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M. A. Part-II : English

Semester-IV

**Drama in English :
Modern and Postmodern**

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Preface

Dear Students,

This book contains Self- Learning Material on the core paper Drama in English : Modern and Postmodern . You must have seen the detailed syllabus prescribed for this paper. The syllabus contains the book from which certain chapters have been prescribed for you for detailed study of the topics stated in the syllabus. Besides there is a list of reference books for additional reading on those topics. In this book there are four Units dealing with the topics in the syllabus, in a detailed manner, making them simple for you to understand. In addition to that, there are one sentences or one word questions interseperated in each unit along with some objective type questions also. They are meant for making you go back to the unit again and again in search of the answers so that you become more and more familiar with the topics and ideas contained in the unit. For Self- check, there are answers of these questions given at the end of each unit. Try to answer the questions in the self-check exercise and then only see the answers given at the end of the unit. This will help you to correct your own answers.

Even though each unit in this book extensively deals with the topics in the syllabus, these are only notes for your guidance. You ought to refer to the original materials in the books prescribed. The units in this book are topics simplified for your guidance. You should supplement this material from your own additional reading.

There are exercises given at the end of each unit, which contain broad answer type questions, which you may face in the final examination. Try to write answers for these questions with the help of this book.

We wish you best luck in your final examination.

- Editors

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Drama in English: Modern & Postmodern
M. A. Part-II Semester-IV

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Each Unit begins with the section objectives -

Objectives are directive and indicative of :

1. what has been presented in the unit and
2. what is expected from you
3. what you are expected to know pertaining to the specific unit, once you have completed working on the unit.

The self check exercises with possible answers will help you understand the unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answers only after you write your answers. These exercises are not to be submitted to us for evaluation. They have been provided to you as study tools to keep you in the right track as you study the unit.

Dear Students

The SLM is simply a supporting material for the study of this paper. It is also advised to see the syllabus for 2024-25 and study the reference books & other related material for the detailed study of the paper.

Unit-1
General Topic : Rejection of Realism in Drama
Text : Luigi Pirandello's Henry IV

1.1 Introduction

In this unit we will study about realism and rejection of realism. We will also study Luigi Pirandello's *Henry IV* which is translated in to English.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are as follows

1. To study realism in drama.
2. To study the rejection of realism in drama.
3. To understand the basic principles and techniques of modern drama.
4. To study various movements in modern drama in the first half of twentieth century.
5. To study the life and writings of Luigi Pirandello.
6. To study the various aspects of the play

1.3 Rejection of Realism in Drama

1.3.1 Definition and meaning of realism.

Realism in drama refers to a movement aimed at presenting life as it truly is, without idealization, romantic embellishments and exaggerations. Realism Emerged as a reaction against the larger-than-life characters and fantastical settings of Romanticism and melodrama. Realism tried to mirror everyday life, focusing on ordinary people and their experiences. The last quarter of the 19th century witnessed a significant transformation in theatrical art.

The rise of realism in drama was rooted in the social, cultural, and intellectual climate of the late 19th century. Industrialization had transformed society, fostering urbanization and a growing middle class. Scientific advancements and the contributions of thinkers like Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Auguste Comte influenced a shift toward a rational understanding of the world. Realism in drama

reflected this intellectual trend, highlighting observable, tangible realities over abstract ideals.

The realist movement also resulted in innovations in staging, acting and production. Konstantin Stanislavski, a key figure in the Russian theatre, developed the Stanislavski System. It was a method of acting that required actors to draw upon their own emotional experiences to portray characters authentically. The Moscow Art Theatre which was co-founded by Stanislavski, became a hub for realist productions. It staged works by Chekhov and other contemporaries. Set designs became increasingly detailed, aiming to replicate real-world environments. The use of lighting, props and costumes contributed to the verisimilitude of the performance.

Traits of realism in drama:

1. Fidelity to Everyday Life: Realist plays portray plausible and relatable situations grounded in the realities of human life.
2. Complex Characters: Unlike the typical heroes and villains of romantic drama, realist characters are multifaceted. Their motivations and flaws are reflective of real human psychology.
3. Social issues: Realist playwrights explore social issues such as class struggle, gender inequality, and the challenges of modern life.
4. Natural Dialogue: Language in realist plays reflects actual speech. It avoids poetic accompaniments or impressive monologues.
5. Settings: Realist drama features accurately designed sets that replicate real-world environments to enhance the authenticity of the story.

The Pioneers of Realist Drama:

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906)

Henrik Ibsen is regarded as the father of modern realism in drama. His works, such as '*A Doll's House*' (1879) and '*Ghosts*' (1881), address controversial social issues, including the restrictions of marriage, gender roles, and societal hypocrisy. '*A Doll's House*', critiques the stifling norms of Victorian society by depicting Nora's journey toward self-liberation. She challenges traditional notions of family and morality.

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)

Anton Chekhov's plays, such as *The Seagull* (1896) and *Uncle Vanya* (1899), exemplify the subtleties of realist drama. His works focus on the inner lives of characters and the complexity of human relationships. Chekhov's use of subtext, where emotions and conflicts are often implied rather than explicitly stated, became a hallmark of modern realism.

Émile Zola (1840–1902)

Zola is primarily known as a novelist, but he contributed significantly to the development of naturalism, a more intense form of realism. In his play *Thérèse Raquin* (1873), Zola employed a scientific approach to storytelling, examining the deterministic influence of heredity and environment on human behavior. His works emphasized the idea that drama should serve as a "slice of life," free from artificial constructions.

The last quarter of the 19th century laid the foundation for modern drama and theatre. Realism challenged traditional notions of what drama could achieve, paving the way for 20th-century movements such as psychological realism and modernist theater. Even today, the principles of realism resonate in contemporary drama, film, and television, where authenticity and relatability remain central to storytelling.

Realism in drama represents a shift toward portraying the human condition with honesty. The realist movement was rooted in the societal transformations of the late 19th century. It revolutionized theatrical art by embracing ordinary lives and real-world issues. Through the works of Ibsen, Chekhov, and others, realism continues to inspire. It invites audiences to confront the complexities of existence and reflect upon their own realities.

1.3.2 Rejection of realism:

The 20th century witnessed a dramatic change in the conventions of theatre. Playwrights and theorists increasingly turned away from realism, which was a dominant form of drama in the 19th century. The political, social, and technological changes of the 20th century led many dramatists to reject realism. They explored new forms and techniques that better captured the complexities and uncertainties of modern existence. By the early 20th century, the limitations of realism became apparent to many playwrights. Realism's focus on the material world was seen as

inadequate for expressing the deeper psychological, existential, and metaphysical concerns of the time. The violence of World War I, the rise of totalitarian regimes and the rapid advancements in technology and science demanded new ways of seeing and understanding the world.

Theoretical Foundations of the Rejection of Realism

The rejection of realism in 20th century was reinforced by a range of philosophical and theoretical developments. The works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung introduced the concept of the unconscious, challenging the rationalism inherent in realism. Existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus questioned the nature of existence and the search for meaning. Advancements in science, such as quantum mechanics, destabilized the deterministic worldview that realism often upheld.

Theatrical Movements that Rejected Realism:

1. Expressionism

The earliest rejection of realism came through expressionism. It was a movement that aimed to depict subjective experience rather than objective reality. Expressionist playwrights like August Strindberg, Georg Kaiser, and Eugene O'Neill used distorted characters, exaggerated dialogue, and fragmented plots to convey emotional truths and existential anguish. For example, Strindberg's '*A Dream Play*' (1901) rejects realistic structures and presents a series of dreamlike episodes that explore human suffering and divine indifference.

2. Epic Theatre

The epic theatre, pioneered by Bertolt Brecht, represents another major rejection of realism. Brecht sought to develop a theatre that promoted critical thinking rather than emotional identification. His use of techniques such as the "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*), direct address to the audience, and visible stage mechanics destroyed the illusion of reality. In works like '*The Three penny Opera*' (1928) and '*Mother Courage and Her Children*' (1939), Brecht rejected the realistic portrayal of characters and situations. Instead he encouraged audience to question societal norms and power structures.

3. Grotesque theatre

Grotesque theatre challenges conventional storytelling and aesthetic norms. It is characterized by blending of the bizarre, the macabre and the comically absurd. Grotesque theatre provides a lens through which audiences can explore the complexities of human existence, societal contradictions, and the tension between beauty and horror. It is rooted in both historical traditions and modern innovations. this unique theatrical style has evolved to provoke thought, evoke deep emotional responses, and subvert expectations.

The grotesque has long been a part of artistic expression, tracing its roots to the Italian word *grottesco* which means "of a cave" or "grotto," which emerged in the Renaissance to describe strange, ornamental art forms inspired by ancient Roman wall paintings. 'Theatre of the Grotesque' is also considered to be rooted in Crepuscular poetry. Crepuscular poetry, or twilight poetry rejects poetic conventions and the socially accepted anthropocentric world view. Crepuscular poetry also strives to undermine human certainties and does so in a surreal way.

In the theatrical realm, the grotesque gained prominence as a dramatic device in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was influenced by the Symbolist movement, which emphasized the use of imagery and symbolism to evoke deeper truths. It was also influenced by modernist reactions to societal upheaval, following World War I.

The grotesque was pioneered by playwrights such as Luigi Chiarelli, Luigi Pirandello and Alfred Jarry. Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) is an important example, presenting absurdity and grotesque humour to critique societal norms and political corruption. Luigi Chiarelli labelled his play '*The Mask and the Face*', written in 1913 as "a Grotesque in Three Acts". His play gave rise to 'Theatre of the Grotesque' as a dramatic style. This style was accepted rapidly in the theatrical world, particularly in Italy. The grotesque became a tool to challenge traditional narrative structures, provoking audience with unsettling juxtapositions that mirrored the fragmented reality of modern life.

Characteristics of Grotesque Theatre

1. Union of Contradictory Elements: The grotesque relies on the tension between opposites, such as beauty and ugliness, humour and horror, or the sublime and the ridiculous. This duality creates a sense of unease and fascination, which compels audience to confront uncomfortable truths.

2. Exaggeration and Distortion: Characters, settings, and narratives are exaggerated or distorted to an extreme. Physical deformities, bizarre costumes and surreal landscapes are common. All these emphasize the absurdity or fragility of human existence.

3. Satirical and Political: Grotesque theatre employs satire to critique societal norms, institutions and power structures. It exposes the flaws and contradictions within systems of authority and culture.

4. Emotional Ambivalence: The grotesque evokes mixed emotions like laughter that borders on discomfort or fear mixed with fascination. This encourages introspection, and audience grapple with their reactions to the material.

5. Breakdown of Traditional Narrative: Grotesque plays often avoid linear storytelling in favour of fragmented or cyclical structures. This mirrors the chaos of the world they portray.

The best example of grotesque tradition is Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. It is a meta theatrical play. The play blurs the lines between reality and fiction. Six unfinished characters confront their creator, exposing the artificiality of theatre and the complexities of identity. Samuel Beckett's "*Waiting for Godot*" is often associated with absurdist theatre. However, the play incorporates grotesque elements through its portrayal of aimless characters in a barren landscape, emphasizing the futility of existence. Eugène Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* is also an example of the grotesque. This play uses nonsensical dialogue and repetitive actions to critique the banality of communication and societal conventions. In film and multimedia, directors like Guillermo del Toro and Yorgos Lanthimos integrate grotesque theatrical elements, blending fantastical imagery with dark, unsettling narratives. The grotesque has also found a place in immersive and participatory theatre, where audiences become active participants in bizarre, surreal experiences.

The grotesque serves an important function in both art and society. By disrupting expectations and confronting audience with uncomfortable realities, it encourages critical thinking and self-reflection. Its emphasis on duality and contradiction mirrors the complexities of the human condition. It illustrates that beauty and horror, laughter and despair are inseparably intertwined. Grotesque theatre provides a space to explore societal taboos and existential fears. It challenges norms about the nature of reality, identity and morality.

4. Surrealism and Avant-Garde Theatre

Surrealist dramatists were influenced by the writings of André Breton and the visual arts movement. They rejected realism in favor of exploring the unconscious mind. Works such as Anton Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) advocated for a "theatre of cruelty". It bypassed logical narrative and appealed directly to the senses. Artaud proposed a visceral theatre that shocked audiences into confronting their deepest fears and desires.

5. Theatre of the Absurd

The mid-20th century witnessed the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd. It was a movement that fully embraced the breakdown of realistic conventions. Playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet composed plays that reflected the existential despair and alienation of the post-war world. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), the plot is minimal, characters are archetypal, and language is fragmented. All these traits underscore the futility and meaninglessness of human existence.

The rejection of realism in early 20th century restructured the landscape of modern drama. It also opened up new possibilities for theatrical expression. By breaking free from the confines of naturalism and realism, playwrights were able to explore abstract ideas, challenge societal norms, and experiment with innovative staging techniques. These movements also paved the way for forms of theatre such as postmodern and immersive theatre. These forms continue to push the boundaries of the art form. The rejection of realism in modern drama during early 20th century was a response to the cultural, intellectual, and political changes of the era. The movements like expressionism, epic theatre and absurdism challenged the mimetic principles of realism. These movements offered audiences new ways to engage with the complexities of human experience. This radical departure from realism not only enriched the theatrical canon but also affirmed the capacity of drama to evolve and adapt to the shifting contours of modern life.

1.4 Life and Works of Luigi Pirandello:

Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) was an Italian dramatist, novelist, poet, and short story writer, best known for his contributions to modern theatre. His works are characterized by themes of identity, reality, and illusion, challenging conventional

narratives and societal norms. Pirandello's literary achievements earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934, establishing his position as one of the most influential literary figures of the 20th century.

Pirandello was born on June 28, 1867, in Agrigento, Sicily. He was raised in a prosperous family involved in Sulphur mining. His upbringing in Sicily, a region steeped in tradition and social contrasts, influenced his literary themes. Pirandello demonstrated an early interest in literature and attended the University of Palermo before transferring to the University of Rome and later the University of Bonn in Germany. He earned his doctorate in philology in 1891.

Pirandello's literary career began with poetry. His first published work, *Mal giocondo* (1889), reflects the influence of Romanticism. But he gradually shifted toward realism and themes of existential conflict. His early prose, including the novel *L'esclusa* (1901), explored societal hypocrisy and personal suffering.

Pirandello's life took a dramatic turn in 1903 when his family faced financial ruin due to a flood that destroyed the Sulphur mine his father managed. This economic ruin deeply affected Pirandello and his wife, Antonietta Portulano. His wife's subsequent mental health struggles shaped Pirandello's worldview. These personal tragedies brought about a shift in his writing toward exploring the complexities of human psychology and the fluid nature of reality.

During this period, Pirandello published *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904), his most celebrated novels. The story of Mattia Pascal deals with a man who fakes his death to start anew, only to find himself trapped in a web of identity crises. This novel exemplifies Pirandello's fascination with the conflict between appearance and reality.

Pirandello's most significant contributions were to modern theatre. He revolutionized traditional forms with his exploration of meta-theatre, subjective truth, and the instability of identity. His plays often blurred the boundaries between performance and reality.

His seminal work, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), exemplifies his innovative approach. The play depicts six unfinished characters who interrupt a rehearsal, seeking an author to complete their story. Through this surreal premise, Pirandello explores the autonomy of fictional characters, the nature of authorship, and the interplay between art and life. The play was initially controversial, but its revolutionary structure eventually earned acclaim. The play marked a turning point in

modern drama. Pirandello's other notable plays include *Henry IV* (1922), which delves into madness and role-playing. *Right You Are (If You Think So)* (1917), which examines the relativity of truth. These plays reflect Pirandello's interest in the fragmentation of identity and the subjective nature of human experience.

Pirandello was also a prolific short story writer. He wrote over 200 stories that delve into the complexities of Sicilian life and universal human struggles. Collections such as *Novelle per un anno* (Stories for a Year) show his keen observation of human nature and his skill in blending humor, tragedy, and irony.

Pirandello's later novels, such as *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand, 1926), continued to explore existential themes. In this work, the protagonist's obsessive quest for self-understanding highlights Pirandello's assertion that identity is not fixed but is instead shaped by others' perceptions and societal constructs.

By the 1920s, Luigi Pirandello had achieved international fame. His works were translated into numerous languages and performed worldwide. His influence extended beyond literature to philosophy, psychology, and film. In 1934, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature."

Pirandello's later years were marked by his ambiguous relationship with Italian Fascism. He initially supported Fascism but later distanced himself from it. He died on December 10, 1936, in Rome. Luigi Pirandello's works embody a profound engagement with the human condition, grappling with the instability of identity, the relativity of truth and the interplay between reality and illusion. His innovative contributions to drama and literature have cemented his status as a pioneer of modernism. His insights remain relevant in contemporary discourse. Pirandello's lasting influence attests to the universality and timelessness of his exploration of the complexities of existence.

1.5 Check your progress 1.

Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each

1. Which theatre did Konstantin Stanislavski establish?
2. State any two Traits of realism in drama.
3. Which social issues did realist playwrights explore in their plays?

4. Name two plays by Henrik Ibsen
5. Who is the protagonist of '*A Doll's House*'?
6. Name two plays by Anton Chekhov.
7. Who is the author of '*Thérèse Raquin*'?
8. Who is the author of '*Dream Play*'?
9. Name two plays of Bertolt Brecht.
10. Name two pioneers of the theatre of grotesque.
11. Who is the author of '*The Mask and the Face*'
12. Which play is considered as the best example of grotesque theatre?
13. Who was the greatest influence on Surrealist dramatists?
14. Which book deals with theatre of cruelty?
15. Who is the author of '*The Theatre and Its Double*'?
16. Name few playwrights who are categorized as writers of absurd plays.
17. When was Luigi Pirandello awarded the Nobel Prize for literature?
18. When was Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of An Author* first performed?

1.6 Henry IV: An introduction

Henry IV (Enrico Quarto) was first performed in 1922. The play deals with philosophical inquiries into the fluidity of human identity and the nature of truth. The play is tragicomedy in its essence. The plot revolves around a man who, after a traumatic fall during a medieval pageant, believes himself to be the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. Pirandello challenges conventional notions of sanity, the performance of identity and societal hypocrisy through interplay of drama and intellect.

The play opens in a setting similar to a medieval court, where the protagonist, Henry IV, has been living in isolation for many years. The "court" is not real. It is a result of the protagonist's belief that he is the German Emperor of the 11th century. His delusion stems from an accident that occurred during a historical pageant in

which he played role of Henry IV. After falling from his horse, he lost his grip on reality and became trapped in the persona of Henry IV.

A group of visitors, including the wealthy Donna Matilda, her daughter Frida, her lover Tito Belcredi, and the psychiatrist Dr.Genoni, arrives at the court to assess Henry IV's mental condition. They are accompanied by his loyal servant and four actors hired to maintain the illusion of his medieval world. The interactions between Henry and these characters expose complex layers of his personality and hint at a deeper awareness of his situation.

Eventually, the audience learns that Henry IV may not be as mad as he appears to be. He reveals that he has been aware of his true identity and surroundings for years but chooses to remain in his role to avoid facing the absurdity and cruelty of the outside world. The play ends in a dramatic act of violence. The audience are left with questions about sanity, freedom, and the masks people wear.

1.7 Act by act summary of *Henry IV*

CHARACTERS in the play:

"Henry IV."

The Marchioness Matilda Spina.

Her daughter Frida.

The young Marquis Charles Di Nolli.

Baron Tito Belcredi.

Doctor Dionysius Genoni.

The four private counsellors:

(The names in brackets are nicknames).

Harold (Frank),

Landolph (Lolo),

Ordulph (Momo),

Berthold (Fino).

John, The old waiter.

The two valets in costume.

The setting of the play is a solitary villa in Italy in modern time.

Act I:

Salon in the villa, furnished and decorated so as to look exactly like the throne room of Henry IV. in the royal residence at Goslar. Among the antique decorations there are two modern life-size portraits in oil painting. They are placed against the back wall, and mounted in a wooden stand that runs the whole length of the wall. (It is wide and protrudes, so that it is like a large bench). One of the paintings is on the right; the other on the left of the throne, which is in the middle of the wall and divides the stand.

The two portraits represent a lady and a gentleman, both young, dressed up in carnival costumes: one as "Henry IV." the other as the "Marchioness Matilda of Tuscany." Exits to Right and Left.

The play begins in the medieval court of "Henry IV," a space designed to maintain the delusion of the protagonist. He believes himself to be the Holy Roman Emperor of the 11th century. The setting is revealed to be a staged illusion. It is maintained by a group of actors hired to reinforce the protagonist's belief.

A group of visitors arrives: Donna Matilda, her daughter Frida, Tito Belcredi (Donna Matilda's lover), and Dr.Genoni, a psychiatrist. They are accompanied by Henry IV's servant, who explains the history of his master's condition. Years earlier, during a historical pageant, Henry IV had an accident. He fell from his horse and suffered a head injury. This trauma caused him to believe he was the historical figure he had been portraying in the pageant. De Nolli's dying mother had requested that he bring a doctor, Dionisio Genoni, to try to cure Henry. All the action of the play takes place on the day of the doctor's visit.

The play begins with the induction of Berthold into the group of Henry IV's privy councilors. Berthold has prepared for his part by studying the history of the wrong Henry—Henry IV of France. The visitors then arrive and are later introduced to Henry. He mistakes the disguised Belcredi for the monk Peter Damian and reacts angrily, but is later calmed.

The visitors are dressed in medieval costumes to avoid disturbing Henry IV. They plan to observe him and assess his mental state. Dr.Genoni hopes to cure him

by using modern psychological methods. Donna Matilda is motivated by guilt and curiosity. Tito Belcredi is sceptical and mocking. He brings an air of cynicism to the proceedings.

When Henry IV appears, he speaks with authority and intensity, fully embodying the role of the emperor. His interactions with the visitors are filled with dramatic tension as they struggle to determine whether his delusion is genuine or if he is aware of reality.

Act II:

Act two begins with discussion of the visitors about Henry's condition. They also discuss what he sees in Matilda. Henry enters once more and his behavior is increasingly erratic. In the absence of visitors, Henry declares to his councilors that he is not truly mad, but has been aware of the nature of his condition for some time. However he has preferred to stay as he was than to live in the 20th century.

In the second act, the focus shifts to deeper conversations and revelations about Henry IV's condition. The visitors' intentions are revealed. Dr. Genoni has a plan to shock Henry IV out of his delusion by introducing him to a situation that might force him to confront reality. He proposes using Frida, whose resemblance to Donna Matilda in her youth might provoke a powerful emotional reaction in Henry IV.

The act reveals the visitors' conflicting motivations. Donna Matilda feels guilt for her role in Henry IV's tragic situation, as he had been infatuated with her during the pageant. Tito Belcredi's disdainful attitude reflects his insecurities and a desire to assert control over the situation. Frida, caught in the middle, is reluctant but pressured by her mother and Tito to participate.

Henry IV reveals to his servants glimpses of self-awareness that unsettle the visitors. His sharp observations and occasional comments suggest that he might not be mad. The act ends with the tension building as the visitors prepare to execute the doctor's plan.

Act III:

The final act brings the play's themes to a dramatic climax. The visitors execute their plan. They present Frida to Henry IV in a way designed to mimic a scene from his past with Donna Matilda. The emotional weight of the moment causes Henry IV to respond with heightened intensity. But instead of succumbing to the psychological

shock, he surprises everyone by revealing the truth: he has been aware of his true identity for years.

Henry IV confesses that he initially believed he was the emperor after his accident but later regained his sanity. However, he chose to continue living the role because it provided him with a refuge from the harsh realities of the outside world. By pretending to be mad, he gained control over his environment and avoided confronting the societal expectations.

The revelation shocks the visitors. But the situation takes a dark turn when Henry IV lashes out at Tito Belcredi, whom he blames for his misfortunes. In a moment of rage, he stabs Tito, killing him. This act solidifies Henry IV's status as an outcast, as he can no longer adjust in the outside world without facing the consequences of his actions. Trapped in his chosen role, he resigns himself to his "madness," fully embracing his identity as the Emperor.

The play concludes on a tragic note, leaving the audience to think about the nature of reality, the masks people wear, and the choices individuals make to cope with life's absurdities.

1.8 Characters and characterization in Henry Iv

Luigi Pirandello's play Henry IV (Enrico IV) explores themes of identity, madness, and the nature of reality. Central to the play's impact is its complex characterization, which serves as a vehicle for Pirandello's philosophical inquiries. The characters in Henry IV are not merely individuals with roles to play; they embody larger questions about the boundaries between sanity and insanity, truth and illusion, and performance and authenticity. The so-called Henry Iv, with his complex blend of madness and mastery, stands as one of modern drama's most compelling figures. The supporting characters provides a rich tapestry of perspectives, each contributing to the play's exploration of its central themes. Through these characters, Pirandello creates a gripping narrative. He invites the audience to reflect on the roles we all play in the theater of life. Henry IV is not merely a study of one man's madness but a universal meditation on the fragile, performative nature of existence.

The Character of Henry IV: Madness or Mastery?

The protagonist of the play is referred to as Henry IV. He is the focal point of the play's exploration of identity. At first glance, he appears to be a madman,

deluded into believing he is the Holy Roman Emperor of the 11th century. However, as the plot unfolds, it becomes evident that his "madness" is far more complex. Henry IV is a multi-layered character who uses his assumed identity both as a shield and a weapon.

Pirandello reveals Henry IV's character through his actions, dialogue, and interactions with others. Initially, Henry seems trapped in his delusion. He maintains the illusion of the medieval emperor with an obsessive dedication to historical accuracy. However, his sharp wit and philosophical remarks reveal a man who is clearly aware of his situation. This duality invites the audience to question whether Henry is truly mad or whether he has chosen to embrace his role as a deliberate escape from a world that has wronged him.

Henry's characterization is related to his tragic background. The fact that he fell from a horse during a historical pageant, leading to a mental breakdown, adds depth to his personality. This accident becomes a metaphor for the fragility of identity and the ease with which it can be disrupted. However, his final acceptance that he is not truly Henry IV but continues the act to maintain control over his world complicates the narrative. This moment of self-awareness highlights Pirandello's theme of the fluidity of identity and the performative aspects of existence.

Other characters in the play:

The supporting characters in the play are portrayed to reflect and contrast with the protagonist. It enhances the play's thematic richness. These characters represent various perspectives on sanity, power and authenticity. They create a dynamic interplay that underscores Henry's complexity.

The Doctor and the Marquis: symbols of rationality and authority

The Doctor and the Marquis serve as representatives of social norms and the external world. The Doctor represents reason and scientific detachment. He proposes to "cure" Henry through psychological intervention. However, his characterization is slightly ironic. His rigid belief in logic and his confidence in his methods seem inadequate in the face of Henry's profound existential insight. The Marquis is a symbol of aristocratic authority and tradition. His attempts to control the situation reveal his limitations and insecurities.

Through characters of The Doctor and the Marquis, Pirandello critiques the inadequacy of conventional frameworks to address the complexities of human identity and mental states. Their interactions with Henry highlight the tension between societal expectations and individual realities.

Matilda and Frida: The Feminine Perspective

Matilda is Henry's former love. Frida is her daughter. Both women add an emotional dimension to the play. Matilda represents the past and the lingering pain of betrayal, as her affair indirectly led to Henry's fall. Matilda's characterization is marked by guilt and a desperate need for closure. Frida represents innocence and the future. She becomes a potential victim of Henry's constructed world when he momentarily believes her to be Matilda. These female characters emphasize the personal and relational consequences of Henry's isolation and his struggle with his identity.

The Valets: Performers Within the Performance

The valets who serve as Henry's medieval court are an example of Pirandello's meta-theatrical techniques. These characters are aware that they are playing roles within Henry's constructed reality, yet they exhibit varying degrees of engagement with their parts. Their willingness to participate in the simulation reflects the broader theme of life as a series of roles imposed by societal expectations. Their presence blurs the line between performance and reality.

Pirandello's approach to characterization in Henry IV serves a dual purpose. it creates emotional individuals while simultaneously engaging with abstract philosophical questions. The characters are not static; they evolve as the play progresses. They reveal hidden depths and complexities. Henry's swinging between rationality and madness mirrors the fluidity of identity. The supporting cast illustrates the external pressures that shape and constrain individuality. The interplay between the characters reinforces the play's central concern with the nature of reality. Henry's constructed world, though apparently a delusion, is presented as more authentic than the hypocritical, role-driven society represented by the visitors. This inversion challenges the audience to reconsider the boundaries between sanity and insanity, performance and truth.

