

# SECTION FOUR

## 4.1 History of English Drama

### INTRODUCTION

*'How dramatic you are!' is your response when a friend exaggerates or overreacts. It means you are correctly using the adjective form of the word 'drama'. Drama is a performance which is essentially loud, exaggerated and larger than life. It is an audio visual medium. The audience sitting around, in front of, close to or in the last row of the theatre, should be able to hear and see the actor on stage. For example, a stage whisper is far louder than a whisper in real life. This would be an example of 'willing suspension of disbelief'. It can be defined as a willingness to accept the unreal. It may also mean sacrifice of realism and logic for the sake of enjoyment. The term was coined by the poet and aesthetic philosopher Samuel T. Coleridge. The term often applies to fictional works of the action, comedy, fantasy and horror genres. It refers to the willingness of the audience to overlook the limitations of a medium. Drama is a medium of expression, whereby performers express themselves artistically. The performance is based on a script which is in the form of dialogues, whereas a story or a novel is written in the narrative form. Poetry is language expressed in rhythm and metre. Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. A play, opera, mime and ballet are performed in a theatre, on radio or on television.*

#### What is drama?

*'Drama is a composition in verse or prose to be acted on the stage, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action and is represented with, accompanying gesture, costume and scenery as in real life'.*

- *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*

*'Drama is a composition designed for performance in the theatre in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action and utter the written dialogue'.*

- *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M.H. Abrams

## The Elements of Drama:

The elements of drama are-

1. plot
2. characterization
3. dialogue
4. settings
5. stage directions
6. conflict
7. theme

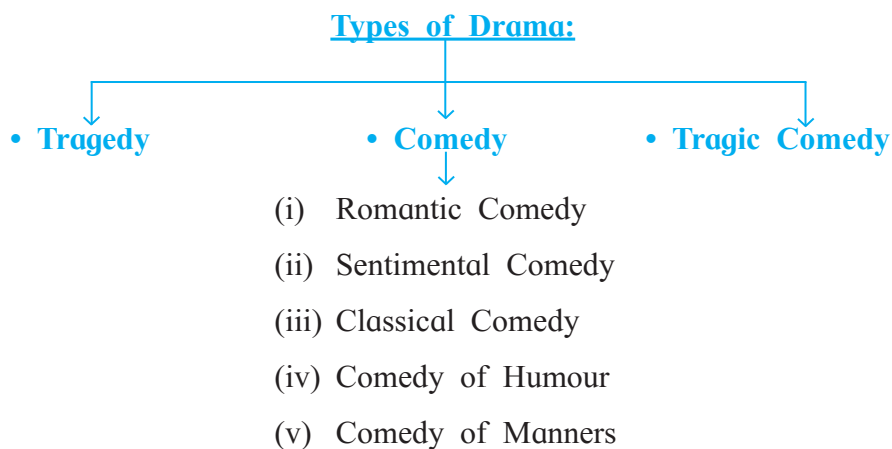
The four closely related areas of focus are-

1. The focus of the **scene**
2. The focus of the **audience**
3. The focus of the **character**
4. The focus of the **actor**

