



E-Content

Instructional Media Centre
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T.S. India

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DEVELOPMENT TEAM

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What is a **drama**?

What are the **elements of drama**?

What are the **dramatic devices**?

What are the **types of drama**?

So far as the first point is concerned

Drama is one of the forms of literature. We also use the word “play” for drama.

It is a story with dialogues and actions.

It is meant to be performed in front of an audience by actors who take on the roles of characters.

Its full qualities are revealed when it is performed on stage.

Its a collaborative work. The dramatist works with director, producer, actors, dress makers, musicians, electricians, scene painters and many others.

The elements of drama are

- Plot
- Character
- Theme
- Setting

The first is Plot

- Plot is the **arrangement of events** of the story.
- This arrangement has a **cause and effect** relationship.
- In a drama, the plot is in the form of scenes and acts. The typical Elizabethan drama was divided into **five acts** each comprising a number of scenes. But, in a modern drama, we find **three acts**. Moreover, we can also have a **one act play**.
- According to the type of drama, the plot may vary. Sometimes it has a single **main plot**. But, it can also have **sub plots**.

- The plot **begins** with some event and leads to the next event and so on.
- The plot often contains details of conflict or tension that exists between the characters.
- When the conflict reaches its highest point it is called **climax**.
- When the conflict comes to an end it is called **resolution**.

After plot we have Character

- A drama deals with people and their actions which are called as characters. These characters may be **humans** as well as non humans like **animals** and **supernatural figures**.
- The way a writer describes people is known as **characterization**.
- While studying a character we should consider his physical appearance, dress, behaviour, expressions or speech, relation with others, mannerisms and names even nick names

- In a drama, the actors present the characters. The costumes and make ups also help in potraying the characters.
- In addition, we learn more about them by what they say and what others say about them.
- Characters who change with the development of plot are known as **round characters**.
- Characters who do not change with the development of plot and remain the same throughout the story are known as **flat characters**.

- Among the characters someone may be the most important such a character is called hero heroine or **protagonist**.
- The protagonist is usually in conflict with another character known as **antagonist** or the villain.
- The characters around whom the action of drama revolves are **major** characters. Apart from them many **minor** characters contribute to the development of the plot.

- Characters can also be classified as types and individuals
- **Types** or typified characters represent a class and are typical. They are generally the minor characters.
- **Individuals** are opposite of the types and are complex. They are generally the major characters.

The next element is Theme

- Theme is the **idea** on which a literary work is based.
- In other words it is the **subject** of a play.
- A play may have **multiplicity of themes** which means it may have more than one theme.
- The dramatist may use certain symbols and motifs to convey these themes.
- **Motifs** are recurring structures, images and contrasts in a play.
- **Symbols** are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Setting

- Setting is **where** and **when** the story takes place. So, it is the **place** and **time** of the events of story.
- Apart from geographical and historical setting, the **social setting** of a play is also important.
- Setting affects the behaviour of a **character** and thereby the **action** of a play.
- Setting also has a **correlation with the theme** of a play.
- In a drama, setting is shown on stage through **scenery and reference**. The use of **lights and sounds** is quite important to create a spectacle.

Now lets move to Dramatic Devices

- **Dramatic irony** is a form of contrast. Often what is being said or done on stage has one meaning for the characters but another meaning for spectators.
- There are two tpes of dramatic irony. One is verbal irony and irony of situation.
- **Verbal irony** arises out of what is being said.
- **Irony of situation** arises out of what is being done.

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- **Next dramatic device is Soliloquy.** It is the act of talking to oneself. The character speaks out his heart on stage when other characters are not present. It acquaints the audience with the character's motives and state of mind.
- **Aside** is the shortest form of soliloquy. It is a passing thought uttered aloud by a character in front of other characters but they do not hear it.
- Expectation and surprise are the dramatic devices related to plot construction.
- When all relevant facts are disclosed at once and the subsequent development of events is as per anticipation, it is called **expectation**.

- When a few facts are heldback for sometime to be sprung on the audience later and the intrest is derived from suspense, it is called **surprise**.
- Too much of expectation leads to dullness whereas too much of surprise leads to melodrama.
- While reading a play, we also come accross stage directions given in the brackets.
- **Stage directions** are not a dramatic device. In the script of a play, they indicate the lines a producer has to follow in order to produce the play as per the author's intension.

- In short, what we have discussed till now is the definition and elements of drama.
- In it we have talked about the nature of Plot, Character, Theme and Setting.
- Among the Dramatic Devices, we have focused on Dramatic irony, Soliloquy, Aside, Expectation and Surprise.
- Finally, we have also touched what Stage Direction is.
- Now lets move to the second part of our discussion that is **types of drama**.