1.9 Themes

Madness and Sanity

Pirandello's play 'Henry IV' questions the boundaries between madness and sanity. Pirandello blurs the line between these states. He portrays madness not as a medical condition but as a subjective perspective. Henry IV's "madness" provides him with a refuge from the chaos of modern life. His declaration of self-awareness challenges the audience to question whether he is truly mad or merely performing madness as a deliberate choice. Pirandello in his play critiques societal norms that define and marginalize those who deviate from accepted realities.

The Fluidity of Identity

Pirandello's play reflects his idea that identity is not fixed but is rather a performance shaped by external expectations and internal desires. Henry IV's assumption of the Emperor's role becomes a metaphor for how individuals construct identities to navigate their social realities. Through the character of Henry IV, Pirandello highlights the masks people wear to cope with life's absurdities. The play suggests that identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct.

Reality versus Illusion

Pirandello's play 'Henry IV' deals with the dichotomy between reality and illusion. This dichotomy is a recurring theme in Pirandello's works. The protagonist's medieval court is a carefully constructed illusion that serves as both a sanctuary and a prison. The visitors' interactions with Henry IV reveal their own illusions. They project their fears, desires and insecurities onto him. The play suggests that reality is subjective and contingent upon individual perception.

Power and Control

Henry IV's perceived madness grants him a unique form of power over others. By retreating into his delusion, he exercises control over his environment and people around him. This reversal of power dynamics raises questions about the relationship between authority, freedom, and societal structures. The visitors, despite their supposed sanity, are drawn into Henry's world and lose their sense of superiority. They become players in his drama.

1.10 Symbols in Henry IV

Luigi Pirandello's *Henry IV* employs rich symbolism to explore themes of self-perception, societal expectations, and the fluid boundaries between sanity and insanity. The symbols in the play serve to deepen the complexity of the narrative, creating layers of meaning that resonate with the reader and viewer. These symbols contribute to the play's central themes. Symbols in Luigi Pirandello's *Henry IV* are helpful in the play's exploration of identity, reality, and human frailty. The throne, costumes, masks and castle each contribute to the plot, offering insights into the protagonist's psyche and the universal struggles of self-perception and societal interaction. Through these symbols, Pirandello deepens the emotional and intellectual impact of the play. He also challenges audiences to reflect on their own identities and the roles they perform in their lives.

The Throne

The throne of Henry IV in the play is one of the most important symbols. It represents authority and power. However, for Henry IV, it also symbolizes isolation and entrapment. The protagonist, believing himself to be the Emperor, sits on the throne as a ruler cut off from the real world. The throne becomes a metaphor for the psychological prison Henry IV has constructed to shield himself from the pain of his past and the intrusion of reality. While the throne displays power and legitimacy in his delusion, it also marks him as a figure trapped in a static role. He is unable to engage with the changing world around him. The throne's duality symbolizes the tension between reality and illusion. While the throne appears to grant Henry IV power over his court, it also reveals his vulnerability. He is not a ruler in control but a man imprisoned by the very symbol of his imagined power.

Costumes

Costumes play a critical symbolic role in *Henry IV*. They emphasize the performative nature of identity. The characters in the play frequently wear costumes, particularly those who serve as Henry IV's courtiers. These garments enable the characters to inhabit their roles within the constructed medieval reality, blurring the lines between play-acting and authentic behavior. For Henry IV himself, the costume of the emperor is more than mere clothing; it is an external manifestation of his inner delusion. It allows him to maintain the illusion of his identity and avoid confronting the trauma of his past. The costumes of the other characters also highlight the ways

people adapt their appearances and behaviors to fit societal expectations and situational demands. In this way, the play questions the nature of identity as something flexible, performed, and, ultimately, illusory.

Masks

Masks are a frequent motif in Pirandello's works. In *Henry IV*, masks symbolize the concealment of true identity and emotions. The protagonist himself metaphorically wears a mask, presenting himself as the medieval emperor to shield his fractured psyche from external scrutiny. This symbolic masking is reflected by the other characters, who wear literal or figurative masks to participate in his delusion or conceal their own motives and insecurities. The mask as a symbol extends beyond individual characters to question the broader human experience. Pirandello suggests that all people wear masks to conform to societal roles, protect themselves from vulnerability, or navigate relationships. The removal or revelation of these masks often leads to discomfort, as it forces individuals to confront truths they may prefer to keep hidden.

The Castle

The castle in *Henry IV* is both a literal and symbolic setting. As a physical space, it isolates the protagonist from the outside world. It creates a controlled environment where his delusion can persist unchallenged. Symbolically, the castle represents the boundaries of Henry IV's mind—a fortress of madness that keeps him both safe and confined. The castle is also a symbol of nostalgia and the desire to retreat from the complexities of the modern world. It is a place where time stands still, allowing Henry IV to exist in a permanent medieval fantasy. However, this comes at a cost, because it prevents him from healing or reconnecting with reality. The castle's dual role as sanctuary and prison represents the central paradox of Henry IV's condition: his delusion protects him from pain while also traps him in a stagnant and unchanging existence.

1.11 Henry IV and Meta-Theatre

Pirandello's *Henry IV* is a meta-theatrical masterpiece. It uses the setting of a historical pageant to emphasize the performative aspects of life. The characters are actors in a literal and figurative sense. The play highlights the artifice of social roles. Henry IV's court is a stage where everyone participates in the illusion. It blurs the

line between actor and character, performance and authenticity. Henry IV masterfully employs meta-theatre to explore themes of identity, reality, and the nature of performance itself.

Meta-theatre is the self-referential use of theatrical elements to draw attention to the play's constructed nature. It serves as a critical device in Henry IV, blurring the boundaries between performance and reality. Through its use of role-playing, theatricality, and self-awareness, Pirandello creates a layered plot that challenges the audience's perceptions of truth and fiction.

Defining Meta-Theatre

Meta-theatre refers to moments in a play where the theatrical nature of the play is deliberately highlighted. It often breaks the fourth wall or draws attention to the artifice of performance. In Henry IV, Pirandello integrates meta-theatrical elements seamlessly into the plot. The central premise of the play is a man who believes he is the medieval Holy Roman Emperor, surrounded by actors playing the roles of his courtiers. This premise establishes a play-within-a-play structure. This setup serves as a constant reminder to the audience that what they are witnessing is a performance, both within the plot and on the stage.

Role-Playing and the Nature of Identity

The central idea in Henry IV is that identity is performative and constructed, a concept Pirandello explores through the characters' role-playing. The protagonist, apparently suffering from a delusion that he is Henry IV, lives in the role of the emperor with theatrical precision. Surrounding him are hired actors, dressed as medieval courtiers, who maintain his fantasy. This deliberate enactment of historical roles within the play mirrors the broader theatricality of human identity.

Pirandello uses meta-theatre to suggest that all individuals, like the characters in the play, perform roles in their lives. These roles are shaped by societal expectations and personal delusions. The courtiers' performance blurs the line between acting and being, as their adopted personas influence their behavior and interactions with Henry IV. The audience is compelled to question whether the protagonist's madness is genuine or a deliberate choice to retreat from reality.

The Fluidity of Reality

Meta-theatre in *Henry IV* also helps to deconstruct the concept of reality. The play constantly shifts between different layers of performance, making it difficult to discern where reality ends and illusion begins. For Henry IV, his court is both a tangible reality and a theatrical fiction. His delusion is sustained by the actors' performances, creating a world where the boundaries between the real and the imagined dissolve. Pirandello enhances this ambiguity through moments of self-awareness. Henry IV, in moments of rationality reveals an awareness of the absurdity of his situation. It suggests that his madness may itself be a conscious performance. This meta-theatrical twist—where the “mad” character becomes the most insightful observer—forces the audience to think about the instability of truth. By inserting layers of fiction within the play, Pirandello mirrors the complexity of human perception, where reality is often filtered through subjective interpretations.

Meta-theatre in *Henry IV* also functions as a critique of societal roles and the masks people wear to conform to expectations. The hired actors who play the role of courtiers of Henry IV embody the idea that individuals are often forced to adopt roles dictated by external circumstances. Their willingness to perpetuate Henry IV's delusion highlights the transactional and performative nature of human interactions.

Henry IV's predicament is a meta-theatrical commentary on the restrictions imposed by societal norms. His assumed identity as the emperor is a metaphor for the roles individuals are compelled to play in their lives, often at the expense of their authentic selves. Pirandello criticizes this tendency by exposing the artificiality of these roles through the play's layered theatricality. The audience is invited to think about their own participation in similar performances, where societal expectations dictate behavior and identity.

Audience as Co-Participants

Pirandello's use of meta-theatre in *Henry IV* extends to the audience, implicating them as co-participants in the drama. By drawing attention to the constructed nature of the play, *Henry IV* encourages viewers to question their role as passive observers. The artificiality of the medieval court, combined with the protagonist's moments of self-awareness, creates a sense of shared complicity between the characters and the audience. This deliberate blurring of the spectator-actor boundary reinforces the play's central themes of performance and perception.

Meta-theatre is a defining feature of *Henry IV*. It shapes its narrative and thematic structure. By using self-referential theatrical elements, Pirandello explores the constructed nature of identity, the fluidity of reality, and the performative aspects of societal roles. The play's layered approach to narrative challenges traditional notions of truth and fiction. *Henry IV* is not just a play about a man trapped in a delusion but a profound meditation on the human condition and the roles we all play in the grand performance of life.

1.12 Henry IV and Theatre of The Grotesque

Grotesque theatre challenges conventional storytelling and aesthetic norms. It is characterized by blending of the bizarre, the macabre and the comically absurd. Grotesque theatre provides a lens through which audiences can see the complexities of human existence, societal contradictions, and the tension between beauty and horror. It is rooted in both historical traditions and modern innovations. This unique theatrical style has evolved to provoke thought, evoke deep emotional responses, and subvert expectations.

The persistent use of grotesque elements in *Henry IV* unsettle the audience and force a re-evaluation of reality. The grotesque is used as a literary and dramatic device that blends the comic with the horrifying, creating a space where boundaries between reality and illusion are blurred. In *Henry IV*, Pirandello employs grotesque elements not only as a thematic and stylistic device but also as a means to question the very fabric of human perception and identity.

Madness as Grotesque

Henry IV is the protagonist, a modern man who believes or pretends to believe that he is the 11th-century German Emperor Henry IV. This delusion is the result of a fall from his horse during a historical pageant, which he initially began as an act of play. His descent into "madness" after the accident represents a grotesque inversion of time and identity. The audience is invited to oscillate between pity and laughter at his condition.

Madness in the play functions as both a liberation and a prison. While it shields the protagonist from the problems of modern life, it also locks him in a constructed reality that he cannot or will not escape. His exaggerated medieval behavior, coupled with his sharp intelligence, creates a paradox: Is his madness genuine, or is it a

conscious performance? The grotesque ambiguity of this question highlights the instability of human identity, a recurring theme in Pirandello's works.

The blending of Reality and Illusion

Henry IV thrives on the interplay between reality and illusion which is an important feature of the grotesque. The setting of the play itself is symbolic: the play takes place in a room transformed into a medieval throne room, complete with tapestries, throne and costumes. This artificial space is both a stage and a prison. The supporting characters, servants hired to perpetuate Henry's fantasy, further blur the boundary between performance and reality.

The grotesque in Henry IV reaches the highest point when the protagonist reveals that he is not mad. He reveals that he regained his sanity years ago but has chosen to remain in his medieval persona. His revelation destabilizes the audience's understanding of his madness. Is he a tragic figure clinging to a safer past, or is he mocking the absurdities of modernity by rejecting its conventions? The grotesque lies in this ambiguity, where neither the characters nor the audience can distinguish truth from illusion.

The blending of Comic and the Tragic

The grotesque in Henry IV is also result of blending of the comic and the tragic. Many scenes in the play are full of absurdity, such as the hired actors' exaggerated performances or the awkward attempts of the noble visitors to humour the "mad" protagonist. These moments provoke laughter but are also a source of a deep sense of unease. The protagonist's wit and eloquence, combined with his supposed insanity, highlight the fragile line between rationality and madness. The comic elements in the play serve to heighten the tragedy. For instance, the final act, where the protagonist is forced to confront the consequences of his delusion. It reveals the devastating cost of his self-imposed exile. His sudden act of violence, killing Tito Belcredi, shatters the layer of comedy and plunges the plot into tragedy. This sudden tonal shift is grotesque. It emphasizes the chaotic and unpredictable nature of human existence.

The Grotesque as a Reflection of Pirandello's Philosophy

Pirandello's use of the grotesque in Henry IV is deeply rooted in his broader philosophical concerns. The central idea in his works is that identity is a fluid and unstable construct. It is shaped by the masks individuals wear to navigate social

expectations. The protagonist's adoption of the medieval persona is both a critique of these masks and exploration of their necessity. His grotesque condition reflects the existential predicament of all human beings, caught between the desire for authenticity and the need for societal acceptance. The grotesque in the play also reflects Pirandello's skepticism of absolute truth. Just as the characters cannot determine the protagonist's true mental state, the audience is left to deal with multiple, often contradictory interpretations of the narrative. This ambiguity is not merely a dramatic device but a philosophical statement on the relativity of human perception.

The grotesque elements in Pirandello's *Henry IV* serve as a powerful lens through which to examine the play's central themes of madness, identity, and the interplay between reality and illusion. Pirandello creates a work that defies simple categorization. By blending the comic and the tragic, the absurd and the profound. The grotesque elements in the play destabilize the audience's expectations, forcing them to confront the fragility of their own perceptions. In doing so, the play transcends the boundaries of conventional drama, offering a timeless meditation on the human condition.

1.13 Check your progress 2.

Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each

1. When was *Henry IV* first performed?
2. What is the Italian title of *Henry IV*?
3. Who is Henry's nephew?
4. Who has come to cure Henry IV?
5. Whom did Henry love before his accident?
6. Who is Matilda Spina's present lover?
7. In the beginning of *Henry IV*, who is inducted into the Privy Council of Henry IV?
8. Who is mistaken for the monk Peter Damian by Henry?
9. Who is Matilda Spina's daughter?
10. Who is stabbed by Henry at the end of the play?

1.14 Summary

Luigi Pirandello's play *Henry IV* explores themes of identity, madness, and the nature of reality. The complex characterization in the play serves as a vehicle for Pirandello's philosophical inquiries. The characters in *Henry IV* embody larger questions about the boundaries between sanity and insanity, truth and illusion and performance and authenticity. Henry IV, with his complex blend of madness and mastery, stands as one of modern drama's most compelling figures. The supporting characters provide a rich tapestry of perspectives, each contributing to the play's exploration of its central themes. Through these characters, Pirandello creates a gripping narrative. He invites the audience to reflect on the roles we all play in the theatre of life. *Henry IV* is not merely a study of one man's madness but a universal meditation on the fragile and performative nature of existence.

1.15 Answers to check your progress

Answers to check your progress 1.

1. The Moscow Art Theatre
2. Fidelity to Everyday Life and Complex Characters
3. class struggle, gender inequality, and the challenges of modern life
4. A Doll's House and Ghosts.
5. Nora.
6. The Seagull and Uncle Vanya
7. Emile Zola
8. August Strindberg
9. The Threepenny Opera' and Mother Courage
10. Luigi Chiarelli and Luigi Pirandello
11. Luigi Chiarelli
12. Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author
13. André Breton
14. The Theatre and Its Double'
15. 'Antonin Artaud
16. Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet

17. 1934.

18. 1921.

Answers to check your progress 2.

1. 1922

2. Enrico Quarto

3. Charles Di Nolli

4. Doctor Dionysius Genoni

5. Matilda Spina

6. Baron Tito Belcredi

7. Berthold

8. Tito Belcredi

9. Freda

10. Tito Belcredi

1.16 Study questions for further exercise

A) Answer the following questions in about 600 words.

1. Define realism. Discuss the features of realism in drama.

2. Discuss reasons for rejection of realism in drama in early 20th century.

3. Discuss some theatrical movements that rejected realism.

4. Explain Grotesque Theatre. Discuss some characteristics of Grotesque Theatre

5. “Henry IV is a multi-layered character who uses his assumed identity both as a shield and a weapon” Discuss with reference to the character of Henry IV in the play.

6. Discuss Charles Di Nolli and Doctor Dionysius Genoni as symbols of rationality and authority.

7. “Pirandello’s play ‘Henry IV’ questions the boundaries between madness and sanity” Discuss.

8. Discuss the theme of Reality versus Illusion in Henry IV.

9. Explain reversal of power dynamics in Henry IV.

10. Discuss Pirandello’s Henry IV as an example of Grotesque play.

B) Write short notes on the following in 200 words.

1. Expressionism
2. Realism in drama.
3. Surrealism
4. Meta-theatre
5. Epic Theatre
6. Theatre of Absurd.
7. Grotesque Theatre.
8. The Marchioness Matilda Spina.
9. Frida.
10. Marquis Charles Di Nolli.
11. Baron Tito Belcredi.
12. Doctor Dionysius Genoni.

1.17 Books for further reading

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Unit-2

Epic Theatre : Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*

Contents:

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction to *The Threepenny Opera*
- 2.2 About the author
- 2.3 A Note on 'Epic Theatre' and 'Alienation Effect':
- 2.4 List of characters
- 2.5 Summary of the play
- 2.6 Detail analysis of the play
 - 2.6.1 Act I
 - 2.6.2 Act II
 - 2.6.3 Act III
 - 2.6.4 Characterization
 - 2.6.5 Alienation effect in *The Threepenny Opera*
 - 2.6.6 Themes in *The Threepenny Opera*
- 2.7 Check your progress
 - 2.7.1 Answers to check your progress
- 2.8 Exercises
- 2.9 References for further study

2.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

1. Understand the plot, characterization, and themes in *The Threepenny Opera*.
2. Explain the concept of "epic theatre"
3. Understand Brecht's writing style and dramatic techniques.
4. Explore the relationship between art and politics.

2.1 Introduction to *The Threepenny Opera*:

Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (originally written in German as *Die Dreigroschenoper*) is a groundbreaking play first performed in 1928 in Berlin. It is an adaptation of John Gay's 18th-century English play, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Brecht worked closely with composer Kurt Weill to create a unique blend of theater and music, often described as a "play with music" or a "musical satire."

The play is set in Victorian London and tells the story of Macheath, also known as "Mac the Knife," a cunning and charismatic criminal. Through Macheath's life, Brecht explores themes such as greed, corruption, and the harsh realities of capitalism. The characters include beggars, thieves, and corrupt officials, all struggling to survive in a society driven by money and power.

Brecht's aim was not just to entertain but to make the audience think critically about social inequalities. To achieve this, he used epic theater techniques, such as breaking the fourth wall, using songs to comment on the action, and creating moments of discomfort to encourage reflection. One of the most famous songs from the play is "The Ballad of Mack the Knife," which became an iconic piece in its own right.

By mixing dark humor with sharp social critique, *The Threepenny Opera* challenges traditional storytelling and invites audiences to question their own world. It remains one of Brecht's most influential works and continues to be performed and studied worldwide. *The Threepenny Opera* was later adapted into Marathi by Pu La Deshpande as *Teen Paishyacha Tamasha* in 1978, becoming a theatrical hit in 1980s.

2.2 About the author:

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was a German playwright, poet, and theatre director, widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in 20th-century theatre. Brecht is best known for developing the concept of "epic theatre", a form of theatre designed to provoke critical thinking and challenge societal norms rather than simply entertain.

Brecht's work often reflects his Marxist beliefs, focusing on themes like social inequality, capitalism, and the struggles of the working class. He aimed to inspire audiences to question the world around them and take action to bring about change.

To achieve this, Brecht used innovative techniques such as:

- **Breaking the Fourth Wall:** Actors directly address the audience to remind them they are watching a play.
- **Songs and Commentary:** Music and songs are used not just for entertainment but to comment on the action and offer deeper insights.
- **Alienation Effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*):** Techniques that prevent the audience from becoming emotionally absorbed in the story, encouraging a more critical perspective.

Brecht's plays often mix humour with serious social critique, challenging traditional storytelling. Some of his notable works include *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941), *The Life of Galileo* (1943), and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944).

In *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht adapted John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* to create a satirical commentary on capitalism, corruption, and morality. This play is a prime example of his epic theatre, using sharp dialogue, memorable songs, and complex characters to engage audiences intellectually and emotionally.

Brecht's legacy lies not only in his plays but also in his contributions to modern theatre theory, making him a central figure for anyone studying drama and literature.

2.3 A Note on 'Epic Theatre' and 'Alienation Effect':

In *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht effectively applies his concepts of epic theatre and the alienation effect. Let us briefly explore these ideas.

Western playwrights experimented with new forms and styles of writing plays in the 20th century. They rebelled against realistic plays of the 19th century, popularized by Ibsen and others and introduced innovative techniques. One such playwright was Bertolt Brecht, a German writer, who developed the idea of epic theatre and the alienation effect.

The term *epic theatre* was used by Brecht in the 1920s to describe his plays. By "epic," he meant bringing the objectivity of storytelling, similar to Homeric epics, to the stage. Brecht used techniques like a detached narrator and other methods to create alienation effects. These effects were designed to prevent the audience from becoming too emotionally involved with the characters or the story. Instead, he wanted them to critically analyze and question the social issues and behaviours

shown in the plays, rather than simply accepting them. A few important characteristics of epic theatre are as follows:

First, in epic theatre, an actor would directly address the audience, revealing the plot of the scene. He would break the 'fourth wall' of the theatre, acknowledging the audience's presence. Brecht's idea was that revealing the plot beforehand would help the audience focus more on the reasons behind the action rather than the action itself. He wanted the audience to engage intellectually rather than emotionally, encouraging them to bring their 'brains' to the theatre. Brecht aimed to create an atmosphere of reason and detachment rather than passion and involvement. For him, theatre was not meant for the 'purgation of emotions' but for critically examining human conditions. Thus, the focus was on provoking rational thought and critical self-reflection rather than emotional immersion. Actors directly address the audience to engage them with the play on an intellectual level.

Second, a key characteristic of epic theatre is the visibility of stage mechanics. Props and scene changes occur in front of the audience to remind them that they are watching a play and not a 'slice of reality'; the artificiality of the performance is deliberately highlighted. By introducing minimalistic sets and costumes, the focus shifts away from realism to emphasize the theatrical nature of the performance.

Third, the use of songs and placards is introduced to break the action and address societal issues.

Fourth, actors play multiple roles, or multiple actors play the same role, to prevent the audience from forming strong emotional attachments to the characters.

Fifth, a natural or neutral style of acting is encouraged. Grand, extravagant, and artificial acting is discouraged. Actors are expected to portray characters believably without convincing themselves or the audience that they have "become" the characters.

Through his concept of epic theatre, Brecht explores social and political issues, aiming to inspire the audience to question the status quo and consider potential solutions. He did not want the audience to passively enjoy the play but to critically reflect on societal issues.

Brecht's plays are still performed today, and his concept of epic theatre has significantly influenced playwrights like Edward Bond and Caryl Churchill in England, and Tony Kushner in America.

Alienation Effect: In the 1920s and later, the German playwright Bertolt Brecht introduced the idea of the alienation effect (German word for alienation effect is 'Verfremdungseffekt') in his epic theatre. This concept was inspired by the Russian formalist idea of "defamiliarization." The German term is also translated as *estrangement effect* or *distancing effect*. The term "distancing effect" best captures Brecht's idea, as it avoids the negative meanings of "alienation," such as feeling detached or apathetic.

Brecht explained that this effect makes everyday social realities appear unfamiliar or strange. This stops the audience from getting emotionally attached to the characters and their actions. Instead, Brecht aimed to create a sense of critical distance, encouraging viewers to think about and challenge the societal issues shown on stage, rather than passively accepting them.

Alienation effect creates a dramatic effect that encourages the audience to think critically instead of getting emotionally absorbed in the story. It is achieved in various ways, such as letting the audience smoke and drink, interrupting the action with songs, making sudden scene changes, and having actors switch roles. Performers are also encouraged to keep some distance from their characters rather than fully immersing themselves in the roles. A narrator may add ironic commentary to reinforce this 'estrangement.' By highlighting the play's artificial nature, Brecht aimed to make viewers see history as something shaped by people rather than an inevitable fate. However, despite this approach, audiences still form emotional connections with characters in *Mother Courage* (1941) and other Brechtian plays.

2.4 List of characters:

i) Macheath (Mac the Knife): A charismatic and cunning criminal, Macheath is the central character in the play. He is both ruthless and charming, navigating London's underworld with ease. He is highly professional and runs his gang as a business enterprise. Despite his crimes, he has a seductive personality that makes him popular among women and feared by his enemies.

ii) Polly Peachum: The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, Polly is Macheath's *new* wife. Initially seen as naive, she proves to be resourceful and clever, especially when managing Macheath's gang.

iii) Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum: Polly's father and the owner of a "beggar's business." He controls a network of beggars and profits from their earnings. Peachum is manipulative and will stop at nothing to protect his business, even betraying Macheath. Peachum is a representative of the capitalists.

iv) Mrs. Peachum: Polly's mother and Mr. Peachum's wife. She is just as ruthless as her husband and fully supports his schemes to bring down Macheath.

v) Tiger Brown: The Chief of Police and an old friend of Macheath. Despite his position, Brown is corrupt and tries to protect Macheath due to their past relationship, though his loyalty is tested.

vi) Lucy Brown: Tiger Brown's daughter and one of Macheath's lovers. She is fiercely jealous of Polly and competes with her for Macheath's attention.

vii) Jenny Diver: A prostitute and Macheath's former lover. Although she still has feelings for him, she ultimately betrays him for money, showing the harsh realities of survival in the play's world.

viii) Reverend Kimball: The minister who hastily marries Macheath and Polly. His character adds a touch of humour and satire to the story, reflecting the hypocrisy of societal institutions.

ix) The Gang Members: Macheath's loyal but comical crew includes characters like Crook-Fingered Jake, Matthew the Mint, and Walt Dreary. They assist Macheath in his schemes but also provide humorous moments in the play.

x) Street Beggars: Controlled by Mr. Peachum, the beggars represent the exploited underclass. They add depth to the play's critique of society and capitalism.

These characters create a vivid and dynamic ensemble, highlighting themes of greed, corruption, and survival in a capitalist society.

2.5 Summary of the play:

Act I: The play begins in the streets of London, where a Ballad Singer tells the audience about Macheath, also known as "Mac the Knife," a notorious criminal and gang leader. Nearby, Jonathan Peachum runs a "beggar's business," where he outfits

and manages beggars, taking a share of their earnings. He and his wife, Mrs. Peachum, discover that their daughter Polly has secretly married Macheath.

Furious, Peachum decides to bring Macheath to justice. Polly, meanwhile, is at a party with Macheath and his gang, celebrating their marriage. The gang treats Polly as part of the group, and she quickly shows she is clever and capable, earning their respect. Macheath and Polly express their love for each other, but the happiness is short-lived when Polly warns Macheath that her father will try to have him arrested.

Act II: Peachum meets with Tiger Brown, the Chief of Police, who is an old friend of Macheath. Peachum pressures Brown to arrest Macheath, threatening to disrupt Queen Victoria's upcoming coronation parade by sending hordes of beggars into the streets.

Macheath, realizing he is in danger, decides to leave town. Before escaping, he gives control of his gang and his money to Polly, trusting her to manage everything in his absence. However, Macheath cannot resist visiting his old lover, Jenny Diver, at a brothel. Jenny betrays him by informing the police of his whereabouts in exchange for a reward promised by Peachum.

Macheath is arrested and taken to jail. In prison, he is treated leniently because of his friendship with Tiger Brown. Lucy Brown, Tiger's daughter and another of Macheath's lovers, visits him in prison. Polly also visits, leading to a heated argument between the two women. Lucy helps Macheath escape from prison.

Act III: After Macheath escapes, Peachum is furious and intensifies his plans to ruin the coronation parade with his beggars. Meanwhile, Macheath's luck runs out when he is caught again and sent back to jail. This time, there seems to be no escape. Macheath prepares for his execution, reflecting on his life and accepting his fate.

As Macheath stands on the gallows, ready to be hanged, an unexpected event occurs. A royal messenger arrives with a pardon from Queen Victoria. Not only is Macheath freed, but he is also granted a noble title and a lifetime pension. The play ends with Macheath's sudden good fortune, leaving the characters and audience surprised. The story closes with a reminder that life is often unfair and unpredictable.

This straightforward plot highlights Macheath's dangerous and tumultuous journey, filled with betrayal, loyalty, and unexpected twists. The characters' actions drive the story, creating a vivid picture of London's criminal underworld.

