UNIT 12  INDIAN THEATRE

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12.0  OBJECTIVES

It is imperative for people and institutions, active in the field of tourism, to become familiar with different facets of Indian culture. It is generally possible for us to get an idea of the rich tradition of India's art and culture through the Indian theatre. This Unit proposes to introduce you to Indian theatre, its history and present form. After reading it you will:

- be able to explain India's theatre tradition,
- understand India's drama (play) tradition,
- be able to describe the different facets of Indian theatre,
- distinguish between the marathi, bengali and the hindi tradition of plays, and
- familiarise yourself with the main theatrical forms of contemporary India.

12.1  INTRODUCTION

'Indian Theatre' is the first Unit of Block 4 on 'Popular Culture'. In this Unit you will be introduced to the rich tradition of Indian theatre. The tradition of writing and enacting plays is quite old in India. Alongwith plays, theatre had also developed. Bharat's book Natya Shastra (The art/philosophy of dance) has focussed on the play, theatre, audience and the sensory response after watching the play (called rasa). Alongwith a pan - Indian tradition, different regions have developed their own tradition of popular plays. Although the ancient tradition of Sanskrit plays could not develop in the medieval times, the popular drama tradition kept advancing uninterrupted through the ages.

In modern times the drama tradition emerged in a new form. New theatre auditoria came into being. The exposure with the west brought in the influence of the Greek tradition and the modern western theatre tradition. Modern Indian theatre has benefitted from both, the popular folk tradition and the western drama tradition. Simultaneously the modern playwrights have also made new experiments. A knowledge about these aspects would enable you to put in perspective the development of Indian theatre. Such knowledge is crucial to those involved in the field of tourism, as they would be able to appreciate the specificities of Indian theatre in the overall context of Indian Culture.
12.2 THEATRE TRADITION IN INDIA

It is difficult to determine the beginning of theatre and play in India. Some experts feel that it is non-Aryan culture which has contributed significantly to the development of Indian plays. Though it is difficult to discern the exact nature of this contribution, yet a developed sanskrit drama tradition must have been preceded by a folk tradition of plays. In other words, the sanskrit tradition presupposes the existence of a folk tradition prior to that. But it is difficult for us to decipher and identify this folk tradition. We can only extrapolate it from the available sanskrit plays, literature related to drama and the existing folk tradition. Let us, therefore, have a look at the sanskrit and folk tradition of Indian theatre.

12.2.1 Sanskrit Theatre

Rig Veda is the oldest available text in sanskrit. It makes a reference to various art forms which include music, dance, poetry etc., but drama has not been included in these art forms. Nevertheless, Mantra Sahitya in the Rig Veda contains Sanlap Suktas (romantic verses) which refer to dramatic literature in its original form. Urvashi and Pururava romance in Rig Veda is significant in so much as it has been developed in a number of later sanskrit texts. Famous sanskrit poet Kalidasa had based his epic play Vikramorvashiyam on the Urvashi and Pururava story. Yajur Veda makes a reference to the term Abhineta (actor).

India's epic Natyashastra, written between the third and the fifth centuries A.D., focuses on two themes - rasa and the means of expressing rasa. Rasa refers to that feeling which is expressed through the play. Natyashastra talks about four ways of expressing feelings:

1) Gestures (Angik): acting by the movement of the different parts of the body.
2) Oral (Vachik): acting through dialogues.
3) Spiritual (Satwik): expressions through gestures.
4) Properties (Aharya): The material required for the play like colours, dresses and decorations etc. All these are mentioned specifically in reference to the theme of the play. Bharat has also described ways of managing the stage in his Natya shastra. Dance and music have been considered the essential ingredients in the play. There is also a reference to the desirable qualities found in the actor (abhineta).

Ancient India observed a tradition of organising plays on important occasions like marriage, travel, coronation ceremony, making a ceremonial entry into a house (griha pravesh) or a city, birth of a child or other special occasions. Plays for the ruling classes used to be enacted in the forts or the temples but those for common people could be played in any open space or even during travels.

Ancient sanskrit texts have elaborate references to the size of the theatres. Natya Shastra refers to theatres of a squarish size. Other books talk about various kinds of stages and galleries etc. From the above references it seems that various aspects of the theatre and organising plays were contemplated upon in Ancient India.

12.2.2 Folk Theatre

Many scholars believe that a folk theatre existed in Ancient India along with a rich classical sanskrit theatre. With the passage of time the sanskrit tradition faded but the folk tradition continued unhampered. As many as 20 different forms still exist and flourish in different parts of India. These include Ramlila and Rasilia in North India, Jatra in Bengal, Akiya Nat, Kirtania and Bidesia in Bihar and Assam, Khyal and Kathputli in Rajasthan, Tamasha in Maharashtra, Swang and Nautanki in Punjab, Bhandijashan in Kashmir, Kariala in Himachal Pradesh, Bhawai in Gujarat, Manch in Madhya Pradesh, Kudiattam and Chabitta in Kerala, Bhagwatmel in Tamilnadu, Yakshagan in Karnataka and Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh.

The forms of folk plays are said to have originated from sangitaka referred to in the old sanskrit plays. Sangitaka contains five elements—song, musical instruments, dance, auditorium and the Nat-Nati (compere or the story telling couple). These elements were shared by both the classical and the folk plays although the nature of the auditorium varied.
Some of the folk plays did not need the stage at all. For instance Raslila could be performed on the stage as well as on the floor in the midst of the audiences.

The thematic content in the folk plays was generally of two kinds - worldly and religious. Ramlila and Raslila were primarily religious plays. Kirtania and Ankia Nat were also portrayals of religious stories. Nautanki, Swang, Bhand, Tamasha and Khyal were based on worldly tales. Certain folk plays like Jatra combined both.

12.2.3 Modern Theatre

As has been said earlier, the modern Indian theatre draws itself from three different traditions i.e. the sanskrit theatre tradition, folk theatre tradition and the tradition of western theatres. It is actually the third which can be said to form the basis of the modern Indian theatre. The sanskrit tradition had evaporated in the medieval times and there was no significant trend of plays being performed for the ruling classes. This view is now being contested and some researchers feel that the sanskrit tradition did not decline in the medieval times. Among the common people, however, the folk tradition continued as we have discussed in the Sub-sec. 12.2.2.

Modern Indian theatre started after the advent of the British in India. The British developed Calcutta in the east, Bombay and Surat in the west and Madras in the south as important centres of trade and administration. They also set up theatres in these cities for their entertainment. Levdef, a gentleman of Russian origin, established a theatre by the name of Bengali Theatre. Abridged versions of plays like Disguise and Love is the Best Doctor were enacted on 21 November 1765, well over 200 years ago. Many rich drama lovers followed the example of Levdef and started conducting shows in their houses, lawns and gardens. This set in motion a process in which many theatres were established and plays enacted.

