
UNIT 4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF DRAMA

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit is to discuss in detail the kinds of drama that we see being performed or read. Plays are categorised and labelled as tragedy, comedy, history, problem plays, poetic drama, epic drama, the theatre of the absurd, etc. The present unit explains as to how these distinctions are made; what reasons behind the specific labels are; and what time period (socially and politically) has been responsible for their growth. The unit has a sub-division on Indian Classical Sanskrit Theatre which discusses the Indian aesthetic theory. One would do well not to ignore Sanskrit drama as it has been a landmark development in the growth of theatre at the world level. This also initiates the growth of drama as part of new literatures which is inclusive of Spanish, German, French, Indian dramatic writing, etc.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Different types of Drama have existed down the ages from Greek classical theatre to the present times. We have already read about the origin and growth of drama in our first unit. Let us answer a few questions about drama which helps us understand the different kinds of drama entertaining, realistic, romantic, relations-based, theme-oriented, etc.

4.2 TRAGEDY

Aristotle first defined tragedy in his *Poetic's* around 330 BC. He defined tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself," in the medium of poetic language and in the manner of dramatic rather than of narrative presentation, involving "incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotion."

Aristotle says that the **tragic hero** will evoke pity and fear if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both but is certainly “better than we are in the sense that he is of higher than ordinary moral worth. Such a man is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of his mistaken choice of an action, to which he is led by his **hamartia**, the tragic flaw or the error of judgment or a moral weakness in character. The plot evokes tragic pity and fear. In this way tragedy relieves the spectators of harmful emotion. The dramatist depicts incidents which arouse pity and fear for the protagonist, bringing the plot to a logical and foreseeable conclusion. This explains how an audience experiences satisfaction even from an unhappy ending. In Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Lear’s madness and his death arouses pity and fear in the audience, thus catharsis in spectators gives a satisfaction despite it being a tragic play. “In his tragedies Shakespeare is indeed grappling with the whole world on a scale approximated only by the profound tragedians of Greece. Tragedy in his work goes beyond individual failure, Nations crumble, and ambition, lust and ingratitude sear the earth. Sensitive souls shudder. They question the chimeras of man and fate, receiving dusty answers. Love for them turns to mockery, common decency become a jest, they see blood flowing like a torrent; conscience gnaws at the marrow of their being; self disgust and a general disgust with mankind ravage many of them” (Gassner:234). Thus Hamlet and Lear are partially authors of their own suffering because of their conduct. Hamlet’s sharp questioning of man and society emanates from the dramatic shock of discovering the murder of his father and his mother’s infidelity; but later his procrastination are aberrations from sound policy. Man struggles against man. Thus it is drama of individual will. Aristotle’s definition excludes many plays which are commonly thought of as tragedies. Not all tragic heroes suffer because of a tragic error.

Contemporary critics suggest a cluster of overlapping perspectives which collectively describe the tragic vision.

First, tragedy begins by asking the ultimate questions: why are we here? Does life have meaning or purpose? Can life have meaning in the face of so much suffering and evil in the world? Does death negate the significance of the protagonist’s life and the goals he/she was seeking? Tragedy offers no singular solution: people suffer because of their own actions. At times the tragic hero appears to suffer simply because he/she lives in a cruel and unjust universe. Though the causes of suffering are diverse, yet the purpose of suffering appears almost universally acknowledged: only through suffering does a person attain wisdom. According to Francis Fergusson, the plays follow a tragic pattern of purpose, passion and perception.