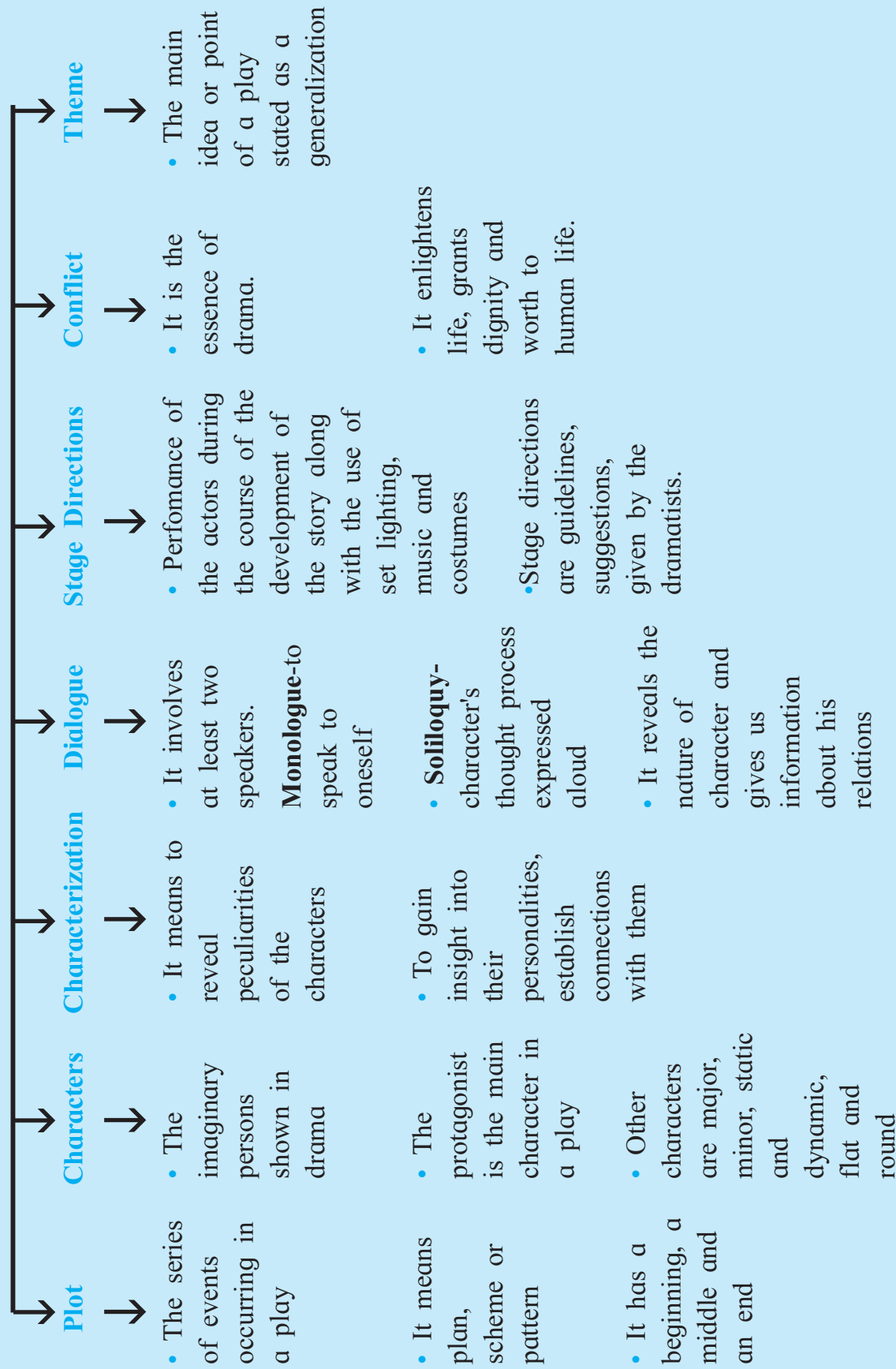
## Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able to :

- understand and identify drama as a genre of literature
- learn the definition of drama
- explain the difference between drama and other forms of literature
- explain the basic elements of drama
- understand the types of drama



# The Elements of Drama



## A Short History of Drama

- (I) Introduction to English drama (Theatre) :** Drama has its origins in folk theatre. We therefore cannot consider drama merely as a part of literature. Words are the medium of literature as an art but drama is a multiple art using words, scenic effects, music, gestures of the actors and the organising talents of a producer. The dramatist must have players, a stage and an audience.