Once general interest developed in the plays, their commercial viewing became inevitable. This led to the formation of theatrical companies among which the Parsi theatrical companies became most popular. These companies toured various provinces and made money. But, more significantly, they contributed to the popularisation of the plays by writing them in Indian languages. Since money making was their main aim, these companies did not either promote excellence or bring about any experiments in the methods of presentation. Nonetheless, they helped in providing a popular platform to plays.

The modern Indian drama was greatly influenced by the west. It, therefore, contained all the features of the western theatres. The Ancient Indian tradition rested on a happy ending of the plays whereas in the western tradition the tragic ending was generally in vogue even though comedy was not completely absent there. Although influenced, modern Indian theatre was not merely an imitation of the west. On the contrary, it was a product of certain Indian social developments. The processes of modernisation and Renaissance in the Indian society, brought about socio-cultural changes and these changes were reflected in the field of art and literature. All this influenced the Indian theatre as well.

The initial thematic content of the modern Indian plays rested on the historical and the mythological themes. Later the social and political themes were also given a place. Along with this, Indian theatre soon began incorporating elements from the classical sanskrit theatres and folk theatres. This combination brought about many changes in the Indian theatre. For example, plays in the Parsi theatres gave tremendous importance to music, song and dances which was the influence of the traditional folk plays.

The post independence theatre also incorporated much of the folk and the Sanskrit traditions but, in essence, retained the realist western tradition. Playwrights like Badal Sarkar, Shambhu Mitra, Vijay Tendulkar, B.V.Karant, Ibrahim Alkazi, Girish Karnad and Utpal Dutt etc. made new experiments in the theatrical devices.

The decade after the seventies witnessed an important development when theatre broke out of the auditoria and surfaced on the open streets and lanes. This heralded a significant change in the world of theatres by adding a new dimension. But it did not in any way diminish the significance of the stage based plays.
1) Discuss the different forms of folk theatre.

2) The theme of Kalidasa's play Vikramorvashiyam was inspired by an ancient Sanskrit text. What was its name?

3) Match the following theatrical forms with the regions they belong to:

   1) Jatra a) Karnataka
   2) Khyal b) Assam
   3) Ankiya Nat c) West Bengal
   4) Yaksha Gan d) Maharashtra
   5) Tamasha e) Rajasthan

12.3 THE TRADITION OF PLAYS IN INDIA

Regarding the origin of plays, Bharat says in his Natyashastra, Having borrowed text (pathya) from Rig Veda, song from Sam Veda, acting (abhinaya) from Yajur Veda and rasa from Atharva Veda, Brahma created a fifth Natya Veda. It is difficult to say when the tradition of play writing might have begun in India but Bharat makes a reference to various plays in his Natyashastra. The leading 5th century playwright Kalidasa refers to Bhas, Saumilla and Kayiputra as his predecessors. He has remembered Bharat also with reverence. Leading grammarian Panini (5th century B.C.) has referred to the Nat Sutras of Shilali and Krishak.

There are different opinions on how the play started in India. Some scholars believe it to have begun with the prayer of Vishnu whereas some others trace it to the dance of puppets. Some take it back to the vedas and some others look upon it as the influence of the Greek tradition. It is a fact that a rich tradition of plays has been in existence for a long time. Let us briefly look at the sanskrit plays because these have been the earliest Indian plays.

12.3.1 Sanskrit Plays

In sanskrit language, the play has been considered a parf of poetry. Poetry has been divided into two heads - shravya (audio) and drishya (video). Poem, story etc. are examples of audio poetry (drishya kavya) and theatre is an example of visual poetry (shravya kavya). Play has also been called a Roopak (metaphor) in the Indian tradition. As many as ten Roopaks are mentioned in sanskrit. These are Natak, Prahara, Bhan, Vyayog, Samvakar, Dim, Eehamrag, Ank, Vithi and Prahasan. These include one act plays, monologues and full length proper plays.

Prastavana (introduction), Vishambhak and Praveshak play a very important role in sanskrit dramas. In Prastavana, the compere (Sutradhar) introduces the story to the audiences. Vishambhak and Praveshak link one act of the play with the other. The Sutradhar comes only at the beginning and the end. He does not figure in the play and is external to it.
Bhas is the first sanskrit play writer (2nd-3rd century) whose plays are available to us. The most important of these is Swapna Vasavadatta. It is important to talk of Ashwa ghosh's play Sariputra Prakaran which was written before Bhas but the complete play is not available. Bhas' plays follow the contemporary epic tradition. Doot Vakyaand Doot Ghatotkach etc. are tragedies.

After Bhas, Kalidas (5th century approximately) is the most distinguished playwright. Three of his plays are available: Malvikagnimiyram, Vikramorvashiyam and Abhigyan Shakanlaam. All his plays have a happy ending and portray life's diversity and conflicts quite beautifully.

Mrichh Katikam by Shudrak can be called a realist play. The selection of characters in this play seems quite contrary to the elite tradition of the sanskrit plays.

Bhav Bhuti and Vishakh Dutt from the 7th-8th centuries are other important playwrights. Bhav Bhuti has written Mahavir Charit, Malti Madhav and Uttar Ramcharit, of which the last is most important. Bhav Bhuti does not portray Ram as a god but as an idealist king who loves his wife and is torn between his duty as a king and his love for his wife. He is constantly searching for a way out. Vishakh Dutt's Mudrarakshasam, based on the story of Chandragupta and Chanakya, is a political play.

Apart from these, Harsha's Ratnavali, Nanganandand Priyadarsika; Mahendra Vikram Varman's Mattavilas; Bhatta Narayan's Veni Sanhar; Muravi's Anarga Raghav; Rajashukhar's Bal Ramayan, Karpur Manjarī, and Vidwahal Bhanjika; Keshimishwar's Chand Kaushik; Damodor Mishra's HanummanNatakand Krishna Mishra's Probodh Chandrodhay are also important sanskrit plays. These plays have generally displayed a conflict between man's efforts and his fate. The conflict also brings out man's helplessness and agony.

Modern theatre personalities have often tried to stage this rich heritage of sanskrit plays. Aome presented them in the old Sanskrit form and some others in the western theatre form. Aome playwrights have also experimented by presenting them in the folk form. Few of these efforts have been successful but it can be said undeniably that the sanskrit plays, Natya Shastra and the ancient forms of staging have shaped Indian theatre quite profoundly.

12.3.2 Post Sanskrit Plays

It is difficult to determine the language in which the earliest plays were written. The earliest available plays are in sanskrit only. The credit for developing folk plays go to Bhas, Shudrak, Vishakhadut, Kalidas, Bhavbhuti, etc. They provided excellence through themes, portrayal of characters, poetry content and dramatics.