Second, tragedy pushes the individual to the outer limits of existence where one must live or die by one’s convictions. Facing the end of life, a person quickly recognizes life’s ultimate values. Tragedy depicts men and women who dissatisfied with the hand destiny has dealt with them, challenge the rules of the game. Tragedy does not depict man as a helpless puppet dancing to the strings of destiny. The tragic vision does not assure man’s ultimate downfall. Instead, it explores ways in which free will exerts itself in the world. The determination to act rather than submit often leads to disastrous results but at the same time it tests the basic substance of humanity. This tremendous strength of will to scale the heights and accomplish the impossible sets the hero apart from the ordinary humanity but inspires us with a vision of human potential. Thus tragedy far from being a pessimistic view of life, is ultimately optimistic about the value of human achievement and the unconquerable strength of human spirit. To put into Eric Bentley’s words. “Tragedy cannot entail extreme pessimism, for that would be to lose faith in Man.” The tragic vision encompasses the paradox of human freedom, admitting the possibility of great goodness and great evil.

Some of the kinds of tragedy are:

- i) **Revenge tragedy** or the tragedy of blood which derives from Seneca its materials of murder, revenge, ghosts, mutilation and carnage. It was a dramatic genre that flourished in the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period. Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1586) established this popular form, later to be followed by Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1592), Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1602).
- ii) **Domestic tragedy** was written in prose and presented a protagonist from the middle or lower social ranks who suffer a commonplace or domestic disaster. This was popularized by eighteenth century writers. For example, George Lillo's *The London Merchant*.
- iii) **Social tragedy** revolved around an issue of general social or political significance. These represent middle class or working class heroes and heroines. Notable tragedies of nineteenth and twentieth centuries are Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and, *Ghosts*, and Arthur Millers *Death of a Salesmen* (1949).
- iv) **Melodrama**: originally applied to musical plays including opera. The protagonists are flat types. Here drama relies on implausible events and sensational action. Continuous action drives the plot through a series of adventures. It thrives on thrills, excitement, suspense and rescues. The conflict is external and everything is delineated as black or white. Melodrama appears to deal with serious subjects, but its seriousness is only pretence. Most of the serious dramas never reach the heights of tragedy and thus become melodramas. Adventure films are examples of this.
- v) **Romantic tragedy**: Romances which end unhappily or with the death of the hero and heroine are categorised as romantic tragedies e.g. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.
- vi) **Heroic drama**: Heroic dramas may not look deeply into the philosophical questions of good, evil, man's relation to supernatural, etc. but they abide by the rule of poetic justice and portray swash-bucking adventures. e.g. *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

4.3 COMEDY

At the most fundamental level, comedy focuses on pleasure and amusement. The spectators are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur and usually the action turns out to be happy for all.

Allardyce Nicoll describes three techniques of comedy which create a comic detachment (i.e. we laugh at the hardships of comic characters because the author sets them at a psychological distance): derision, incongruity and automatism.

Derision takes aim at human frailties such as stupidity, hypocrisy and arrogance, knocking the victim off his self-built pedestal. The character too pretends more, thus setting himself up for the fall. With insults and sarcasm, comedy's sharp wit seeks to pierce the over-inflated egos of pompous politicians, bragging generals and haughty aristocrats. Derision creates distance by placing its subjects beneath us as contemptible and foolish. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a classic example of this.

Incongruity provokes laughter by means of ridiculous contrast in situation, character or dialogue. The unexpected element takes us by surprise. Misplaced words or statements are also a source of laughter. For instance, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Gogol's *The Inspector General*.

Automatism occurs when people are depicted as acting without thinking. Comic characters often have annoying habits or mannerisms. They lose the ability to interact naturally. For example, Chekhov's *The Marriage Proposal*.

Comedies make use of several of the traditional roles. They tend to portray characters as recognizable stereotypes. Comic characters remain on the other side of line separating fiction from reality. This aesthetic distance allows us to laugh at their troubles without feeling pity and fear of tragedy. The world of comedy is characterized by absence of real pain. For all its criticism of human limitations, hypocrisy and foolishness, comedy views human beings as survivors. In comedy we laugh at our shortcomings and learn from our failures.