2.6 Detail analysis of the play:

The play is divided into 3 acts. Each act is further divided into scenes. Let us study each scene of each act thoroughly.

2.6.1 Act I:

Act I comprises three scenes, with a detailed summary of each as follows.

The Prologue: The play starts with a prologue; with a song (moritat) introducing Soho, a busy and poor area in Victorian London. Beggars, thieves, and prostitutes fill the streets. A singer performs *The Ballad of Mackie the Knife*, describing Macheath, a ruthless criminal who hides his crimes behind charm and white gloves. The song lists Macheath's brutal crimes, including murder, robbery, and rape, with a dark, joking tone. The crowd laughs, and a man quietly leaves. A woman points out that the man is Macheath himself. The song sets the tone for the play. While the moritat is going on, Peachum, with his wife and daughter, strolls across the stage. In the moritat Macheath's many crimes are referred to. He is a thief, a murderer, a killer, a womanizer, and a pimp, who always wears white gloves indicating his innocence.

Scene i: The scene is set at Peachum's shop, where he outfits beggars and takes a cut of their earnings. Peachum sings about being a heartless businessman, claiming it's necessary for survival. He then explains how his business depends on creating sympathy but complains that people's emotions grow numb over time.

A man named Filch enters, begging for help. Peachum recognizes him as an unlicensed beggar beaten by his workers the day before. Peachum demands payment for a license, and after some haggling, Filch agrees. Peachum also gives him a costume to help him look more pitiful, ignoring Filch's request for a role closer to his real life. Peachum notes that the queen's upcoming coronation will boost business for beggars.

While outfitting Filch, Peachum and his wife discuss their daughter Polly's mysterious suitor. Mrs. Peachum describes him as a charming gentleman who took Polly to a fancy hotel. From her description, Peachum realizes the man is Macheath. He rushes upstairs to find Polly missing, with her bed untouched. The Peachums fear she is with Macheath. They sing a song mocking young love, saying it blinds people to reality and leads to heartbreak.

Analysis: The opening song sets a dark and ironic tone, describing Macheath's horrific crimes in a way that amuses the crowd. This suggests the play's world has blurred lines between good and evil, making the audience question who the true villains and heroes are.

The Victorian London setting helps audiences reflect on issues like poverty and inequality, which mirror similar struggles in Brecht's 1928 Germany. By setting the story in the past and in another country, Brecht subtly criticizes his own society without being direct.

Peachum's actions reveal the selfishness and moral flexibility of the characters. He only cares about profit, even using Bible quotes to manipulate others. His concerns about Polly's relationship are not about her safety or happiness but about how her absence might hurt his business. This highlights how self-interest takes priority over love or family.

Peachum's business also reflects the harsh realities of capitalism, where even emotions like pity are turned into products to make money. He carefully designs "perfect" beggars because real suffering isn't profitable enough. This exaggeration shows how the capitalist system rewards profit over genuine human connection.

Overall, the play explores themes of love, greed, and morality in a world where values are flexible and profit often comes before people.

Scene ii: Matthew, one of Macheath's gang, checks a stable in Soho for safety with a revolver before Macheath and Polly enter. Polly, wearing a wedding dress, is upset about celebrating her marriage in a stable and starting her new life with crime, showing she doesn't fully know Macheath's nature. Macheath promises the furnishings will arrive soon. The other criminals—Jacob, Robert, Walter, and Ed—arrive with stolen furniture, food, and tableware, proudly recounting the violence involved in getting these items. Polly is horrified by the violence, but Macheath only complains about the mismatched goods.

The thieves set up the stable, revealing their incompetence, as they only bring odd items like two chairs, forks, and pieces of a harpsichord. Tension rises when Matthew makes a crude joke, and a mention of Lucy hints at Macheath's unfaithfulness, which Polly notices. Reverend Kimball arrives, and the gang sings a sarcastic song about couples who don't know each other well. Polly lightens the

mood by singing “Pirate Jenny,” a song about a girl dreaming of revenge and freedom, which receives applause.

The police arrive, but Macheath warmly greets Sheriff Tiger Brown as an old friend. They sing about their army days and reveal their corrupt alliance, where Macheath bribes Brown, and Brown tips him off about raids. Brown notices a stolen rug but is charmed by Macheath’s excuses. After Brown leaves, the gang gifts Macheath and Polly a big bed. Left alone, Macheath and Polly express their love in poetic verses, downplaying their troubled circumstances.

Analysis: This scene highlights the conflicts and contradictions in Macheath’s character and relationships. Polly begins to realize Macheath’s dishonesty, as he hides his criminal life and other relationships from her. Her initial shock at the gang’s crimes softens as she bonds with the thieves, reflecting her growing complicity in Macheath’s world. The corruption between Macheath and Tiger Brown illustrates the blurred lines between law and crime, emphasizing Brecht’s critique of systemic hypocrisy.

Macheath’s attempts to appear upper-class, through fancy words and appreciation of fine goods, contrast with his criminal reality, showing his superficial aspirations. The humor in his misuse of language and mismatched furnishings underscores the gap between appearance and reality. Polly’s song, “Pirate Jenny,” hints at her emerging toughness and adaptability, foreshadowing her growth.

The scene ends with Brecht’s alienation effect, as Macheath and Polly’s poetic exchange feels artificial, questioning the sincerity of their love. This pulls the audience away from emotional involvement and encourages critical reflection on their relationship and the social dynamics of the play.

Scene iii: Peachum and Mrs. Peachum are in their shop when Polly arrives, carrying a travel bag. Polly sings about why she married Macheath. She explains that she grew up learning to protect herself from love, even when a man was kind, wealthy, and respectful. But she met someone who was none of those things and still couldn’t say no to him. She describes how the moonlight inspired her to take a chance on love.

Peachum and Mrs. Peachum are furious. They scold Polly for leaving them, especially since her marriage will hurt their business. Five beggars come in to complain about their equipment. One says his fake stump isn’t convincing enough to

earn good money, so Peachum gives him another one. He examines the others and criticizes them for not looking pathetic enough, even firing one for gaining weight. Peachum insists that beggars must make people feel pity. The beggars leave.

The family resumes arguing about Macheath. Polly defends him, saying he earns good money, but Peachum argues that women often divorce after getting married. Mrs. Peachum adds that Macheath has many women and warns that if he's hanged, those women will show up. Peachum then decides to report Macheath to the sheriff to collect a reward of 40 pounds. Mrs. Peachum suggests they can find him in Wapping, where he's with prostitutes. Polly, who has been eavesdropping, insists that Macheath would rather go to jail than be with prostitutes. She also says that Sheriff Brown, Macheath's friend, would protect him and points out that Macheath has no criminal record. Peachum is still confident his plan will work. He remarks that the world is full of selfishness and everyone must fight to survive.

The three of them sing a song called "The First Threepenny Finale on the Uncertainty of Human Circumstances." Polly sings about her love for Macheath, but Peachum responds that just because something makes someone happy doesn't mean they should have it. He says that if people were good, the world would be like heaven, but it's not, because morals are lacking. Peachum claims there isn't enough good to go around and that even family members will steal to survive. Mrs. Peachum and Polly join in, singing about how miserable the world is. They end the song by directly addressing the audience, blaming them for ignoring how selfish and corrupt the world is.

Analysis: This scene shows how people can use bad reasoning to make good points. Macheath is dangerous and unfaithful, but the Peachums oppose the marriage for selfish reasons, not because they care about Polly's well-being. Peachum is only concerned about losing his daughter's help in the business.

The scene also contrasts Polly and Peachum. Polly is motivated by love, while Peachum only cares about money. Polly defends Macheath by saying he earns a good income, but Peachum dominates the argument, reducing her love to financial terms. By the end, Polly and Mrs. Peachum sing along with Peachum, agreeing that people must be selfish to survive.

The song challenges the audience to think critically. Peachum's selfish philosophy may seem wrong because society teaches people to care for others, but it

highlights harsh truths about survival and inequality. Brecht wants the audience to feel uncomfortable and question how the world could work better.

Peachum also treats his beggars like bad actors, complaining that they can't make people feel sorry for them. The play criticizes performers who fake suffering to profit from the emotions of wealthy audiences, reflecting broader social hypocrisy.

2.6.2 Act II:

This act contains three scenes. Detailed summary and analysis of each scene in Act II is as follows.

Scene i: Macheath is lying in bed in the stable when Polly comes in. She tells him that her father has spoken to Sheriff Brown and that Macheath needs to leave immediately. Macheath does not seem worried and asks Polly to join him in bed. To calm her, he reminds her that he has no criminal record at Scotland Yard. Polly argues that although he did not have a record yesterday, her father's visit to Brown has now added a long list of crimes, including murder, burglary, robbery, arson, and seducing two underage sisters. Macheath casually replies that the sisters claimed they were twenty. When he asks what Brown said, Polly explains that Brown told her father he could no longer protect Macheath.

Realizing the danger, Macheath decides Polly will need to manage his business while he is gone. This time, Polly wants to join him in bed, but Macheath insists on discussing business first. He shows her his ledgers and explains how to manage his gang. At first, Polly is overwhelmed and cries while he gives instructions, but she eventually agrees to take on the responsibility. Macheath tells her to keep sending profits to a bank in Manchester and shares his plan to leave petty crime for banking, which is safer and more profitable. He also tells her to deposit all the money in two weeks and turn in his gang to the authorities.

Just then, the gang arrives. Macheath informs them he must leave and that Polly will take over. Matthew protests, saying it's unfortunate for Macheath to leave just before the coronation. Macheath tells the gang Polly will lead while he is gone. When Matthew keeps arguing, Macheath encourages Polly to scold him, and she does it so well that the gang applauds her, agreeing she will be a great leader. Before they leave, Macheath warns Matthew about drinking too much. He jokes about Matthew bragging last week that he set a children's hospital on fire, but the gang reminds him it was Macheath who did it. The gang leaves.

Now alone, Macheath and Polly say goodbye. Polly worries that Macheath will cheat on her while he is away. Macheath promises to stay faithful. Polly, deeply in love, begs him to stay, fearing their love is ending. She tells him about a dream she had, where she saw a moon the size of a faded penny. They kiss, and Macheath leaves.

Left alone, Polly says he will never return. She tells herself to stop loving him and move on. Reflecting on women's suffering, she wonders why they grieve when their mothers faced the same pain. She prays to the Virgin Mary to have pity on women. As she finishes, bells ring to announce the queen's arrival.

Analysis: This scene highlights how the characters' trust in each other is tested. Brown, who moments earlier claimed to be Macheath's loyal friend, quickly betrays him under pressure from Peachum. This shows Brown is not as loyal as he pretended to be, but Macheath does not seem very surprised. On one hand, it is ironic that Macheath is not more upset—if they were truly best friends, this betrayal would hurt him more. On the other hand, this situation makes Macheath trust Polly, his new wife. Polly knows from her parents and from the criminals that she should not fully trust what Macheath tells her. Still, she wants to believe him because she loves him. The list of Macheath's past crimes causes conflict for Polly; she knows he is a criminal but is willing to do anything to help him because of her feelings. Polly's struggle shows the tension between love and self-interest.

Macheath is portrayed as an ironic hero. Irony means something is the opposite of what is expected. Macheath is charming, dresses well, makes people laugh, and is good at business, which makes him appealing. But his actions are completely immoral by society's standards—he kills, seduces underage girls, betrays friends to the police, and even brags about burning down a children's hospital. The play does not try to reconcile these contradictions, making his role as a hero ironic. Macheath does not feel guilty for his crimes because he views them as part of his business. His charming exterior contrasts sharply with his unethical actions, creating a sense of irony. This raises the question: Is Macheath a good person trying to survive in a corrupt world, or a bad person hiding his true nature with charm? The play suggests there might not be a difference—survival in such a corrupt world leaves little room for true goodness, and morality is often a luxury only the wealthy can afford.

Polly's character becomes more complex when she stands up to the thieves after Macheath puts her in charge of his gang. At first, she just wants Macheath to escape and stay safe. When Macheath insists she learn to run his business, she hesitates but eventually agrees out of love for him. This decision begins to change her. When the gang arrives, Polly shows she can handle the job by fiercely scolding Matthew. Her outburst reveals a tougher and harsher side that has not been seen before. Polly is no longer just a naïve girl trying to fit into a dangerous world—she shows she has the strength and even some cruelty to lead. However, her love for Macheath still defines her, as she softens again once the thieves leave. By taking on these new responsibilities, Polly grows as a person, even though she ultimately accepts the painful truth: Macheath is untrustworthy and will break her heart.

Scene ii: The stage directions tell Mrs. Peachum and Jenny to come in front of the curtain for a short scene. During this moment, Mrs. Peachum tells Jenny to report Macheath if she sees him. Jenny asks if it is likely she will see him, given that he is on the run. Mrs. Peachum confidently replies that Macheath will never break his routine, and then sings "*The Ballad of Sexual Submissiveness*." The song is about a tough man who cannot resist women. In the second verse, Mrs. Peachum talks about men in general, saying that no matter what they believe, all men want sex when night falls.

The scene moves to the brothel in Wapping. One of Macheath's thieves, Jacob, is sitting inside, reading a newspaper. Around him, the women are ironing clothes and doing laundry, like a regular household. Jacob says Macheath surely will not come there, but just then, Macheath walks in and asks for coffee. Jacob is shocked, but Macheath calmly says it is Thursday, and he will not let small problems ruin his routine. He tosses his arrest warrant on the floor, and Jacob reads it with amusement. Jenny offers to read Macheath's palm. She looks at his hand and sees a betrayal by a woman. When Macheath asks for the woman's name, Jenny says it starts with a J. Macheath corrects her, saying it must start with a P, hinting that Polly might betray him. He gets distracted by Jacob laughing at the warrant, and they end up chatting with the other women about underwear. Meanwhile, Jenny quietly slips out.

Macheath starts feeling sentimental. He sings about how he and Jenny used to live together before he became a big-time criminal. He tells their story in "*The Ballad of the Fancy Man*." While he sings, Jenny is outside, signalling Constable Smith. Macheath keeps singing about being both Jenny's boyfriend and pimp, saying

their life was cozy and he wishes he could see their old brothel again. Jenny joins in, singing about how sweet Macheath was but also mentioning how he used to sell her clothes and beat her badly. Together, they sing the chorus, wishing to visit their old brothel. They share darkly funny lines—one about how they could only sleep together in the afternoons because her nights were booked, and another about flushing a baby down the sewer when she got pregnant. They dance until Constable Smith interrupts. He tries to handcuff Macheath, but Macheath shoves him away and jumps out the window. Outside, he runs into Mrs. Peachum and more constables. Calmly, he asks Mrs. Peachum about her husband before being taken to jail.

Analysis: Macheath's visit to the brothel in Wapping highlights the universal human desire for sex. Sex is a basic physical need, and in this play, the characters are mainly driven by their physical and material wants. The idea that sex makes everyone equal shows how fragile and changeable society's rules and beliefs are. If people are the same at their core, then the traditions and values built on top of that are artificial. By understanding this, humanity can be studied and possibly changed. After the interlude, the events in Scene II play out exactly as Mrs. Peachum predicted. In "*The Ballad of Sexual Obsession*," Macheath proves the point that he cannot control his desires. It's not his crimes but his inability to resist temptation that ultimately leads to his downfall.

The prostitutes' daily tasks like ironing and washing clothes show that they are not so different from the rest of society, as they have similar responsibilities. Traditional morality sees prostitutes as "fallen" women who cannot be redeemed because their lives revolve around sex, which is often linked to immorality. However, one could argue that these women are relatively free because they control what they sell—their bodies—unlike workers who rely on employers. Still, the play does not glamorize prostitution. Jenny's duet with Macheath mentions violence and theft, showing the harsh reality of their lives. At the same time, Brecht does not dismiss their role in society. The calm and organized way the prostitutes manage their home suggests they contribute to the social system just like anyone else.

The Threepenny Opera uses biblical parallels to compare Macheath to Jesus. Jenny's betrayal of Macheath mirrors Judas betraying Jesus, and her name also starts with a J. Macheath is betrayed on a Thursday and sent to the gallows on a Friday, just like Jesus's timeline before the crucifixion. However, unlike Jesus, who was a spiritual threat to traditional authority, Macheath is a true criminal, which makes it

harder to sympathize with him. The duet Macheath sings with Jenny adds another layer of irony. In the song, Macheath is portrayed as a terrible person—a pimp who beat Jenny and killed their unwanted child. The song’s upbeat tone contrasts with the dark events it describes, forcing the audience to enjoy something that would normally be horrifying. This contradiction makes the audience question the values and judgments of these characters.

Jenny also twists a familiar archetype: the prostitute with a heart of gold. Like this stereotype, Jenny seems sweet and caring toward Macheath, her former lover and pimp. But unlike the archetype, she betrays him for money. Jenny, like everyone else, looks out for herself. She chooses cash over loyalty to Macheath, showing how self-interest wins over love. Similar to Polly, Jenny struggles between love and self-interest but ultimately picks self-interest.

Scene iii: Brown walks into the jail alone, hoping Macheath will not be caught. Just then, the constables bring Macheath in and lock him in a cell. Macheath silently glares at Brown, who begs him to speak. Brown eventually breaks down crying and leaves. After he is gone, Macheath turns to the audience and explains his behavior. He says he thought about yelling at Brown but decided a cold stare would be more effective, a trick he says he learned from the Bible.

Constable Smith enters with handcuffs. Macheath politely asks for a more comfortable pair and offers Smith a bribe. He writes Smith a check for fifty pounds in exchange for not wearing handcuffs at all. While doing this, Macheath worries to himself about what will happen if Brown finds out he has been sleeping with Brown’s daughter, Lucy. Then, Macheath sings “*The Secret of Gracious Living*.” In the first verse, he mocks poor artists and thinkers who sacrifice everything for their ideals, saying that kind of life is not really living. In the second verse, he criticizes ambitious people who brag about their achievements but go home to cold, loveless lives. He concludes that despite their success, they are not truly happy.

Lucy enters, visibly pregnant, and angrily confronts Macheath. He protests, saying a woman should not speak like that to her man. She accuses him of being involved with Polly. Macheath denies marrying Polly, claiming he just kissed her and that she made up the story. He offers to marry Lucy and make her an “honest woman.”

Polly enters at that moment, rushing to Macheath and asking why he did not escape. When he does not answer, she becomes worried. Lucy calls Polly a slut, and the two women begin arguing despite Macheath's attempts to calm them. They sing the "*Jealousy Duet*," insulting each other and bragging that Macheath loves only one of them.

After the song, Macheath tells Lucy to calm down and scolds Polly for claiming they are married. Polly insists she is his wife, and the argument escalates. Mrs. Peachum arrives to take Polly away. She slaps her daughter and drags her off while Polly continues calling out for Macheath.

Once Polly is gone, Macheath thanks Lucy for helping him. He claims he was only kind to Polly out of pity. He and Lucy exchange sweet words, and Macheath asks her to bring him his hat and cane. She throws them into his cell and leaves. Constable Smith then enters and demands Macheath hand over the cane. Armed with a chair and crowbar, Smith chases Macheath around the cell, but Macheath escapes by slipping past him.

Brown returns and is relieved to find Macheath gone. Peachum enters, expecting his reward for Macheath's capture. Brown apologizes, saying there is nothing he can do now that Macheath has escaped. Peachum warns Brown that if Macheath is free, the coronation will turn into chaos. He tells a story about an Egyptian police chief who failed to control the lower classes during a coronation and was punished by having poisonous snakes placed on his chest. Peachum hints that unless the sheriff catches Macheath, he will stir up trouble throughout the city. Horrified, Brown realizes he must capture Macheath to protect his reputation.

Meanwhile, Macheath and Jenny sing the "*Second Threepenny-Finale*." The song criticizes moralists who expect people to avoid sin. In the first verse, they argue that food is more important than morals—people need to eat before they can think about right and wrong. The chorus explains that society is built on the suffering of millions. In the second verse, they highlight the hypocrisy of judging one woman taking off her clothes as art and another as pornography. They repeat that as long as society thrives on oppression, no one can preach morality sincerely.

Analysis: Brown, Macheath, and Peachum all act based on self-interest. Brown feels bad for betraying Macheath, but his guilt does not stop him from putting himself first. When Peachum threatens to ruin the coronation with his beggars,

Brown gives in to protect his reputation. It is clear that Brown did not betray Macheath out of anger or disloyalty—he just wanted to save himself.

Macheath also looks out for himself. He quickly forgets about Polly when Lucy can help him get out of jail. He does not care deeply for Polly beyond physical attraction and does not want Lucy and Polly to find out about each other. By keeping the truth from them, Macheath protects his own interests. If he truly loved Lucy and Polly, he would be honest with them. But unlike the other characters, Macheath does not struggle between self-interest and love—he only cares about himself.

Peachum, too, will do anything to protect his business. He does not disrupt the coronation out of hatred or chaos for its own sake but to save his business and earn money for Macheath's capture. His actions show how far he is willing to go to defend his interests.

The scene includes two moments where the alienation effect is used to remind the audience they are watching a play. First, when Macheath talks with Lucy, he says he wants to owe her his life, and she asks him to repeat it. What could seem like sweet banter instead highlights the artificiality of their interaction. Second, after Macheath stares down Brown, he steps out of the scene to talk directly to the audience about what he just did. These moments break the emotional connection between the audience and the characters, encouraging viewers to think critically about what they are seeing.

Both Peachum and Macheath manipulate the Bible for personal gain, showing how moral guidance can be twisted to serve selfish ends. Peachum's fabricated story about Egyptian history further reveals his habit of lying to achieve his goals, reflecting the play's critique of exploiting others for self-interest. The second *finale* underscores the randomness of moral values, arguing that society's true problem lies in its exploitation of the starving masses. As long as selfishness is rewarded, characters like Peachum and Macheath will thrive, leaving the audience to question how to address the root causes of inequality.

2.6.3 Act III:

This act contains three scenes. Detailed summary and analysis of each scene in Act III is as follows.

Scene i: The next morning is the coronation. At their shop, Peachum and Mrs. Peachum train the beggars to carry pitiful signs. Peachum explains his plan to line the coronation route with an army of beggars. A drum roll signals that the coronation guard is presenting arms.

Filch arrives, followed by the whores, led by Jenny. The women demand payment for turning in Macheath, but Mrs. Peachum refuses, explaining that Macheath has escaped. Jenny angrily defends Macheath, calling him a gentleman and accusing the Peachums of being worse than him. She reveals that Macheath visited her at the brothel the previous night to forgive her by spending the night with her. Afterward, he went to be with her friend Suky Tawdry. Jenny accidentally lets slip that Macheath is still with Suky.

Peachum seizes the opportunity and tells Filch to inform the police of Macheath's location. He then offers the whores coffee. As Mrs. Peachum goes to prepare it, she sings the third verse of *The Ballad of Sexual Submissiveness*, about a man facing death who still desires intimacy. Peachum orders the beggars to get ready and shares his philosophy: while the rich create misery, they cannot bear to see it. By confronting them with visible suffering, he profits from their pity.

Before the beggars leave, Filch rushes back to warn that the police are already on their way. Peachum realizes they intend to arrest him and tells the beggars to hide. He instructs Mrs. Peachum to play music if he says the word *harmless*. Though confused, she agrees.

Brown arrives with constables, pretending not to know Peachum. Now, he plans to arrest Peachum instead of Macheath. Peachum remains calm, offers him coffee, and explains that everyone in the shop is law-abiding. He argues that laws exploit those who don't understand them or are too poor to follow them. Another drum roll sounds, and Peachum warns that soon, the poorest people will take their positions along the coronation route. Brown threatens to send them all to jail.

Peachum counters, saying that arresting the beggars will not stop the thousands who will still appear at the event. He paints a grim picture of the police using force against the crowd, which would embarrass the authorities. Recognizing Peachum's leverage, Brown admits he does not know Macheath's whereabouts. Peachum asks Jenny, who reluctantly reveals that Macheath is with Suky Tawdry. Brown sends Constable Smith to arrest Macheath again and leaves. Another drum roll sounds as

Peachum sends the beggars to the jail, likely to ensure Brown captures Macheath. After they leave, Peachum sings the fourth verse of *The Song of the Futility of All Human Endeavor*, lamenting that humanity is not ready for this world and that death is inevitable.

Jenny then sings *The Song of Solomon*, describing characters whose virtues lead to their downfall. Solomon was too wise, Cleopatra too beautiful, Caesar too brave, Brecht too curious, and Macheath too emotional. Each verse ends with Jenny observing that a truly fortunate person lacks the virtue described.

Analysis: Brecht highlights self-interest through Peachum's exploitation of the wealthy's guilt. The rich donate to Peachum's beggars not out of kindness but to relieve their own guilt, keeping Peachum's business alive. Peachum's use of sympathy is hypocritical, as it serves only his interests. Instead of addressing systemic problems, society chooses small gestures like donations to feel better, allowing Peachum to profit from their inaction.

"The Song of the Futility of All Human Endeavor" critiques capitalism's competitive nature. Peachum outsmarts Brown, who becomes powerless as he tries to choose between staying loyal to Macheath and doing his job as sheriff. Both characters are trapped in a system where success comes at the expense of others, reinforcing Brecht's message about society's flaws.

Peachum's view of the law as a tool for exploiting the weak reveals the arbitrary nature of values. Unlike traditional villains who oppose morality, Peachum advocates conventional moral ideas, forcing the audience to question their validity. His manipulation of the law exposes its role in sustaining inequality.

Jenny's "The Song of Solomon" reinforces Brecht's alienation effect. The song depicts traditional virtues as vices that lead to downfall. By including himself in the critique, Brecht distances the audience further, prompting them to think critically. The lack of alternative virtues in the song encourages viewers to question their own values and rethink what they consider moral.

Scene ii: Polly visits Lucy at the jail, where Lucy lives because her father, Brown, is in charge there. Polly starts by apologizing for her behaviour the day before. She explains that she was upset with Macheath and suggests Lucy should tell him how she feels when she sees him. Lucy replies that she will not see Macheath

again. Surprised, Polly wonders if Macheath is avoiding Lucy because she loves him too much. They both admit they might be too deeply in love with him.

Polly then shares how she ended up marrying Macheath. She says he took her to a hotel and that she never imagined getting married just twelve days ago. She asks Lucy why Macheath treated her so coldly the day before. Lucy suggests that maybe Macheath is not entirely to blame and hints Polly should have married someone from her own social class. Polly thinks about this and starts crying. Seeing her tears, Lucy softens a little and tells Polly she can at least take comfort in being Macheath's wife, even if it is only official. Lucy leaves to get some food for Polly.

As soon as Lucy steps out, Polly speaks to the audience, calling Lucy a "silly little fool." When Lucy returns, Polly notices a picture of Macheath and asks if he brought it. Lucy says he has never been in the room and suddenly realizes Polly is trying to find out where Macheath is. Lucy accuses Polly of scheming, but Polly insists she does not know where he is either. Polly is thrilled to learn Lucy is clueless too and starts laughing, while Lucy begins to cry. Polly then offers Lucy her own food to comfort her. Feeling hopeless, Lucy reveals that her pregnancy is fake. Polly laughs even harder and calls Lucy a fool to her face. Just then, Lucy looks out the window and sees that Macheath has been captured again. Polly collapses in despair. Mrs. Peachum enters with a widow's dress for Polly and urges her to put it on. She says Polly will look lovely as a widow if she can manage to cheer up a little.

Analysis: The interaction between Lucy and Polly in this scene shows that even personal relationships in the play are driven by self-interest. The scene centers on the conflict between two women who both want the same man and are willing to be cruel to each other to get him. Both Polly and Lucy enjoy seeing the other suffer. Their roles switch during the scene: first, Lucy laughs while Polly cries, and later Polly laughs while Lucy cries. This back-and-forth adds balance to the scene, but its main focus is on their cruelty.

The only reason they are kind to each other is to get information about where Macheath is. At the start, Polly does not openly state her goal. Instead, she pretends to have a casual conversation to trick Lucy into giving away Macheath's location. Lucy, on the other hand, is suspicious of Polly's visit but stays polite until she realizes Polly's true purpose. Once Polly's goal becomes clear, the tone of the scene

changes. Polly, who seemed like a sweet and innocent girl, shows her selfish side by insisting on finding out where Macheath is, even if it hurts Lucy.

Scene iii: At 5:04 a.m., constables bring Macheath to the death cell, saying he will be hanged at 6 a.m. A crowd gathers outside, risking the queen's 7 a.m. coronation being ignored. After locking the cell, Brown enters, refuses involvement in the hanging, and leaves. Macheath tries to bribe Smith, who initially dismisses him but listens. Smith leaves, and Macheath sings a desperate plea for help. Matthew and Jacob arrive at 5:25. Macheath asks for £400, but Jacob says it's all their money. Despite protests, Macheath insists. Smith interrupts to ask about Macheath's final meal; he requests asparagus.