After sanskrit, some plays were written in pali and prak,' also, which focussed mainly on the lives of Buddha and Mahavir, respectively. It has been argued by some that the writing and staging of plays was discontinued because of the arrival of the Muslims. But this is not true. In fact, the staging of plays had declined from 8th century itself but the tradition of folk plays continued. A possible explanation for the decline in the writing of plays had something to do with the attitude of the heads of the Brahmīn, Buddhist and Jain religions. These elites looked upon the art of play writing with contempt. Secondly, this was the age of political instability of the feudal class. This affected adversely the patronage which the play writing used to receive earlier. Even the cultural regeneration created by the Bhakti movement during the medieval period did not create any space for a renewal of the classical drama tradition. This was because the sections, where the Bhakti movement was active, were already exposed to the folk tradition of plays. It was precisely the folk tradition which was used and developed during the Bhakti period. Certain new experiments like Ramlila, etc. were also made in the specific forms of folk plays during this period.

Ramlila, Raslila, Jatra, Yakshagan, Ankia nat, etc. draw there themes mainly from religious stories and ballads of gods and goddesses. They catered to the religious sentiments of the people and entertained them at the same time. On the other hand, the kathputli, Bhan, Kyal, were oriented towards wordly themes. In these folk plays the storyline was invariably traditional, and not many innovations were made at that level, but the elements of songs dance and music kept the audiences engrossed. The folk plays did not have a tradition of writing plays and could, therefore, change easily according to the place, time and the preferences of the participants involved.
These folk forms are important in so much as they fill a gap of around thousand years between the ancient sanskrit plays and the modern plays. They represented their times mainly through religious and worldly stories. Their contribution to modern theatre can be discerned easily through the works of Vijay Tendulkar (Ghasiram Kotwal), Girish Karnad (Hayvadan), Mani Madhukar (Ras Gandharva), Sarveshvar Dayal Saksena (Bakari), Arun Mukherjee (Mareech Samvad), K.N. Panikkar (Abhavan Katamba), and Satish Alekar (Mahanirvan). All of them have used, very creatively, the traditional folk forms and style.

12.3.3 Modern Plays

As has been mentioned earlier, the credit for reviving interest in the play in modern times, goes to the British. When Indians watched plays in the theatres set up by the British, they realised the absence of play literature in their own languages. Thus began the process of translation of English and Sanskrit plays in vernacular languages. The initiative was taken in bengali language. In 1857 Kali Prasanna Singh translated Kalidas’ Vikramorvashiyam in bengali by the name of Vidyotsahni. Subsequently, Ramnarayan Tarkarata translated Venisamhar (1856), Ratnavali (1859), Abhigyan Shakuntalam (1867), and Malti Madhav (1867) into bengali. Around the same time translations were done from English and Sanskrit to assamese, telugu, punjabi, sindhi, marathi and hindi etc. The translations from English were not mere translations but had been adapted into their Indian version. For instance, Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice appeared in its indigeneus form as Bhanumati Chitravilas.

After the phase of translations, original play writing in Indian languages was taken up. Initially plays in all the languages centred around mythological and historical themes along with satires on social problems. The ideas of religious morality dominated the initial plays but with the emergence of the Indian National Movement nationalist expressions also found an entry into the world of plays. For this, playwrights chose historical settings and characters. These plays combined emotions of immense courage, selflessness, pathos and prospects of a bright future which would leave a deep imprint on the readers and the audiences.

Girishchandra Ghosh and Dwijendralal Roy wrote historical plays in bengali language. The former tended to lean more towards religion than patriotism unlike the latter whose plays were more inspired by patriotism. Venkatrai Shastri (Pratap Rudriyam), Kolachalam Srinivas (Ramanuj Charitra), Sripad Krishnamurti Shastri (Bobbili Yuddham), Yagyanarayan Shastri (Rasaputra Vijayam) were some of the leading playwrights in telugu. Similarly historical plays were written in hindi, tamil, malayalam and marathi. Nationalist plays were written by Jayshankar Prasad and Harikrishna Premi in hindi, K.M. Munshi and Umashankar Joshi in gujarati and Krishna Pillai in malayalam.

Combining nationalism with contemporary social reality was another trend in modern plays. The first famous play of this kind was written by Deenbandhu Mitra (Neel Darpan) in bengali. This play was based on the theme of forcible cultivation of indigo inflicted on the native planters by British imperialism. This play was also indicative of a newly emerging consciousness of nationalism. It became very popular in Bengal. assamese plays by Padmanath Gohai Barua (Lochit Barfukan), Lahshmikant Bejbarua (Cakradhwaj Singh) and Bimanand Barua (Sharai Ghat) were also powerful expressions of nationalist feelings. Pavler wrote nationalist plays (Khadrin Verdri and Desheeya Kati among others) in tamil. In malayalam the nationalist tradition was carried by V.T. Bhattachiripad, K. Damodaran, Govindan, Ittasheri, S.L. Puran, K.T. Muhammad, etc. Bhartendu Harishchandra wrote nationalist satires in hindi (Bharat Durdasha, Bharat Janani and Andher Nagri) and his tradition was carried to its culmination by the plays of Jai Shankar Prasad.

The Indian intellectuals of the 19th century had grasped the reality that India’s degeneration was not only because of the alien rulers but also because of certain social evils and superstitions prevalent in the Indian society. The plays of that period reflect this understanding very well. The playwrights focussed their sarcasm on those Indians who were busy in blindly following the west. The playwrights of this period attacked the caste system, child marriage, dowry, false notions of pride and prestige, prostitution, untouchability and other social evils in their plays. Michael Madhusudan Dutt in bengali; Bhartendu, Pratap Narain Mishra and Radhacharan Goswami in hindi; Hemchandra Barua and Gunhiram Barua in assamese; Narayan Rao in telugu; Kailasam, A.N. Murthirao, K. Ksheersagar and Srimang in kannada; S.D. Sundaram, Krishnamurti and Neelkanth in tamil; V.T. Bhattachiripad, M.P. Bhattachiripad, K. Damodaran in Malayalam; Ranchhod Bhai Udayaram,
Umashankar Joshi and Gulabdas Broker in gujarati; and Khanchand Daryani and M.U.Malkani in sindhi are some of the leading playwrights of this period.

By the fourth decade of the 20th century play writing had matured considerably. This was reflected in a certain breaking out of the fold of idealism and moving towards realism. The plays now were also influenced by the problem-oriented plays of Ibsen. As a result social and personal problems began to be seen together in the plays. Instead of focussing only on events, the plays now began to concentrate on the internal conflicts and dilemmas of the characters. As a result, matters of everyday life acquired importance in the theme selection of the plays. It had its effect on the staging of the plays as well. The earlier plays, though excellent from the literary point of view, were difficult to stage. On the other hand, the commercial Parsi plays were fit to be staged, but few of these could meet the literary standards satisfactorily. However, now the gap between the literary plays and the plays to be staged had started narrowing down.