In his work on ethics, Aristotle describes two types of contrasting characters. The braggart (*alazon*) pretends to be more than he is, while the ironist (*eiron*) seems to be less than he is. Aristotle defined comedy as written about persons of minor importance whom their faults rendered ridiculous. The pair of crafty schemer and the parasite was one of the most popular plots. This can be witnessed in Jonson's *Volpone* (1606) where Volpone and Mosca trick others out of money and wives both. Similarly Horner in *The Country Wife* (1675).

Within the broad spectrum of comedy the following types are often distinguished:

- i) **Farce:** It is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to hearty laughter – ‘belly laugh.’ This employs highly exaggerated or caricatured type of characters, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and makes free use of sexual mix-ups, broad verbal humour, and physical bustle and horseplay. At times the sustained brilliance and wit of dialogue helps to achieve the comic effect in a better way. Human beings are presented as helpless victims of their bodily urges, hungry for food, drink and sex. Characters in farce are usually single minded, seeking to satisfy their cravings with reckless desperation. Little emphasis is on depth of characters. Thus comedy which focuses on physical humour or “slapstick” is called farce. Plot complications, mistaken identities and miscommunication make it effective. Facial expressions and body gestures bring farce to life. Farce is effective in performance than as literature. Comedians like Charlie Chaplin and Keaton became masters of farce.

Commedia dell Arte was a form of comic drama developed around mid-sixteenth century by guilds of professional Italian actors. Playing stock characters, the actors largely improvised the dialogue around a given scenario. Commedia performers relied on stereotypes and familiar situations to invent dialogue and action. The plot is enlivened by the buffoonery of ‘Punch’ and other clowns. Wandering Italian troupes played in all the large cities of Renaissance Europe and influenced various writers of comedies.

- ii) **Comedy of Manners** is the most prominent form of high comedy as it holds the customs of aristocratic society up to ridicule. It uses verbal wit and sarcasm to depict the charm and reveal the pretensions of its characters. It exhibits two contrasting impulses: to celebrate and to criticize. The comic vision professes both hope and discouragement about the human condition, looking for the best but expecting the worst. It originated in the *New Comedy* of the Greek Menander as distinguished from the Old Comedy of Aristophanes. Shakespeare's *Loves Labour Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are examples of comedy of manners. The comedy of manners, as its name implies, concentrates upon the depiction of men and women living in a social world ruled by convention. Its manners are not simply the behaviour of humanity in general but the affectations and cultured veneer of a highly developed and self-conscious group. Intellectual refinement, epigrammatic wit and easy dalliance had been made the prime qualities sought after by the gallants and their mistresses. At the same time, it tends to tone down and to intellectualize ordinary emotions.

This form of comedy was given a high polish in Restoration Comedy (1660-1700), and is much indebted to French writer Moliere (1622-73). It deals with

the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper class society and relies for comic effect on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue often in the form of repartees. Each person tries to cap the remark of the other, or to turn it to his or her own advantage. William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) are classic examples of mastery of wit.

- iii) **Sentimental comedy** grew out of this comedy of manners. It represented the 18th century middle class life and its reaction against what had come to be considered the immorality of a situation and indecency of dialogue. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, Sheridan's *The Rivals* and *A School for Scandal* and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest* deleted the indecency, revived the wit and gaiety of Restoration comedy.
- iv) **Comedy of Humour** was a type of comedy developed by Ben Jonson based on the ancient physiological theory of the 'four humours' the primary fluids i.e. blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile) and melancholy (black bile) whose mixture was held to determine both a person's physical condition and character type. Thomas Shadwell had a flair and skill in depicting humorous types. This is also called the 'satiric comedy' or the 'corrective comedy'. It tends to see the dark side of humanity and uses laughter as a satiric weapon. Jonson's *Volpone* is an example of this comedy which exposes the false premises on which people stand.
- v) **Tendency comedy** is another mode of the comic in which one is made to laugh at a person not merely because he is ridiculous but because he is being ridiculed; the laughter is derisive with contempt and malice.
- vi) **Festive comedies:** They emphasized celebration; the victory symbolized the process of renewal and regeneration which allows life to continue. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a perfect example of love found, lost and regained and the traditional wedding at the end of comedy represents the continuance of life itself. This was also categorized as the Romantic comedy. *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare are examples of romantic comedy as they represent a love affair which goes topsy-turvy due to problems or disguises but ends in a happy union.