Smith later asks if Macheath has the money. Macheath claims he can get £400, but Smith is noncommittal. Polly visits, but when Macheath demands money, she cries, saying it is all in the banks. She leaves, telling him not to forget her. Brown and Smith bring Macheath's asparagus. Macheath angrily accuses Brown of demanding money from a condemned man. Offstage, gallows construction sounds. Brown reads their accounts, growing upset, while Macheath is cold. Overwhelmed, Brown leaves, and Smith asks if Macheath has the money. Without it, the hanging proceeds.

At 6 a.m., characters gather for the execution. Matthew and Jacob say they could not reach the bank. Macheath gives a speech, reflecting on crime, class, and society's greed. He sings a final ballad, asking for forgiveness but bitterly condemning the police. As he reaches the gallows, Peachum interrupts, breaking character to announce a new ending. Brown arrives with a royal pardon from the queen, freeing Macheath and making him a nobleman. Everyone cheers. Peachum comments on the lack of saviors for the poor and calls for change. The group sings a closing hymn about injustice and hope.

Analysis: The final scene shows how money and economics shape life. Smith tells Macheath he could go free if he paid. Macheath accepts this as normal, understanding that freedom comes at a cost. When he cannot pay, he does not beg but focuses on business, even asking Brown to review their accounts. When Matthew and Jacob return without money, Macheath shifts his concern to their plans to rob during the coronation. Before going to the gallows, Macheath criticizes capitalism, comparing his small-scale theft to the larger exploitation of banks and corporations.

He argues that the rich steal far more from society than he ever could. This casts Macheath as an ironic hero, committing less harm than those in power.

The play contrasts justice and humanity. Justice means punishing Macheath, but under capitalism, justice is tied to money—Macheath nearly buys his freedom. Humanity demands that he face consequences for his crimes. Brecht uses this tension to challenge the audience to think about their values. The final scene centers on Macheath, with all characters coming to him to resolve their conflicts. The gallows are built offstage, and time compresses rapidly, heightening tension. Just as all hope seems lost, a ‘deus ex machina’ occurs: Brown arrives with a royal pardon, freeing Macheath. This improbable ending shocks the audience and relieves the characters of their struggles.

Peachum steps out of character to explain the significance of the deus ex machina. Known for his selfishness, his sudden sincerity delivers a moral message about charity and generosity. Brecht uses this to surprise the audience and make them reflect.

The happy ending challenges realism. Brecht highlights how rarely the poor are spared in real life. By sparing Macheath, he asks the audience to question why they feel relief for a fictional criminal but don’t extend that mercy to real people.

2.6.4 Characterization:

In a literary text, “characterization” refers to the process by which an author develops and describes the personalities, traits, and motivations of characters within a story, allowing the reader to understand who they are through their actions, dialogue, thoughts, and interactions with other characters. Let us analyze the important characters in the play to gain a better understanding of it.

i) Macheath: Macheath is the main character of *The Threepenny Opera* and the story’s “hero.” He is a top criminal in London, committing murders and robberies with ease. However, he is tired of being a small-time crook and dreams of becoming respectable, like someone in the middle class. At the start of the play, Macheath is planning to move his money into a bank and hand over his gang to the police in two weeks. He doesn’t steal and kill because he hates society but because he is good at it. If being honest can make him money more easily, he’s ready to try that instead.

Macheath stays the same throughout the play. By the end, he is still a selfish and ruthless criminal who only thinks about what he wants. He never regrets his crimes or questions his actions. He focuses only on satisfying his immediate needs.

Macheath has many qualities people usually admire in a hero. He is attractive, funny, charming, and strong. Other characters often talk about how likable he is. But his actions are far from heroic—he is a thief, a murderer, and unfaithful. This mix of charm and cruelty raises the question: what makes someone a hero? In the end, Macheath might be best described as an “anti hero”—a character who looks like a hero but acts very differently.

ii) Peachum: Peachum is Macheath’s opponent in *The Threepenny Opera*. He is the character who stands against the hero and drives the story forward. Peachum is motivated by self-interest—his only goal is to make money through his business. Throughout the play, Peachum remains the same. He is focused on protecting what he owns and never wavers from this. However, when the queen pardons Macheath at the end, Peachum accepts his defeat. This moment is the only time Peachum shows any change.

Peachum is an unusual type of villain. Normally, a villain is evil just for the sake of being evil, doing terrible things because they are naturally bad. This kind of villain helps the audience understand good and bad by being completely immoral. Peachum, however, is different. He strongly supports traditional morality—he follows the law, reads the Bible, and wants his daughter to respect her parents. But Peachum does these things not because he is a good person, but because they help his business. His actions show how he uses morality to excuse his cruel behaviour.

iii) Polly: Polly is the only character in *The Threepenny Opera* who changes significantly during the play. At the beginning, she is a young and innocent girl who has fallen in love. She is shocked when she learns about her husband Macheath’s criminal life. However, over time, she accepts his illegal activities and even agrees to take charge of his gang when he is away. By the time Macheath escapes from jail, Polly has become tough enough to try to trick Lucy into revealing where he is hiding.

Polly’s relationship with Macheath is what changes her. At first, she is horrified by the crime and violence in his world. But eventually, she gets used to it and even embraces it. She convinces Macheath’s gang to accept her as their leader when he leaves. At the jailhouse, Polly shows a hardness that contrasts with her earlier

sweetness. This toughness hides her jealousy and shows how an innocent girl has turned into someone cruel.

Despite everything, Polly remains deeply in love with Macheath. She loves him at their wedding, when he runs away, when he is arrested, and even after she discovers he has another woman. Her love creates a conflict with the self-interest that drives most of the characters in the play. Polly's love also clashes with her parents' selfish goals, and she stands as a symbol of something greater than self-interest.

2.6.5 Alienation effect in *The Threepenny Opera*:

It is interesting to see how Brecht uses the alienation effect in *The Threepenny Opera*. The alienation effect is a way to create distance between the audience and the play. Brecht believed theater should make people think about how to change the world, so he used this technique to stop the audience from getting too emotionally involved in the story.

In his stage directions, Brecht tells the actors to act in a way that reminds the audience they are watching actors, not real characters. Many songs in *The Threepenny Opera* add to this distancing effect because their lyrics often have nothing to do with what is happening in the play. For example, Polly sings the song "Pirate Jenny" during her wedding to Macheath. The song isn't about marriage, Macheath, or Polly's life. Instead, it's about a maid dreaming of killing her customers and escaping with pirates. This reminds the audience they are watching a play, keeping them from getting lost in the story.

Brecht also uses signs in the play to make certain points and pull the audience's attention away from the action. For instance, a sudden sign reading "It is more blessed to give than to receive" appears out of context, breaking the illusion of being in a small shop in Soho and reminding the audience they are in a theatre.

2.6.6 Themes in *The Threepenny Opera*:

Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* explores a range of themes that critique society, morality, and human behaviour. Through its characters, songs, and storyline, the play challenges traditional notions of justice, heroism, and social order.

1. **Capitalism and Exploitation:** The play is a sharp critique of capitalism, portraying a world where money drives human behaviour. Characters like Peachum and Macheath use manipulation, crime, and business strategies to

survive and thrive in a corrupt society. Brecht highlights how the capitalist system dehumanizes individuals, forcing them to prioritize profit over morality.

2. **Morality and Hypocrisy:** The play questions traditional ideas of morality, showing how they are often hypocritical and self-serving. Peachum, who preaches morality, exploits beggars for profit. Macheath, though a criminal, is charming and likable, blurring the line between “good” and “bad.” Brecht suggests that morality is flexible and often used as a tool for personal gain.
3. **Corruption of Institutions:** Brecht exposes the corruption in institutions like the police, the government, and even marriage. The police, represented by Tiger Brown, are in league with criminals like Macheath. The queen’s last-minute pardon of Macheath mocks the justice system, showing how power and money can override laws and ethics.
4. **Love and Betrayal:** Relationships in the play are marked by love but also by betrayal and manipulation. Polly’s love for Macheath is genuine but leads her to accept his criminal world. Meanwhile, Macheath betrays Polly by being involved with Lucy and Jenny. These dynamics highlight the tension between personal emotions and self-interest.
5. **Alienation and Audience Awareness:** A key theme in Brecht’s work is alienation, where the audience is made aware that they are watching a play. This theme is central to *The Threepenny Opera*, as it forces viewers to think critically about the social issues being presented rather than becoming emotionally absorbed in the story.
6. **Survival and Self-Interest:** Most characters in the play act out of self-interest, whether it’s Peachum exploiting beggars, Macheath committing crimes, or Polly navigating her new role as part of Macheath’s gang. The play portrays survival in a harsh, competitive world where personal gain often comes at the expense of others.

In *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht challenges audiences to reflect on the flaws and contradictions of modern society. Through its dark humour, biting satire, and unforgettable characters, the play continues to provoke thought about the systems and values that govern human life.

2.7 Check your progress:

I. Choose the correct option from the following

1. What is Peachum's business, as introduced in Act I, Scene i?
 - A. Designing costumes for actors
 - B. Licensing and outfitting beggars for a share of their earnings
 - C. Selling goods to Macheath's gang
 - D. Managing a charity for the poor
2. Why is Polly upset in Act I, Scene ii during her wedding celebration?
 - A. She dislikes Macheath's gang members.
 - B. She is horrified by the violence involved in stealing goods.
 - C. She feels the stable is an unworthy place for her wedding.
 - D. Both B and C
3. How does Macheath maintain his safety from the police in Act I, Scene ii?
 - A. He bribes Sheriff Tiger Brown and receives warnings about raids.
 - B. He hides in a remote stable with Polly.
 - C. He disguises himself as one of his gang members.
 - D. He avoids stealing high-profile goods.
4. In Scene iii, why are Peachum and Mrs. Peachum angry about Polly's marriage to Macheath?
 - A. They think Macheath is untrustworthy and dangerous.
 - B. Her marriage threatens their business interests.
 - C. They wanted Polly to marry someone wealthier.
 - D. Both A and B
5. What is the theme of the song "The First Three penny Finale on the Uncertainty of Human Circumstances" in Scene iii?
 - A. The joys of true love
 - B. The moral corruption and selfishness in society

- C. The power of justice over crime
 - D. The inevitability of tragedy in human relationships
6. Why does Polly urge Macheath to leave immediately in Act II?
- A. She wants to take over his gang.
 - B. Her father has added a list of crimes to his record.
 - C. Macheath is bored of staying in the stable.
 - D. Brown threatens to arrest Polly too.
7. In Act II what plan does Macheath share with Polly for the gang's future?
- A. Transition from crime to banking for more profit and safety.
 - B. Continue petty crimes to maintain their income.
 - C. Escape to another country and start fresh.
 - D. Merge with another gang for greater power.
8. How does Macheath react when Jenny predicts betrayal?
- A. He laughs it off, saying betrayal is part of his life.
 - B. He dismisses it and focuses on his gang.
 - C. He accuses Jenny of planning to betray him.
 - D. He insists the betrayer's name must start with a P, not a J.
9. What happens during the "Jealousy Duet"?
- A. Polly and Lucy reconcile their differences.
 - B. Polly and Lucy sing about their love for Macheath without arguing.
 - C. Polly and Lucy argue about who Macheath truly loves.
 - D. Lucy insults Polly and leaves the scene.
10. What is the main theme of the "Second Threepenny-Finale"?
- A. Romantic love outweighs social injustice.
 - B. Moral values are irrelevant in a society built on oppression.
 - C. Ambition leads to success but also to isolation.

- D. True happiness comes from personal wealth.
11. What is Peachum's plan for the coronation day?
- A. To join the queen's procession
 - B. To line the route with an army of beggars carrying pitiful signs
 - C. To bribe the police to release Macheath
 - D. To host a celebration in his shop
12. Why does Jenny reveal Macheath's location to Peachum?
- A. She wants to help Macheath escape
 - B. She is angry about not being paid for turning him in
 - C. Peachum bribes her to give information
 - D. She accidentally mentions he is with Suky Tawdry
13. Who is Macheath by profession?
- A. A politician
 - B. Policeman
 - C. A thief and a gang leader
 - D. A newspaper reporter
14. What is the unexpected ending of the play?
- A. Macheath escapes the gallows on his own
 - B. Peachum declares Macheath's death inevitable
 - C. A royal pardon frees Macheath and makes him a nobleman
 - D. The crowd riots and prevents the execution
15. Who does Mac marry in the play?
- A. Polly
 - B. Lucy
 - C. Jenny
 - D. Linda

II. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence

- 1. Who is the protagonist in *The Threepenny Opera*?
- 2. Who is Tiger Brown's daughter?
- 3. What is the profession of Jonathan Peachum?
- 4. Where does Lucy live in the play?

5. What event is happening on the same morning as Macheath's scheduled execution?
6. How does Macheath attempt to escape execution?
7. What song does Jenny sing that reflects the downfall of virtuous characters?
8. What unexpected event saves Macheath from the gallows?
9. Who delivers the royal pardon in the play?
10. What is the primary critique of capitalism expressed in Macheath's speech?
11. What kind of ending does Peachum describe at the conclusion of the play?
12. Which modern technique is employed by Brecht in *The Threepenny Opera*?

2.7.1 Answers to check your progress:

- I) 1 – B, 2 – D, 3 – A, 4 – D, 5 – B,
 6 – B, 7 – A, 8 – D, 9 – C, 10 – B,
 11 – B, 12 – D, 13 – C, 14 – C, 15 – A

- II) 1. Macheath 2. Lucy
 3. Manager of beggars 4. At the jail
 5. The queen's coronation 6. By bribing Smith.
 7. The Song of Solomon 8. A royal pardon
 9. Brown, as a royal messenger
 10. Theft by corporations and banks is worse than individual crimes.
 11. A deus ex machina ending

(**Deus ex machina** is a plot device where an unexpected and improbable event or character resolves a seemingly unsolvable conflict, often used to create a sudden happy ending.)

12. Alienation effect

2.8 Exercises:

1. How does Polly's character evolve throughout the play, and what does this changesignify about her relationship with Macheath?
2. Discuss major themes in *The Threepenny Opera*.
3. How does Brecht use the alienation effect in *The Threepenny Opera*? Discuss its purpose and impact on the audience's engagement with the play.
4. In what ways is Macheath portrayed as both a hero and an anti-hero? How does his character challenge traditional ideas of heroism?
5. What does *The Threepenny Opera* reveal about the nature of morality and self-interest in society? Provide examples from the play to illustrate your argument.
6. Write a note on the role of women in *The Threepenny Opera*

2.9 Reference for further study:

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Unit-3

The Theater of the Absurd

Text : Tom Stoppard 's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*

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3.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand:

1. The nature and characteristics of The Theater of the Absurd.
2. Life and contribution of Tom Stoppard to the literature and the theater
3. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* as Absurd Play
4. The plot, structure, themes, characters in the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*
5. How *Hamlet* is explored by Tom Stoppard in the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* to suit his idea of human life.

3.1 Introduction: Introduction to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*

The play's Reception, Historical Significance, and Impact on Modern Theatre

The play was performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1966. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* became popular very quickly and it was later on performed at the National Theatre in London. The play was appreciated for its originality, wit and philosophical depth. But some critics found that the theme of existentialism in the play is very bleak.

The influence of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* on the modern Theater such that soon Stoppard became a major playwright. The play exercised the influence on the later works involved in the exploration of metatheatre and existentialism. In other words, the play helped in the rise of postmodern theatre and also inspired playwrights like David Ives and Martin McDonagh. Today *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is considered as a classic contemporary play and it is performed regularly worldwide. The play's engagement with fate, free will and the meaning of the existence is very relevant with modern day audiences. The play is a wonderful blending of comedy, tragedy and philosophy. The play, through its exploration of the fate, absurdism, and the nature of performance, challenges audiences to rethink about how the stories are told and the meanings are formed. Stoppard uses *Hamlet* to reframe its lesser characters by doing this he has paid homage to Shakespeare and expanded the themes of the original play. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* has now become a classic work that has continued to inspire and provoke new thought in the theater.

3.2 The Theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd found its ground in American drama in the late fifties. The Theatre of the Absurd is a type of drama that is associated with Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, using Ionesco, Arthur Miller, Jean Genet, Tom Stoppard and a number of other avant –grade writers in France, Britain, Italy ,Spain, Germany and the United States and elsewhere. It provided a new language, new ideas, new approaches, and a new philosophy. The Theatre of the Absurd also brought new trends and traits to make it powerful means of expression.

The trend of The Theatre of the Absurd was not common around 1920. It took time to filter into wider consciousness. According to Martin Esslin Theatre of Absurd can make its original contribution to this new type of art. He also thinks that Theater of Absurd is important and it has produced some of the finest dramatic achievements of our times. The reception of *Waiting for Godot* and the wider acclaim given to the plays by Ionesco, Adamov , Pinter and others clearly indicate that the plays of this kind are more than merely presentation that leads to mystification of the facts about life. However, many failed to understand the plays or they were confused or misunderstood. It seems the difficulty was result of a new and still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and has hardly ever been defined. Usually The Absurd plays have no story and skilful characterization or recognizable characters. Very often characters are puppets.

Literary school or a moment is a normally a product of intellectual debates on certain issues and ideas. But the term the theatre of the absurd is coined by Martin Esslin himself who is a critic. Esslin very clearly mentions that each absurd dramatist started his career as an individual artist and not as a member of the Theatre of the Absurd. Each absurd dramatist has his own subject- matter and form and from, his own roots, sources and background and even different language nationalities, cultures. But the Absurd dramatist do have something common as their works most sensitively mirror and reflect the preoccupation and anxieties, emotions and thinking of many of their contemporaries in the Western world. This is suddenly interesting in an age of transition. Esslin thinks that the theatre of the absurd is a reflection of changing attitude of the time. This changing attitude is a result of the feeling that certitudes and unshakable basic assumption of former ages have been swept away. The decline of religious faith was marked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism and various other totalitarian fallacies. But after the disaster Second World War new faiths were shattered shuttle and humanity was placed in a tense predicament.

Albert Camus, a novelist, thought that life of man had lost all meaning and man should seek escape in suicide. In “*Myth of Sisyphus*”, Camus tried to diagnose human life in world of shattered beliefs. Originally ‘Absurd’ means something that is ‘out of

harmony' in a musical context. But generally absurd is understood as ridiculous. For Camus meaning of the absurd is different when one thinks of the word absurd in the context of the theatre of the absurd. To Ionesco, absurd is that which is devoid of purpose cut off from his religious metaphysical and transcendental roots, a man is lost, his actions become senseless, absurd and useless.

Martin Esslin observes that 'the sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking the theme of the plays of Samuel Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet, and some other writers.. But it is important to know that nearly subject matter does not define the theatre of the absurd. A similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable, valuation of ideals, purity and purpose, is also the theme in the dramas of the dramatist like Gide, Giraudoux, Anouilh, Sartre and Camus himself. But Martin Esslin does not call these writers as absurd dramatists because these dramatists present their sense of irrationality of the human condition in very lucid manner and logically constructed reasoning. The absurdists present their sense of senselessness of the human life and the inadequacy of the rational approach by giving away the rational devices and discursive thought.

In other words Camus and Sartre express a new content in the old conversation and the theatre of the absurd goes a step ahead to achieve, a unity between its basic assumption and in the form in which these are expressed. In fact Esslin thinks that the theatre of the philosophy of Sartre and Camus is less adequate as an expression of the philosophy of Sartre and Camus—in artistic, as distinct from philosophic terms than the Theatre of the absurd. Both Camus and Sartre tried to explain the meaninglessness, absurdity of life in a brilliant and a logical argument. But the absurdists do not argue about absurdity, they merely present it in terms of concrete images. The absurdists tried to seek integration between the subject-matter and the form in which it is expressed. And this is the difference between the theatre of the absurd and the Existentialist theatre.

Esslin makes a difference between French theatre that occupied with the absurdity and uncertainty of human condition 'poetic avant-garde' the theatre of the dramatists like Michael de Ghelderode, Jacques Audoubert and George Neveux etc. It is very difficult to draw a dividing line between two approaches as they overlap a good deal. The 'Poetic avant-garde' relies on fantasy and dream as much as the theatre of the absurd. Both approaches disregard the basic unity, plot and consistency of character. The difference also lies in the fact that 'Poetic avant-garde' is more lyrical and for less violent and grotesque and still one more important difference is its difference attitude towards language which is poetic in nature. On the other hand there is a radical valuation of a language in the theatre of the absurd.

The theatre of the absurd is a part of anti-literary movement of 20th century and its centre is Paris, a powerhouse of modern movements. It doesn't mean that the theatre of

the absurd is essentially French. Many artists of great repute from all corners of the world could come together in Paris to shape different dramatists of different languages. An Irishman Samuel Beckett, a Rumanian Eugene Ionesco, a Russian of American origin, Arthur Adamov are among the major absurdists.

Absurd Plays could get thoughtful and eager audience in Paris not full and eager audience in Paris. However, it doesn't mean that the absurd plays could enjoy success immediately. It is the matter of time because the plays very were difficult in nature. But due to success in Paris absurd plays could get the audience from different parts of the word.

Major Absurdists

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett is a major playwright of the theatre of the absurd whose writing reveals him as the most tormented and sensitive of human being. His lifelong association with Paris started when he was send by his university at its representative in a traditional exchange of lectures. In Paris he met James Joyce and became a member his circle. He started writing at the age 23. During his first stay in Paris he made his mark as a poet by winning the first prize in a competition of poem writing and the subject was time. Samuel Beckett felt the habit and routine where the cancer of time and social intercourse, mere illusion.

Beckett travels through many European countries and it is interesting to know that many of his characters are Tramps and wanders and all are lonely. Beckett was addicted to silence. Beckett's first play *Eleutheria* written in French, is about young man's efforts to cut himself loose from his family and social obligation. Beckett published prose fragments, novels short stories and plays. But he earned his reputation as a great writer with his play *Waiting for Godot*, originally written in French. *Waiting for Godot* was a great success and it ran for a long time in theatre. *Waiting for Godot* has been translated in more than 20 languages and performed in various parts of the word. In fact *Waiting for Godot* received unprecedented reception in spite of its most unusual dramatic construction. *Waiting for Godot* doesn't tell a story it explores a static situation "Nothing happens nobody comes nobody goes, it is awful". There is a hardly any difference in the end in both the acts only the same characters in a reverse order and a question mark is used after, well, in the end of Act II. Sequence of events and the dialogues in each act are different. Every time they encounter a pair of Lucky and Pozzo but in different physical conditions. In each act Vladimir and Estragon attempt to commit suicide but fail. Their dialogue has the same repetitive quality. Beckett is truly a great master in presenting routine in a most interesting, effective and novel way.

Eugene Ionesco

Eugene Ionesco born in Born in Slatina, Rumania in 1912, is not only a writer of hilarious nonsense plays but also a serious artist dedicated to arduous exploration of realities of human situation. He was brought up in a Paris. Eugene shows more contemporaneous in his sensitivity with regard to social and intellectual concerns than Beckett and Genet. He uses an evident unrealism to dramatize much of its fictiveness and absurdity. For Eugene Ionesco, dramatization of human absurdity or irrationality is an act of discovery of true theater. According to Ionesco realism of the attempt to present the literal world, has an inherent tendency to falsify it. The form of Ionesco's plays emerges from his conception of absurdity which is an aggressive and dangerous thing that really tortures man psychologically and emotionally. Ionesco has a very prominent place in the world of the theatre of the absurd for his plays. His major plays are *The Baluk Prima Donna*, *The Lesson*, *The Chairs*, *The Victims of Duty*, *How to get rid of it*, *The killer*, etc.

Jean Genet

Jean Genet was born in Paris in 1910. He was abandoned by his mother and was brought up by foster parents. Genet started as a poet, then prose writer and finally dramatist. Plays have helped Genet to write freely and very importantly to forget his past life which was full nasty stuff. His comments on the absurdity of human life are very ruthless and he rejects the traditional idea of theatre. Genet presents a structure of rituals which expresses and clarifies the human urges to overcome the alienation Genet's ritual presents the unceasing absurdity in human life and the destructiveness that is part of the absurdity. Among his important plays are *Deathwatch*, *The Maids*, *The Balcony*, *The Blacks*, and *The Screen*.

Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter was in 1930 in East London. He wrote poetry in his early life. After finishing his training in acting, he started his acting career. After unsuccessful attempt to write a novel, he began to write plays. *The Room*, one act play, is his first play which he wrote to perform at Bristol University in 1995. The play indicates his basic themes, personal style and idiom, later on his features. To achieve higher degree of realism, Pinter rejected the idea the idea of well made plays. In his early career he created kind of 'Comedy of Menace' in which characters are humorously horrified by mysterious outsiders. His later works re more psychological in nature. *Birthday* his first full length play, *The Caretaker*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Servant*, *The Home Coming*, *Landscape*, *Sitene and Old Times* are his important plays.

Arthur Adamo

Arthur Adamo, born in Russia, lived in France and wrote in French. He is one of the leading figures in the theatre of the absurd. Through his autobiographical volume, he first expressed his deep sense of alienation, a major concern of the absurdist. However, he rejected the heading the theatre of the absurd under which his plays were included. Remarkable dramatist and thinker, Adamo, wrote remarkable plays like *La Parodie*, *L' Invasion*, *Professor Taramne*, *Le Ping Pong*, *Paolo Paoli*, and *Pront Temps*, 171. After 1955, he left absurd to write in favour of the Brechtian Epic.

Tom Stoppard

He is associated with absurdist theatre. Like Samuel Beckett and Eugene, Stoppard focuses on the meaningless and chaotic nature of existence but in a different style. His style involves clever wordplay, logical paradoxes and literary allusions. He presents serious philosophical concerns through humor very much in tune with absurd theatre.

Stoppard with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* made his presence felt on the world stage. After that he created a number of other plays. Among them are, *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), *Jumpers* (1972), *Travesties* (1974; Tony Award for best play), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1978), *Night and Day* (1978), *Undiscovered Country* (1980, adapted from a play by Arthur Schnitzler), and *On the Razzle* (1981, adapted from a play by Johann Nestroy). The Tony-winning *The Real Thing* (1982) is Stoppard's first romantic comedy.

To sum up the above absurdist have contributed significantly to the theatre of the absurd to grow, expand and establish as one of the leading art forms of the play after 1940.

Biographical information of Tom Stoppard

Tom Stoppard was born on July 3rd, 1937 in Zlín in Czechoslovakia. Now the place of his birth is in the Czech Republic. Tom Stoppard is playwright and the screenwriter. He is known for his verbal brilliance, ingenious action and structural dexterity. His father was working in Singapore. Stoppard's father was working in Singapore in the late 1930s. The Japanese invaded Singapore around 1937 and his father was killed in the war. Tom's mother took her two sons and escaped to India. In 1946 she married a British officer, Kenneth Stoppard. Soon the family went to England. Tom Stoppard took his step father's name. He started working as the journalist in Bristol in 1954. He moved to London and started writing plays in 1960.

Tom Stoppard assumed his stepfather's surname—quit school and started his career as a journalist in Bristol in 1954. He began to write plays in 1960 after moving to London. He married three times, first in 1965 with Jostle Ingle and in 1972 with Miriam Stoppard. Sabrina Guinness is his third wife with whom he married in 2014.

Tom Stoppard works incorporate wordplay, intertextuality and philosophical debate. His first play, *A Walk on the Water* (1960) was televised in 1963 and later on the same play was staged with a new title *Enter a Free Man*. His major play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* was performed in 1964-1965. He published his only novel, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* in 1966. But his play was a great success and soon it rapidly became famous at international level. The irony and brilliance of this work was derived from Shakespeare's two minor characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from *Hamlet*. After *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* Tom Stoppard created a number of other plays. Among them are *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), *Jumpers* (1972), *Travesties* (1974; Tony Award for best play), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1978), *Night and Day* (1978), *Undiscovered Country* (1980, adapted from a play by Arthur Schnitzler), and *On the Razzle* (1981, adapted from a play by Johann Nestroy). The Tony-winning *The Real Thing* (1982) is Stoppard's first romantic comedy. It deals with deals with art and reality and features a playwright as a protagonist. *Arcadia*, which juxtaposes 19th-century Romanticism and 20th-century Chaos Theory and is set in a Derbyshire country house which was premiered in 1993, and *The Invention of Soloman* about A.E. Housman, was first staged in 1997. The trilogy *The Coast Utopia Voyage, Shipwreck, and Salvage*, first performed in 2002, explores the lives and debates of a circle of 19th-century Russian émigré intellectuals which received a Tony Award for best play. *Heroes* (2005), translated from a play by Gérald Sibleyras, is set in a retirement home for French soldiers, and it received a Laurence Olivier Award for best new comedy. *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006) jumps between England and Czechoslovakia during the period 1968–90. In *The Hard Problem* (2015), Stoppard explored consciousness. *Leopoldstadt* (2020) follows a Jewish family in Vienna from the early 20th century through the Holocaust; the critically acclaimed work won the Olivier Award for best new play.