Broadly speaking the **Types of Drama** are

- Tragedy
- Comedy
- Tragi-comedy
- Farce
- Melodrama and
- Masque

Tragedy

- From the ancient times drama has been divided into two kinds – tragedy and comedy.
- Of these tragedy deals with the dark side of life.
- In the Greek tragedy, the protagonist belonged to the high class of society. His fate led him towards his tragedy. His tragedy affected the whole nation.
- The atmosphere of tragedy is serious. In pure tragedies, the mixing of comic elements was not allowed.

- But, the English dramatists have experimented with it and mixed the elements of comedy with tragedy.
- For instance, in Shakespeare's tragedies, we find the presence of comic elements without affecting the end effect of tragedy.
- The end effect of tragedy or the aim of tragedy is purgation or purification of feelings. This is known as **Catharsis**.
- **Catharsis** is a Greek word. It is used by Aristotle in his book Poetics while talking about the theory of tragedy.

- Tragedy is classified in two ways. One is with reference to its form and another is with reference to its theme.
- As per the forms tragedy is either classical tragedy or romantic tragedy
- Classical tragedy is based on the Greek model. It follows the three unities of time, action and place. It also makes use of Chorus.
- Chorus is a group of factors who report what happened off the stage and make moral comments from time to time.
- Classical tragedy tries to strengthen the religious convictions of the audience.

- Romantic tragedy doesn't have a set pattern. The writer uses the form as per the requirement of his dramatic purpose.
- It is opposed to classical tragedy in the way that it doesn't necessarily maintain the three unities. It doesn't employ Chorus. Its not didactic.
- From the theme or matter point of view there can be many types of tragedy depending upon the variety of subjects. Horror tragedy, Heroic tragedy, She tragedy, Domestic tragedy etc.

- Horror tragedy deals with violence and cruelty. It is also known as Revenge tragedy. It follows the Greek model of Seneca. In English, John Webster's dramas are read as horror tragedies.
- Heroic tragedy deals with the exploits of a sublime hero. Sometime, they are written in verse. In English, John Dryden has written this kind of tragedies.
- She tragedy has a female protagonist. It is also known as Pathetic tragedy. It explores the sufferings of a woman. This kind of tragedy was popular during restoration period. Nicolas Rowe provides some finest examples of She tragedies

- Domestic tragedy was popular during the 18th Century. It portrays the middle class life using prose. As opposed to classical tragedy, Domestic tragedy uses characters and incidents of ordinary life as the subject of serious drama. George Lillo's London Merchant is a famous example of Domestic tragedy.
- Like tragedy, comedy also has two forms- Classical and Romantic.
- Classical comedy observes all the classical rules of comedy as dealing with the light side of life, having lower people as the characters, having a comic atmosphere and a happy ending.

- Ben Jonson and the restoration playwrights wrote classical comedies.
- Romantic Comedy doesn't follow the classical rules of comedy. Shakespeare and the University Wits wrote Romantic comedies.
- Depending on the subject there are many types of comedies like Comedy of Humours, Comedy of Intrigue, Comedy of Manners, Sentimental Comedy.
- Comedy of Humours is developed by Elizabethan playwright, Ben Jonson. It is based on the ancient theory of four Humours or temperaments.

- It is believed that human body has four primary fluids. They determine a person physical condition and type of character. Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humour is the best example of it.
- Comedy of Intrigue is also known as Comedy of Situation. It was popular specially during the restoration period. It deals with complicated plots, conspiracies and situation arising out of unfaithfulness in love and marriage. Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing is considered as Comedy of Intrigue.

- Comedy of Manners is also known as Restoration Comedy. It criticises the manners of high class society. The language and behaviour of the characters is highly stylish and artificial. William Congreve's *The Way of the World* is an example of it.
- Sentimental comedy presents melodramatic situation. It came as a reaction to the immoral tone of Restoration Comedy. It generally has a middle class protagonist. It aims at producing tears rather than laughter. Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* can be put forward as an instance.

- Satiric Comedy ridicules political policies or philosophical doctrines. It attacks deviations from social order. The Greek dramatist Aristophanes wrote this kind of drama. Ben Jonson calls it Corrective Comedy.
- Tragi Comedy is the next type of drama. It originated during the Elizabethan period. It combines the features of Tragedy and Comedy. It is a Tragedy with a comic relief and a Comedy with tragic background. The rising action is tragedy and the following action is comedy. In other words, it begins with tragedy and ends with comedy. Shakespeare's Winter's Tale and The Tempest are the examples.