4.4 TRAGI-COMEDY

According to Horace Walpole, "Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel". Not all plays fit into a single category; in fact most plays consist of elements from two or more genres. It was a type of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama which intermingled both the standard characters and subject matter and the standard plots of tragedy and comedy. People were of high degree and low degree and the plot was serious criticism with lowbrow farce and slapstick humour. Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1610), Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *The Winter's Tale* are popular tragicomic romances. It is thus defined as an interpretation of emotional reaction where tragedy and comedy are both present yet one does not merely follow upon the other but arises from it.

One of the first dramatists to explain tragicomedy as a uniquely modern world view, Friedrich Duerrenmatt (1921-1990) felt that the 20th century was an era lying in the shadow of two wars, and the Holocaust, and could no longer support the spirit of exaltation and therefore the true reflection of modern humanity is a paradox in which the tragic is depicted as comic; thus man is like a circus clown with a sad face, whose actions appear comical but the implication of ultimate meaninglessness behind those actions came closer to tragic despair.

4.5 HISTORY PLAYS

Chronicle plays were dramatic works based on the historical materials in the English Chronicles by Raphael Holinshed and others. Chronicles were written accounts in prose or verse, of national or worldwide events. These works achieved high popularity in the sixteenth century. The early chronicle plays were a loosely-knit series of historical events and depended for effect on stage battles. Public was fascinated by these historical dramas. The dramatic presentation of historical events such as *Julius Caesar*, *Richard II*, *Edward I*, *Henry V* are popular Elizabethan historical plays and recent examples are Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1962). The concern with history committed the playwright to deal with all sorts of situations, ambiguities and apparent irrelevancies. The fusion of the outer (events) and inner (character) i.e. the close interdependence of action and character brings the dramatic effect.

4.6 PROBLEM PLAY

Problem plays pertain to drama with a specific contemporary problem by making the protagonist face it. It was a type of drama popularized by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. The dramatist manages to propose a solution to the problem which is at odds with the prevailing opinion. From Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* are examples of problem plays as they explore problems like morality of behaviour, capital punishment, dignity of women, capitalist society, racial and ethnic issues, etc. Social issues are either incorporated into the plot or are debated amongst characters, but may not necessarily search a solution and thus the problem may remain unresolved. Such plays create awareness on social issues and force the spectators to think.

4.7 REALISTIC DRAMA

Realistic and Naturalistic drama of 20th century has been discussed at length in the last unit.

4.8 POETIC DRAMA

In poetic drama the dialogue is written in verse, which in English is usually the blank verse. This was chiefly associated with the work of TS Eliot and Christopher Fry. *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, are popular plays of Eliot. He emphasized vigorous and bold use of all devices proper to the form of verse drama, emphatic melody, alliterative values, arresting imagery. The dialogue is so shaped that the audiences are not made conscious of the fact that they are listening to verse at all. The drama floats on moving words and musical melodies. The choruses were formal and fluid. Spanish writer Lorca made effective use of poetic overtones. In his play *The House of Bernard Alba* (1936), Lorca created a nationalistic prose-poetry, combining realistic exposition with theatre of local colours. Lyrics and ballads were dramatized in a unique and stylized way. Dialogues became formal poetry. *Blood Wedding* (1933) and *Yerma* (1934) are rare dramatic presentations of this kind.

4.9 EPIC THEATRE

The term epic theatre was first used in Germany in 1920s and became associated with the name of Bertolt Brecht. It cuts across the traditional divisions. Epic story telling is objective. The beginnings of epic theatre coincide with German experiments in the use of the theatre as an instrument of political instruction. Brecht rejected the

conventional theatre for he said that it delighted the senses without impinging on the mind. In his essay *On Experimental Theatre* (1939) Brecht asked: "How can the theatres be entertaining and at the same time instructive?" He was looking for a theatre that would help to change the world.