Apart from plays, Tom Stoppard wrote a number of radio plays and also plays. Stoppard wrote a number of radio plays, including *In the Native State* (1991), which was reworked as the stage play *Indian Ink* (1995). He also wrote a number of notable television plays, such as *Professional Foul* (1977). Among his early screenplays are those for *The Romantic Englishwoman* (1975), *Despair* (1978), and *Brazil* (1985), as well as for a film version (1990) of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* that he also directed. In 1999 the screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), co-written by Stoppard and Marc Norman, won an Academy Award. Stoppard also adapted the French screenplay for the English-language film *Vatel* (2000), about a 17th-century chef, and wrote the screenplay for *Enigma* (2001), which chronicles the English effort to break the German Enigma code. He later penned scripts for a lavish miniseries (2012) based on novelist Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Paradise End* and for a film adaptation (2012) of Leo Tolstoy's *Karenina*. Stoppard also co-

wrote the historical drama *Tulip Fever* (2017), which is set in 17th-century Amsterdam.

To Stoppard received many awards including the Japan Art Association's Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperiale prize for theatre/film (2009). He was knighted in 1997.

3.3 Check your progress

Question 1.

Complete the following sentences by selecting correct options given below'

1. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was first performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in
a) 1941 b) 1980 c) 1966 d) 1920
2. thought that life of man had lost all meaning and man should seek escape in suicide in "*Myth of Sisyphus*".
a) Martin Esslin b) Tom Stoppard c) Samuel Beckett d) Albert Camus
3. *The Caretaker* is written by
a) Jean Genet b) Harold Pinter c) Tom Stoppard d) Samuel Beckett
3. Pozzo is character in
a) *Jumper* b) *The Caretaker*
c) *Waiting for Godot* d) *Hamlet*
4. According to Theatre of Absurd can make its original contribution to this new type of art.
a) To Stoppard b) Albert Camus c) Jean Genet d) Martin Esslin
5. presents routine in a most interesting, effective and novel way.
a) To Stoppard b) Samuel Beckett c) Jean Genet d) Martin Esslin

B) Identify True or false sentences.

1. Martin Esslin is a critic of Elizabethan theatre
2. Samuel Beckett was born in England

3. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is pure comedy.
4. The theatre of the Absurd, a modern dramatic movement started in late 19th century.
5. The theatre of the absurd is a reflection of changing attitude of the time.

3.4 Key to check your progress

- A) 1. c) 1966 2. d) Albert Camus 3. b) Harold Pinter 4. d) Martin Esslin
 5. b) Samuel Beckett
- B) 1. False 2 False 3.False 4. False 5.True

3.5 Modern times:

The world experienced the Second World War. There were many changes in the field in the fields like science, technology, politics and also literature. The world started witnessing changes in various fields after the First World War and these changes were multiplied after the Second World War. Decolonization of many countries, civil right movement, urbanization and migration etc. were the major changes. The changes also include formation of UNO, cold war between Russia and America, division between Europe and Germany, nuclear politics, etc. The changing scenario had tremendous impact on literature. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre explored the meaninglessness and individual freedom. The literature became more experimental and fragmented. There was rise of antiheroes, freely questioning the traditional values. In fact the impact of the world war on literature was profound and far-reaching. The writers all over the world quickly and sumptuously responded through various forms of literature. The writers explored trauma, existential despair, and absurdity of life. The French writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus focused on freedom isolation, and search for meaning of life. Disillusionment became very common in the literature. The socio-political situation is seen clearly in the literature after the Second World War. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a classic exploration of the mood of the human predicament.

3.6 Modern theater

The theatre of the Absurd is a modern dramatic movement. This movement started in mid-twentieth century. The movement reflects about existential philosophy and exploring meaninglessness and absurdity of human existence Absurd play presents the themes through illogical plots and fragmented dialogues.

The modern theatre rejects the old traditional ideas of realism, plot, character development and logical structure. This movement has its roots in existential philosophy. Albert Camus' idea that human existence is inherently absurd has influenced the absurd play. The absurd play explores the feeling of purposelessness and futility of human efforts. The play is full of fragmented dialogues with characters' inability to communicate. The characters are placed in illogical situation and the play ends where it begins.

The influence of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* on the modern Theatre is such that soon it became a major playwright. The play exercised the influence on the later works involved in the exploration of metatheatre and existentialism. In other words the play helped in the rise of postmodern theatre and also inspired playwright like David Ives and Martin McDonagh. Today *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is considered as a classic contemporary play and it is performed regularly worldwide. Play's engagement with fate, free will and the meaning of the existence is very relevant with modern day audiences. The play is a wonderful blending of comedy, tragedy and philosophy. The play through its exploration of the fate, absurdism, and the nature of performance, challenges audiences to rethink about how the stories are told and the meanings are formed. Stoppard uses *Hamlet* to reframe its lesser characters by doing this he has paid homage to Shakespeare and expanded the themes of the original play. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* has now become a classic work that has continued to inspire and provoke new thought in the theater.

3.7 Sources:

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* draws from different sources. The play blends Shakespeare's tragedy with existential philosophy and absurdist theatre. The play is directly inspired by Shakespeare's *Hamlet* especially by the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Stoppard has used dialogue from *Hamlet* and integrates it with his own original writing. The themes of free will and death in the *Hamlet* are presented with comedic and existential twist. *Waiting for Godot* is a major influence, especially in the use of two characters that are trapped in an ambiguous situation.

3.8 Setting of the play

The setting of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* is very ambiguous. It shifts between different locations. This suggests themes of existential uncertainty and theatrical illusion. Much of the play takes place in an unspecified place. There is no clarity

about geographical or temporal markers. This unknown place suggests the theme of existential confusion very much like *Waiting for Godot*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are lost in the space between the scenes of *Hamlet*. Some scenes are set in Danish court, overlapping with moments from *Hamlet*. In the final act, characters are on the ship heading for England. This scene is very similar to Hamlet's story.

3.9 Characters in the play

Rosencrantz

Rosencrantz is simple-minded, cheerful, forgetful, easily distracted, more accepting of circumstances. His approach to fate is very passive and his optimism is very blind. Rosencrantz tends to go along with whatever is happening without much resistance. He is content to enjoy simple pleasures, such as playing games or engaging in meaningless conversations.

Guildenstern

Guildenstern is more philosophical, anxious and makes attempts to understand the events. Frustration is natural to him. He presents existential doubts and need to control and finding out the meaning. He is deeply troubled by their predicament.

He always tries to analyze their situation. He questions whether they have any free will.

The Player

He is the leader of the tragedians. He is very fascinating character in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. He is a master of illusion. He is a bridge between illusion and reality

The Supporting Characters from *Hamlet*

Hamlet: The enigmatic Prince of Denmark is deeply introspective and complex character. But in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* he is largely distant and difficult to understand. Hamlet's behavior confuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

King Claudius: The appearance of King Claudius in the play is brief. He maintains his role as a calculating and ruthless king. He uses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as the tools to spy on Hamlet.

Queen Gertrude:

Mother of Hamlet, Gertrude is very kind to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But like Claudius she looks at them as only as a minor figures in grand political drama.

Polonius, Ophelia, and Other Minor Characters:

These characters appear only briefly. Their appearance suggests how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exist on the margins of Hamlet's story.

3.10 Plot of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* is an absurdist tragicomedy. The two insignificant characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find themselves in an unknown place. They decide to go for tossing. But mysteriously coins land on heads every time. They are not sure about how they got there. They struggle with their identity, memory and purpose. Soon they are called to the court of Denmark. They are asked to investigate Prince Hamlet's strange behavior. Throughout their journey they meet a troupe of travelling actors. These actors are led by the enigmatic Player. The Player hints at the enviable nature of their fate. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to fulfill their mission but they fail in it because they could not understand Hamlet's madness or even their own role in a grand scheme of things. In the end they carry a letter ordering execution of Hamlet. But Hamlet switches it, sealing their fates instead. In the last act they are on the ship to England. Here they realized that their death is imminent. They grapple with existential question before disappearing from the stage. The play ends with the casual announcement of the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by the ambassador. It only emphasizes the insignificance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in a grand narrative.

3.11 Act-wise summary and notes

Act I

The play opens in an unknown setting. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are engaged in a flipping a coin repeatedly. Rosencrantz consistently wins. The improbability of the repeated heads-up result introduces a central motif i.e. chance versus determinism. They gradually begin to recall that they were summoned to the court of Denmark by King Claudius, though they are unsure of the exact reason. Soon, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet a traveling troupe of actors. They are known as a traveling troupe of actors, known as the Tragedians and they are led by the enigmatic Player. Their interaction with the Player introduces themes of performance, illusion, and the blurred line between reality and fiction.

Key Events

1. Coin Tossing and Probability:

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss probability and randomness. The fact that the coin keeps landing on heads suggests a universe governed by strange, incomprehensible laws.

2. Uncertain Identities and Confusion:

The protagonists struggle to remember their mission or even distinguish themselves from one another, emphasizing their existential predicament.

3. The Arrival of the Tragedians:

The Tragedians, a group of performers, offer to put on a play, hinting at the metatheatrical aspect of the work. The Player suggests that theatrical performances—especially those involving death—are the only meaningful events in life.

4. Interaction with Hamlet:

A brief encounter with Hamlet occurs, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are side characters in larger story, uncontrollable story.

5. Connections to *Hamlet*

This act mirrors Hamlet's Act II, Scene 2, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern first arrive at the Danish court. Stoppard reimagines the story from their perspective, showing their confusion and lack of agency.

Themes Introduced

- Fate vs. Free Will: The repeated coin toss suggests a world where probability is skewed, and question whether the protagonists have any control over their lives.
- Identity and Meaning: The protagonists' struggle to remember their own purpose reflects existentialist concerns about the search for meaning.
- Theatre and Reality: The arrival of the Player and the Tragedians highlights the play's self-referential nature, suggesting that all of life might be a performance.

Act II

The second act takes place within Elsinore Castle, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attempt to fulfill their mission of uncovering Hamlet's mental state. However, Hamlet manipulates them, leaving them increasingly perplexed. The act alternates between their interactions with Hamlet and their bewildered discussions in private. The Player and his troupe perform *The Murder of Gonzago*, the play-within-a-play from *Hamlet*, further blurring the line between art and reality.

Key Events

1. **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's Failure to Interrogate Hamlet:** They attempt to determine whether Hamlet is truly mad, but he outwits them. Their conversation with Hamlet mirrors their exchange in *Hamlet*, where he evades their questioning.
2. **The Player's Perspective on Death:** The Player argues that death is only meaningful in performance, reinforcing the idea that life itself might be theatrical.
3. **The Performance of The Murder of Gonzago:**

This metatheatrical moment echoes Shakespeare's play, where Hamlet uses theatre to expose Claudius's guilt. The Tragedians perform a sequence that foreshadows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's own fate.

4. **Their Growing Awareness of Predestination:** As events from *Hamlet* continue unfolding, the duo becomes increasingly aware that they are trapped in a script beyond their control.

Connections to *Hamlet*

This act corresponds with *Hamlet's* Act III, where the title character becomes more erratic, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are used as pawns in Claudius's schemes. The performance of *The Murder of Gonzago* directly parallels the play in *Hamlet* that exposes Claudius's guilt.

Themes Explored

- **Powerlessness:** The protagonists are unable to influence events, despite their attempts to understand their situation.
- **The Nature of Death:** The Player suggests that death is only real when performed, questioning whether death has inherent meaning.
- **Metatheatre:** The play-within-a-play reinforces the blurred boundary between reality and fiction.

Act III

The final act takes place aboard a ship en route to England, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern unknowingly carry a letter ordering Hamlet's execution. However, Hamlet secretly replaces the letter, sealing their doom instead. As the reality of their fate dawns upon them, they resign themselves to their impending deaths. The play concludes with a reenactment of their offstage deaths from *Hamlet*.

Key Events

1. **Realization of Their Fate:** They discover the letter's contents and finally understand their role in the larger story.
2. **Hamlet's Trick:** Hamlet replaces the letter, ensuring that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will be executed in his place.
3. **The Tragedians Perform a Death Scene:** The Player demonstrates a staged death, reinforcing the theme that theatrical deaths are more comprehensible than real ones.
4. **Their Resignation and Disappearance:** The duo gradually vanishes from the play, reflecting their fate in Hamlet. The final scene echoes the closing lines of Hamlet, where an ambassador announces their deaths.

Connections to *Hamlet*

This act corresponds with Hamlet's Act IV and V, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent to England and executed. Their deaths occur offstage in Hamlet, making their disappearance in Stoppard's play a poetic reenactment.

Themes Concluded

- **The Inevitability of Death:** The protagonists ultimately accept their fate, echoing existentialist notions of mortality.

Absurdity and Meaninglessness: Their inability to change the course of events reinforces the absurdity of existence.
- **Performance vs. Reality:** The Player's theatrical death highlights the contrast between staged and real-life tragedies.

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a masterful reinterpretation of Hamlet that transforms two minor characters into existential heroes. Through absurdist humor, metatheatrical elements, and philosophical dialogue, the play explores fate, free will, identity, and the search for meaning in an indifferent universe. By presenting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as bewildered figures struggling to comprehend their role in a predetermined narrative, Stoppard creates a profound meditation on the human condition. Their deaths, though inevitable, serve as a poignant reminder of the absurdity of existence and the fragile nature of identity. Ultimately, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* stands as both a tribute to Shakespeare's Hamlet and a brilliant work in its own right, offering timeless reflection on the mysteries of life, death, and the power of storytelling.

3.12 Glossary and notes

Absurdism: A philosophy that highlights the conflict between man's quest for meaning of life and universe's indifferent silence. The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* reflects this tension.

Metatheatre : It is a device where play self-consciously reflects on the theatre and performance. Tom Stoppard has blended the scenes from *Hamlet* who are aware about their theatrical existence.

Existentialism: A philosophical theory emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and the absence of inherent meaning of life. The protagonists' struggle shows existentialist dilemmas.

Tragicomedy: A genre which combines both tragedy and comedy. The play's humorous dialogues juxtaposed with its fatalistic themes exemplify this blend.

The player : The leader of tragedians, a group of travelling actors. He is a guide to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He often blurs the lines between the reality and performance.

Coin : A symbol of chance versus determinism. The recurring coin tosses landing on heads challenges the laws of probability, suggesting themes of fate and randomness.

The Boat : It symbolizes the journey of life and the inevitability of death. The characters travel to England and the boat becomes a metaphor for their lack of control over fate.

The tragedians: A troupe of actors within the play who perform *The Murder of Gonzago*. This act of murder mirrors the play within a play. It suggests the theme of imitation of art.

Fourth Wall: The imaginary barrier between the actors and the audience. Stoppard frequently breaks the wall to draw attention to the play's artifice and to engage the audience directly.

Determinism versus free will ; A central theme which explores whether the characters control their fate or they are subject to predestined outcomes.

3.13 Characterization

Characters

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Tom Stoppard mainly focuses on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. These two characters are presented as bewildered and

insignificant and trapped in larger and incomprehensible plot. The interactions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with other characters and the player present the themes of fate, free will, and the nature of performance. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the tragicomic protagonists and the minor characters from *Hamlet*. In the original play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are courtiers and childhood friends of the Prince of Denmark. But in the play of Stoppard they are presented as the protagonists. Though they are protagonists, they are largely passive, powerless and unable to understand the events around them. Their dynamic resembles that of Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. One character represents curiosity and analysis while the other embraces absurdity. Both of them are confused for each other. Sometime they forget their identity. They do not know who they are. Actually they are mere pawns in the predetermined story. Their exchange of the dialogue is filled with miscommunication, wordplay, and contradictions, presenting the absurdity of their existence. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern slowly become aware of their lack of agency. Initially they believe they have been summoned for a purpose and that they may be able to influence events. In the middle of the play they realize that they are simply used by Claudius and Hamlet and their frustration grows. In the final act, they discover the letter ordering Hamlet's execution and they begin to understand their inevitable death. They disappear from the play like in *Hamlet*. Finally they resign themselves to their deaths. Their deaths are reported offstage. The journey of their life is tragic because they struggle against the forces that were beyond their control.

Character of Rosencrantz

Both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play similar roles, they are different from each other. Rosencrantz is simple-minded, cheerful, forgetful, easily distracted, more accepting of circumstances. His approach to fate is very passive and his optimism is very blind. Rosencrantz tends to go along with whatever is happening without much resistance. He is content to enjoy simple pleasures, such as playing games or engaging in meaningless conversations.

Character of Guildenstern

Guildenstern is more philosophical, anxious and makes attempts to understand the events. Frustration is natural to him. He presents existential doubts and need to control and finding out the meaning. He is deeply troubled by their predicament.

He always tries to analyze their situation. He questions whether they have any free will.

The Player

He is the leader of the tragedians. He is a very fascinating character in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. He is a master of illusion. He is a bridge between illusion

and reality. He appears more in control than the protagonists. He is very confident, charismatic and pragmatic. He knows the artificial nature of storytelling and performance. He serves as a foil to Guildenstern's existential struggles suggesting that life itself is another performance. His attitude towards death is very striking. He argues that stage deaths are more convincing than the deaths in real life. Deaths in real life lack meaning and theatricality. The Player often acts as a guide to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But his lessons are more about performance than philosophy. For the player all the world is stage which presents the metatheatrical nature of the play. His troupe of actors performs *The Murder of Gonzago*, which mirrors *Hamlet's* themes of deception and fate. In the end of the play Player dies during a demonstration only to show that it was merely an act. Death of the player blurs line between the reality and performance. It also hints the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's fate may itself be just another scripted moment.

His presence reminds the audience that the play itself is a constructed illusion. This will help the audience to question the nature of storytelling

The Supporting Characters from Hamlet

The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* revolves around its two main characters. But several characters from *Hamlet* make their appearances. The roles of these characters are largely unchanged. But their conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern highlights the insignificance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Hamlet: The enigmatic Prince of Denmark is deeply introspective and complex character. But in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* he is largely distant and difficult to understand. Hamlet's behavior confuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are confused because they fail to understand whether Hamlet is truly mad or he is pretending. They think that Hamlet is erratic and he is using them as pawns for his plan. It is Hamlet's decision of execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seals the fate of both of them.

King Claudius: The appearance of King Claudius in the play is brief. He maintains his role as a calculating and ruthless king. He uses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as the tools to spy on Hamlet. His dialogue with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern shows complete lack of awareness and understanding. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fail to understand the danger in which they are placed.

Queen Gertrude:

Mother of Hamlet, Gertrude is very kind to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But like Claudius she looks at them as only as minor figures in grand political drama. She has no role in their fate. This, too, shows that both are irrelevant in the larger scheme of things.

Polonius, Ophelia, and Other Minor Characters:

These characters appear only briefly. Their appearance suggests how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exist on the margins of Hamlet's story. Interactions of these characters are in the background and it highlights the protagonists' lack of importance.

Conclusion:

- The characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are very carefully crafted to explore the themes of fate, free will, and the nature of performance.
- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are tragicomic figures and they struggle to their role in this universe. In the end they realize that they are powerless.
- The Player serves as a philosophical guide and offers insights into the illusory nature of reality and storytelling.
- Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude remain largely as they are in Hamlet, but from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's perspective, they seem distant and uninterested in their fates. Through these characters, Stoppard creates a play that is both deeply humorous and profoundly tragic. He forces the audiences to confront the absurdity of existence and the limitations of human understanding.

3.14 Check your progress

Question 1 A. Write answer in one answer.

1. What is unusual about the coin tossing?
2. Who are the tragedians?
3. Which character is more philosophical and contemplative?
4. How does the play end?
5. What is the genre of the play?

Identify True or False

1. Events of the Shakespeare's *Hamlet* occurs in the background of the play.
2. The players believe that death can be more convincing on the stage.
3. The Characters have complete control on their fate.
4. Rosencratz and Guildestern always know what is happening around them.

5. Claidias breaks the fourth wall and comments on the performance.

3.15 Key to check your progress

Q1.A) 1.True 2.True 3. False 4. False 5.False

1. It always lands on heads
2. A group of actors
3. Guildenstern
4. With the death of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz
5. Tragicomedy

B)

3.16 Criticism of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*

3.17 Criticism of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* has been widely praised for its wit and philosophical depth. The play is also noteworthy for its innovative use of a celebrated work of Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. But the play has faced severe criticism on different issues. The critics have pointed out that the play lacks emotional depth and it is heavily depended on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for its meaning. The play is also criticized for its treatment of existential themes.

1. Lack of Emotional Depth

According to some critics the play is intellectually stimulating but it is terribly weak in its emotional weight as compared to the emotional weight of *Hamlet* or other existentialist works like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's plight is often played for comedy. So it is difficult to fully sympathies with their existential crisis.

2. Over-Reliance on *Hamlet*

Hamlet, is the main source of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. So it is obvious that the play derives much of its content From *Hamlet*. Without the knowledge of *Hamlet* it is not possible to understand the play. Much of the play's irony

and humour may be lost due to the ignorance of *Hamlet*. This has led to criticism that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is more of an intellectual exercise than a standalone masterpiece. The play cannot stand on its own legs.

3. Repetitiveness and Pacing Issues

Tom Stoppard's wordplay is admired by the critics. But some of the critics find that long philosophical dialogues are repetitive in nature and self-indulgent. The constant back-and-forth between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, though clever, can become tedious, especially in a theater setting.

4. Weak Characterization

Characters in *Hamlet* are drawn most brilliantly, especially complex characters like Hamlet. But the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are often portrayed as passive and confused, lacking strong individual personalities. Their interchangeable nature may be a thematic choice, but it also makes them less compelling protagonists.

5. Ambiguity in Themes

While the play explores existentialist ideas, some critics feel it does so without taking a clear stance. Unlike *Waiting for Godot*, which leans into nihilism, or *Hamlet*, which wrestles with existential despair in a personal way, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* sits between tragedy and comedy in a way that some find unsatisfying.

Conclusion

Despite these criticisms, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* remains a highly regarded and influential play, especially for its clever dialogue, metatheatrical elements, and fresh take on Shakespeare. However, its detachment, reliance on *Hamlet*, and ambiguous tone leave some audiences and critics divided.

3.18 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead as Absurd Play

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* (1966) is one of the most influential plays of modern theatre. The play blends existential philosophy and absurdist humour and metaphysical techniques to create deeply reflective yet highly entertaining. By reimagining *Hamlet* from the perspective of its most insignificant play characters, Stoppard challenges the traditional notions of narrative, agency, and the meaning of life. The play draws heavily from the Theatre of Absurd, particularly the works of Samuel Beckett.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead is deeply influenced by existentialist thought of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle

with their own existence. They question the purpose and the significance of their roles. They do not know the reason of their summon. They do not know anything about function in the grander narrative. The confusion of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and lack of agency highlight the absurdity of life. The absurdity of life is a key concept in Camus' philosophy of life. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. They are caught in a meaningless cycle of actions with no clear purpose of life. Both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are going to die without understanding why they have to die. It highlights the existentialist idea that life is absurd and it lacks meaning.

The Nature of Death:

The play is filled with discussions about death. It talks about it as the abstract concept of death and also as inevitable reality of life. The Player claims that death is only real when performed. In other words death in life until it happens. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's eventual accept their fate. Their acceptance of death is a classic existential dilemma. They meet their death with or without understanding. Their deaths are ultimately and offstage which suggests that their existence is so trivial that even their death is insignificant.

The Role of Art and Performance

Art and performance are central themes in the play. Life is seen through a lens that is offered by the tragedians and the players. The lens suggests that life is theater. In other words life is a performance. The actors in the play do death better than real people in real life.

The metatheatrical elements like the play- within – a- play and the blurred lines between the reality and the fiction suggests human life is scripted or predetermined. This theme also critiques Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, focusing on how different perspectives on the same story can be presented in terms of meaning of the story.

Metatheatre and Its Impact on the Audience

Metatheatre is one of the most striking features of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Stoppard constantly reminds the audience that they are watching a play, creating a sense of theatrical self-awareness or understanding of their existence.

1. The Play-within-a-Play Structure: The performance of the tragedians of the murder of Gonzaga reflects the events of *Hamlet* and it also hints the fate of both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The actors blur the lines between the reality and illusion suggesting that even real events may be a part of larger performance.

Characters Aware of Their Own Fictionality :

Tom Stoppard plays with audience

The protagonists constantly ask question about their reality .They ask if they are alive or not or part of some other story. The audience also gets involved in the theatrical illusion and raises the question about the nature of storytelling and perception. Tom Stoppard plays with audience's expectations by using Shakespeare's familiar story but focusing on the trivial characters. He makes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as the important characters and forces the audience to think about what makes the character important in the story. The play does not provide any proper or clear resolution. The audience is confused in making out the theme and to decide character's fate was tragic, comic, or simply meaningless.

Role of language and wit:

Tom Stoppard's language and wit play important role in the success of the play. The style of Stoppard combines both comedy and also deep philosophical inquiry into life. He uses pun, wordplay, verbal paradoxes and linguistic games to make his play interesting. His wit is more like Shakespeare's wit but with modern existential touch. Characters are involved in meaningless and conversations which results in the absurdity of the language. Humor is often dark and it is the result of characters' ignorance of their fate. They march towards the death with all confusion and failure to understand the circumstances in which they are placed. Characters appear before the audience as the comedian. The dialogues are mundane and very much like dialogues in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The dialogues present fundamental questions about existence, identity, and a nature of reality. The engagement with *Hamlet* of the play is not a mere parody but it deepens the Shakespeare's work. The shifting the focus to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Stoppard shows how the minor characters are used in the like pawn in the larger narrative. The play questions about Hamlet's free will and also about the characters' fate. Hamlet in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* appears distant and mysterious and suggests that like other characters he too is trapped in his story.

3.19 Check your progress

Q 1 A). Identify true or false

1. Metatheatre is not one of the most striking features of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.
2. The play is filled with discussions about death.
3. Both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know the reason of their summon.

4. The characters are always engaged in the meaningful dialogue and conversation.
 5. Some critics think that the play is weak in its emotional weight as compared to *Hamlet*.
- 2.0 Key to check your progress
- a) False 2. True 3.False 4. False 5.True

3.21 . Exercise

Q1. A answer the following questions in detail.

- a. Character- sketch of Rosencrantz
- b. Character- sketch of Guildenstern
- c. Discuss *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as absurd play
- d. How the play blend comedy and tragedy

B) Short notes

1. Significance of the coin tossing at the opening of the play
2. The role of tragedians
3. Use of metatheatre in the play.

3.23 References Books :

1. Esslin Martin, '*The Theatre of The Absurd*', Penguin Books (1961)
2. Williams Raymond, '*Drama: From Ibsen to Brecht*. London University Press,1987'
3. Hunter Jim . '*Tom Stoppard's plays*' (London ,1982)'

3.24 Recommended reading:

1. Beckett Samuel, '*Waiting for Godot*', Faber and Faber Ltd.,(1956)
2. Shakespeare William, *Hamlet*
3. Camus Albert's , '*The Myth of Sisyphus*', Hamish Hamilton ,1955

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Unit-4
General Topic : Modern Indian Drama
Text : Shanta Gokhale's *Avinash*

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- 4.2 Modern Indian Drama
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 - 4.2.4 Important features of Modern Indian Drama
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- 4.3 Prescribed Play: *Avinash* by Shanta Gokhale
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4.4 Summary

4.5 Answers to Check Your Progress -I

4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress -II

4.7 Exercises

4.8 Books and e-Resources for Further Study

4.9 References

4.0 Objectives

The present unit will cover two topics from syllabus – the general topic ‘Modern Indian Drama’ and the prescribed play *Avinash* by Indian playwright Shanta Gokhale.