The beginnings of drama in England are obscure. There is evidence to believe that when the Romans were in England they established vast amphitheatres for the production of plays but when the Romans departed their theatre departed with them. Then there were minstrels. People enjoyed their performances. Gradually by the 10<sup>th</sup> century the ritual of the plays that itself had something dramatic in it, got extended into the rudiments of a play. Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century drama started having themes which were separated from religion. The words themselves were spoken in English, a longer dramatic script came into use, and they were called Miracle plays. Later, these religious dramas were the Morality plays in which characters were abstract vices and virtues. These were allegories.

- (II) Elizabethan and Restoration drama (Theatre) :** These Secular Morality plays have direct links with Elizabethan plays. The Renaissance imposed a learned tradition, classical in depth with themes of education, general moral problems and secular politics. The plays had nothing to do with religion. There were examples of both, comedy and tragedy. Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare are the prime dramatists of this era. It was Kyd who discovered how easily blank verse might be converted into a useful theatrical medium which Shakespeare used brilliantly in all his plays. Tragedy developed in the hands of Kyd and Marlowe. Comedy had also proceeded beyond rustic humour. But by the nineties of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the theatre in England was fully established but complicated conditions governed the activities of the dramatist.

The public theatre of the 16<sup>th</sup> century differed in many important ways from the modern theatre. It was open to sky, without artificial lighting, the stage was a raised platform with the recess at the back supported by pillars. There was no curtain and the main platform could be surrounded on three sides by the audience. Around the theatre there were galleries. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the enclosed theatre gained importance. There was increasing attention to scenic device as theatre became private.

Shakespearean era came into existence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the public theatre. He wrote for the contemporary theatre, manipulating the Elizabethan stage with great resource and invention. But the genius of Shakespeare should not allow the rest of the drama of his age to be obscured. Contemporary

to him was Ben Johnson, a classicist, a moralist and a reformer of drama. In comedy, Johnson's genius is found at its best and his influence was considerable. The Restoration dramatists leaned strongly upon him.

Closing of theatres by the Puritans in 1642 brought this greatest of all periods in the history of English drama to an end. With the Civil wars no theatre existed between 1642 to 1660. The next phase which appeared after the Restoration produced a very different kind of dramatic literature. Dramatists like Chapman, Thomas Middleton, Webster and Dekker were at the forefront.

When Charles II came back with the Restoration of 1660, the theatres were reopened. The Restoration comedy achieved its peculiar excellence. Drama developed into class drama with upper-class ethos. It lasted beyond this period into the first decade of the 18th century. Comedy in the early 18th century declined into sentimentalism. It became Comedy of Manners. George Etherege was its most important exponent. From such depths the drama was rescued by Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan. With Sheridan, something of the brilliance of restoration dialogue returned into comedy but with more genial atmosphere. The characters were firmly presented with clarity, reminiscent of Johnson but with no depth in Sheridan's world, no new interpretation of human nature. In this he was nearer to Oscar Wilde than to Johnson.

**(III) Modern drama (Theatre) :** The modern theatre with its picture frame stage, its actresses taking female parts, its moveable scenery designed to create a visual image of the locale of each scene and its artificial light was developed during the Restoration period. There is clear influence of France on theatre, the audience and the themes.

The drama of the early 19th century was on the whole on the way to decline for many reasons. The theatre was home, mainly to irregular spectacle, melodrama and farce. A simple external reason can be found in the monopoly held by the two houses, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, for the performance of serious drama. The audiences which gathered to the 19th century theatre had not the intelligence or the imagination of the Elizabethan audience. The danger in the 19th century theatre was that, above all, it was unrelated to the life of the time. The changes in the structure of society had so modified the human personality itself that a new interpretation was essential.