He set out the contrasts between dramatic theatre and epic theatre as follows:

dramatic	epic
plot enactment	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture
spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feeling preserved	brought to the point of recognition
spectator is in the thick of it	spectator stands outside (observer)
the human being is taken for granted	human being is the object of inquiry
he is unalterable	able to alter
eyes on finish	eyes on course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

Dramatic theatre enacted plots, involved the audience and stimulated their emotions. Epic theatre tells a story in a way that invited the audience to consider the events involved and to make their assessment of them. Adjustments had to be made in the form of the play. If the dramatic play was a closed system of underdevelopment scenes, but with a plot so structured that the audience was in suspense till the end ; then the epic play was a montage of independent incidents which showed a process and it moved from scene to scene by curves and jumps which kept the audience alert to judge what was right. Brecht sometimes compared his plays to scientific experiments and change for the better lay at the centre of thinking. Brecht rejected the notion that human nature was fixed and that man's own thinking governed his being. In epic theatre man's thinking is conditioned by his social situation and will change if that changes. He is the agent of social change. *Mother Courage and her Children* (1941) is a good example of an epic play. By employing a detached narrator and other devices to achieve **alienation effects**, Brecht aimed to subvert the sympathy of the audience and the identification of the actor with his role. He hoped to encourage his audience to criticize and oppose the social conditions. The theatre of illusion had always carefully concealed machinery behind the curtain. Brecht had a bare grey stage and had minimal scenery and properties. Bright white light was used for every scene. The songs invite the actors to step out of their roles and address themselves to the audience. Brecht always insisted on the texture of reality.

Brecht's theory which rejected Aristotelian principles, regarded a play as a series of loosely connected scenes, dispensed with dramatic climaxes and used songs to comment on the action.

4.10 THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

It is a term applied to drama that reflects the attitudes that the universe is without purpose and that human life is futile and meaningless. Under such circumstances, man's existence becomes absurd. In both form and content, it portrays human beings as isolated from others. There is no conventional plot, dialogue or character motivation. This formlessness and apparent irrationality are an expression of the absurd predicament of man, whose existence has no reason. Important playwrights are Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Albee and Adamov. Martin Esslin writes: "A term like Theatre of the Absurd must be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method and convention of shared philosophical and artistic premises whether conscious or subconscious, and of inferences from a common store of transition." Sense of loss of meaning (due to political and social upheavals in the first half century) must inevitably lead to a questioning of the recognized instrument for communication of meaning – Language. Conversation is absurd and nonsensical as the language reflects the preoccupation of contemporary philosophy with the discovery of reality and it emphasizes the basic absurdity of human condition. Thus it has much in common with the existential philosophy of Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. The theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. "It does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation" says Martin Esslin.

4.11 CLASSICAL SANSKRIT THEATRE

Kalidasa belongs to Sanskrit Classical Theatre. The sources of classical Indian drama probably antedate the Gupta period in which most literary compositions are complex, multi-layered works that display and play with conflicting philosophies of life and art. The earliest extant works are fragments of plays of Buddhist poet Asvaghosa. It was during the Gupta period that drama emerged as a sophisticated form of public literature. Sudraka's satiric romance *Mrcchakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart*), Visakhadatta's political drama *Mudraraksas* (*The Minister's Signet Ring*) and Kalidasa's dramatic romances were performed. The *Natyasastra* was probably compiled during the Gupta period.

"Bharata's dramatic theory recognizes the emotional and ethical instruction afforded by the spectacle of theatre. Like Aristotle, Bharata stresses the emotional satisfaction that spectators may enjoy through the action of drama. Although their modes of ordinary experience are significantly different, Greek tragedy and Indian heroic romance (*nataka*) were conceived and performed as sources of pleasure and insight for the audience. Indian heroic romances represent human emotions in a theatrical universe of symbolically charged characters and events in order to lead the audience into a state of extraordinary pleasure and insight. The goal of a Sanskrit drama is to re-establish emotional harmony in the microcosm of the audience by exploring the deeper relations that bind apparent conflicts of existence. The manifestation of these relations produces the intense aesthetic experience called *rasa*. (Miller: 13 - 14).