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand:

1. The complex issues involved in the terms ‘modern’ and ‘Indian’ in the case of Modern Indian drama
2. The development of Modern Indian Drama
3. Important features of Modern Indian Drama
4. Important Modern Indian Dramatists and Directors
5. The status of Indian Drama in English
6. Contribution of Indian Women playwrights
7. Shanta Gokhale’s oeuvre
8. The plot, setting and characters of the play *Avinash* by Shanta Gokhale
9. Interpretations of the play from different critical perspectives.

4.1 Introduction

Indian drama has a long and an almost unbroken history of over two thousand years. These years are generally classified into three distinct phases:

1. The ancient or the so-called ‘classical’ period of Sanskrit theatre (200 BCE to 1000 CE) of play-wrights like Bhasa, Kalidasa, Shudraka, Vishakhadatta, Bhavabhuti and Harsha. This phase was in fact not composed solely of Sanskrit plays;
2. The medieval period or the traditional theatre (1000 CE to 1857 CE) in which regional literatures and folk and ritualistic theatres flourished;
3. The phase often called ‘modern Indian drama’ (1857 CE to the present) which developed from the colonial period. Some scholars are of the opinion that this phase begins with 1800 and some others think 1850 is the beginning.

In this unit we are going to look at the third phase which extends roughly from the mid-19th century to the present. In the next section we shall study some of the major developments in Indian modern drama and in the second section we shall study the prescribed play *Avinash* by Shanta Gokhale.

4.2 Modern Indian Drama:

4.2.1 Defining Modern Indian Drama

Indian Drama is a huge body of plays and actually comprises of plays in various Indian languages. So, it encompasses Bengali theatre, Marathi theatre, Gujarati theatre, Tamil theatre, Hindi theatre and so on. It also includes the comparatively smaller body of plays written in English by Indian playwrights. And hence, Indian drama is a very vast field to cover in a single unit. Each of these theatres has its distinct characteristics, distinct trajectories, and so on. Yet, there is of course a common thread that connects all these theatres together. Indian Drama is marked by plurality and some scholars see this plurality as a cluster of numerous regional language theatres. However, there are others (such as G. P. Deshpande) who are not happy with this perspective. In his book *Modern Indian Drama*, Deshpande says that we shouldn’t use the term “regional” literatures (or theatres) for these different modes as each mode is uniquely Indian. And so, he says, “there is no regional theatre in India. There are several, equally valid and legitimate Indian theatres” (Deshpande, 1999, p. 95).

There are some major problems when we try to explain the word ‘modern’ in the context of Indian drama:

1. How to establish the beginning of the 'modern' period? For a few it is the advent of freedom from colonial rule and for many others, it is arrival of the British that brought modernity to India in its true sense.
2. Modernity didn't reach different regions, languages and literatures at the same time.
3. 'Modernity' took different forms in different literatures.
4. Defining the modern period has also been found extremely problematic in the case of Western literatures and so Indian case is not unique in that sense.

However, given the plurality in Indian literature, culture and history, designating a modern period and describing the features of the period doesn't remain a simple task.

Let's discuss these problems in greater detail now. In this context, Ananda Lal says,

"Many people, even cognoscenti, use 'modern' very loosely to refer to post-Independence developments, often unaware that those very aspects that they associate with modernity had all appeared previously at different times during the course of the colonial period in India." (P. 31)

It would be more correct to say that modernism reached India with the colonial rule and brought about many sweeping changes from then on and this continued until 1947 or up to sometime later.

It is true that modernism didn't reach all Indian theatres at the same time. Ananda Lal points out that in some Indian theatres like Kashmiri, Dogri, Konkani, Rajasthani, etc, it reached as late as the mid-twentieth century. He further says, "Let us not forget the reality that in many traditional forms, modernism had much of an influence, so that premodern and postmodern Indian theatre anachronistically coexist today" (Lal, p. 32).

G. P. Deshpande points out yet another problem when he says, "India's tryst with modernity takes different (necessarily comparable) forms in different languages." And so, modernity means different things in different Indian theatres.

Some scholars associate the third phase of Indian Drama, that is, the Modern Indian Drama with the writing of a few dramatists, especially a few dramatists

writing in different Indian languages like Badal Sircar in Bengali, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Girish Karnad in Kannada. Some other scholars prefer locating the beginnings in certain specific circumstances rather than in individual attempts. Nandi Bhatia (2009) opines that the influence of Western and European models on local theatrical traditions is responsible for the beginnings of the modern theatre in India. That is, Indian modern drama emerged under the influence of two distinct sources - the rich heritage of Indian drama and the exposure to Western dramatic classics through English.

This was a complex time marked by many contradictions. Shakespeare and Sheridan were as popular as were Kalidasa and Shudrak. There were attempts to return to the Indian classics along with attempts to discover Western classics like Shakespeare. Proscenium arch was used along with folk forms which had never been performed in that kind of western theatrical space. Sanskrit drama was gaining popularity during this time mainly because of the European Orientalist scholars like Sir William Jones who extolled Sanskrit plays. So, on one hand Anglo-European theatrical models and on the other hand ancient Sanskrit plays and traditional theatre from the medieval period were exerting influence on this drama. To complicate the scene, anti-colonial feelings, nationalism, and attempts at finding roots and 'inventing traditions' all marked this theatre simultaneously. As Partha Chatterjee says, this was truly a period marked by many paradoxes. Diverse elements, such as Orientalism, anti-colonialism, classicism, European influences co-existed even if they were sometimes contradictory to each other.

The 'modern' Indian theatre developed through European contact. The local literati were either fascinated or felt the need to 'respond' to the Euro-American drama. Yet they kept on turning back to Sanskrit and traditional theatre. Sanskrit theatre was being admired because of nationalist goals as well as due to the Orientalist influence. Under these twin influences, the modern Indian theatre sought to project both modernity and Indianness in its style and subject matter. It sought to invent a pan-Indian nation-state that was on one hand modern yet uniquely Indian by returning to ancient Hindu traditions.

Another important factor is that 'modern' signified different things for different Indian theatres, and for different writers. For example, in Hindi theatre, modernity signified plays modelled after European drama in form and scenography (Dalmia 2005). For the Parsi theatre, modern signified finding new theatrical models through

the use of traditional performances on European style proscenium stage and themes and stories drawn from international mixed hybrid sources like Persian *Arabian Nights*, Shakespeare, 19th century courtesan culture and so on (Kapur 2006).

4.2.2 A Brief Survey of Modern Indian Drama:

Solomon (2009) describes the developments in Modern Indian Drama in terms of three phases:

1. the Orientalist phase (1827 to 1920),
2. the Nationalist phase (1920-47) and
3. the post-Independence nationalist phase (1947 onwards)

These phases are not to be understood as water-tight compartments, however. The Orientalist phase, for example, starts with the beginning of Indology and continues to exert influence into the early decades of the 20th century.

Under the rule of the East India Company in Bengal, western drama started exerting its influence on the Indians and first attempts at drama started in Bengal. In 1795 a Russian violinist Herasim Stepanovich Lebedeff staged a Hindi and Bengali mixed-language version of a short play by Paul Jodrell. This was the first indigenous performance with native actors and even if it did not exert much influence, it is historically important. It is not surprising that the first 'modern' Indian play was written in English by Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjea in 1831. It was called *The Persecuted, or Dramatic scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*. The play was never performed nor had any impact on other writers. However, it was the first play by an Indian to criticize the actual conditions of the time and hence needs to be seen as 'modern' properly.

The British used to stage plays for themselves. Taking the example of the colonial officers, the local literati started staging European plays. In the 1830s, with the help of rich native families, first Bengali-language theatre emerged. It was different from the traditional Indian theatre. From the 1850s, we begin to see a number of Indian theatre enthusiasts staging their own plays, in their respective languages, in Calcutta, Bombay, and several parts of North and South India. These plays used the Western proscenium style and were distinctly Indian in character.

In 1853 Marathi playwright Vishnudas Bhave for the first time used the commercial strategy of selling tickets for the play thus making drama more democratic and modern. It was no longer confined to private family theatre houses and limited to invited audience and dependent on the patronage of the rich natives. The Parsi and Gujarati theatre soon followed his example and modernism was established commercially in Bombay. The Bengali theatre was not able to do this but it embraced modernism on the thematic level by producing plays on socially relevant issues. Polygamy custom is attacked in Bengali play *Kulin-kulasarbaswa*(1857) by Tarakaratna. During this time Assamese drama too, produced social realist plays attacking social evils like child marriage (Gunabhiram Barua's play *Ram Navami*, 1857).

Similar attempts followed in Hindi (Bharatendu Harishchandra's *Vaidika Hinsa Hinsa Na Bhavati*, 1873, an attack on violence sanctioned by faith), in Oriya (Jagmohan Lala's *Babaji*, 1877, an attack on religious deception) and in Gujarati (Ranchhodbhai Dave's *Lalita Dukhdarshak*, 1878, on the plight of women).

So, by the late 19th Century, a stream of urban drama emerged that was influenced by Anglo-European traditions. This urban theatre didn't eradicate the pre-existing traditional theatre. On the other hand, this new theatre maintained connections with the older traditional theatre and folk forms that gave it a hybrid identity - it was neither completely western nor indigenous. By the end of the century, this new proscenium Indian theatre had become a completely commercial venture independent of patronage of the rich natives. From the 1870s, both in Calcutta and Bombay, plays became highly spectacular by using monumental sets, ornate costumes and sensational stage effects. Unlike traditional folk and tribal theatre, this theatre was performed inside theatre, now called proscenium theatre. They were often a mixture of melodrama, humour, romance and social criticism. It was performed by professional groups, who often travelled to other towns and localities to perform. For a very long time (until the emergence of cinema) it was the only source of mass entertainment and when cinema emerged, this theatre set the paradigms for Indian cinema through its emphasis on music, spectacle and melodrama. Except in some states like Maharashtra and Assam, entertainment theatre was gradually supplanted by popular cinema by 1970's.

This theatricality remained popular with the audience for five more decades. However, in the meantime, it also brought about two types of developments – the

musical plays and the plays concerned with social realism. A Marathi play like Deval's *Sharada* (1899), which attacks the custom of rich old men marrying young girls, is both a musical (*sangeet natak*) and a social realist play.

Anti-colonial spirit influenced both thesetypes in its wake. Some plays were openly nationalist such as *Sirajudaulla*, *Emperor Sivaji* (both in Bengali). On the other hand, some were not so direct. Khadilkar's Marathi play *Keechak Wadh* (1907) even if about an episode from Mahabharata was actually a satire on Lord Curzon's brutal rule and was banned by the British for a very long time. Dinabandhu Mitra's Bengali play *Nildarpan* (1872) was openly anti-British in its criticism of the atrocities committed by Indigo planters. From this play onwards, Bengali theatre started exhibiting more and more patriotic and nationalist tendencies. This outraged the colonial rulers and they passed the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876 to control the anti-colonial tendencies. This act survives even today (and is still used against writers) as does the trend of writing social and political plays.

From the latter part of the nineteenth century, drama increasingly became a vehicle for nationalist thought. Even before the rise of a full-fledged nationalist movement in India, we see political themes and seeds of nationalist thought in Hindi and Bengali drama. These emerged soon after the Mutiny in 1857 and the Indigo Revolt in Bengal in 1859-60. These plays attack colonialism, invoke a glorious India and yet place it all in colonial Victorianism. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the anti-colonial sentiment grew both in the Indian theatres and outside. During this period drama in Marathi, Hindi, and other Indian theatres used mythological and historical elements and were imbued with a spirit of revivalist Hinduism. The plays stressed the importance of moral duty (*dharma*) towards the nation, pushed for more anti-colonial action, and by touching class and caste issues (especially 'untouchability'), showed a strong social perspective. In Telugu and Tamil too, theatre was used as a means of propaganda by the nationalists from 1919 right up to 1945.

An important role was played by the poets of different Indian languages. An important dramatist of the time was Rabindranath Tagore, who contributed immensely to the genres of drama, poetry and fiction in Bengali. Tagore created his own drama and theatre borrowing elements from both the western and the Indian theatrical forms yet which was very distinct from both. His plays were a rich combination of poetry, symbolism, socio-political criticism and cosmic vision.

Chitrangada, and *Post-office*, were performed in Europe and North America and *Muktadhara* and *Roktokoribi* draw attention to immoderate technological development. Poets in other Indian languages too contributed to the development of Drama. Some major examples are Bharatendu Harishchandra and Jaishankar Prasad in Hindi, Samsa and Kuvempu in Kannada, Subrahmanya Bharathiar in Tamil, and Sreekanthan Nair in Malayalam and so on.

An important development in the 1940s was the establishment of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), which was the cultural wing of the Indian Communist Party that had been founded in 1922. IPTA's Bengal and Bombay branches were especially successful in challenging the non-ideological commercial theatre of the time. IPTA dramatists wanted a classless society. This drama was anti-colonial and anti-fascist and strived to reach the masses. They looked at theatre as a means for social change. The regions where this movement was strongest were Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Prominent examples are Bhishma Sahani in North and Toppil Bhasi in the South. Bhasi's Malayalam musical play *You Made Me a Communist* is said to have paved the way for the first ever elected Communist government in Kerala.

Theatre of social criticism critiquing social evils influenced mainly by Ibsen and Bernard Shaw was quite influential. Telugu play *Kanyashulkam* by Vireshalingam Pantulu is an attack on dowry-system. Kannada playwright Adya Rangachary (Sriranga) wrote plays on social evils like caste system, exploitation of women, religious hypocrisy.

We also find during this time amateur theatres striving to bring about social change but which were not connected to Communism. Prithvi Theatre founded by the movie star Prithviraj Kapoor in 1944 was one of these.

After 1947, the impact of IPTA began to wane. Amateur theatre continued to flourish in big cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore. Two major figures of this time are Utpal Dutt and Shambhu Mitra. Utpal Dutt, playwright, director, actor and producer made significant contributions to political theatre after the waning of IPTA through his memorable productions like *Teen Talwar* and *Surya Shikari*. Dutt adapted popular folk theatre *Jatra* to make it a vehicle to communicate contemporary political messages. Shambhu Mitra, a film and stage actor, director,

playwright, ushered in a new theatre movement in Bengal with his group 'Bohurupee' established in 1948 after leaving IPTA.

The need to have theatre that addressed the needs of the independent nation was strongly felt after Independence. To this end, a drama seminar was held in 1956. The participants agreed that post-Independence Indian drama should be a 'synthesis' of the Western elements and pre-Colonial indigenous elements and strike a middle path between imitation and revivalism. The establishment of National School of Drama (NSD) in 1959 as a national theatre institute was the next step in the same direction. However, this period also saw a revival of the Sanskrit drama. With the Kalidasa Festival in Ujjain in 1959, vogue to authentically produce Sanskrit plays for the modern audience started and this continued into the seventies and eighties. Most of the prominent directors (K. N. Pannikar, Ratan Thiyyam, and others) and theatre groups from the country tried their hand at this. This revival in a way contributed to the development of the 'theatre of the roots' trend. This theatre sought inspiration in ritual and folk performances, local traditions.

The connection with the 'authentic' ancient India tradition was established as an important ingredient of the national theatre by both – the Sanskrit drama and the theatre of the roots. The roots movement thus emphasized an anti-modern outlook and made the western style realistic theatre seem inconsequential. It tried to define the complexity of the modern theatre through the folk by establishing the classical and the folk as timeless categories. K. N. Panicker experimented with traditional dance forms from Kerala. Habib Tanvir used Chhattisgarh tribal forms such as *nacha*, to create a new theatrical language and K. Shivarama Karanth who was responsible for the rejuvenation of 'Yakshagana', one of the performing folk arts of coastal Karnataka, used it in his drama.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Badal Sircar experimented not just with form but also with space through his 'Third Theatre' and 'Free Theatre' which rejected ticketing and sponsorship. In the 1980s, issues such as interculturalism of Indian theatre and the place of Indian theatre in world started getting critical attention.

4.2.3 Indian Drama in English:

Drama in Indian English started with Krishna Mohan Banerji's *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the present state of Hindu Society in Calcutta* (1831). However, the real development of Indian English Drama starts with Michael

Madhusudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilization* (1871). The pre-independence period witnessed a number of celebrated playwrights such as Sri Aurobindo, Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, A.S.P. Ayyar, and Bharati Sarabhai writing in English. In the post-Independence period, considerable number of plays by Indian playwrights such as Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, and Gurucharan Das were successfully staged in England and U.S.A. In addition, playwrights such as Lakhan Deb, Nissim Ezekiel, Pratap Sharma, Gieve Patel, Cyrus Mistry, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabham, Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, Uma Parmeswaran, have contributed to the development of Indian English Drama. Notwithstanding this number of playwrights writing in English and their success, Indian drama in English remains relegated to the background. Some reasons for this are:

1. English is seen as the language of the colonisers and so not 'Indian enough';
2. English is seen as the language of the elite and not of the masses;
3. English theatre in India doesn't receive enough patronage;
4. Indian English drama is not seen as commercially viable
5. Media ignores Indian English drama however takes better cognizance of European and American plays in English
6. Even if many organisations and institutes catering to different Indian theatres have been established from pre-Independence period to the present, there is almost none for Indian English drama and very few opportunities are available for the latter.
7. NSD in its attempt to promote a 'national theatre', favoured translations of plays from various Indian languages into Hindi. This had an adverse impact on Indian English plays.
8. From pre-Independence period Indian English drama faced problems related to audience and location and remained restricted mainly to cities.

Because of these reasons, Indian English drama got marginalised and as Bhatia says, dependent on translation of plays from Indian languages especially of Karnad, Tendulkar, Rakesh, and Sircar.

Given the sheer breadth of the topic, it is impossible to discuss all the developments in all modern Indian theatres.

4.2.4 Important features of Modern Indian Drama:

Now let's look at some of the features of the drama of the period like the themes, forms or techniques, language, music, etc., used by the drama of this period so that we can understand 'modernity' of these phase.

1. Themes: The themes become 'modern' as they move to actual situations of the time. They become social and political. The wide thematic range in modern theatre is described by Bhatia thus:

“the politics of the British Raj, conditions prevalent on tea and indigo plantations, workers' rights, famines, the 1947 Partition, psychological fragmentation, familial problems and urban angst, concerns with women's issues, dowry problems, and the rights of dalits, among other issues” (Bhatia xiii).

During the first half of the twentieth century, the themes were heavily influenced by social reform movements, anti-colonial movements, and by the two World Wars. In addition, Marxism, psychoanalysis, symbolism, surrealism were also exerting influence. After Independence, postcolonial issues, feminism, transgender issues, caste and class inequalities, urban anxieties, minority communities and their concerns started getting ascendance.

2. Forms and Techniques: A wide range of themes is handled using a number of different forms and techniques – mythological dramas, folk forms and rituals, historical revivals, transformed versions of Euro-American plays, notably of Shakespeare and Brecht, and through *avant garde* experimentation” (Bhatia xiii).

3. Music: Music became an important modernist device in Indian plays. In addition to Parsi theatre, to other important forms of musical theatre arose around 1880 - Marathi Sangeet Natak, and Bengali Gitabhinay. In Marathi theatre, people like Kirloskar experimented with music by mixing folk songs, devotional kirtans, Hindustani and Carnatic music and, moreover, used actors instead of chorus to sing them. Tagore too experimented with classical ragas and inserted Western music too. Another ground-breaking experiment was made successful In Hindi by Bhartendu Harishchandra in his *Andher Nagari* (1881), a musical political satire.

4. Dance and folk forms: As seen above, experimenting with folk and tribal art forms, classical dance forms, became an important part of Modern Indian drama. *Yakshagana, Jatra, nacha, dashavtari*, etc., were used in plays.

5. Women on stage: In the classical and medieval theatremen performed the roles of women. Theatre was considered an inappropriate place for women. If there were women performers, they were mostly from the communities of courtesans and prostitutes. It was not until the modern phase that women took acting in the theatre. Secondly, this was the time when women started writing plays. Some of these noteworthy playwrights are -Mahashweta Devi(in Bengali), Padmanabhan, Shanta Gandhi and Dhiruben Patel (in Gujarati), Nalini Prava Dekha (in Assamese), Sheila Bhatia (in Punjabi), Sai Paranjape and Shanta Gokhale, (in Marathi), C.S. Lakshmi and Mangai (in Tamil), Volga and Vinodini (in Telugu), Rasheed Jahan and Jameela Nishat (in Urdu), Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Polie Sengupta (in English). This period also saw some very influential women directors like Prema Karanth and B. Jayashreein Kannada, Vijaya Mehta in Marathi, Tripti Mitra in Bengali, Pearl Padamsee in English, Amal Allana and Anuradha Kapur in Hindi.

Modernity, however, was not limited only to these elements; it influenced all the spheres of the Indian drama – where the plays were performed, theatre architecture, patronage, stage (proscenium), lighting, commercialisation of the theatre, and advent of the director. In each case, from themes to music to the role of director, there was constant referencing and response to the western drama.

4.2.5 Important Modern Indian Playwrights:

Given the huge canvas and complexities of the field, it is impossible to discuss all the important personalities who shaped Indian modern theatre. Only a few major contributors are discussed here.

1. Dharamvir Bharati (1926-1997) was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in Playwriting (Hindi) in 1988 for his only play *Andha Yug*, a verse play in Hindi written in 1953. Set in the last day of the Great Mahabharata war, can be seen as allegory of the aftermaths of the partition of India. The play is related to the "theatre of the roots" movement and is today recognised as a major play that ushered in a new era in Hindi and in Indian theatre.

2. **Mohan Rakesh** (1925-1972) Recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1968, Rakesh wrote three important plays, *Ashadh ka ek Din* (1958), *Lehron ke Rajhans* (1963) and *Aadhe-adhure* (1969). Each of these plays deals with man-woman relationship and the inability to communicate with each other. *Aadhe-adhure* (translated as *Halfway House*), also deals with the clash between the egos of man and woman, the tension, suffocation, and the disintegration of such a relationship, and the disintegration of the whole family. The play is a ruthless portrayal of problems in modern life, and is considered an important landmark in Indian theatre.

3. **Badal Sircar (1925-2011)**: Celebrated Bengali dramatist Sircar is known for his anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement, his contribution to the street theatre and experimental Bengali theatre through his “Third Theatre”. He wrote more than fifty plays for his *Aanganmanch* (courtyard stage). His plays *Evam Indrajit*, *Basi Khabar*, and *Saari Raat* are well known and *Evam Indrajit* is considered a milestone in Indian theatre.

4. **Vijay Tendulkar** (1928-2008): Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar is considered a very influential dramatist who was awarded Padma Bhushan in 1984 and Sangeet Natak Academy fellowship in 1988. His plays are intense and dark exposing violence and gender inequalities in Indian society as in *Silence! The Court is On*. Most of his plays have been controversial like *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Sakharam Binder*, and *Gidhade*. *Ghashiram Kotwal* which represented Indian theatre at the international gathering in Berlin in 1980 experiments with the form of the play making use of Marathi medieval dramatic forms like *tamasha*, *keertan*, and *dashavatar*.

5. **Girish Karnad** (1938 –2019): Karnad’s place in modern Kannada playwriting is similar to that of BadalSirkar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. Recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India, Karnad is known for his use of mythology, folktales and history to engage with contemporary social issues. His most acclaimed plays *Tughlaq*, *Yayati*, *Hayavadan* and *Nagamandala* have been directed by some of the biggest directors of India including Ebrahim Alkazi, Vijaya Mehta, B V Karanth and Satyadev Dubey.

6. **B. V. Karanth** (1929 –2002): Karanth’s contribution is not limited only to Kannada theatre but also extends to Hindi, Telugu, Tamil theatre. His plays like

Jokumara Swamy, Sankranti, Huchu Kudure and Oedipus, changed the old formal style of the Kannada theatre through innovative use of music drawing on classical, traditional and folk forms. He also directed plays in English, Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, Punjabi, Urdu, Sanskrit and Gujarati and one of the pioneers of Kannada and Hindi new wave cinema.

7. Mahashweta Devi (1926-2016): Bengali writer and socio-political activist Devi fought for the rights of the tribal people of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Her writing depicts the brutal oppression of the tribal people and untouchables at the hands of the landlords, money-lenders, and government officials. Five of her plays are especially acclaimed—*Mother of 1084*, *Aajir*, *Urvashi and Johnny*, *Bayen*, and *Water*. She was honoured with various literary awards such as the Sahitya Akademi Award (in Bengali), Jnanpith Award and Ramon Magsaysay Award.

8. Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 1939) Elkunchwar and Vijay Tendulkar, are considered today the most influential and progressive playwrights not just in Marathi theatre, but also in Indian theatre. In 2014, he was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship. He has written more than 20 plays including *Yatanaghar*, *Garbo*, *Vasanakand*, *Magna Talyakathi*, *Party*, *Wada Chirebandi*, *Pratibimb*, *Yuganta*, *Sonata*, *Eka Natacha*, *Mrityu*, *Raktapushp*, etc.

9. Mahesh Dattani (b. 1958): Dattani is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. Dattani's plays deal with sensitive issues like homosexuality, communalism, female infanticide, domestic abuse, child sexual abuse, condition of the eunuchs in Indian society, etc. He focuses on gender issues by questioning the traditional hegemonic stereotypical gender roles. He has written a number of plays such as *Where There's a Will* (1988), *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1992-93), *Do The Needful* (1997), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1998), *Thirty Days in September* (2001), *Uma and the Fairy Queen* (2001), *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* (2012), etc.

4.2.6 Important Modern Indian Theatre Directors:

It is not possible to discuss Modern Indian theatre without mentioning the contribution of a few theatre stalwarts and directors like Shambhu Mitra, Ebrahim Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey, and Vijaya Mehta. These people shaped the modern Indian

theatre and left there lasting marks on it. **Shambhu Mitra (1915 –1997)**: Recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship for lifetime contribution in 1966, and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1976, Mitra is considered a pioneer of the West Bengal theatre movement through his theatre group ‘Bohurupee’ which started the group-theatre movement in West Bengal. He is known as a great director, especially for his direction of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Rakta Karabi*, *Bisarjan*, *Raja* and *Char Adhyay*. **Ebrahim Alkazi** was the first director of the National School of Drama. He revolutionized the Hindi theatre by experimenting with scenographic design. He directed some of the plays that went on to become milestones in Indian drama like Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq*, Mohan Rakesh’s *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, and Dharmavir Bharati’s *Andha Yug*. He also directed many Shakespearean and Greek plays. Moreover, he trained people like Vijaya Mehta, Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, who themselves became theatre authorities in the later period. **Satyadev Dubey**, the recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1971 and Padma Bhushan in 2011, brought about exponential growth in Marathi theatre in the 60s and the 70s. He produced some of the major plays like Dharmavir Bharati’s *Andha Yug*, Girish Karnad’s *Yayati* and *Hayavadan*, Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit*, Mohan Rakesh’s *Aadhe Adhure* and Vijay Tendulkar’s *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe*. **Vijaya Mehta** through her theatre group Rangayan became one of leading figures in the experimental Marathi theatre. She introduced Bertold Brecht into Marathi theatre with adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (*Ajab Nyay Vartulacha*), and Ionesco with *Chairs*. She was awarded the Sangeet Natak Academy award in 1975.

4.2.7 Check your progress I

1. Who changed the old formal style of the Kannada plays?
2. Who is known for his use of mythology, folktales and history to engage with contemporary social issues?
3. Which Marathi play attacks the custom of those days involving rich old men marrying young girls?
4. When was Dramatic Performances Act passed to control anti-colonial activities?
5. Which movement was against the non-ideological commercial theatre?
6. After leaving IPTA, which actor-director- playwright started a new theatrical movement with his group Bohurupee?

7. used Chhattisgarh tribal forms in his plays.
8. With which play did the real development of Indian English Drama start?
9. When was the Kalidasa Festival held in Ujjain? in 1959
10. Match the playwrights/plays in column A with the appropriate play/movement/ description given in column B:

A		B	
1.	Pearl Padamsee	a.	the last day of the Great Mahabharata war
2.	<i>Andher Nagari</i>	b.	‘Aanganmanch’
3.	Dharamvir Bharati	c.	plays exposing violence and gender inequalities
4.	Mohan Rakesh	d.	a musical political satire
5.	Badal Sircar	e.	<i>Party</i>
6.	Vijay Tendulkar	f.	English theatre in India
7.	Mahesh Elkunchwar	g.	<i>Final Solutions</i>
8.	Mahesh Dattani	h.	<i>Ashadh ka ek Din</i>
9.	Mahashveta Devi	i.	<i>Nagamandala</i>
10.	Girish Karnad	j.	<i>Mother of 1084</i>

4.3 Prescribed Play: *Avinash* by Shanta Gokhale

In this section we shall study an important modern Indian play – *Avinash*– by Shanta Gokhale.