Ibsen, the great Norwegian dramatist of the 19th century, dominates the realistic drama. He developed modernist, realist, social and psychological dramas like *The Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People*. They are far more subtle in stagecraft and profound in thought than anything in the modern English theatre. But it was only George Bernard Shaw who

was deeply influenced and affected by Ibsen's innovative contributions and experimentation. He was the most brilliant playwrights of his times. He alone had understood the greatness of Ibsen and he was determined that his own plays should also be a vehicle for ideas. The responsibility of elevation of the English drama to the brilliance of the Norwegian, fell with Oscar Wilde and G. B. Shaw in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century showed a talent in the drama with which the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not compete. H. Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, St. John Ervine were some of the playwrights who explored contemporary problems. St. John Ervine had been associated with a group of Irish dramatists whose work was normally produced in the Abbey theatre in Dublin. Much that is best in the modern drama in English developed from this movement. One of its originators was Lady Gregory with W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge. They were the most important dramatists of this Irish revival who used a sense of tragic irony, a violent species of humour and a rich and highly flavoured language.

T.S. Eliot experimented with Greek tragedy in the early forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other dramatists of the modern era, John Osborne, wrote on people who grew up after the Second World War. Kingsley Amis wrote about frustrated, anti-establishment young people. Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* brought a new vitality to the theatre scene. It was more a cultural phenomenon than the work of literature. Other important playwrights of the modern era include Anton Chekhov, Bertolt Brecht, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter.

#### (IV) Indian drama (Theatre) :

Earliest seeds of modern Indian Drama can be found in the Sanskrit Drama from the first century A.D. *Mahabhasya* by Patanjali provides a feasible date for the beginning of theatre in India. The major source of evidence is 'A Treatise on Theatre' (NatyaShastra) by Bharat Muni is the most complete work of dramatology in the ancient world. It gives mythological account of the origin of theatre. Modern Indian drama, however, has influences from all over the world, as well as Sanskrit and Urdu traditions.

HISTORY OF DRAMA			
PERIODS IN HISTORY	TYPES OF PLAYS	CLASSICS (PLAYS)	
MEDIEVAL PERIOD (11th to 15th Century Reign of Henry VI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Didactic plays</li> <li>- Mystery plays / Miracle plays</li> <li>- Cycle plays, Morality plays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Robin Hood</i> by Howard Pyle, <i>Everyman</i> etc.</li> </ul>	
RENAISSANCE PERIOD (1600 to 1700, Reign of Elizabeth I and James I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tragi-comedy</li> <li>- Melancholy</li> <li>- Revenge plays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Romeo And Juliet</i> (Tragedy), <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> (Comedy), <i>Henry IV</i> (Historical) by Shakespeare</li> <li>- <i>Dr. Faustus</i> and <i>Jew of Malta</i> by Christopher Marlowe</li> <li>- <i>Duchess of Malfi</i> by John Webster</li> <li>- <i>The Changeling</i> by Thomas Middleton</li> </ul>	
RESTORATION PERIOD (1660 onwards, Reign of Charles II)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Heroic drama</li> <li>- Pathetic drama</li> <li>- Restoration comedy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>All For Love</i> (Tragedy) by John Dryden</li> <li>- <i>The Way of The World</i> (Comedy) by William Congereve</li> </ul>	
VICTORIAN PERIOD (1837 to 1901, Reign of Queen Victoria)	All types of plays were performed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The Importance of being Earnest</i> by Oscar Wilde</li> <li>- <i>Candia</i> by G.B. Shaw</li> <li>- <i>A Doll's House</i> } by Henrik Ibsen</li> <li>- <i>An Enemy of the People</i> }</li> </ul>	
MODERN PERIOD (1901 TO 1945)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stream of consciousness,</li> <li>- Absurd plays,</li> <li>- Poetic drama,</li> <li>- Radio drama</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Pygmalion</i> by G.B.Shaw</li> <li>- <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> (poetic drama) by T.S.Eliot</li> </ul>	
POST MODERN ERA (1945 to 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Almost all types of dramas were performed</li> <li>- Kitchen sink drama</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Look Back in Anger</i> by John Osborne</li> <li>- <i>Waiting for Godot</i> by Samuel Beckett</li> </ul>	



## About One Act Play

The revised Coursebook for Std. XI focuses on language and literature. Students should be able to enjoy, appreciate and digest the various forms of literature. Literature provides a gateway to express emotions. This is a paradigm shift from studying general extracts of literature to understanding a specific genre of literature. With this intention, a One Act Play, as a genre, has been selected for close study to Std. XI.