Apart from the expansion of the thematic content, the plays in this phase also acquired a deep humanistic element. P.B.Rajmunnar's play *Tappe Varidi* (who is guilty), closely resembling Premchand's famous novel *Nirmala*, makes a detailed examination of man-woman relations through the problem of incompatible (incompatibility of age) marriage. P.Sriram Murty and K.Gopalram Sharma in telugu; Praveen Phukan and Sharda Phukan in assamese; Lankesh in kannada; N.Krishna Pillai, K.Surendran G.Sahknar Pillai and C.N.Shrikanth in Malayalam; Mama Varerkar, Ackarya Atte and M.G.Rangnekar in marathi; Chandra Badan Mehta, Jayanti Dalal and Ganesh Shankar Lal Shankar Pandya in gujarati and Jai Shankar Prasad (Dhruswamini), Lakhshmi Narayan Mishra and Upendra Nath Ashk in hindi are some of the famous playwrights of this period.

Some writers of the pre-independence phase, like Rabindranath Tagore, do not fall into the above mentioned categories. Many of his works can be called symbolic plays. He created poetic dramas and ballets as well. No attempt at reconstructing the history of Indian plays will ever be complete without a reference to Tagore.

**Post Independence Plays**

The post independence period witnessed changes in both the style and content of the Indian plays. The second world war and the partition of the sub-continent had a profound impact on Indian society. The widely shared optimism of a better tomorrow turned out to be an illusion after the attainment of independence. On the one hand, sufferings of the common people increased, and on the other, a powerful class emerged which pursued opportunism disregarding the values of the freedom movement. The rapid changes brought about by science and industrialisation in the society, affected the value systems of the people. These changes were bound to show up in the world of Indian plays in a variety of ways.

An important change was the increased access, to India, of plays written in foreign languages other than English. Indians were now getting introduced to the plays of Brecht from Germany, Gogol and Chekhov from Russia and Sartre from France. This influenced both the writing and staging of the new plays. The new trend is most visible in the plays of Badal Sarkar in bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in marathi and Girish Karnad in kannada. The new plays displayed a receptivity towards new experiments being made in the field. The earlier trend was to write five act plays, with many scenes in one act. This was reduced to three and finally to one. Many scenes in an act used to disturb the continuity and interrupt viewer's pleasure. Therefore, the practice of having many scenes in an act was almost discontinued.

The historical plays of the pre-independence period used to focus on invoking national pride. But the new historical plays attempted to understand and analyse history from a new angle. The plays of Uttam Barua (*Varja Fuleshwari*, assamese), P.Lankesh (*Sankranti*, kannada), Girish Karnad (*Tughlaq*, hindi), Vijay Kumar Mishra (*Tat Nirajan*, oriya), Dharmvir Bharti (*Andha Yug*, hindi), Mohan Rakesh (*Ashaap Ka Ek Din*, hindi), Jagdish Chandra Mathur (*Pahla Raja*, hindi) and Sant Singh Sekhon (*Mohu Sar Na Kai*, punjabi) are quite remarkable in this respect.

In the post-independence plays the mythological form was also used to portray complex human emotions and dilemmas. Plays of Budi Dev Basu (*Kaal Sandhya* and *Pratham Parth* in bengali), Girish Karnad (*Yayati* in kannada), C.N.Srikanth Naiyar (*Lanka Lakshmi*, *Kauchan Sita* and *Saketam* in Maylam), Sant Singh Sekhon (*Kalakar* in punjabi, based on the life of a mythological character Ahilya), Dharmavir Bharti (*Andha Yug* in hindi) and
The focus on social plays continued in the post independence period as well, with a much enlarged canvas to include new social problems and themes. Now, the increasing economic disparity with resultant frustrations, the plight of women in the society, the despondency of the dalits and the depressed, Hindu-Muslim relations, the miseries of the rural life, de-humanisation of the city life, hypocrisy of the middle class and the clash between the new and the old values dominated the thematic content of the new social plays. Many examples of the new social plays can be cited but Adhe Adhure of Mohan Rakesh, Anjo Didi' of Upendra Nath Ashq, Bakri of Sarveshwar Dayal Saksena, Tilchatta of Mudrarakshas, Shuturmurg of Gyan Dev Agnihotri, Ek Aur Dronacharya of Shankar Ghosh (all in hindi); Shantata Court Chalu, Ghasiram kotwal, Sakharam Binder and Gidh of Vijay Tendulkar (in marathi); Evam Indrajit, Baki Ithas and Pagla Ghora of Badal Sarkar, Tin Ki Talwar of Utpal Dutt, ginpig of Mohit Chatterjee and Chako Bhanga Madhu of Manoj Mitra (all in bengali); Suryast of Jagannath Prasad (in oriya); Interview of Ram Panjwani (in sindhi); and N.G.O. of Acharya Atre and Padi Pand of Venkateshwar Rao (in telugu) would stand out among the many that exist.

At the level of experiments, folk plays, ballets, absurd plays, street plays and radio plays were some of the major innovations carried out. We shall discuss them later when we talk about the various forms of plays.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Read the following statements and mark correct [✓] or incorrect [×].
   a) The sanskrit plays are quite often tragedies. [ ]
   b) Bhavabhuti has portrayed Ram's character as that of an idealist king. [ ]
   c) In sanskrit plays, we find a conflict between a man's efforts and his destiny. [ ]
   d) Mrichh Katikam of Shudrak is an elitist romantic play. [ ]
   e) Sanskrit plays have no relevance today. [ ]

2) Which have been the main sources in the theme selection in the folk plays?

3) What was the initial thematic concern of modern plays?
4) What has been the dominant perspective in the presentation of the historical and the mythological plays during the post independence period?

5) Match the name of the play with that of its author and the language.

a) Sankranti 1) Dharmavir Bharti i) punjabi
b) Kalakar 2) P. Lankesh ii) marathi
c) Andha Yug 3) Badal Sarkar iii) hindi
d) Evam Indrajit 4) Vijay Tendulkar iv) kannada
e) Ghsairam Kotwal 5) Sant Singh Sekhon v) Bangla

12.4 MODERN INDIAN THEATRE

As we have already informed you, modern Indian theatre was started in calcutta in 1765 by Levedef, a Russian. Eleven years later, in 1776, a theatre was started in Bombay, the other important town. Gradually, general interest increased in the theatre and this was reflected in the setting up of new theatres. New theatrical companies were established which started touring different cities to stage plays. The plays now began to be identified as a popular art form. Among these companies, the role of the Parsi theatre is particularly important. Apart from Parsi theatre, the traditional folk theatre also got an opportunity. The folk theatre also influenced the westernised theatrical forms. The westernised elite theatre had been confined only to big cities and the elite audiences. The formation of Progressive Writers Association in 1936 was soon followed by the formation of the Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA) in 1942 which carried forward the march of folk theatres in India. In this Section we intend to familiarise you with the different forms of the modern Indian theatre.