4.3.1 About the writer Shanta Gokhale:

Shanta Gokhale was born on August 14, 1939. She is a distinguished Marathi novelist, playwright, translator, journalist, and theatre critic. Her multifaceted contributions have had much influence on contemporary Marathi literature and theatre.

Shanta Gokhale was born in Dahanu, Maharashtra, and grew up in a culturally rich environment that fostered her love for literature and the arts. She was student of Bombay Scottish School, Mahim. She left for England at the age of fifteen. She did her B. A. (Hons) in English literature at Bristol University. She returned to India at

the age of twenty-one. She did her M. A. (Hons) degree in English literature from University of Mumbai and later joined Xavier's Institute of Communication, Mumbai, where she studied Communications and Video Production. Shanta Gokhale worked as a part-time teacher at Elphinstone College for some time and then as a public relations executive at Glaxo Laboratories. She also worked as Arts Editor with *The Times of India*, Mumbai, and Sub-Editor at *Femina*. She was also a columnist for newspapers like *The Sunday Times of India* and *The Independent*, for tabloids like *Mid-Day* and *Mumbai Mirror* and for websites like *Scroll.in*.

4.3.2 Shanta Gokhale's Literary Contribution:

Shanta Gokhale's literary works are marked by their depth, sensitivity, and keen observation of human nature. She began her literary journey with publishing stories, in both English and Marathi started publishing novels. She published her first novel *Rita Welinkar*, in Marathi in 1992. It won the Maharashtra State award for the best novel of the year. A letter from Nissim Ezekiel encouraged her to write in Marathi. She wrote the book while she still worked at Glaxo, formulating the ideas during her bus journeys and writing during her lunch breaks. The novel was translated into English by herself and published in the year 1995. It won the V S Khandekar award for her. Her second book, *Tya Varshi*, was published seventeen years later, in 2008. This novel also won the Maharashtra State Award for the best novel of the year in 2009. It was later translated and published by her in English as *Crowfall*, in 2013.

Shanta Gokhale has written a few plays – *Avinash* (1994), *Dip and Dop* and *Rosemary for Remembrance* (performed at the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival in 2016). *Mengoubi The Fair One* (2019) is a docudrama on Manipur's Irom Chanu Sharmila, her 16-year long hunger strike to protest against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act; the failure of the hunger strike and her people's rejection of her when she ended it and married an 'outsider'. In 2023, two more plays were published in the book *Maili Chadar, or The Stained Shawl and Truth and Justice*.

In 2018, she released an anthology of her writings over the decades, titled *The Engaged Observer*, which was edited by her close friend, Jerry Pinto. Her memoir *One Foot on The Ground: A Life Told Through the Body* was published in 2019. In March 2020, Gokhale's *Shivaji Park, Dadar 28: History, Places, People*, was published. Here she traces the history of the Mumbai neighbourhood where she lives. Recently she edited with Jerry Pinto a short story collection *Maya Nagari, A*

City in Stories (2024) which has twenty-one stories of which some are in English and some have been translated from other languages.

Shanta Gokhale is a theatre critic too. She has written extensively on the evolution of Marathi theatre, documenting its history and analysing its trends. Her book *Playwright at the Centre: Marathi Drama from 1843 to the Present* is a seminal work that provides an in-depth look at the development of Marathi theatre over the years. She has edited *Satyadev Dubey: A Fifty-year Journey Through Theatre* (2011), *The Theatre of Veenapani Chawla: Theory, Practice and Performance* (2014) and *The Scenes We Made: An Oral History of Experimental Theatre in Mumbai* (2016)

Shanta Gokhale's contribution as a translator has been tremendous and has been acknowledged through numerous well-deserved awards. She has translated a number of important Marathi books into English such as Satish Alekar's play *Begum Barve*, *The Grand Exit* and *Conversation with Dolly*; Mahesh Elkunchwar's Wada trilogy plays as well as *Party*, *Garbo*, *Desire in the Rocks*, *Old Stone Mansion*, *Reflection*, *Sonata*, *An Actor Exits*; Shridhar Ketkar's Marathi novel *Kalindi: Brahmakanya* and Makarand Sathe's *Achyut Athavale ani Athavan* (*The Man who Tried to Remember*, 2012). Her and Jerry Pinto's translations of fifty-one hymns of Sant Tukaram in *Behold! The Word is God* stand out as different because of the use of two 'voices' as the book brings together two translated versions of each hymn. Vishnubhat Godse's *Adventures of a Brahmin Priest: My Travels in the 1857 Rebellion* was translated into English by her with Priya Adarkar. In 2021 she translated *Shyamchi Aai* written by Sane Guruji. Shanta Gokhale has translated some biographies and autobiographies from Marathi into English such as Sudhanva Deshpande's *Halla Bol* – a moving account in English of the death and life of Safdar Hashmi; Durga Khote's autobiography, Laxmibai Tilak's *Smritichitre: The Memoirs of a Spirited Wife*, Nirmala Patil's autobiography. She has also translated some English books into Marathi too, for example, Gieve Patel's play *Mr Behram*, Jerry Pinto's book *Em and the Big Hoom*, Arun Khopkar's book on Guru Dutt entitled *Guru Dutt: A Tragedy in Three Acts*.

As a translator, Gokhale's work has been crucial in bringing some of the most important works of Marathi theatre including those by Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Satish Alekar, G. P. Deshpande and Rajeev Naik, as well as the work of Ketkar, Makarand Sathe, Sane Guruji and many others to English-speaking readers.

Shanta Gokhale has also written screenplays for several films and documentaries. She wrote the screenplay for the Hindi film, *Haathi Ka Anda* (2002) directed by Arun Khopkar. She has written for Khopkar many documentary scripts too. She wrote the screenplay for the Marathi film, *Ti Ani Itar* (2011) directed by Govind Nihalani that is adapted from Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* (1986).

Shanta Gokhale has also acted in a few films and plays such as Govind Nihalani's film *Ardh Satya* (1983) and in a 13-part TV series directed by Amol Palekar. She played the titular role in the production of Snehalata Reddy's *Sita* directed by Pearl Padamsee in 1978.

Gokhale's novel *Rita Welinkar* was made into a Marathi film – *Rita* (2009) and it was directed by her daughter Renuka Shahane and featured Pallavi Joshi, Renuka Shahane and Jackie Shroff in the cast.

4.3.2.1 Critical Reception:

Shanta Gokhale's novels *Rita Welinkar* and *Tya Varshi* have been appreciated for the exploration of complex themes of identity, gender, and societal norms. Her translations are celebrated for their fidelity to the original texts and their ability to convey the cultural context effectively.

Gokhale's theatre criticism is characterized by its insightful analysis and her deep understanding of the medium. She has been a vocal advocate for experimental and avant-garde theatre, encouraging innovation and creativity in the field. Her reviews and essays have been instrumental in shaping public discourse around theatre and have inspired many young playwrights and directors.

4.3.2.2 Awards and Recognition:

Shanta Gokhale's contributions have been widely recognized and celebrated. She has received numerous awards, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2015) for her contribution to theatre criticism, two Maharashtra state awards - the VS Khandekar Award for *Rita Welinkar and the other* for her novel *Crowfall* in 2008. She has twice received Lifetime Achievement Award – the Ooty Literary Festival Lifetime Achievement Award (2018) and then the Tata Literature Live! Lifetime Achievement Award (2019). Her work continues to inspire and influence writers, critics, and theatre practitioners across India. Her translation *Smritichitre*:

The Memoirs of a Spirited Wife originally written in Marathi by Lakshmibai Tilak fetched her the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize 2021.

4.3.3 The Play *Avinash*

Avinash is a poignant play written by Shanta Gokhale, an acclaimed Indian playwright. The play sheds light on the internal battles faced by Avinash's family members reflecting the broader societal reluctance to discuss mental health openly. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing mental health issues. The titular character, Avinash, is a social misfit and a depressive alcoholic and is never seen in the play. Yet he dominates his family's lives and also the drama. His mysterious disappearance (and assumed death) triggers off harsh inter-personal conflicts in the family. The play forces the audience to ask themselves many questions regarding coping with mental disability and depression, the condition of the family members of such family, the stigma associated with mental and psychological problems, physical disability, marginalisation of women with disability, the impact of social and political factors apropos mental disabilities, the issue of marriage and procreation in case of a mentally instable person, etc.

Avinash's family is a lower middle class family coping with economic hardships with great difficulty. Avinash's illness puts even more stress on the family. There is of course the financial burden as Avinash no longer earns anything and the family, or rather Tatya, his retired father, has to spend money on the medical treatment from his meagre savings. In addition, the fact that mental problems are seen as social stigma also puts tremendous strain on the family. The whole family strives hard to hide the matter from the society. Tying up the mentally disturbed person, ostracizing him from the society, confining him to his room, hiding his cries in loud music are of course disgraceful things they do yet these acts also strike us as pathetic.

Each family member tries to locate the reason of Avinash's problem in his/her own way. Each one tries to place the blame somewhere. Tatya feels the evil eye of his half-brother Anna is responsible for Avi's condition. Prakash thinks Avinash is ill not insane. Each member also seeks solution to the problem in his or her own way. Durga believes love and care from his wife will cure him. Vasudha secretly keeps on helping Avinash get alcoholic drinks. Vikram even entertains for a brief moment the thought of killing Avinash in his anger and frustration. Prakash believes proper medical treatment should be available. When Avinash disappears mysteriously, the

reactions of each member are different again, giving rise to interpersonal conflict. Vasudha thinks Vikram has a role in Avi's disappearance. Vikram points out Vasudha's help in providing Prakash feels the news of pregnancy must have been very overwhelming for Avinash.

Each member has chosen their own way of dealing with the suffocation and trauma. Tatya leaves early morning to give all the remaining savings to his half-brother Anna to placate him and save Avinash from Anna's 'evil eye'. Vikram runs away from the family and the situation. Vasudha chooses 'a new life to live with and grow with' in the form of the baby.

4.3.3.1 The Characters in the play *Avinash*

The play has eight characters:

1. **Tatya** – Father of Avinash; a retired old man supported only by his meagre amount of pension. Since Avinash has fallen ill, his pension is the only source of income for the family. He has been working very hard for all his life. In fact, he became the bread winner of the family at the young age of 15 and has spent much amount on marrying off his two sisters and then has spent whatever he could on educating his three sons. However, none is earning now and this has made him very bitter. He is constantly complaining about the three sons and rebuking them for their inability in earning their livelihood. He describes his three sons thus: 'Such sons. A madman, a pansy and a loafer'. He has spent some money on getting treatment for Avinash from three different psychiatrists. However, the treatment has been stopped, as he says there is no improvement in Avinash. However, more probably, it is because Tatya can't afford the treatment any longer. He is not ready to spend any more money on Avinash's treatment. Nevertheless, he is ready to part with this last part of his savings by giving it to his half-brother Anna because he is superstitious and believes that Anna has cast an evil eye on Avinash making him go insane. He believes the last amount of money that is left with him may save his son if it is handed over to Anna to pacify him. He believes one has to pay for one's forefather's sins.

2. **Durga** – Durga is Avinash's mother. She is a very religious person and keeps on counting her beads and praying to her gods during much of the play for the well-being of Avinash and the family. We gather that she was kind and warm with the friends of her children in earlier days. She seems to have transferred all the

responsibility of her son Avinash to Vasudha after the marriage. She feels sympathy and even pity for Vasudha sometimes. She performs her role of a dutiful wife and tries to placate Tatya's anger and frustration throughout the play. It is not clear if she really likes Tatya's decision of giving the rest of their savings to Anna.

3. **Prakash** – He is Avinash's younger brother. He is about 30 but is still unemployed. He is described as busy in reading big books. He believes Avinash is not insane but just ill. He thinks Avinash needs treatment. He is also the most supportive and sympathetic of Vasudha. He feels financial conditions, social factors too could have influenced Avinash's condition.

4. **Vikram** – The youngest brother of Avinash. He has been asking Tatya to help him financially to set up some business but Tatya has said he doesn't have any money. Vikram is furious with Tatya when Tatya decides to give the last remaining part of his savings to his half-brother. He is the most vociferous of all his family members in his criticism of Avinash. He uses words like "this vampire who is sucking our blood drop by drop" when referring to Avinash. He is so furious with what he perceives as injustice to him and the rest of the family due to Avinash that he thinks of asking his friends to beat Avinash up or even drown him. Yet he recollects how Avinash was a caring elder brother during his childhood and rejects the idea. At the end he decides to leave the house (and the country) in search of a job. He feels Avinash's illness is hereditary and will pass on to his offspring and is sceptical of Vasudha's decision to have the baby.

5. **Vasudha** – Wife of Avinash. She has some physical disability and limps when walking. She has been married to Avinash after she was rejected by many able-bodied men. Her parents then started searching a groom with some disability. She has been coping with the hardships without complaint. She is pregnant when Avinash vanishes and decides to have the baby in spite of the contrary advice from others.

6. **Lokhande:** A neighbour almost of the age of Tatya and who is very curious about Avinash and all that's happening in their lives. Visits twice- in the first and the last scene. The family has to use different strategies to make him leave and save themselves from his prying eyes. He represents the society that hardly helps you yet is very interested in all the happenings in your family for the sake of amusement. He is also the much needed outside perspective available to the reader to gather some vital information about the family and Avinash before he fell ill.

7. **Kiran:** Avinash's school friend who has not been with touch with the family for a very long time. He visits with his wife on the fatal day as Durga writes to him to invite him. He has fond memories of not just Avinash but also the time he has spent with Avinash's family, especially the love showered on him by Durga. He belonged to a family that is more better off economically than Avinash's family yet he lovingly tells how he used to like to spend time in Avinash's house. He has been successful in life. He has a good job; he is married and has two children, and most importantly, have no disability or illness. Kiran-Anu couple is very different from Avinash-Vasudha as one represents 'the haves' and the other 'the have nots or the fits and the misfits in the society.

8. **Anu:** Kiran's wife who is visiting Avinash's family for the first time. She is a student of psychology. She is also an outsider, yet unlike Lokhande, she is not a nosey person. She is quick to understand the tense atmosphere in the house and quickly leaves them without making them feel more embarrassed.

Talking about the characters in an interview, Gokhale said the following:

"See, basically, it wasn't Avinash's character that inspired me. What inspired me to write this play was the situation in which misfits of any kind find themselves in our society. And by our society, I don't mean only Indian society, but all over the world. Misfits are extremely difficult for society to cope with. And [...] it was actually the family that I was interested in because I had seen families around me taking decisions which I didn't feel comfortable with. It's not that I was a psychologist or I had any special knowledge, but simply as a human being. I wasn't comfortable with how people with mental illness were being treated. I think my first experience, which I have mentioned in my introduction to the published play, was when I was at school. I had been invited over to my friend's house and I heard this awful kind of scream — like an animal's. The casual way in which my friend said, oh, that's my sister, she's mentally retarded, we keep her tied up, shocked me. My friend could go on eating her snacks and having her tea but I found I couldn't. I was haunted by that voice and I was haunted by my imagination of a young girl, who's been locked up. Tied up. Not given the dignity that every human being deserves. From then onwards I somehow kept noticing families of this kind. It wasn't as if I was thinking of writing a play, but one's experiences accumulate. They move you, your very spirit, and become questions in your mind. Over the years — I mean, when did that first thing happen? When I was 14 or 15 years old — and some 20-25 years

after that, I found that these events and instances of inhuman treatment of the mentally ill had continued to accumulate. Maybe for me, the last draw was this highly educated couple whom I knew. The woman was a colleague of mine. They had a daughter who was slow. She had some mental problem. The couple was not only highly educated, the husband was a surgeon. Despite that, they thought they should exorcise the evil that had possessed their daughter. And they did. It wasn't something I could wrap my mind around at all. I thought if such people believe in this sort of superstition, then where are we? I think it was that scream at one end and this exorcising couple at the other end that played on my mind. I simply couldn't rid myself of the many questions these events posed. I thought of these families and I asked myself, "What are they supposed to do? What can be done for mentally ill people?"

Today, there are conversations around depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia. There are discussions even in the mass media about these subjects, although not enough. But back then, nobody talked about these things. They were just swept under the carpet. You were not supposed to ask questions. You were not even supposed to think about these people. I think all those experiences and horrendous events accumulated to form, what could be called in nuclear language, a 'critical mass'. That critical mass finally stimulated me to write *Avinash*." (Gokhale 2024)

4.3.3.2 The Setting of the Play

The setting of this play is very thoughtfully employed to reflect the theme of the play and the emotional turmoil of the characters.

Time Period:

The play is set in contemporary times, reflecting the socio-cultural dynamics of modern-day India. The period is significant as it portrays the transitional phase in Indian society, grappling with tradition and modernity and the inability of the society to deal with mental disorder which is still seen as a stigma. As the social perspective of looking at mental disorders has not changed much, the play still works perfectly well today as it did more than thirty-five years back. The time covered in the play in the first three scenes is a span of just a day or twenty-four hours – starting in the afternoon of a laid-back Sunday and the next day. The last scene happens a week later.

Location:

Avinash is definitely a city play. The setting of the play is an urban apartment in Mumbai. The early parts of the play suggest that it must be Mumbai and this is confirmed in the later part. This metropolitan backdrop is crucial as it brings forth the lack of both personal and social space. Additionally, the play also speaks of the lack of space and acceptance in the society for the misfits.

The play consists of four scenes. The stage setting remains the same in all the four. It is described thus at the beginning of the play:

“Before the lights come on there is a sudden, wild cry. It is a strange cry – both angry and grieving. Footsteps are heard running from stage right to stage left. The voice is suddenly smothered. Simultaneously music begins to play – loud with a very strong beat. The lights come on to reveal three cramped rooms. To the right is a small entrance hall with the entrance door in the back wall and window in the front looking out across the audience. In the centre is the living room with a couple of divans used as beds, chairs and a table with a tape recorder and a table lamp. The room at the left is very tiny because the back has been partitioned off to form a bedroom. In the corner of the small room is a cluster of household gods before which Durga, about 55, is revealed sitting with folded hands and closed eyes. Taty, 61, paces the floor outside. Vikram, 25, dances frenziedly to the music. Prakash, 30, stands at the hall window looking out...” (Gokhale 2004: 89)

The Apartment:

1. **The Entrance Hall:** This is a small room to the stage right. It has the entrance door in the back wall and window in the front looking out across the audience.
2. **The Living Room:** The primary action of the play takes place in the living room. It is depicted as a typical lower middle-class urban living room with a couple of divans which are also used as beds. There are a few chairs and a table with a tape recorder and a table lamp. These props are important as they have a role in the action and also serve to create a microcosm of the characters' lives.
3. **A tiny prayer room:** This room on the left has become very small because the back has been partitioned off to form a bedroom. In the corner of the small room is a cluster of household gods. We see Durga praying in front of these gods

when the play opens. She frequently turns to this place to count her beads and pray.

4. Avinash's Bedroom lies beyond the partition and is not seen just as we do not see Avinash. The most important action in the play happens here and is reported to us (mainly by Vasudha). There must also be a kitchen and other parts of the house which are not visible to the audience. There is a backdoor through which Avinash leaves the house without being seen by anyone in the house.

Stage Props:

In any play, the setting includes various symbolic elements like photographs, mementos, and personal artifacts that impart important information regarding the lives of the main characters and that help add depth to the characters' backgrounds and help the audience grasp the action. The important props in the play *Avinash* are the furniture like diwans, chairs, the table, the tape recorder, the table lamp, etc. – all reflecting the strained financial condition of the family, the space crunch in lower middleclass houses and efforts to make the ends meet. The tape recorder is a very important prop as the family uses it to play loud music on it to drown the shouts and screams of raving Avinash when he relapses into a frenzied state. At other times the family plays sitar music. The difference between the two contrasting kinds of music underlines their attempts to hide a part of the reality and to show they are leading a normal satisfactory life.

Use of Space:

The limited space of the apartment is used effectively to create a sense of confinement. This spatial arrangement highlights the characters' struggles with personal boundaries and the suffocating nature of their circumstances. It serves not only as a physical space but also as a metaphorical representation of the claustrophobic lives of the urban characters and their emotional and psychological states. The partition looms large over the house and the stage. It symbolises multiple things at the same time. It divides the family and the society – the socially acceptable and the misfit; the public and the private; the controlling and the controlled and so on. It can also be said that much part of the room has been encroached upon by the bedroom created for Avinash through this partitioning. It looks different from the rest of the house and has decreased the space available for the family members too. In a way it is just like Avinash on whom the family has spent much for treatment even if

they can hardly afford it. It hides something that literally rules their lives and yet has to be hidden with great efforts. About this partition Gokhale has said in an interview

“I had this in my mind of a person who's closed away from society so Avinash is behind a partition but this is a play and the idea was that this partition is so lit up that its shadow falls on the acting space where the rest of the family is living its own life and so it's a family under the shadow and each one is then trying to find a way to deal with this problem” (House of Belongg: 7.39 to 8.14)

4.3.3.3 The Plot of the play

The play is not divided into acts. The plot consists of four scenes. In an interview, Shanta Gokhale has said:

“Obviously, if I had the family as protagonists, my form would have to be realistic, it would have to be based on characterisation, dialogue, and a logical sequence of events. In a play that is written in a pure realistic form — take for instance Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Wada Chirebandi* or Vijay Tendulkar’s *Sakharam Binder* – old conventions are informing the playwright’s choices. You have a first act that forms the exposition, that is setting up the situation. The second act that gives us the conflict, confrontation. Then the third act that offers the resolution. I knew clearly that I could not, for what I wanted to do, follow this pattern, this structure. I didn’t want to be tied down to three acts or two acts. I wanted the play to flow and to take me the way it was going; not to have me impose anything on it. That’s how it was written. I wrote four scenes. I call them scenes, not acts. In that sense I wasn’t writing in the strictly realistic form.” (Gokhale 2024)

Scene 1: A Sunday afternoon.

The family was assuming Avinash is recovering and life is becoming normal when suddenly Avinash has a relapse. Vasudha has gone out of the house which she never does. Kiran is about to visit Avinash after a very long time with his wife Anu. The play begins with Avi’s unnatural scream/sound that is quickly gagged by the family. Loud music is played by the family to hide this from the world and using different tricks, the prying neighbour Lokhande is avoided. The ensuing discussion makes it clear that the family is living under tremendous tension. Avi’s condition is described by Durga thus:

“Wild, staring eyes. Abusive. Aggressive. An empty bottle in his hand” (p. 92).

However, since his marriage he seemed to be improving. The hope that Avi is getting better is dashed suddenly on that Sunday afternoon. They have no idea why this happened. Durga worries about Vasudha's feelings on learning about the relapse on her return home. She says:

DURGA. She has watched over him for eight months, day and night. She needs to breathe. Why must she be punished for no fault of hers?

TATYA. She was looking after her husband. Is that a punishment?

PRAKASH. Dada seemed to have turned the corner, Taty. She thought she could relax. Didn't we all? Hadn't we begun to talk and smile? Hadn't Vasu begun to glow, thinking her love and care had borne fruit.

DURGA. Poor girl.

TATYA. Poor? We told her parents that this was our attempt to save our son. If it worked well and good, if it didn't, their daughter was free to start a new life. Why did they agree to the marriage? Because she had her own handicap.

PRAKASH. One leg, a little shorter than the other. Is that a handicap to compare with what our Avi had turned into?

TATYA. So it wasn't. Then, why had she remained single all those years? Go on – tell me. Why?

Durga is even more worried about how to manage hiding this from Karan. Karan and his wife Anu arrive before Vasu is back. The family puts on a show of everything being okay. They lie that Avi has fever and is sleeping. Karan and Anu sense that something is amiss yet let it go. Vasu returns home and is shocked to learn about the relapse. Without letting the guests know anything, she rushes to the bedroom.

Kiran and Anu (Anu is a psychology graduate) don't even know about Avinash's actual condition. They talk in general about the upbringing of a child, however, the playwright is able to skilfully connect this discussion with the main problem of the play.

DURGA. The change has to come from within. There is something we are all born with. It's what you may call a seed that's hidden in us. Whatever

we do or become, it is already there in that seed. The seed sprouts in the way it must. And nothing anyone else does can alter the shape and form. All one can do is to watch it grow and try to understand.

ANU. That is not quite true. You know, the environment has a lot to do with what people do and become.

VASU. You mean, if the environment is right, good, or whatever, the child will be normal. In the sense that it would not turn out bad. Is that what you mean?

ANU. It's not quite so simple. The truth might be like somewhere in between. I guess every child is born with some traits. The seed, as I said, but the environment can train or shape what grows from it. Do you see? So, person's attitudes and acts as he grows up are the result of a kind of combination of these two influences.

KIRAN. ...All I know is, when children from 'good' homes turn out bad, the reason's in the way they were brought up.

PRAKASH. Rubbish. The reason's in economics, in the social structure, in the political system.

TATYA. Big words. Always big words. What has the political system got to do with what you do with your life? He drags politics into everything. It's a question of your destiny. One can be a model parent, slog all one's life for one's children. But how they turn out is a matter of one's destiny.

VIKRAM. And not getting a job? Is that also destiny? A chap has all the qualifications and the will to work. But there's no job for him. Yet that cheat and dimwit Salil Kulkarni has one laid out for him. If the jobless chap goes out and makes a mess of his life, would that still be destiny? Or would the system have something to do with it? (Pp. 102-103)

When sounds are again heard from the bedroom, first Prakash and Vikram and then Vasu move swiftly to the room. Kiran and Anu sense the tension. Anu makes an excuse of it being very late and wants to leave. Even if Kiran is reluctant to leave, they prefer not being too intrusive as Avi's family is not eager to share the problem. So, Kiran and Anu leave without meeting Avi.

Scene 2: Sunday night.

Some hours have elapsed after the events in the scene one. The family has had its dinner. The scene starts with one of Tatya's outbursts about how hard he has worked hard all his life. An angry altercation takes place between Vikram and Tatya. Vikram is frustrated as he is not getting a job of his liking. Tatya is frustrated that his sons are not earning and doing better than him in spite of the troubles he has taken for them all his life. He complains that even in his old age there is no relief offered by any of his three sons as all the three are unemployed. When Durga asks Vasu if Avi has had his food, Tatya vents his anger and frustration on him too:

TATYA. Why shouldn't he? As long as his father's feeding him? Eat, drink, sleep...great life, just great. (*Vasu returns to Avi's room.*)

DURGA. Why do you say such things?

TATYA (*suddenly tired*). What do I say, then? You tell me. Forty years of hard work. First baby to marry off. Then Sashi. One's own life began then. Home. Children. I thought at sixty I'd earned a bit of peace. Wrong. I haven't. Why? Why not? For what sins of my past life ?

DURGA. Don't upset yourself like this. Tell him Prakash, speak to him. There are times when I feel we are all going mad one by one.

PRAKASH. What can I say to him? He doesn't understand me. I don't understand him. Everything I say makes him mad. I've spent days and nights trying to figure out this problem. I am not sure how we can deal with it, but surely not this way. Dada is not evil. He is not insane – he's ill.

VIKRAM. Ill? Eats like an ox, drinks like a fish, and he's supposed to be ill! What he needs is a good thrashing.

PRAKASH. He's ill in the mind.

TATYA. Listen to that. There is one kind of lunatic in there. And here is another. That one's ready to tear you to bits when the fit's on him. And this one opens his arms and says, come to me poor human, you're ill.

DURGA. Prakash, I understand what you're saying. I know my Avi. He's not mean or vicious – I've watched him grow.

When Vasu is asked what Avi said, she tells:

VASU. (*in a toneless voice*). Forgive me, he said. Go home to your parents. I am no good. This is the way I am going to be all my life, a curse on my people. I don't know how to – I can't cope with living. (*Pause.*) Then he put his head in my lap and wept. (pp.105-106)

Prakash believes, if they give medical treatment to Avi, it will help. He says:

PRAKASH. If perfectly healthy, bodies can collapse under stress. Can't minds too. I'm sure we can manage Avi. But not by sweeping him under the carpet. He needs treatment.

However, Tatya is not ready to spend any more money on doctors.

TATYA. Enough! There will be no more treatment. I spent enough on those quacks. Poured my hard-earned cash down their throats. One says, give him pills. Another says, give him shocks. A third wants to have long chats with him Easy enough to say. But how do you get this hulking brute to the doctor if he doesn't want to go? He is a lamb one moment, a wild beast the next. How is it to be done?

PRAKASH. Leave that to me. Tatya, please. Vasu and I will manage him between us. I am sure we could.

TATYA. No, thanks. I am strong enough to look after my son while there is still life in me. There is one last way, and that is the only way.