A one act play is not exactly a shortened play. It is a complete story that has to be performed on the stage in stipulated time. It has its own features and characteristics. The action is confined to a single place and the number of characters is limited. Simplicity of design and quick effect are its features. The prescribed one act play will help the learners to understand the following features.

**1. Plot-** The plot of a one act play is limited to a single interesting episode. The plot of any piece of literature is a story that has been woven into a closely related chain of events arranged in sequence. It is said that '**conflict is the soul of drama**'. We usually have conflict in a play. But modern plays of the '**Theatre of the Absurd**' are an exception to it.

**2. Theme-** A theme is the central idea around which the plot revolves. It is directly stated through the playwright's instructions, dialogues and other features. It focuses on the subject of the play. It can be implicit or explicit. There can be a number of sub-themes that portray human life. The theme helps to convey the message of the playwright.

**3. Setting-** Setting or location is a place where the story occurs. A drama is meant for stage performance. The location or setting is revealed through effective use of a variety of props. The unity of time, place and action has to be taken into consideration while setting the stage. The proper use of setting/props helps the play to be impactful.

**4. Language-** We all know that the 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. Likewise, words are the weapons of a writer. There is another language too. Have you enjoyed films of **Charlie Chaplin**, who uses nonverbal communication very effectively through his body? It conveys emotions and underlying meanings profoundly. One act play has a profound effect due to its brevity of words. If the dialogues are witty, pungent and concise, they add to the overall impact of the play e.g. Shakespeare's Hamlet says "To be or Not to be". The dialogues of the playwright use techniques like projection, articulation and phrasing for effective communication. Poetic devices and figures of speech like imagery, symbolism, personification and humour embedded in wit, pun, irony, and paradox make the dialogues extremely powerful. The tone of the dialogue can be comic, ironic, light, playful, sad, serious, sinister, solemn, sombre, threatening etc.



**5. Characters-** There are a limited number of characters in one act plays. There are two types of characters-main and supporting. E M Foster in his *Aspects of the Novel* divides characters in two types: **Round:** the one that develops through the experiences and evolves as a dynamic persona and a **Flat** character is one who remains the same throughout the story. Flat characters are also known as **Caricatures** and recognized only through one characteristic. The story revolves around the main character or characters who face a dilemma or conflict.

#### Features of One Act Play:

1. It has one or more scenes.
2. It is concise in manner.
3. It has a single dominant theme which produces singular effect.
4. It treats problems of everyday life.
5. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. The stages are as follows-

1	Exposition	is brief, introductory
2	Conflict	Development of drama, –It is a backbone.
3	Climax	Turning point, an important part
4	Denouement	Brief, often overlaps climax

6. It gives introduction of stage direction.
7. It creates mood or atmosphere.
8. It has unity of time, place and action.
9. It has simplicity of plot, concentration of action and unity of Impression.
10. It has limited characters.
11. It presents a question, answers of which are eagerly awaited by the audience.

#### Creativity

The course book aims not only at understanding and at studying the given genre but also at being creative to use the features of the same, to express feelings and ideas. Learners should try to produce the given content in their own language. They are expected to add some of their own imaginative beginnings or ends by using the features obtained from the given one act play. It will be an aid to create the citizens having linguistic proficiency. The learners are expected to study as well as enjoy exploring the richness of the language by studying a genre in detail.

## Objective Test

1. Name any four periods of History of British Drama.

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2. List the four elements of drama.

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3. State a type of drama each from any four periods of history.

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4. Compare the features of comedy and tragedy.

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5. State the difference between poetry and drama.

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6. State the difference between drama and novel.

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7. Define drama.

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8. Explain the term 'plot'.

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9. Differentiate between characters and characterization.

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10. List a few reasons for watching a drama live on the stage.

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