12.4.1 Parsi theatre

The Parsi community had migrated from Persia and settled at the western coast. Essentially a trading community, the Parsis made rapid progress in trade and industry during the British period. Bombay presidency was the centre of their activity. The Bombay theatre, as we have informed you, was established in 1776 and initially only English plays were staged there. Besides, the theatre was open only to the soldiers and officers of the East India Company. The theatre was closed for repairs in 1818 and reopened again on the 1st January 1819. In 1835 it was bought by Jamshedji Jijibhai but it was closed down again. In 1846, Jagannath Shankar Seth, a famous trader from Bombay, started his Grant Road Theatre, situated on the Grant Road in Bombay. The theatre started off with English plays, but it was not before long that gujarati, marathi and hindi-urdu plays began being staged there.

Bombay theatre was constructed along the lines of the Drury Lane Theatre of London. The dress box was surrounded by a large gallery from all sides. the dress box could accommodate 72 people, 'pit' 65 and the gallery 200. Thus the entire auditorium could easily accommodate 337 viewers.

The first ten years of the Grant Road Theatre were far from smooth. Unlike Bombay Theatre, it received no patronage from the government. Once the officers and the gentry stopped visiting the theatre, it started attracting sailors, soldiers and small traders. Free from any kind of fear, they used to make loud noises during the play, create a ruckus and often fight amongst themselves. This was precisely the kind of audience inherited by the Parsi theatre and later by the popular cinema also.
Initially the actors at the Parsi theatres were invariably Parsis who used to advertise their plays to attract viewers. Another company with the name Parsi Natak Mandali was set up in 1853 by Pestonji Dhanji Bhai Master. He used to act also. Parsee Theatrical Committee was yet another company. The ticket rates of the Parsi theatres were considerably less expensive than those of the English plays - dress circle for Rs. three and 'pit' for only one rupee. The tickets for dress circle were later reduced further to two and a half rupees.

The main play writers of the Parsi Natak Mandali were Vamanji Kavasji and Jahangir Nasharvanji Patel. Vamanji Kavasji wrote many plays like Bholi Gul, Baghe Bahisht, Vapna shrap, Noore neki, Wafa Par Jafa and Deljung Diler. Jahangir Nasharvanji wrote an extremely popular comedy called Fakuro Feeturi.

In Bombay another theatre company was established in 1867 called the Victoria Natak Mandal. A number of Parsi companies were active in Bombay before 1890. These included both the commercial and non-commercial companies. The rehearsals of the plays used to be supervised by a director.

Increasing popularity of the parsi theatres led to the opening of a number of theatre halls in Bombay. Some of these were Eros Theatre, Edward Theatre, Empire Theatre, Elphinstone Theatre, Esplaned Theatre, Original Theatre, Novelty Theatre, Royal Opera House, Victoria Theatre and hindi Natyashala. After 1930, a number of them were converted into cinema halls.

Although the play writers provided by the Parsi theatres were not really talented from literary point of view, yet their contribution towards initial attempts at play writing is immensely important. Most of the initial play writers were Parsis only. Some of these were Kavasji Kaikhuro Navroziji (Bezan Manizeh, Jamshed, Faredoon, Lavkush and Nandbattisi), Eduljee Jamshediji Khor (Rustam Ane Sohrab, Hazamvad Ane Ugamvad, Khudabakhsh, Noorjehan and Zalam Jare), Nanabhai Rustamji Ranina (Karani Tevi Par Uturni, Kala Mentha, Homlo Hau, Sati Savitri and Nazan Shirin), Heerji Khambatta (Aabe Iblees), Jahangir Khambatta (Khudadd in urdu), Juddin Jhagro, Mad House and Dhartikamp), Merwanji Nasarvanji Wadia (Satro Nigabpan Khuda and Honeymoon). Most of their plays were written in gujarati. Their translations into hindustani were also staged.

Among the play writers writing in urdu-hindi for the Parsi theatres were Abbas Ali Abbas (Naurange Sitamgar, Zanjeere Gauhar, Nairang Naz, Dukhia Dulhan, Shamsheer Islam and Ek Hi Paisa), Mohammad Ibrahim Ambalvi 'Mashtar' (Dushmane Iman, Joshe Tauhid, Gunahgar Bap and Garib Hindustan), Mahmud Mian Banarsi 'Raunak' (Benazir Badreunmir, Laila Majnu, Puran Bhagat and Fasane Ajayab), Husain Mian zarif (Gul Sanover, Khuda Dost and Ihsrat Sabha), Munshi Vinayak Prasad 'Tali' (Lailo Nihar, Nal Damyanti, Fasane Ajayab, Gopi Chand, Harishchand, Vikram Vilas and Alladh), Narayan Prasad 'Betab' (Husne Farang, Qatle Nazir, Mahabharat, Ramayana and Patni Pralap), Agha Mohammad Shah Kashmori 'Hasr' (Aftabe Mohabbat, Khoone Nahak, Dame Husn, Shaheede Naz, Achahtoa Daman, Madhur Murl, Bhagirath Ganga, Hindustan, Turki Hoor and Ankh Ka Nasha), Mehdi Hasan 'Ahasan' (Zahre Ishq, Chandravali, Khoone Nahak and Chalata Purza) and Radhey Shyam Kathavachak (Abhimanyu). Among these, the plays of Mehdi Hasan, Narayan Prasad 'Betab', Agha Kashmori and Vinayak Prasad 'Tali' can certainly be considered of a very high quality.

Apart from the companies referred to above, there were also Zoroostrian Theatrical Club (1866), Empress Victoria Natak Mandal (1876) and the Corothian theatre etc. Moreover, there existed theatre companies in the towns of Karachi, Jodhpur, Agra, Aligarh, Hyderabad, Meerut, Lucknow and Lahore along the lines of the Parsi theatres which staged both commercial and non-commercial plays.
The thematic content was initially derived mostly from the Persian background. Once the Hindus and Muslims started watching the plays their traditions were also included in the themes. The historical and mythological themes dominated the Parsi plays and these were often presented in a romantic and melodramatic way. The influence of the English Elizabeth Theatre was also quite visible. Shakespeare's plays often appeared in an Indianised form. The music, apart from a few ghazals, was invariably Indian classical, particularly thumri, dadra, jhinjhoti etc. The level of poetry was somewhat pedestrian. Good, sensitive poetry was quite rare.

Initially Parsi theatres had no place for music. Dialogues were in prose. The opera was used for the first time by Dadi Patel, famous Parsi actor and director, in his Benzir Badre Munir. This virtually opened the flood gates as far as music in Parsi theatres was concerned. Nasharvanji Apakhtyar, Alladiya Meharban, Master Jhande Khan and Master Lal were some of the leading music directors of the Parsi theatres.

In the context of the Parsi theatres, it is important to make a reference to Inder Sabha. Inder Sabha was written by Syed Agha Hasan who wrote under the pen name Amanat. He wrote it in 1853 and it exercised a profound impact on the plays of the Parsi theatres. Somenath Gupt, a researcher on the Parsi theatres, has referred to a number of plays which were influenced by Inder Sabha. He writes, 'Inder Sabha had acquired unimaginable fame in its times. It was translated into many Indian and foreign languages. Its songs and their tunes were on the lips of the people. It gave a new lease of life to the classical music. It was translated into marathi and German. Sinhalac plays in Sri Lanka were influenced by it. Such was the extent of its influence that certain companies used to show portions of Inder Sabha before staging their plays, primarily in order to attract the audiences. In its larger impact, the romantic stories of fairies, giants and princes generally came to be regarded as Inder Sabhas. (Parsi Theatre, p. 229.)

