

# **Theatre Arts: an Introduction**

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## UNIT - 1

### 1.1.1 Introduction : Drama, Theatre and Play

This chapter explains the words 'Drama', 'Theatre' and 'Play' and the contexts in which these words are used. These are the basic terms that constantly appear in our discussion and so need to be clearly defined.

A preliminary question that is constantly asked is about the need for the study of theatre arts. Some of the uses of theatre are explained here.

We have also a component about some conventions that form the basis for an understanding of theatre activity. Unless these conventions are mutually agreed upon both by the actors and the audience, there is every likelihood of misunderstanding. Some of the major conventions are outlined here.

#### Objectives:

As an introduction to the study of Theatre Arts, the students will be introduced to the basic concepts of theatre. This chapter will also answer a question that is frequently put to candidates studying theatre as a subject: "why theatre?" The chapter concludes with some rules of the game to be followed by all the members involved in play production.

### Theatre, Drama and Play

There are three words that are frequently used to refer to the activity by actors on the stage. They are 'drama', 'theatre' and 'play'. All of them mean almost the same, though the contexts in which these words are used may differ.

### 1.1.2 Drama

The word "*drama*" may be defined as a composition in prose or verse, presenting in pantomime and dialogue a story involving conflict and usually designed for presentation on the stage. It is derived from a Greek word 'dran' meaning "to do", "to act". Aristotle, the first great Western critic of Drama, defined it as "imitated human action." This definition suggests that drama mainly depends upon an imitation of human action which consists of conflict. Thus "drama" is usually applicable to a text that is selected for performance. It is more often applied to denote the dramatic literature of a period - "Elizabethan Drama", "Indian Drama", "Modern Drama", "Medieval Drama" etc. It also presupposes a theatre, actors and an audience.

### **1.1.3 Theatre**

The word 'theatre', from the Greek word "theatron", means "a seeing place". It is applied variously to refer to outdoor stages where drama was first performed. In course of time, however, it acquired several shades of meaning, though it still retains its basic meaning of the presentation in dialogue or pantomime of action involving conflict between characters. The word "theatre" is used for three different things connected with dramatic presentation:

1. A building, or part of a building, or any outdoor area for the staging of dramatic presentations.
2. Dramatic works collectively, such as the theatre of Ibsen or the theatre of France suggesting the works of Ibsen or plays written in France that were performed or are likely to be performed.
3. The quality and effectiveness of dramatic presentation, as "good theatre", "dull theatre", etc.,

### **1.1.4 Play**

The word "play" is a native English word which means "a literary composition in dramatic form intended to be presented on a stage by actors who assume identities, speak dialogue, and perform actions devised by an author.

All the meanings of the word "play" indicate that it denotes a game, an entertainment, an activity that gives pleasure. However, the word today means any text that is chosen for presentation on the stage.

All the three words thus refer to the composite activity of the stage presentation of a dramatic text. Largely speaking a drama is a written text; a play is the performance text and theatre - the entire staging including the place for staging and the quality and the audio-visual effect it provides.

### **1.2.1 Basic Features of Drama**

Each one of us must have seen several plays, performed on different occasions. Each one of them is different from the other. But we call all of them "dramas" or "plays". What are the common features in all of them to be labelled as "plays"?

(a) In each case a specific group of people gathered at a specific place to watch and listen as another smaller group of people pretended to be persons they were not, acting out a story written by yet another person.

(b) In the above description, you must have recognised the group or groups of people we are referring to. The first group is the audience; the second are the actors and the third one is the dramatist, who is also known as the playwright.

(c) We further notice that in each play the space occupied by the acting group is more brightly lighted than the area where the spectators sit to watch the play. The lighted area is the stage, covered on either side by wings. There is usually a back curtain and a front curtain also, besides the wings. The stage is equipped with articles of furniture, painted frames of canvas and various other articles.