Rasa is essentially the flavour that the poet / dramatist distils from a given emotional situation for aesthetic appreciation. There are eight *rasas* : the erotic, the heroic, the comic, the marvellous, the horrible, the furious, the pathetic and the disgusting. Every drama has a dominant *rasa*. For Indian aesthetics human emotions (*bhava*) also exist. There are eight (*bhava*) also known as *sthayi bhava* (permanent emotions) – *rati/shringar* (romance); *haas* (comic); *shok* (melancholy); *krodh* (angry); *uhsaah* (zeal); *bhay* (fear); *jigyasa* (anxiety); and *vismay* (surprise). The ninth sentiment is *shaant* (tranquillity). *Anubhava* is the outward manifestation of the internal feelings through the eyes, face, gestures, etc.

Drama is a representation of the emotional states of the threefold universe and therefore includes concerns of duty (*dharmā*); play (*kridā*); desire (*kama*), material gain (*artha*); peace (*sama*), mirth (*hasya*), war (*yuddh*) and death (*nadha*). Drama is a holy presentation that the gods originated to offer ethical instruction through diversion. Drama was patronized by royalty and permanent troupes of actors were associated with major courts. Royal palaces contained a theatre with a backstage greenroom. The world is created by enactment, gestures and verbal delivery, costume, make up and emoting *bhava* and *rasa*.

As Miller writes:

Bharata analyses acting into four components:

1. Acting through the body (*angika*), relating to gestures and movements.
2. Acting through speech (*vacika*), relating to voice intonation, recitation and singing.
3. Acting through accessories (*aharya*), such as makeup, costume, jewellery, props.
4. Acting through signs of emotion (*sattvika*), relating to the physical manifestation of emotional states such as tears,,,,,(Miller: 18).

Gestures function to make vivid pictures, to communicate motions and emotions and therefore must not be mechanical but graceful and spontaneous. "In the Indian theatre acting is considered a discipline (*yoga*) where the actor and acted became one. Arduous training is essential to the perfect acting (*abhinaya*) that can produce aesthetic experience (*rasa*)". (Miller: 19).

Nature functions as a setting as well as a representative of creation and destruction of life. The eight essential principles of empirical existence – air, water, earth, fire, ether, the sun, the moon and the ritual sacrifice express Siva (*ardhanarisvara*) – the male and the female; the *purusa* and *prakriti*; Siva and Parvati. These concepts are the basic tenets of Kalidasa's drama. The Indian drama begins with an invocation and a prologue (*prastavana*). The invocation of the recital of *Nandi* suggests the gist of the plot. The Prelude may begin with a brief allusion to the poets' literary attainment, his genealogy etc; the *Sutradhara* (Chorus) suggests the subject, names the character about to enter and pleases the audience with sweet songs descriptive of some season. The prelude marks a transition to the action of drama itself. The swift rhythms give way to dialogue, poetry and action. This also sets the zones on the stage that represent different realms of the dramatic universe. The whole matter is well- determined and divided into Acts and Scenes. An act must not be too long and should be full of *rasa*. The play should end with a Benediction or prayer (*Bharatvakya*). The language used by the hero and the higher character is Classical Sanskrit, while female and other minor characters speak in the different Prakrit dialects. The plot should be drawn from real life; the Hero must be of ministerial rank or a Brahman; the Heroine may be a maiden of a noble family or a courtesan, and the character to be represented should be celestial as well as human. It is observed that the characteristic peculiarities of the Indian drama are mainly three - 1) its peculiar structure, 2) the absence of the distinction between comedy and tragedy and 3) the diversity of language spoken by the characters. The Sanskrit verses are rich in imagery and metaphor and follow the aesthetic norms whereas the Prakrit verses are lyrical, expressive and imaginative.