An important feature of Inder Sabha and other similar plays was that they were all in a poetic format. The language was hindi mixed with urdu. All the plays had more or less the same story line. It was either the story of a fairy falling in love with a man or the other way round. Their union was achieved after crossing many hurdles. The plays were full of magical powers and mesmerising situations which used to completely captivate and hypnotise the audiences. The influence of Inder Sabha was not just confined to the Parsi theatres. The popular cinema today seems like an extension of Inder Sabha. However, with the arrival of talkies in the 1930s, the Parsi theatre lost much of its charm and popularity.

12.4.2 Elite Theatre

After its inception under the British, the development of the modern theatre got diversified. The Parsi theatres had their appeal among the lower middle classes. The traditional folk forms like Ramlila, Raslila, Nautanki, Yakshagan and Jatra etc. were popular among the rural population of different areas. It is important to remember that these traditional folk forms had not remained unchanged over the centuries. The Nautankies had begun resembling the Parsi plays and the Ramlillas had also changed from the days of the Bhakti movement.

Besides these two another kind of theatre had started developing, and was different from them. The educated Indians, exposed to the western plays and also to the theatres established by the British, could not have been contented either with the English or the Parsi theatre. This class created a theatre which may conveniently be called the Elite theatre. It started in Calcutta. We have already discussed that the bengali theatre was the result of the efforts of Levedf (1765) but it had no effect on the common people. For almost fifty years no new initiative was taken. It was no further in 1831 that Prasanna Kumar Tagore established a Hindu Theatre which staged Shakespeare's plays and the English versions of the sanskrit plays. Another theatre was set up in 1833 at the house of Naveen Chandra Bose and every year about four to five plays were staged there. Vidya Sunder, staged in 1835, was particularly successful. Initially, the female roles were also done by the male artists. This was true of the entire 19th century theatrical tradition. Another common tradition was that the plays which were enacted were seldom published.

The bengali plays, in the early stages, did not have much of a literary value but a new phase began in 1857 in bengali plays and theatres. It was for the first time that four already published Bangla plays were staged at three different theatres in Bengal. This trend continued even later.
Popular Culture

Famous Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt saw some English plays and was very impressed by their quality. He, then, decided to write such plays in Bengali also. His play *Sharmistha*, staged for the first time on the 3rd September 1859, was a trend setter in so much as it was decidedly much superior than any of the plays staged till then. Michael Madhusudan Dutt went on to write many tragedies, comedies and satires. He completely transformed the quality of Bengali plays and theatres. He also developed, in the people, an appetite for good plays.

It was precisely this climate which made possible the creation of a play like *Neel Darpan*. Deen Bandhu Mitra’s play focussed on the imperialist exploitation and the poor peasants’ struggle against it. In a way, this was the beginning of a particular tradition of progressive plays which was to later culminate in the formation of IPTA (Indian Peoples Theatre Association) and carry on as a politico-literary movement.

After making a beginning in Bengal, the new theatre gradually spread to other languages also. Bhartendu Harishchandra’s efforts resulted in the creation of a Hindi theatrical company. Bhartendu wrote plays for it and also acted in them. Pratap Narayan Mishra worked towards the setting up of theatres in Kanpur. Many such plays were staged in various Indian cities catering mainly to the aesthetic sensibilities of the middle classes. It was from within this that the two major theatrical traditions developed:

- One was that of the elite, artistic and the experimental theatre which provided a certain level of excellence to the art of Indian theatres.
- The other was that of the peoples’ theatre which gave a certain purpose and political relevance to Indian theatre.

However, there was no rigid barriers between the two. The two concerns – aesthetic excellence and social relevance – were reflected in the staging of various plays. Commercial profit and sheer entertainment were certainly not the only concerns of these plays.

### 12.4.3 Peoples’ Theatre

Deen Bhandhu Mitra’s *Neel Darpan*, Bhartendu’s *Andher Nagri* and Madhu Sudan Dutt’s *Boodhe Shaliker Ghare Ran* generally focussed on people’s struggle against imperialism and feudal oppression. Till 1930, the dominant plays were either the commercial plays from the Parsi theatres or the overtly nationalist plays based on historical and mythological themes. The decade after 1930 witnessed an increasing left wing influence on the freedom movement. All India organisations of the students, peasants and workers came into being. The trends were also visible in the field of art and literature. In 1936 Progressive Writers Association (PWA) was formed under the presidency of Premchand. Seven years later was held the first convention of the Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA). With IPTA a new kind of theatre came into existence.

IPTA initiated an all India movement of the theatre for the people. The theatres hitherto were active only in their specific linguistic zones somewhat unconnected with their counterparts in other languages. IPTA helped bring them together on a common platform.

From its very inception, IPTA was associated with ensuring peoples’ participation in the freedom struggle, a cultural defence against imperialism and fascism, liberation from every form of oppression, generating awareness against socio-religious superstitions and the development of a humanistic aesthetics. After 1943, branches of IPTA spread in different parts of the country. This encouraged the writing and screening of people oriented plays in almost all the Indian languages. IPTA contributed some of the great play writers, directors, actors, music directors and singers. Leading theatre personalities like Mama Varerkar, Makhdum Mohiuddin, Dr. Raja Rao, Shamshu Mitra, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Ali Sardar Jafri and Sajjad Zaheer had been associated with IPTA from its first conference only. Later, names like M. Vallatole, Hemant Mukherjee, Jyotindra Mitra, Balraj Sahni, Uday Shankar, Prithvi Raj Kapoor and Shanta Gandhi etc. also remained associated with IPTA. IPTA not only staged plays but also made significant contributions in the field of songs, music, dance and film making. In 1944, famous artist Uday Shankar staged his play *Ram Lila* in front of the workers, with the help of IPTA.

The play and dance companies associated with IPTA visited different parts of the country to present their programmes. Although the main areas of activities were Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, but IPTA was also active in Punjab, Assam, Orissa, U.P. and
Maharashtra. IPTA also contributed to the encouragement of the regional theatre. Regional theatre experimented with the folk play forms to create new forms of theatres. IPTA has, therefore, not only made the Indian theatre progressive, but also enriched it by incorporating various folk theatrical forms into it. IPTA generally staged its theatres among the workers and peasants and participated enthusiastically in popular movements. Often this involvement in political activities tended to hamper the artistic quality of their plays, but it also provided the much needed incentive to carry on their activities. It can be said that the political theatre could become a possibility largely because of IPTA's efforts.