(d) We also notice that the actors wear clothes different from their usual dress, which disguised their own personalities and which seem to belong to the characters they are representing.

### **1.2.2 Why Theatre?**

#### **The Uses and Functions of Theatre:**

Though some people argue that the study and practice of theatre is for one's own pleasure, there are obvious uses of theatre in the present-day world which will not only benefit the practitioners but also the public that participate in theatre productions.

#### **1. Theatre as cultural heritage:**

Theatre has a proud heritage and to know about its 2500 - year long history is to know the cultural heritage of the world. Since theatre deals with human relations as existed in a particular age, and theatre mirrors such relations and so, to know about theatre (history) is to know about our heritage, the customs and manners and behavioural patterns of our ancestors.

#### **2. Theatre as liberal education :**

Theatre is one place where you can question anything under the sun and discuss the pros and cons of a question. There is nothing that does not come under the scrutiny of the theatre. The relevance or use of war, man-woman relationship, the atrocities of rulers, the uselessness of power and many others have been moulded into great plays which are still popular.

#### **3. Theatre as Fine Art :**

Fine Art is an art that evokes finer sensibilities among human beings. Since theatre's major concern is to discuss human relationships in extremely sensitive movements, no other art form portrays human concerns so delicately, yet so strongly.

#### **4. Theatre as Experience :**

Theatre is a place where human faults are condemned and human successes are celebrated openly. Fight against mighty forces at all odds and fight against human foibles

and social evils are common in theatre. Theatre is a place where, after witnessing a play, one feels greatly relieved or greatly elevated. You are proud of the human race for a protagonist's undaunted struggle against evil forces and laugh at people's idiosyncracies so that they will mend their ways. As theatre deals with human emotions it is directly concerned with human beings' 'inner' lives.

#### **5. Intimacy of the theatre experience :**

'Live' and 'intimate' and 'direct' experience is theatre's one advantage over other media that also deal with stories of human experience.

In theatre, the process of communication and appreciation (or condemnation) is in two directions at once - from actor to audience and from audience to actors. "Feedback" is never so creative and instantaneous as it can be seen in theatre.

#### **6. Theatre as Entertainment :**

Theatre is perhaps the best place which offers "enlightened entertainment". This, in fact, should be the first reason why it lived so long. Theatre presents a slice of life in a way that you re-live your own experiences and relate the theatrical experiences to your own. This is the reason why even tragic stories ennoble your thoughts.

#### **7. Theatre is Natural :**

The roots of all theatre activities lie in imitation, which is common in various degrees of competence in all human beings. A child imitates his or her parents or teachers, thus learning "the ways of the world". This tendency continues all through our lives. Theatre is only an extension of human being's love for imitation since it imitates life and presents a sharpened view of the life it mirrors.

#### **8. Seeing Drama is a social occasion:**

In a world that is slowly getting distanced because of each one's "busy" lives, drama offers a safe ground for social get-togetherness.

#### **9. Drama holds a mirror up to nature:**

Drama, by mirroring life, by imitating the actions of the human beings, makes aware of the nobility of human beings as well as their depravity thereby projecting all phases and types of experience.

#### **10. Drama is a progressive experience :**

Drama is concerned with the 'eternal present'. It fulfils the exciting expectations in seeing a story enacted by two methods: firstly, it brings all incidents - past, present and future - into the present, as though these incidents are happening now for the first time

before us. Secondly, it builds up the tensions and unties them progressively - so that our sense of expectation is constantly kept active. That is why the words like **conflict, crisis, suspense, surprise, rise and fall of tension**, etc. become very important in studying drama. This happens in any kind of a story narration. But in drama this sense of expectation is the highest because it portrays these tensions before us as no other literary medium does.

