objective is to ensure that the original quality should cope through. Serial **adaptation** of Sharat Chandra's

Shrikant, Shree Lal **Shukla's Raag Darbari** and the Gyanpeeth Award Winner **Asha Purna Devi's Pratham Pratishruti** can be quoted as instances of successful serial adaptation.

Colour TV has given a spur to Costume Serials like **Ramayan** and **Mahabharat**.

Thrillers

Thrillers are probably the oldest form of serials. The first episode poses the mystery, **introduces** the cast, with a murder situation. Then, while the second episode raises doubts, the subsequent episodes build up to the climax.

Children's serials

Action and adventure are very popular with children; such scripts should have a simple action-packed storyline, short scenes, and a small **recognisable** cast. Costume serials are also very popular with children. So is music and the musical.

Science fiction

Science fiction brings excitement to millions. So every screen writer should have adequate understanding and background of science. Although **BBC's 'Doctor'** has impressed millions, Indian TV has yet to screen indigenous science serials of any significant merit.

Soap operas

The storyline of a soap opera is broad-based, allowing for endless development. Simple **presentation** with slow pace is a major distinction of every soap opera.

For the soap opera, the writer has to plan, and at times create at short notice, **side-stories**, events and characters, even after it has started appearing on the screen. He has also to invent his characters' exits, when they seem to be dragging. Or, he may have to induct an accident eliminating some characters **enbloc**. This is because overstaying of characters can be disastrous for the serial.

Scripting soap operas requires team work. The team has to be under the command of the chief **writer** who controls the storyline and characters. A gifted junior writer, with experience and perseverance, can hope to be the chief writer at some stage. Sharp imagination, vast experience and deep study of life are the main tools for producing a successful soap opera.

4.15 SUMMING UP

In this unit, with the help of examples, you have learnt:

- about TV plays vis-a-vis Theatre, Radio and Film
- about the structure of a TV play
- about the essential requirements for scripting a TV play
- **Among** the many faces of serial broadcasting are **series/serials** and soap operas which are distinguishable in terms of their content, frequency, pace and duration.
- While soap opera themes are ordinarily serious, **series/serials** could be either serious or comic or satirical.
- **Series/serials** have a beginning, a climax and a set end, whereas soap operas have an 'endless middle' without a well-defined beginning or end.
- A TV serial writer has to establish a close partnership with the director, since his work is essentially a team venture.
- The script should not be tight but loose and flexible, capable of dividing itself into episodes which are self-contained but which have a running theme.

4.16 SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

- 1) Read the excerpt from Macbeth in 4.3. Imagine you are producing this scene for TV. Discuss what kind of appearance should be for the witches on the TV screen.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) We give below the synopsis of a play called Embers. After going through the story discuss whether it is Suitable for a TV presentation.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

The principal **speaker** in the play is called Henry. He is heard walking near the sea and later sitting down for a time. He recalls **his dead** father whom we do not hear. He also calls for "**Hooves!**" and we hear the **sound** of hooves walking on a hard road. They die rapidly away but are once more audible when Henry calls for them. In the same play we hear **the** sound of Henry's wife, Ada, and of a music lesson and of a **riding** lesson given to his daughter, **Addie**, both of which end in **Addie** weeping **hysterically**. Henry tells himself a story involving two characters, **Bolton** and **Holloway**, which contains a notable passage describing a silent confrontation **between** the two old men in **Bolton's** house late at night.

- 3) How is a soap opera **essentially** different from a **series/serial**? (100 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 4) How would you classify the themes of a serialized drama? Which of the telecast serials in India, in **your** opinion, have proved most popular and effective? (60 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Exercise 2

This is a piece **suitable** only for Radio; for it is conceived in terms of sound without sight. We have the **voice** of a woman, Ada, but we are not told whether she is actually present or whether **she is an abstraction** in Henry's mind. So the play is more a **visualisation** of sounds and hence not adaptable for TV.

Exercise 3

A soap opera differs **from series/serial** in respect of its structure, content, pace, duration and frequency.

- Its structure is **loose and** flexible with no set beginning or end. It has, so to say, an 'endless middle'.
- The soap opera deals with serious themes as against the serial whose subject could be serious, comic or satirical.
- The pace in a soap opera is slow when compared to a serial which has a faster pace and greater action.
- The soap opera, unlike the serial, has no fixed number of episodes.
- The soap opera has a habit-forming **quality**, whereas the serial offers entertainment without addiction.
- The serial has a **weekly** appearance, whereas the soap opera is telecast two to five times a week.

Exercise 4

Themes may broadly be classified in terms of original works and adaptations. There is a great diversity in the **subjects** and their treatment under both the categories: social, cultural, historical, crime and adventure, mystery and children's serials. Adaptations **from** the classics includesuch popular serials as 'Ramayan', Sharat Chandra's 'Shrikant', works of **Tagore** and Premchand. In soap operas 'Hum Log' and 'Buniyad' had great popular appeal.

Exercise 5

The capabilities and **skills** that a TV writer should have involve:

- knowledge of such basic techniques of TV production as setting, movement, action and photography in **the** video part, and dialogue, sound and music in the audio part;
- proper choice of subject and treatment;
- capacity for **team** work in close collaboration with the director and the performers;
- capacity to be creative **in** visual terms and in the art of combining images with words.

Exercise 6

Hints

Keep the following **points** in mind while writing your comment.

- i) Is it a feature or a **documentary**?
- ii) What is the format?
- iii) Does it have all the **essentials** of a TV production: visuals, appropriate dialogue, music, setting, costumes, etc.
- iv) Does it have all the **essentials** of a TV serial as described in this Unit?
- v) Did each episode **carry** adequate dramatic punch: suspense, action, etc.

4.18 GLOSSARY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

You will **find** in the **glossary** a **short** list of the literary terms used in this Unit.

Audio: Sound, including **dialogue**, voice-over narration, music and effects. The 'audio side' (that is, the **right side**) of a two-column script is the side which tells what sound elements are to be included.

Director: The individual who interprets a script and supervises its filming

Producer: The individual who plans, coordinates, and supervises production of a film

Soap opera: Sentimental domestic broadcast serial (often sponsored by soap-makers)

Video: The side of a two-column script describing the action to be filmed. The visual (left) side

- 1 Shaun, Sutton *The Largest Theatre in the World*. London, BBC, (1982).
- 2 Cantor, Muriel G. and Pingree, Suzanne. *The Soap Opera*. New Delhi, Sage Publishers, (1983).
- 3 Saxena, Gopal. 'Soap Operas in India'. *The Hitvada* (1.9.86). (1986).
- 4 Saxena, Gopal. 'Growing the serial crop.' *TV World* (May, 1986) (1986)
- 5 Laguardia, R. *The Wonderful World of Soap Operas*. New York: Ballantine (1974).
- 6 Stedman, R.W. *The Serials: Suspense and Drama by Instalments*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, (1977).

Note: This bibliography suggests books for advanced reading only. Some of these titles may not be available at the IGNOU study centres for the time being.

NOTES