_Praja Natya Mandali_ formed in Andhra Pradesh, as a result of IPTA's influence, staged plays using folk forms. In Kerala, _Kerala Peoples Art Club_ staged plays in Malabar and North Travancore, along with peasant organisations. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bhupen Hazarika from Assam and K.Patnayak from Orissa were also associated with IPTA.

IPTA also influenced cinema in the 1950s. _Dharti Ke Lal_, made in 1946 by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, was the result of the collective efforts of IPTA. BALraj Sahni, Ravi Shankar, Krishan Chander, Chetan Anand, Prithvi Raj Kapoor (whose plays like Kisan and Pathan etc. were very much a part of IPTA tradition) were all associated with IPTA.

IPTA continued to be active till about a decade after independence but slackened somewhat with the slackening of PWA in 1953. A number of writers, music directors, singers and actors associated with IPTA joined cinema instead. Some of them dissociated themselves from the theatre. Today IPTA may have disintegrated somewhat but the tradition of people's theatres still continues. A sharpening in popular movements in the 1970s once again turned the focus on peoples theatres. A number of peoples theatres were formed in Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tripura, Punjab, U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. A difference between these theatres and IPTA was that these new peoples theatres adopted a new form of theatre called 'street theatre'. Street theatres have now become very popular all over and they champion the cause of the oppressed. This has led to frequent attacks on the peoples' theatres by the vested interests. For example a famous young theatre activist Safdar Hashmi was killed in an attack by goondas, during the staging of a street theatre _Halla Bol_, in a workers colony near Delhi, in 1990.

### 12.5 DIFFERENT THEATRICAL FORMS

Indian theatre has come of age. Theatre in regional languages has developed along with different theatrical forms. Westernised, sanskrit and folk forms have helped impart a certain shape to Indian theatre. Plays within the auditoriums have experimented with the writing and staging of plays, while alternatives to auditoriums have also been explored in order to reach out to more people. The writing and staging of plays has, on the one hand, been influenced by radio, cinema and television; and by the experiments in the theatrical forms, on the other. In the following Sub-secs., we shall introduce you to some of these forms.

#### 12.5.1 Westernised Theatrical Form

Westernised forms have made a significant contribution to Indian theatre. The first influence on the modern Indian theatre was that of the Elizabethan Theatre which staged Shakespearean plays. Initially, in places like Bombay theatres were even constructed like the Elizabethan theatre, with the audiences sitting on all the three sides of the stage. The play used to be staged in the day time. The area of acting on the stage used to be quite large and the platform was permanent. Elizabethan theatre also influenced the Parsi theatres. Later, the Indian theatre was influenced more by the realist theatre. The Indian theatre has also been quite receptive to many western art movements. Symbolism, Expressionism, naturalism and absurdism, theatre of the absurd have been some of the major art movements which influenced the Indian theatre. Stanislavsky and Brekht have influenced the writing, acting and the presenting of the plays. Their theatre forms have contributed to Indian theatre. Absurd theatre has been quite dominant even in India since the sixth decade of this century. Many plays staged here have been influenced by the plays of Samuel Beckett. Brekht's influence is particularly marked on the street plays.
12.5.2 Sanskrit Theatrical Forms

The Sanskrit form has influenced the Indian theatre in two ways. First was the fact that some of the leading Sanskrit plays were translated into Indian languages and staged. Plays like Abhigyan Shakuntalam, Vikramorvashiyam, Mrichh Katikam, Swapnavasavadatta, Mudrarakshasam and Uttar Ram Charit etc. were staged many times. Secondly, staging of these plays, as of some modern plays as well, was attempted along the lines prescribed in the Natya Shastra. Needless to say, these attempts were not very successful. But the fact can not be denied that the Sanskrit theatrical form has exercised an important influence on the modern Indian theatre.

12.5.3 Folk Forms

The impact of the traditional folk plays on the modern Indian theatre is a lot more profound, compared to their Sanskrit counterparts. Their influence in the field of playwriting has already been discussed. B.V.Karant, Jabbar Patel, Satish Alekar, Ratan Kumar Thiyam, K.N.Panikkar, Bansi Kaul, Habib Tanvir and Prasanna etc. have creatively incorporated aspects of traditional theatres into their plays. B.V.Karant successfully staged Barnam Van (based on Shakespeare’s Mackbeth) by using the yakshagan form. Vijaya Mehta, Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay and M.K.Raina have made experiments in presenting western plays in a folk form. We can conclude by saying that the traditional folk theatrical forms have kept alive the diversities and the specificities of India’s socio-cultural life. These forms have still a lot to offer to the Indian theatre in terms of the methods, conventions and the traditions followed.

12.5.4 Others

One act play, radio feature and opera are some of the other forms. Let us briefly look at them.

One Act Play: One act play is not exactly a form but a kind of play which has a shorter duration than a normal play. It consists of just one act. The exact difference between the two is that between a story and a novel. In the initial stages of play writing small plays were written to be presented either at the beginning of the play or during the interval. One act plays continued to be written and staged till the fifth and the sixth decades of the 20th century but declined after the arrival of the radio features. Nonetheless, one act plays continued to be played in the street theatres. Such small plays, lasting for ten to fifteen minutes, became quite popular on the radios. Somenath Zutshi, Somenath Sadhu, Faruk Masoodi (Kashmiri); Uma Shankar Joshi, Jayanti Dalal, Gubal Das Broker and Raman Lal Mehta (gujarati); Upendra Nath Ashq, Jagdish Chandra Mathur, Lakshmi Narayan Lal and Uday Shankar Bhatt (hindi); Basant Kumar Mohapatra, Jaduthan Das Mohapatra and Kamal Lochan Mohanti (oriya); Balwant Gargi and Kartar Singh Duggal (punjabi) and Mirza Kalich Beg, S.U. Malkani and Moti Prakash (sindhi) are some of the leading one act play writers in different languages.

Radio Feature: Plays started being presented on the radio once it established itself as a popular medium. Given the constraints of radio, it was essential for radio features to convey the story mainly through dialogues. Keeping this in mind features were written in many Indian languages both as one act plays as well as full fledged plays. Yashodh Mehta, Chunni Lal Bhadia, C.C.Mehta and Shiv Kumar Joshi (gujarati); Vishnu Prabhakar, Revti Raman Sharma and Chiranjit (hindi); N.N.Shiv Swamy (kannada); Pushkar Bhan, S.M.Zutshi and Hari Krishna Kaul (Kashmiri); S.K.Naiyar and K.R.Pillai (Malayalam); Mudda Krishna (telugu) and Krishna Chander and Manto (urdu) have been some of the prominent names associated with the world of radio feature.

Play and theatre in India have been particularly influenced by cinema and television. The Parsi theatre was rendered redundant by popular cinema. The art theatre also had to improve its quality in order to face new challenges and survive in a competitive world. The real threat to the theatre has come, not so much from cinema, as from the television. On the one hand, it has provided a powerful and economically viable alternative to theatre artists, it has also snatched away a large chunk of theatre’s audiences, on the other. Needless to say, the theatre is not going to completely die out in the face of these challenges because no new art medium can completely wipe out the old. Every art form has something unique of its own, to offer, and this ‘uniqueness’ keeps it going even though its base might shrink a bit.