### 1.2.3 Theatre and its Conventions:

It is common experience that every game is governed by certain rules and regulations. These must be acceptable to both the parties participating in the game. Similarly, there are certain rules that theatre also practises. These are called 'Conventions'. A practitioner in theatre must be aware of the 'conventions' in theatre to enjoy theatrical practice. Conventions are rules that both the actors and the audience must accept and they must adhere to them while the play is on. These conventions describe the special nature of drama and the special circumstances under which it operates.

1. Drama presents situations which are not real by themselves, but reflect an illusion of reality.
2. Drama condenses both real time and place. In real life, incidents take their own time. Similarly, a series of incidents may take place at different places. But for unity and believability, these incidents are shown as though they are happening in a sequence and also the incidents that might have happened at different places are brought together as though they are all happening at the same place.
3. Actors speak more loudly than they speak in real life because the audience will have heard every word they speak. Even 'stage whispers' are heard clearly.
5. Movements and gestures are more elaborately emphasized in theatre so that the audience are aware of their significance, for, in theatre, every gesture and movement will denote a meaning. Further, in theatre, all movements are natural extensions of words.
6. Similarly we are made to believe that even if two plants are placed on the stage, it stands for a garden. We believe it to be a room if three flats are placed as three walls.

There are also some conventions which are limited to some ages in the past such as using soliloquies and asides; singing songs and poems. Men taking up the role of women was another convention.

Every age creates certain convenient conventions of its own to make the plays more enjoyable to the public.

## Questions on Unit 1

I. Answer the following in about 5 lines each:

1. What do you understand by the word 'theatre' ?
2. What are the uses of theatre activity ?
3. What are the theatre's major conventions ?

II. Fill in the blanks :

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ defined drama as imitated \_\_\_\_\_ action.
- b) All the meanings that we have for the word 'play' indicate that it denotes a \_\_\_\_\_, an activity that gives \_\_\_\_\_.
- c) Theatre is a place where \_\_\_\_\_ faults are condemned and human successes are \_\_\_\_\_

Answers :

- I.
1. Theatre has 3 different meanings :
    - a) A building where theatre activities take place
    - b) Dramatic works, when we speak of them collectively
    - c) The quality of dramatic presentation.
  2. Theatre has several uses :
    - a) Theatre opens up our rich heritage for us
    - b) Theatre offers liberal education and is a Fine Art
    - c) Theatre offers such experience that you can not get such an experience in the outside world within the same period of time.
    - d) Theatre experience is very intense.
  3. A convention is a long-standing practice, the rules of which are agreed upon by all the people involved.  
Some of the conventions of theatre are:
    - 1) to condense the stage area and designate it as something that it is not.
    - 2) Use of a symbolic part of a set in Stage design.
    - 3) Time lapses are accepted
    - 4) Accept an actor not suitable to a role (for example, a lean man as a king) as the character.
    - 5) Songs and poems are elaborately sung though in real life we do not do so.

Answers - II

human, pleasure, celebrated, Aristotle, game, human



## UNIT - 2

### 2.1.1 The Production Team : Introduction

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

#### Objectives :

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

### 2.1.2 Different specialists involved in a theatre production

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

1. Persons who see the play : spectators/audience
2. Persons who present the play : actors/performers
3. Person who writes the play : playwright/dramatist
4. Person who provides lighting : lighting designer
5. Person who provides the background, the curtains and sets : stage/set designer
6. Person who makes the costume : costume designer

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

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

### 2.1.3 The playwright:

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

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

The playwright chooses a story or some substance and moulds a plot out of the substance by ordering and arranging some of the most "dramatic" elements in the story and creates a 'form'. Thus the playwright is involved in three things in the process of "making" his play: he chooses his subject-matter, chooses the **form** (the shape or structure within which he operates) and chooses the proper **technique** (which is the method of blending the substance into the form). By his choice of the form a play becomes a tragedy, comedy, farce, etc. How he transforms the chosen subject into a form that suits his subject is the technique. (that the tragedy is serious, a comedy has a happy-ending, etc).