- Farce is a exaggerated form of comedy. It is meant for laughter. It is far away from real life. It makes use of highly exaggerated or caricatured characters. The situation are improbable and hard to believe. In English drama, Farce is used as an episode in the comedy. The modern dramatists employ it in the theatre of absurd. Some of the scenes in Shakespearean comedies have the Farcical element in them.
- Melodrama is a lower form of tragedy. Music was the essential element of a melodrama, but later on sentiments and sensational actions became more important.

- Though, we can trace the elements of melodrama in earlier plays, melodrama became especially in the Victorian period. Melodramas have wonderful scenic devices representing major calamities on stage.
- Masque is also a play with music, elaborate scenic effects and dancing. It generally has a fairy tale, a myth or an allegory as its base for the story. This kind of drama originated in Italy. In England it was introduced in the 16th century. It makes use of elaborate costumes and dancing. John Milton's Comus is an example of English Masque. Shakespeare used Masque partially in his play The Tempest.

- One Act Play is as old as Mystery and Miracle plays. The Interlude of 15th century was also a One Act Play.
- One Act Play is like a short story. It imposes many restriction on the dramatist. Brevity is the soul of One Act Play. The plot of One Act Play is simple. It generally conveys one theme.
- It is either a comedy or a tragedy and conveys single emotion.
- The success of One Act Play depends on simplicity of design and immediate impact.

- Miracle plays, Morality plays and Interludes are types of Medieval drama. They were written in a variety of verse forms.
- Miracle play was generally based on a story from the Bible or on the life of some saint. Initially they were sponsored by the Church and were didactic in nature.
- Morality plays were also based on the Christian beliefs. They followed the allegorical form. The characters were personifications of virtues, vices, angels and demon. The best known morality play is Everyman.

- Interludes are a variety of short stage entertainments. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries interludes were performed by bands of professional actors. They were often enacted in between the courses of a feast or between the acts of a longer play. John Heywood's farces of the first half of 16th century are the best example of interludes.
- Historical Plays are also known as Chronicle Plays. Christopher Marlowe's Edward II is an example of it. Generally these plays are based on Historical materials such as Holinshed's Chronicles.

- This kind of plays were popular in the 16th century England. They deal with people and events from English History.
- Shakespeare's Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Julius Caesar are the History plays or Chronicle plays.
- Dear students, as part of types of drama we have focused on tragedy and its different types such as Classical Tragedy, Romantic tragedy, Horror tragedy, Heroic Tragedy, She Tragedy, comedy and Domestic Tragedy.

- In case of Comedy we have seen Classical Comedy, Romantic Comedy, Comedy of Humours, Comedy of Intrigue, Comedy of Manners, Sentimental Comedy and Satiric Comedy.
- I would like to remind you that we have also discussed some other types of drama like Farce, Melodrama, Masque, One Act Play, Miracle Play, Morality Play, Interludes and Historical Plays.
- Now, Lets complete our discussion by including some of the modern types of dramas. Problem play is one of them in it a social problem is discussed. The Author doesn't provide any solution but leaves the audience to decide. G B Shaw is the major practitioner of this kind of plays.

- The most prominent form of modern drama is Absurd drama. After the World Wars some of the thinkers have an opinion that Human life is meaningless and Absurd. Albert Camus who was an existentialist Philosopher expresses the same opinion in his book *Myth of Sisyphus*.
- Absurd drama makes use of black humour and flat characters to convey the meaninglessness of Human existence. The dialogues are abrupt and don't follow any logical sequence. The action are repetitive. The loneliness and dehumanization in a commercialized world are the major themes.

- Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, Harold Pinter's Birthday Party, Tom Stoppard's Jumpers, Edward Albee's The Zoo Story are the popular examples of Absurd play.
- Expressionistic drama is another modern development. Expressionism is German movement in Literature and in other Arts. As opposed to the tradition of Realism, the Expressionist artist expresses a personal vision of Human life and Human society. This is done by exaggerating and distorting the expected features of the World.

- In drama, Eugene O'Neill made use of expressionism or expressionistic techniques. For instance, in the play *The Hairy Ape* he focuses on what is going on in the mind of the protagonist. The use of lights and sound effects helps the dramatist in achieving the goal.
- Bertolt Brecht's plays are read as the plays of epic theatre. He was a German playwright. He gave the concept of alienation effect which is closer to defamiliarization of the Russian formalists. It seeks the dramatists to have a critical distance from the audience. They present social reality as something strange.

- In epic theatre, the social reality is presented in such a way that the audience are aroused to criticise and take action against it rather than simply accepting it. In these plays the audience not only have sympathy for the actors but also identify themselves with the actors and thus are encouraged to take their roles.
- Thus among the modern types of drama we have talked about problem plays, absurd plays, expressionistic plays and the epic theatre