The government subsidy to the Indian theatre in the pre-independence period was almost non-existent. But things have changed since independence. Various institutions have been established to support theatre artists and to encourage creative work. Some of these institutions include the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, the National School of Drama, the National Institute of Drama, and the National Centre for Performing Arts. These institutions provide training, funding, and opportunities for artists to produce and perform new works.

Despite these challenges, the Indian theatre continues to thrive and evolve. New forms and styles are being developed, and traditional forms are being adapted to contemporary contexts. The theatre, with its power to convey complex ideas and emotions, remains a vital force in Indian society.
A Sangeet Natak Akademi was established at an all India level and similar academies were set up in the states. Different states have also contributed to the preservation and protection of their traditional folk theatre forms. A National School of Drama (NSD) was established in New Delhi to provide the necessary training to acting, stage management (decoration and maintenance of the stage) and direction. Ibrahim Alkazi, a leading theatre personality, has made a seminal contribution to the training of talented theatre artists and the general uplift of the Indian theatre. The theatre in India has been deeply influenced by the plays directed by Alkazi.

The theatre in India has inherited a long tradition and still continues inspite of the deterrents from within and without. Continuous staging of plays in various parts of the country is ample proof that theatre as an art form still enjoys a following among the people. It also shows that the need for good plays is not likely to even die out.

Check Your Progress-3

1) Mark correct [✓] or incorrect [×] against the following statements regarding the Parsi theatres.
   a) Only gujarati plays were staged in the Parsi theatres. [ ]
   b) The plays of the Parsi theatres were quite influenced by Inder sabha. [ ]
   c) Most of the plays of the Parsi theatres were based on the historical and the mythological themes. [ ]
   d) Parsi theatres were completely devoid of songs. [ ]
   e) Parsi theatres influenced the Indian cinema. [ ]

2) Name the institution responsible for transforming peoples' theatre into a movement. How did this transformation brought about?

3) In what ways did the peoples' theatre influence the Indian theatre?
4) Answer the following questions.

a) Which national institute was established to promote plays and theatres?

b) Which national institute was established to impart training to different aspects of theatre?

c) What was the name of the play writer and the play on the exploitation of indigo cultivators by British imperialism?

d) What is street theatre?

5) Following are statements regarding the contribution of the folk theatrical forms to the development of modern Indian theatre. Mark correct [✓] or incorrect [✗] against them.

a) Folk theatre brought Indian theatre closer to peoples' lives. [✓]

b) Folk theatre made Indian theatre obscurantist and backward looking. [✗]

c) Folk theatre obstructed the possibilities of new experiments being carried out in the Indian theatre. [✗]

d) Folk theatre enabled the Indian theatre to acquire depth and imagination. [✓]

e) Folk theatre established a certain intimacy between the actor and the audiences. [✓]

12.6 LET US SUM UP

After reading this Unit, you must have learnt the following points.

- The theatre tradition in India is quite old. Much like the Greek tradition, play writing and the manuals prescribing their staging have developed in an unprecedented manner. Sanskrit tradition has given us a text like Natya Shastra and writers like Kalidas and Bhavabhuti.

- The folk tradition in India is as old as the sanskrit tradition. The sanskrit tradition was obstructed for about a thousand years but the folk tradition continued unhampered. About 25 different folk forms have continued to be active from centuries in different parts of the country. They are still popular and continue to entertain and enthral their audiences. This tradition has contributed in no small measure to the development of Indian theatre.

- Modern theatre was started in India by the British who established theatres for their entertainment. Watching and reading plays of Shakespeare and Ibsen inspired Indians to start and set up their own theatre. The early Indian theatre was influenced by Elizabethan theatre. Later it also incorporated elements from other western theatrical forms, sanskrit and folk forms.

- Play writing for Indian theatre was started with the translations of english and sanskrit plays. This was because plays in Indian languages did not exist. However, original play writing in Indian languages began by mid 19th century. The thematic content had a historical and mythological base and was motivated by the contemporary social reality,
expressing ideas of national and social regeneration. The initial plays were not very conveniently to the stage but gradually overcame this limitation. Deen Bhandhu Mitra, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bhartendu Harishchandra, Jayshankar Prasad, Rabindranath Tagore, Mama Varerkar, Kusumagraj, P.Lankesh, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sarkar, Mohan Rakesh and G.P. Deshpande have been some of the leading Indian play writers.

- The Parsi theatre has contributed in no small measure in the development of modern Indian theatre. Started by the Parsi community in the 19th century, the Parsi theatre initiated a melodramatic style which entertained the urban middle and lower middle classes for almost eight decades. Inspired and influenced by Inder Sabha, this theatre contained all the elements which later helped in the development of popular cinema. The Parsi theatre also gave us some distinguished play writers and actors. These plays used to be staged in gujarati, hindi-urdu and marathi.

- Along with the sharpening of the leftist influence in the national movement, emerged the peoples' theatre in the fourth and fifth decades of this century. Helped by IPTA in its growth, the peoples' theatre gave expression to anti-imperialist, anti-fascist ideas and inspired the oppressed Indian people to collectively struggle against it. The theatre personalities associated with the peoples theatres staged their plays among the workers and peasants. Peoples theatre also helped in the growth of theatres in regional languages. This theatre gave us good theatre persons in the field of dance, music and acting. IPTA has also helped in the making of good cinema. In the seventh and eighth decades the street theatres have carried forward the tradition of IPTA.

- Sanskrit, western and folk theatrical forms have contributed to the development of Indian theatre. At the same time, one act plays, poetic drama, ballets and opera have also influenced Indian theatre. Plays were also written for the radio.

### 12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

#### Check Your Progress-1

1) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 12.2.2.

2) Rig Veda.

3) 1-c, 2-e, 3-b, 4-a, 5-d.

#### Check Your Progress-2

1) a) ×, b) √, c) √, d) ×, e) ×.

2) Religious and wordy.

3) Historical, mythological and problematic social.

4) To redefine these issues from a new perspective.

5) a-2-iv, b-5-i, c-1-iii, d-3-v, e-4-ii.

Balraj Sahni - An IPTA activist
1) a) ×, b) √, c) √, d) ×, e) √

2) Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA).

3. i) Spread the ideas of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism.
   ii) Gave vent to expressions of the oppressed people.
   iii) Took theatre to the workers and peasants in the form of movements.
   iv) Helped develop regional theatre.

4) a) Sangeet Natak Akademi
   b) National School of Drama (NSD)
   c) Deen Bandhu Mitra, Neel Darpan.
   d) Plays which were played not in the auditoriums but out in the open among the people.

5) a) √, b) ×, c) ×, d) √, e) √.
New Victoria Theatre, Bombay.

A scene from the Sanskrit play Mudrarakshaasam.