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

### 2.1.4 Different Forms of Drama:

The playwright's choice of the subject matter and his choice of an appropriate "form" for his subject-matter result in several forms of drama such as tragedy, comedy, etc. There are four such major forms - tragedy, comedy, farce, and the realistic play. Several other types of drama came into operation from time to time, but these are the most important ones.

Ancient Indian drama recognised ten different kinds of plays as 'rupakas' ('rupaka' is a Sanskrit equivalent of drama). They are called '**Dasa Rupakas**' (Ten kinds of plays), created on the basis of the hero chosen and the major subject matter the play deals with. **Nataka**, **Prakarana** and **Prahasana** are the most important among them.

#### 2.1.4.1 Tragedy:

A play that deals with noble sentiments  
(of noble persons in the ancient period, but commoners now)

A play presenting a clash between a power outside the hero and a power from within

A play that deals with the fall of a person due to a fault of his own

A justification of divine justice

#### **2.1.4.2 Comedy:**

A play that deals with common people's aspirations and pitfalls and laughs at their frivolities.

A play about the society and its imperfections

A play that contains imperfect heroes, romantic escapades, cruel fathers and faltering servants

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

A play in which stock characters and stock situations abound.

A play intended for the lovable enjoyment of the audience

#### **2.1.4.3 Farce :**

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

#### **2.1.4.4 The Realistic Play:**

Contrary to the old types of plays, this form, developed in the mid-nineteenth century, can be a tragedy or comedy, but it reflects life's immediate concerns. Man confronting his environment, social relationships, contemporary world of miseries and hopes - all of them form the subject-matter of realistic plays, expressed in a manner which mirrors our own daily lives. The realistic play mainly deals with problems common to us or nearer to the living experiences of many and it relies on a form that accentuates verifiable facts and sensory experiences.

There are many new forms that emerged during the last fifty to hundred years - all of them as reactions to the realistic play, but the realistic play is one that continues to be the playwright's choice though with several modifications.

#### **2.2.1 The Actors:**

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

"Acting" is what the actor does, which may be roughly defined as "any sort of human response - physical or mental. It involves both words and gestures. We can perceive both the character and the range of human emotions in tracing the graph of the

characters' actions. Since these emotions reflect those in our daily lives, theatre resembles life.

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

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

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

### **2.3.1 The Technicians :**

Though in the early days of the theatre, the script and the actors were enough to present a play, today several people work behind the stage to help the director and the actors for the success of the play and assist its proper interpretation.

'Scenery' was the first one of these new techniques added. Scenery added beauty to the scene; but, more importantly, it defined the locale - the place where 'action' takes place. When the locale is set, there came articles that filled in the stage, many of them serving as utility pieces. It has also become necessary that the back stage areas are to be concealed. Thus came the curtains and the side wings.

In the early days, plays were performed during the day. Lighting was provided by the sun. When drama moved indoors, candles were used. When, during the mid-nineteenth century, gas was discovered, illumination became important.

Real artistry in stage lighting was introduced when electricity came into use. The lighting technician has become an asset to stage productions because lights not only indicate the 'time' changes in the play, but sets the 'mood' of the play.

Another important area that required special attention is the make-up and costume of the actors. Though traditional colours of make-up were used for long, today factory-

prepared, soft and harmless colours in different shades offer any number variations. Make-up, dress and ornaments decide the character's background, his age, his social and economic status. Thus it provides the actor with the entire external personality and indicates his state of mind now.

These are the major technical people that help a production's success.

Besides, there is the music director if the play requires elaborate musical score; a choreographer if dance sequences demand one; and a sound technician if sound effects need the attention of a separate expert. There is often a 'stage manager' who co-ordinates the work of these different 'specialists' who works under the directions of the director.

#### **2.4.1 The Director :**

The most prominent person in the theatre today is the "director". He is the leader of the entire group; he is the chief co-ordinator of the different elements that go into the production; he is the guide. He is responsible for the selection, the organization and the design of the over-all production.