The hero in each play is a king and it is through the king that the natural, social and divine worlds unite. The King's spiritual powers can be equated with his martial strength and moral superiority. He is the royal sage. His responsibility is to guide and protect those beneath him. The heroine of drama is the vehicle for transforming erotic passion into aesthetic experience.

Kalidasa's literary reputation is based on his six surviving works : *Malavikagnimitra* (*Malavika and Agnimitra*); *Vikramorvasiya* (*Urvashi won by valour*); *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (*Sakuntala and the Ring of Recollection*); *Meghduta* (*The Cloud messenger*); *Raghuvamisa* (*The Lineage of Raghu*) and *Kumara Sambhava* (*The Birth of Siva's Son*). Coherent language, poetic technique; style and sentiment makes Kalidasa the acknowledged master poet of Sanskrit. The heroines are endowed with physical forms, language, dance movement and magical relations to nature. The heroes are also connoisseurs of natural beauty and art. The audience tends to forget the everyday world and enters the fantastic realm of imagination. His plays are also known as the "Theatre of Memory" for memory is crucial to the production of romantic sentiment throughout Sanskrit literature. Miller writes : "... memory has the power to break through the logic of everyday experience – it makes visible what is invisible, obliterates distances, reverses chronologies, and fuses what is ordinarily separate" (Miller : 39 - 40).

David Gitomer describes the playhouse as follows:

...most attention is given to the medium rectangular variety ...Ninety-six feet in length, forty-eight in width, but divided so that equal halves were given over to audience and performers, these halls could have accommodated no more than 200 spectators sitting on a mat-covered floor with benches for the distinguished and elderly on the sides. Wooden pillars supported the roof, which was thatched. At least few of these pillars stood away from the walls within the audience area. Each was associated with one of the four classes (*varnas*) . . .

The part of the house which was the domain of the performer was again subdivided.... there was a wall between the backstage area and the stage, with two doorways cut near the centre for entrances and exits....there were sliding curtains over these doorsbetween the doors were two large drums; clustered around them were the other musicians of the ensemble, which seems to have provided an almost continuous accompaniment to any dance-dramathe actual playing area may have been as small as twelve feet square; another scheme works out to a rectangular 24' x 12'....

Every aspect of the construction of the playhouses, from the laying of the string to measure the foundation to the drawing of a mandala for the installation and worship of gods in the building, was part of a great ritual, undertaken at the proper astrological moment, which drew on traditional modes of vedic sacrifice . . . (Miller : 63 - 65).

The stage becomes a fluid space in which divisions are established by dialogue and movement, highlighted by lights and costumes and the audience transported through earthly and cosmic spaces.

From the time of Kalidasa to the present times poetic drama or verse play is popular on the Indian stage. Verse plays like Batalvi's *Luna* or love legends of *Laila-Majnu*, *Sassi-Panu* and *Heer-Ranjha* belong to a single cultural tradition and seek to teach didactic and moral lessons. The epical modes of Eastern epic have remained dependent on established and elitist notions. With the passage of time imaginative construction gave way to a new direction in literary creation which amounts to flouting of the tradition and searching for new meanings and interpretations.

4.12 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit we get to know that there are different kinds of plays such as Tragedy, Comedy, Tragi Comedy, History plays, Problem plays, Realistic plays,

Poetic drama, Epic theatre and Absurd Theatre. This unit also makes us familiar with Classical Sanskrit theatre.

4.13 EXERCISES

1. Enlist the different types of drama and point out two distinctive features of each.
2. Differentiate between high comedy and low comedy.
3. Trace the growth of tragedy and comedy in English Literature.
5. How does comedy offer a balance to the perspective of tragedy?
6. Compare and contrast Greek theatre with Sanskrit drama.

4.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

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