The director chooses the script and edits it to suit his actors.

He chooses the actors according to their capabilities and their physical and mental fitness to take up particular roles.

He trains them in the proper use of the body and voice and guides them in speech and diction.

He is responsible for the 'blocking' of the play, which means he directs the physical movements of the actors on the stage. "Blocking" provides meaning to the script, by externalising the inner conflicts of the characters and also their emotional nature.

He is responsible for an over-all selection of the various technical elements (as we have discussed above) that should go into the production. He is responsible for unifying the different technical aspects.

He is responsible for conducting the rehearsals and he trains the actors in their respective roles.

He is the sole interpreter of the text and is the sole organizer of the show and the sole artistic head of the group.

#### **2.5.1 The Audience :**

The audience are one of the **two** important elements that make a dramatic presentation meaningful, the other one being the actors. There is no play without the actors and the audience.

Unlike in the case of other arts, the performing arts - music, dance and drama - requires an audience assembled at a given time and place to experience a performance as a group. In the ancient days, when there was no lighting, no stage design and no other technical help, it was enough if the actors and the audience were present.

### 2.5.2 Why should the audience go to see a play?

People go to theatre because it provides relaxation through entertainment.

Some people think that theatre must provide proper instructions - what is right and what is wrong in a person's behaviour in relationship to others - about social behaviour.

Some people may go to theatre for the exciting characters a play projects; some others for its poetry, still some others for its punch in the dialogues.

People may go to theatre for the fulfillment of their personal tastes. But they also go to the theatre because it provides a 'community' fulfillment. Thus Theatre becomes a societal pastime.

In order to reach the audiences, all the people concerned with the "making" of the dramatic presentation should mould the play in such a way that it easily pleases the audience both visually and auditorily. If the audience likes the thought presented in the play or the ordering and selection of the incidents into an emotionally viable plot construction, the play will be a success.

The audience are an important influence on the play's success, because of their "word of mouth publicity" that draws more audience.

Finally and most importantly, it is the presence of the audience that makes theatre a '**live**' experience - a direct interaction between the viewers and the viewed, face to face with each other. Good acting inspires the audience to applaud; proper applause at the right moment encourages the actors to do better.

This 'mutual' relationship between the audience and the actors is the key to a play's quality of "immediacy". **It is also the "live" presence of the audience that distinguishes theatre experience from that of television and cinema.**

## Questions on Unit 2

- I. Answer the questions in about 5 lines.
1. Who are the major participants in the production?
  2. What are the major characteristics of a tragedy ?
  3. What is a realistic drama ?
- II. Fill in the blanks :
- a) The playwright chooses a \_\_\_\_\_ or some substance and moulds a \_\_\_\_\_ out of the substance.
  - b) An actor \_\_\_\_\_ his own personality and puts on the personality of the \_\_\_\_\_ he is portraying.
  - c) The director is the sole \_\_\_\_\_ of the text and is the sole \_\_\_\_\_ of the show.

Answers:

1. The major participants in play production are the playwright, the actors, the technicians, the director and the audience.
2. Tragedy is a play with a noble person or a commoner as a hero who is in conflict with major forces of nature and which ends unhappily.
3. A realistic play may be either a tragedy or comedy, but must be a mirror of the life around us, with characters that are familiar to us, with incidents which are based on verifiable facts and emotions that rely on our senses.

Answers to Q II

- a) plot, story
- b) hides, character
- c) interpreter, organizer

## UNIT - 3

### 3.1.1 Play Production : Introduction

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

#### Objectives :

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

### 3.1.2 What is Play Production?

Play production is the assembling of things and people together in a delicate balance of believability in order to bring the artistic creation of a playwright to life.

A play in the form of a script is not a play. A play is life relived. To bring this life to the experience of the audience, and allow them to relive the emotional experiences, the director, the actors and the technicians interpret the text through their respective communication skills. Play production, therefore, intends to translate the written message of a creative writer into images of experience - through talking, crying, laughing, fearing and so on - in short, living.

The excitement of play production is involved in the actions and reactions of the characters, engaging themselves in the sharpest possible emotions, as we possibly do if we are placed in similar circumstances. This equation of the theatrical emotions with our own imaginably relevant emotions is what makes a theatrical experience so dear to us.

### 3.1.3 Creativity in Play Production:

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



### 3.2.1 Requirements of a Production :

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

### 3.2.2 The Stage :

Even from the ancient days, the place designated for acting has an important role to play in the production of a play.

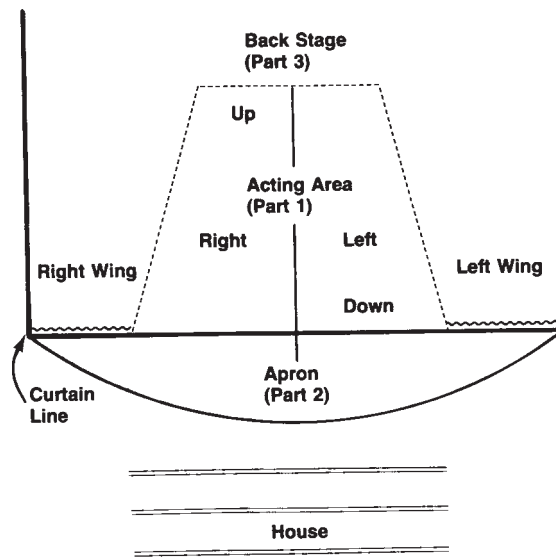
A stage is usually a raised platform or any demarcated place where actors perform. The audience may be seated around them as in festival performances in villages; or they may sit opposite the actors as in a modern auditorium. Directors have visualised different kinds of stages to put on their plays.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

The Proscenium Stage  
The Arena Stage  
The Thrust Stage

#### 3.2.2.1 The Proscenium Stage :

This is also called the 'traditional stage' as it is more widely used all over the world.

The word 'proscenium' comes from the Greek word 'proskenion', which is the stage area of the ancient Greeks, with a large stage and a covered place on either side. It is actually called the '**Proscenium Arch**' theatre, or the '**picture-frame stage**' because the stage resembles a picture-frame through which the audience watches the play. The audience sits within a square or rectangular building, in straight or slightly curved rows on one, two or three levels, facing a large opening in one of the four walls of a raised platform in front of them. The opening is usually surrounded by decorative furnishings. Within this opening, as in a frame, the actors perform on a raised level, a considerable distance away from the stage. The audience are further distanced by the 'apron', the semi-circular extension of the stage. Surrounding this acting area there is space above (called 'flies' where curtains and hanging pieces of cloth are stored). On either side of this stage (which is actually called the '**acting area**') and in the rear painted canvas and other kinds of scenery are hung to store and hide further pieces of scenery for the coming scenes. The narrow side cloth pieces are called '**wings**' and the space behind is the 'wing space' for actors to wait for entry and also for scenic pieces to be brought onto the stage. These canvas pieces also hide the various sources of artificial light. This sort of theatre is called picture-frame theatre or proscenium-arch theatre. **The proscenium arch frames the action of the play as a picture-frame frames a picture.**

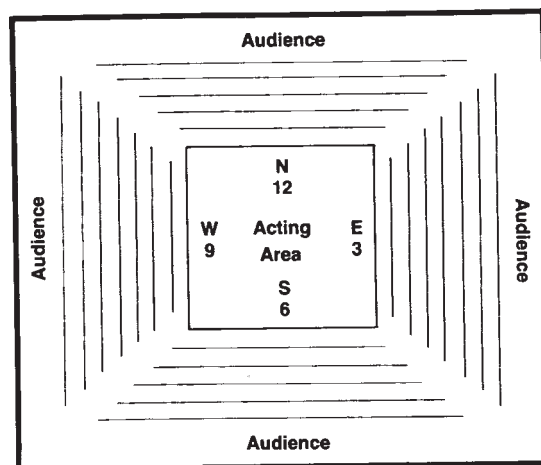


**The Proscenium Stage**

Since the last one hundred years, this kind of theatre was found to attract several new technical innovations in lighting and scenic design and hence the picture-frame stage was by far the most favoured theatre. But modern directors preferred other types of theatre for their flexibility, out of which two types stand out prominently - the Arena stage and the Thrust stage.

### 3.2.2.2 The Arena Stage :

Arena Stage is also called the "theatre-in-the-round" because the audience sits around in a circle ( or sometime in a square), while the acting area is in the middle. The seats of the audience are raked so that everyone can see the actors clearly. The isles in the four corners edging the seats are left out for entries and exits of both the actors and the audience.



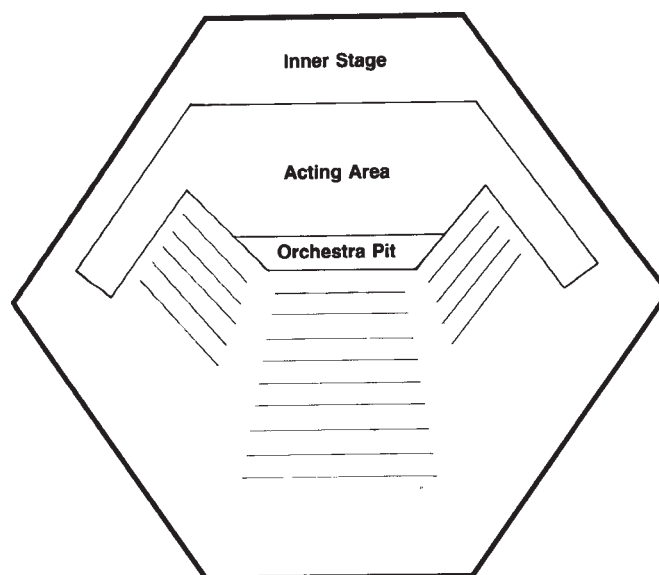
**The Arena Stage**

The acting area is relatively small, and so elaborate setting is out of question. Settings are not used elaborately since they also hinder the audience's clear view of the stage. This is an intimate theatre and audience are seated close to the actors and so can easily comprehend the excitement of the play and the actions. It is also for smaller audiences. Another advantage in arena staging is that it cuts the cost of elaborate sets and complex lighting gadgets. It gives scope to the actor for 'opening up' and showing his historic talents. Another important factor is that the grouping and movement of the actors can be seen from all the sides.

Unlike in a proscenium stage, which provides different acting places based on the importance given to an actor at a time, the arena stage has only one basic place for dramatic action. Each actor is important unlike on a proscenium. In the proscenium importance of an actor is gained by his position at a particular advantageous position on the stage. Arena stage eliminates such an importance to one actor since all of them are placed on equal plane.

### 3.2.2.3 The Thrust Stage:

The thrust stage is often called the 'open' stage, though there is some difference in the nature of actor-audience relationship; This is a recent development in staging. The 'apron' of the proscenium stage is extended into the house in this theatre. The audience sits on three sides of the thrust stage. The acting area is moved forward on to the extended part (the 'thrust' part) of the stage so that most of the action takes place on the 'down front'. Unlike in an arena stage, there is space for settings here, which are placed on the rear side of the stage. The Thrust stage can be used with modifications and can be created on any platform stage by building an extension of fifteen to twenty feet onto the apron.



**The Thrust Stage**

A thrust stage brings the audience still closer. By manipulating the seats of the audience into tiers, the thrust stage can be used more profitably. Since the audience sits on three sides, the fourth side is used for setting, thus combining the benefits of the proscenium and the arena stages. Group activity easily holds attention and the individual actor will have to use his qualities of performance to dominate the scene.

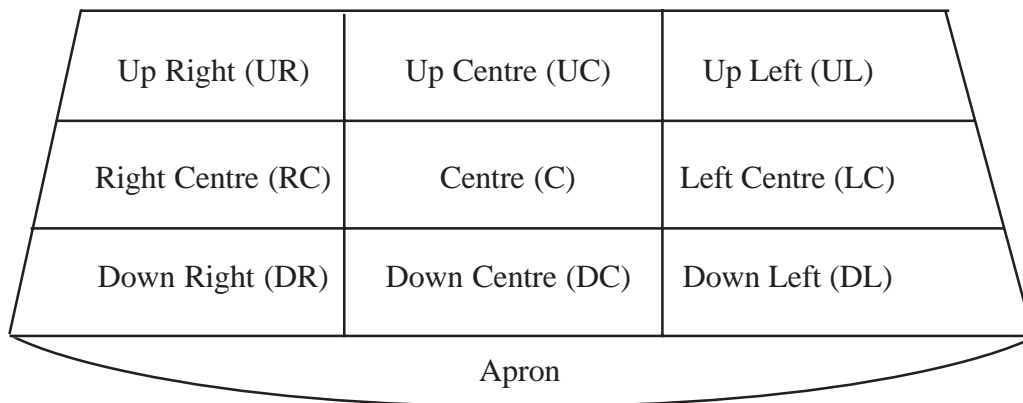
Besides these three major forms of theatre now being used, there are many other possible variations of the three basic elements required of a stage - it should have a large enough place for the actors to freely move; a comfortable place for the audience; must provide perfect sight lines of the entire stage and also has place for settings.

The simplest theatres in the olden days were some planks or platforms raised, or a space cleared in the centre of a hall while the audience sat on the ground and enjoyed the show. Sometimes a curtain screened off a small backstage area in which the actors did their make-up and changed their costume. Most of these forms were suitable for popular drama because they were both cheap and could be improvised anywhere, any time.

With the changed conditions after the emergence of the realistic drama and along with it the enhanced techniques in presentation, drama came indoors. Elaborate settings, lights, costumes and the like were introduced into theatre to heighten the illusion of reality. Directors have been always trying to come out of the proscenium arch theatre and to find newer and freer ways of dramatic presentation. The search will continue as theatre is always in search of newer and more effective ways of presentation.

### 3.3.1 Stage Geography:

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



### Stage Geography

### Questions on Unit 3

I. Answer the questions in not more than 5 lines

1. What is a play production?
2. How many major kinds of theatre are in use now?  
Which type of the theatre do you prefer? why?
3. What is the significance of stage geography?

II. Fill in the blanks :

- a) Arena theatre is an \_\_\_\_\_ theatre, for it holds smaller number of spectators, who sit in a \_\_\_\_\_ close to the acting area.
- b) Since in a thrust stage, the audience sits on \_\_\_\_\_ sides, the fourth side is used for \_\_\_\_\_.
- c) The right and \_\_\_\_\_ indications are always from the point of view of the \_\_\_\_\_.

Answers :

1. Play production is the ultimate result of the work done by actors with the author's text as the basis. The director is in charge of the entire production. He is assisted by a team of technical experts. The audience for whom the play is performed is an important component of this team.
2. There are three types of stages: The Proscenium Arch; the Arena and the Thrust. The Proscenium Arch is the best because it provides lots of opportunities for technical innovations. (Similarly, the candidate is advised to suggest the advantages of the other two kinds of theatre also).
3. 'Stage Geography' is useful for the director to ask his actors to move to DL or DR (Down Left or Down Right) and so on. The actors also know what areas on the stage are 'strong' positions and what are 'weak'.

Answers to Question II

- a) intimate, circle
- b) three, settings
- c) left, actors