Vikram. What's that?

TATYA. I will take the first bus out to village tomorrow and hand over that 10,000 rupees.

We learn from the ensuing dialogue that Tatya's father had a mistress and a son from her referred to as Anna. Tatya believes, one has to pay for the karma of one's forefathers. As Anna was wronged by Tatya's father, the bad *karma* is affecting him and his eldest son. It is Anna's 'evil eye' that is responsible for the condition of Avinash. This superstition makes Tatya decide that giving the rest of his savings to Anna will ward off Avi's problem.

However, both his sons can't agree to this. Vikram is especially furious as he has been asking money to set up some business of his own. Tatya has lied to him so long

that he had any money left after Avi's treatment. When Tatya denies to change his plan, Vikram is so furious at Avi, that he gives an ultimatum to Tatya:

VIKRAM. [...] My father has money but I don't get it for doing something good and useful. Who gets it is a bastard! For the sake of this beast, this vampire who's sucking our blood drop by drop. If that's okay by you, it's not okay by me. ...Sure I'll take it, and you'll see how. Don't blame me then for what you'll see. It's Dada or me now. One of us will have to go. Do you hear that? Him or me. You choose.

The scene ends here with the following stage directions:

Rushes out. A slow, sad wail starts up in Avi's room, almost like keening. Slow blackout.

Scene 3: 3 o'clock the same night.

The stage directions tell that it is dark with only an oil lamp burning in front of the household gods and the table lamp where Prakash is reading but getting up frequently to check outside. Even if it is so late, hardly anybody has been able to sleep as Vikram has not yet returned since he left home in anger. Avi has been given sleep inducing medicines to stop him from wailing. Tatya is sitting in his bed. Like the earlier scene, this scene too starts with Tatya's tirade against his sons.

TATYA. *(to himself)*. They're driving me to my death. My own sons. I slogged day and night for forty years to feed these animals who were only waiting to prey on me. This one*(looking at the partition)* was waiting for me to retire before devouring me whole. (P. 112)

When Durga comes over to check with him, they talk about how things changed.

DURGA. He's been devouring himself and us these six years, when you were hardly around. At first he moped around the house, wouldn't go out, meet his friends. Just sit, staring into space. Or sleep. For hours on end. I'd look at his sleeping face and think, he's shutting us out, doesn't want to know we're there, doesn't want to know he's there. It was scaring, his absolute emptiness. One day he said he was going out. I thought he was coming back to us, coming back into the world. But when he came back, he brought that smell with him, for the first time, in this house – that sickly smell. (p. 112)

Tatya feels Durga spoiled Avi from childhood and that she neglected everyone else (especially Tatya) due to Avi.

TATYA: *(Turns to the partition)* Listen, you bastard. This is last bit I'm going to spend on you. After that you won't live off me. You can go beg on the streets if you like! or jump in the sea. As long as you get off our bloody backs.

Tatya vehemently says that Avi has driven their whole family to ruin. When Tatya dozes off, Durga says to Prakash:

DURGA *(softly)*. Prakash, sometimes I get this feeling that we are all tottering on the edge of a precipice. We could go over any moment, but there is something in us that holds us back. Something that we have to hold on to, Prakash. We mustn't let ourselves sit staring at open books, not reading or telling beads when the clamour in our minds won't let us hear God's name.

After some time, Prakash dozes off for some time with his head on the book he is reading and Durga retires to tell her beads. When everything is quiet and dark, Vasu enters to inform that Avi has vanished. Vasu asks immediately about the whereabouts of Vikram. Prakash has to struggle for some time before he can make Vasu focus on his questions about what was Avi doing when she went into his room. She says "they" must have opened the door. And who are 'they'? She says – "Those who didn't want him here. Where's Vikram?" She probably means Vikram didn't want Avi here so he must have had a role in his disappearance. She even says – "They carried him away while he slept... Don't pretend you don't know. You heard him shout – it's either him or me. One of us will have to go, he said." (p. 117)

Vasu imagines she has not seen these people but has smelled them, felt them moving. Prakash tries to make her get this notion out of her head. He tells her it is not easy to carry away Dada.

When Durga and Prakash ask Vasu questions, we get to hear about Vasu for the first time speaking in longer sentences and revealing her past life before marriage as well as some things after marriage.

PRAKASH Was he asleep when he went in, Vasu?

VASU. I thought he was. But the moment he heard me; he began to curse.

DURGA. Curse? Avi never did that with you...

VASU. So, you thought, because you didn't want to hear. You handed him over to me and grew blind and deaf, waiting for a miracle to happen.

DURGA. Why did he curse Vasu? Was he cursing this evening. Is that what he was talking about?

VASU. The usual. Telling me to get out, go back to my parents. (*Almost to herself*). I didn't say a word. You mustn't answer when he talks like that. He calms down then. He grew quite suddenly; sat staring at me. Said it shouldn't have happened.

DURGA. What shouldn't have happened? My inviting Kiran?

VASU. That and (*pulls us up together*).

PRAKASH. and what, Vasu? What else shouldn't have happened?

VASU. Whatever it was. I didn't want him to talk about it and get upset. I am with you, I said, You are not to worry. But he was looking at himself and shaking his head. There was such revulsion, such self-disgust in his look. I just could not bear it. I put my hand out to him, but he shrank away. Contracted his body into a tight ball and turned his back on me.

Vasu thinks that Vikram is involved in Avi's disappearance. However, others try to convince her that this is not true.

DURGA. Vasu, please put that thought out of your mind. Vikram has a terrible temper. He says dreadful things, but he'd never....

When Vikram comes back and he is asked by all where he had been, he says –

VIKRAM. Walking. And thinking. And wondering how it can be that one human being gets to destroy so many lives. What gives him the right to do that? What's our sin that we must take it? There was a fire raging in my head. I wanted to call up the gang tell them to put him in a sack and sink him in the sea. He wouldn't be sober enough to know he was drowning. Good riddance. The end of all this. (p. 119)

However, Vikram didn't actually harm Avi as he recollected childhood memories and how his big brother had helped him overcome his stuttering problem.

VIKRAM. [...] No, I didn't tell my friends to take him away. I decided to go away myself [...] Wherever there's work to do, any kind of work, for any kind of man as long as there's money. Plenty of it. I don't want to live like this.

After learning that Avi has gone on his own, Vasu is convinced that he will never return. Tatya expresses his confidence that when he completes doing what he has intended to do, Avi will come back. Prakash wants to inform the police but Tatya commands him not to.

Scene 4: A week later.

This happens after a week. As in the first scene, Vasu has gone out for a walk. Like the first scene, the intrusive neighbour Lokhande has come to pay a condolence visit and actually to get more information about what exactly happened. Through the interaction we come to know that a body has been found in Mudh Island. Lokhande's talk and his questions reflect how the society is the least concerned about the wellbeing of a family or an individual and are just curious and insensitive to the pain of others. Lokhande represents the world that wants to hear interesting bits of information. Lokhande is more worried about how a person sleep-walking reached Mudh island from here and not in helping the family to cope with the loss and shock in his way.

Like in the first scene, Lokhande's visit and talk also serves another purpose – of giving a perspective of an outsider. Elsewhere it is only the close family and friend Kiran through whom we hear and learn somethings about Avi. As they are too close, the perspectives on Avi we get may not be entirely sufficient and reliable. Through Lokhande we get another perspective.

LOKHANDE. Such a fine, intelligent boy. Sweet as honey, my wife always said. Never hurt a fly in his life. Why should anyone have wanted to do this to him? (Gokhale, 2004: 121)

No sooner he leaves, Kiran suddenly drops in. He has read the news in papers. He can't believe the gossip and has come to find the truth. The family members share with him what happened that day as well as their own thoughts regarding the reasons.

TATYA. Yes, we should have seen what was happening. He was different... Even stranger.

PRAKASH. We are all strange. When I was a boy, Abhi was the model. I was sickly awkward, shy, and I was always being told to be like dada.

DURGA. Yes he was a model child. Where did we go wrong?

KIRAN. Wont one of you tell me what was wrong with Abhi?

PRAKASH. It was a kind of mental illness, I guess.

TATYA. Rubbish. It was just plain madness.

PRAKASH. He would stare into space for hours or sleep all day. Then suddenly he would become violent. It was a kind of despair.

TATYA. Big words. Despair. What was he despairing about? Work till your bones ache. And then there is no time for despair.

PRAKASH. The despair drove him to ... drink

Kiran asks Durga why they hid all this from him for so many years and she says:

DURGA. I don't know. Perhaps I wanted at least one person close to him to remember him as he used to be. It was terrible to see him go to pieces before my eyes. I would look at him and ask myself, what is this I have created? How can I understand what was born of my own flesh.

TATYA. There is no way to understand such things. The sins of our fathers and grandfathers are visited upon us. We only allow our destiny to work through us...

PRAKASH. We had got used to hiding Dada from the world. We thought the problem would go away if we didn't talk about it. We left Vasu to manage it all by herself.

Then Vikram comes back. He shows them the contract he has signed of a new job in Dubai. Durga asks him not to accept the job as the life is terrible and lonely there. Durga says, "We need the warmth of families. Loneliness can drive you crazy." And Vikram retorts

VIKRAM. Too much family can also drive you crazy. You don't get a job. You hit the water, you despair, disappear, turn up bloated on a beach. The police ask nasty questions. Your own family thinks you have.

Durga is sad that one by one everyone is leaving. She feels Vasu will also leave to remarry. However, Prakash doesn't believe this is realistic because "It was difficult enough the first time. Can you imagine what it will be like now? Why can't she stay here? She could work." When they talk about this with Vasu when she returns, she bitterly points out that even her mother doesn't expect her to come back home. They too don't have enough space in their house now that Vasu's brother is getting married. When Durga says that perhaps Vasu too may want to make a new life for herself, Vasu shares her emotions and thoughts and plans for the first time at length. She tells us why she married Avi, how life was with Avi after marriage and the brief moments of happiness. This part is also important as it throws much light on Avi's personality and removes doubts one may have about Vikram.

VASU. Well, I do. I am going to make a new life for myself (*Startled silence. She examines their faces.*) But not in the way you think. I wouldn't put myself through that humiliation again. Being shown to man after man, each with his own handicap to match mine. I felt no sympathy at all for those men, only horror, which compounded my horror of myself. I rejected them all. I was foolish. I thought my parents would give up, let me be. But I did not know how strong the urge is in parents to do their duty. They weren't going to rest till they had hung me round some man's neck. So I decided, why not? Let me accept the next man that comes along, whoever or whatever he is. It happened to be Avi.

DURGA (*deeply pained*). I always wondered why you agreed to marry him. But you watched over him with such love.

VASU. Love? Never love. How could I love anybody when I hated myself so? No, he was the punishment I had inflicted upon myself. With exquisite pain I suffered it. I would sit staring at the stubble on his chin at his pyjama string hanging down, his eyes glazed over with drink...

TATYA. Drink? He didn't touch it after he got married.

VASU. He drank every night. That was the only way he could sleep, and I could sleep.

TATYA. Who gave it to him? Where did he get it from?

VASU. I gave it to him. (*Shocked silence.*) I had neither the energy nor the desire to stop him. I was quite happy to see us both go downhill together. Till that day (*pause*) when I went in after dinner and he had a bottle in his hand, and he was about to put it to his lips. But before he did, he looked at me, and it was a look of such helplessness, so vulnerable that before I knew what I was doing, I had gone over to him, taken the bottle from his hand and poured the liquid out of the window. He didn't say a word, not one protest. And then I realised that for the first time in my life, I had walked without being aware of my limp. (*pause*). Yes, he did not drink after that. It was a new life for us. There was joy, hope, and the baby was a sign of that ... yes, it is two months old in me.

(*Silence as she looks at them again. A very long pause.*)

VIKRAM. Are you going to have it?

VASU. Yes.

PRAKASH. What business is it of yours, Vikram?

VIKRAM. None, none at all. I'm not going to be here. You can start another madhouse here for all I care. I only thought Vasu might be a bit scared to have Dada's child.

VASU. Why should I be?

DURGA. Have you thought about it Vasu?

VASU. I have

PRAKASH. Did Avi know about the baby? (*Vasu does not answer.*) Did he? Was he talking about the baby when he said it shouldn't have happened? I cannot cope.

VASU (*quietly*). Yes, he was. Perhaps it was too early for him. I know that now. He wasn't strong enough. But how does one know unless one is tested? I had become strong because of Avi. I could feel this life in me growing stronger because of me. I thought Avi was with me. But he wasn't.

Durga gets up and slowly walks away towards her gods. Tatya follows and sits down on his bed.

VIKRAM (*to Prakash*). So who is to blame now, huh? Oh, to hell with all of you.

Storms out of the house. Prakash looks at Vasu with concern and takes a step towards her, but she doesn't notice.

VASU (*to herself*). There's only two ways open to us. We either despair and die, or hope and live. Who knows how this baby will be? Perfect or imperfect, bringing joy or sorrow. But it's a whole new life, and that's something. A new life to live with and grow with.

Slow black out.

So, the scene and the play ends with Vasu's long monologue. In many interviews, Shanta Gokhale has spoken about the ending and a few changes she was asked to make in the play on the demand of her two directors when the play was performed in Marathi (1988; director Satydeb Dubey) and in Hindi (1990; director Sunil Shanbhag). About this ending she says:

“Satyadev Dubey's practice, normally, was to pull a script apart and reassemble it in his own way, dropping things, adding things; he reshaped the plays he did. But in this case, luckily, he didn't touch the play. What he wanted was a long statement at the end from Vasudha and... umm ..., I gave it to him. He played it that way. But what appears in the published copy is the way I wrote it because a statement means that the person who is making it knows what she is feeling, knows what she is thinking, which would have gone completely against the grain of what I was trying to do. Nobody knows, is the whole point. You have to be open to questions, you have to be open to life itself and that is how I wanted the play to end, and that's how it is in the published copy.” (Gokhale 2024)

4.3.3.4The Plot structure:

The play consists of four scenes. Now let's analyse these scenes to find the plot structure and the techniques used to make it effective.

The first part of the first scene tries to establish the background of the play, introducing the characters and the characters' diverse opinions regarding the reason of Avi's problem through dialogue between the family members and then between the family members and Kiran and Anu. Through this part the pathetic condition of

the family amidst financial problems and attempts to hide the facts of Avi's condition from the outsiders is firmly established. Psychological perspective also gets established through Anu who is a psychology graduate.

In the second scene (the same night), the growing tensions between the family members due to Avi come in focus with difference of opinion escalating especially between Taty and Vikram.

In the third scene (that night 3 o'clock) Avi disappears and the family's reactions, discussion of options, bickering between themselves, growing hostility between Vasu and Vikram come to the forefront.

In the fourth scene Avi's death, family's attempts to cope with inner rifts and to face the world draw attention. Vasu's dialogue/monologue reveal her condition and her choices.

The scenes happening at the same location and with very less time lapse in between have a concentrated impact on the audience. According to Gustav Freytag's model, a plot consists of five parts:

- **Exposition:** The de-facto introduction that brings out the story's cast of characters and plants the seeds of conflict,
- **Rising Action:** In which a series of events (usually triggered by an inciting incident) escalates and sets the rest of the story in motion,
- **Climax:** The moment of peak tension in a story — in other words, what everything else builds up to,
- **Falling Action:** The bridge between the climax and the resolution in which subplots and mini-conflicts are resolved,
- **Denouement:** the wrapping up of the whole story.

It can be said that the first part of scene 1 is the exposition, the remaining of the first and scene, the second scene comprise rising action. Avi's disappearance, Vasu's doubt that Vikram has a role in his disappearance, Vikram's absence together bring the play to a high point (climax). Vikram's decision to leave the house for job and Vasu's talk on what had transpired between her and Avi can be considered the falling action. It is also possible to argue that the Vasu's speech selecting to 'hope and live' over 'despair and die' could be considered the denouement.

4.3.3.5 Important themes and issues raised in the play:

Even if the play is short, it touches upon many critical issues afflicting Indian society. It uncovers the true intersectional nature of these problems – how gender, class, ability, age, access to education and jobs, and other parameters converge in oppression. The play brings in relief:

1. The problem of unemployment in the youths
2. The stress caused due to lack of money, resources on one hand and increasing responsibilities on the other
3. Prejudices of the society regarding disabilities – physical and mental; regarding unemployed youth, etc.
4. Superstitions of the people which hugely impact lives of people. The superstition that sanity is lost due to ‘evil eye’; or that it can be restored by praying to god; connection between genetics and mental illness and so on.
5. The stigma associated with mental illness and seeking help
6. The marginalisation of the disabled people and especially of disabled women in the society
7. The gerontology perspective –Research shows that older people’s well-being can be negatively affected by negative life events that happened to their grown-up children (Greenfield & Marks, 2006) and especially by their adult children’s experiences of unemployment and mental illness (Milkie et al., 2008). When a child is unemployed, it can significantly stress their elderly parents due to a combination of factors including: reduced financial support, increased reliance on the parents for basic needs, emotional strain from seeing their child struggle, and potential concerns about their child's future stability; essentially, the parents might feel burdened with additional responsibility at a time when they themselves may be facing health challenges and reduced income. The play makes us ponder over the impact of socio-political factors – unemployment, corruption, financial stress, etc. – on not just the young people but also on the older generation. That is, the play makes the use of literary gerontology (literary studies that implement age as a critical perspective).

4.3.5 Critical Readings of the play:

1. The Absent 'Avi':

In the play *Avinash*, we never get to see Avi. We neither see the earlier version of Avi when he was fit and fine, not the present Avi who is facing depression and mental problems. However, the whole play is full of others telling us about him, wondering about him, trying to find the reasons for his problems and searching for solutions in their own ways.

His mother says the following about him:

DURGA. He was never any trouble. No answering back, no raising his hand. Worked hard, did well at school. What could have come over him ...

Probably Avinash was a model child and youth and the younger siblings were given his example by the family.

PRAKASH. ...When I was a boy, Avi was the model. I was sickly, awkward, shy, and I was always being told to be like Dada. (p. 125)

Even Vikram who says the harshest things about Avi has fond memories of him. The experience he shares towards the end of the play brings out the caring, helpful and sensitive nature of Avi of the former days. Avi got angry with the school boys troubling Vikram, yet, he didn't hit them. Instead, he helped Vikram overcome his problem of stuttering. This must have been a very significant experience for Vikram indeed.

The family's versions of Avi matches with what an outsider like Lokhande says about him:

LOKHANDE. Such a fine, intelligent boy. Sweet as honey, my wife always said. Never hurt a fly in his life. Why should anyone have wanted to do this to him? (Gokhale, 2004: 121)

As the author has said herself, Avinash and the partition behind which he is confined all the time is like a shadow that "falls on the acting space where the rest of the family is living its own life and so it's a family under the shadow and each one is then trying to find a way to deal with this problem". The author has no intention of making this play a 'psychodrama' – "There was to be no analysis of Avinash's problem with a suitably glib know-all character providing the cure" (Gokhale, 2004;

p. 87). So, Avi can be just a peg to start the discussion on mental illnesses and on the mentally ill get going.

2. The title of the play:

The title of the play is Avinash and so is the eldest son of the family who is never present on the stage. However, his presence looms so large on the play and on the lives of the other characters, that he becomes the *raison d'être* (the most important reason for somebody's/something's existence) of the play. It must be noted, yet, that the English translation, the play has been called 'Avinash (The Indestructible)'. So, there is a possibility that the title is not a reference essentially and just limited to the eldest son, but may refer to the quality of being eternal, everlasting, durable. What exactly is indestructible in the play?

- The unseen presence and influence of Avi on others?
- The fact that he was not present on the stage even before his death is announced makes it very difficult to destruct this strong influence through a mere news.
- Or does it point at the unchanged attitude of the society towards looking at depression and mental illness? The play was first performed in 1988 and after thirty-six years nothing has changed. Mental issues carry the same social stigma even today.
- Does it refer to the indomitable spirit that triumphs over all odds and 'despair and death' to 'hope and live'? It may refer to hope and life signified by the unborn baby – this baby might be, as Vasu says – "perfect or imperfect, bringing joy or sorrow. But it's a whole new life. And that's something. A new life to live with and grow with" (p. 131).

3. The protagonists and the antagonists of the play:

Is the play a story of Avinash? Is Avinash the titular character? Or is it the story of Vasudha? In other words, who is the protagonist? The play is definitely mainly about Avinash and the problem of mental illness. Underlining importance of Avi in the play, the author argues:

“...Avinash’s disappearance had in no way brought peace to the family. On the contrary, it had made them guilt-ridden whereas earlier they had been frustrated and helpless” (Gokhale, 2024: 87)

However, neither is Avinash present in the play as a character nor is the play a psychodrama exploring the reasons and solutions to mental illness. The author has said she had “the family as protagonists”. Some researchers argue Vasu, a lower middleclass woman with disability is the protagonist. According to Mahesh Dattani, it is the tragedy of Tatya:

“There is a certain over hanging despair over Avinash’s fate and Tatya’s relentless outpouring of frustration and disappointment. It is this blanket of darkness that makes *Avinash* an important play, saving it from melodrama. Avinash and Tatya are two very tragic characters. At the end of it, one is actually thankful that Avinash is redeemed from his situation through death, leaving us with a feeling of immense loss for Tatya. He must suffer being trapped in the role that has been allotted to him by generations before him. He will live, and he will suffer, but he will never know why he is suffering That, in a sense, is Shantha Gokhale’s drama. The tragedy of Tatya.” (Dattani, 2004: xii)

The question regarding the antagonist is even more complex. Even if there are a lot of hard feelings expressed by Avi’s family about him and also about each other, it is, nevertheless, a bunch of people who love and care for each other. They have faced a lot of financial hardships. The already strained financial condition is even more distressed due to the expenditure on Avi’s treatment and due to the social stigma associated with mental illness.

Reader can of course be tempted to place the blame on something or someone for their hardships just like the characters do - they have their own hobby horses to ride, such as evil eye, fate, etc. All characters have different takes on the reasons of Avi’s problem. Each one wants to place the blame somewhere. It is a general tendency of people to find something or somebody to place the blame on for something gone wrong in their life. Tatya blames his half-brother for his son’s problems; Durga seeks the solution in God. Vasu feels Vikram’s behaviour made Avi leave the house. It could be even Tatya’s outpouring that could have added to his agitation. Almost at the end, Vikram covertly suggests Vasu’s pregnancy may have been responsible in increasing Avi’s stress of coping with the situation. Prakash

blames the social system and the mounting stress on the youth to provide for the family in a time where finding jobs has not remained easy. About this the author also has commented elsewhere:

“A character in my 1988 play *Avinash* says, the depression his older brother suffers from may not be the result entirely of some inborn psychological tic. Its roots might also lie in economics, in the social structure and the political system. To this, the character's father retorts, "What has politics got to do with it? What you are is the result of your destiny." (Gokhale 2020)

So, is the socio-political system to be blamed? Instead of presenting glib answers to this complex problem, the author wants the audience to look at the issue open-mindedly and to motivate discussion and better awareness regarding the issue.

4. The ending of the play:

The play doesn't end with the disappearance of Avi or with the news of his death. This has been commented upon by a few people. As the author herself says, some people were convinced that the play should have ended with Avi's disappearance. However, according to her, these people were the ones who interpreted the play as a 'family drama' or as a 'psychodrama' (and Gokhale is not writing either of the two). For these people, "what came after was pointless". However, Shanta Gokhale says

“But that was the whole point. The obvious dramatic climax had to be crossed to see that Avinash's disappearance had in no way brought peace to the family. On the contrary, it had made them guilt-ridden whereas earlier they had been frustrated and helpless” (Gokhale, 2024: 87).

Like the point at which the play should have ended, the interpretation of the way it actually ends is also capable of stoking debate. Does the ending (Vasu decides to have the child) make the play a stereotypical, traditional play binding women to the traditional role of a nurturer forced on her by patriarchy?

Shanta Gokhale, aware of this, has talked about the ending of the play in her preface to the play thus:

“Some people have felt that the end of the play is reactionary. By which they mean that a woman bravely waiting to bring forth her dead husband's child is an old stereotype. But the old stereotype would have the woman seeing in the child a

symbol and a memory. Vasudha sees it only as another life through which she will live. It is not a light that beckons her towards a less painful future. It is merely an assertion of life and of her own strength in meeting life head on and coping with it whatever lies in store” (Gokhale, 2004; 87)

Even Mahesh Dattani in his comment on the play sees Gokhale imposing the role of nurturer on Vasu:

“The women carry on with the roles as nurturers unquestioningly. Durga, dutifully, prays to the gods and presses Taty’s head when he is in a phase of self pity, or he is generally angry with all three sons. It is only towards the end when Vasudha makes a choice that there seems to be some reclaiming of personal dignity for the women. Ironically, even this personal choice involves her womanly role as nurturer. Ms Gokhale is not concerned with political correctness, but is precise in a representation of middleclass Maharashtrian families, which is not too different from middle class families elsewhere.” (Dattani, 2004: xi-xii)

However, this can be debated. When seen in conjunction with Gokhale’s attempt to make the audience think and discuss the problem of mental illness instead of sweeping it under the carpet as well as her clear intention of not writing a ‘psychodrama’ that gives glib answers to all problems, Gokhale’s ending makes sense too. The alternative of selecting hope and life over despair and death seems very apt on part of Vasu and Gokhale.

5. Psychoanalysis and the play Avinash:

People have been tempted to use the lens of psychoanalysis to analyse the play. However, there are some problems in doing this. Firstly, the author doesn’t want us to search for ready-made solutions in the play nor wants it to be seen as a psychodrama. On the other hand, she wants us to realise the complexity of the problem through various perspectives. These different perspectives are voiced by the characters in the play. In her words,

“I was not interested in leading the audience to a solution. I was not beginning with an exposition of the problem which, through mounting dramatic tension, would finally be resolved....There was to be no analysis of Avinash’s problem...” (p. 87)

The absence of the central character precludes a psychoanalytical reading of the play even of the reader may very much be tempted to use the perspective to analyse Avinash's condition.

6. Disability Studies and the Play *Avinash*:

Disability studies in literature is the study of how disability is represented in literature. It also helps us understand how this representation reveals a lot about the culture that created it. It's a field that challenges the medical model of disability, which sees in individuals the location of physical and mental impairments. On the other hand, the social model argues that the world as disabling people. That is, the society's attitudes of looking at disabled people and the lack of ramps, elevators and other resources/infrastructure create problems for the disabled people to use space and to function properly making the disabled people 'the most poor and disempowered groups'. So, society creates architectural and attitudinal barriers that disables people. The social model discovers the ways that able-bodied ideologies are created and perpetuated through various means, literature and films being an important part of these. Disability studies argues ability should not be the criteria in deciding human worth. It contends that disability is produced not only by bodily conditions but also by cultural and environmental factors. It sees disability more as a social and political phenomenon and argues that dominant ideologies stigmatize the disabled people with negative meaning – they are seen as damaged, inferior, and in need of rehabilitation, care and cure.

Through Vasu's character the play *Avinash* makes a strong statement on the condition of disabled women in Indian society. A woman with disability is seen as a responsibility that is pushed from one shoulder to another. In spite of the difficulties, Vasu's parents tried very hard to marry her off. She hardly has a say in this or a choice in this matter. She is assumed to be lacking the capacity to live alone and look after herself and as unable to take her own decisions by her family. She is also an unwanted responsibility and is unwelcome to her paternal home after marriage. Hardly any one looks at her as an individual in her own right. She is just Avi's wife – brought home to take care of Avi. We learn that she has hardly left the home since marriage. She is reduced to an unpaid nurse. After her husband is dead, she is no longer needed and people actually are looking forward to her departure to her mother's home (where she is not at all welcome). So, neither house has really become her home. She is an outsider at both places or in fact in the prejudiced

society that sees disability as a blot. Even if she is not treated ill by her in-laws, she hardly gets any love and affection there. She reveals her inner most thoughts and emotions only in the last scene. The decision to have Avi's child or not to have it is a very difficult decision – not only for Vasu but also for the author. It involves selecting between

1. The role of nurturer – which brings with it a lot of risk, responsibility and is the traditional role expected and forced on women
2. The role of a rebel – even if involving lesser risk and responsibility, it involves turning away from the last ray of hope and destroying an unborn life.

Typically, the decision is to be taken by Vasu and whatever she decides she will carry the responsibility alone through the rest of her life. It never becomes a decision they all take together like a shared responsibility. Gokhale subtly comments on the complex issue of reproductive rights of the disabled people.

The Indian belief that once a boy gets married, many of his problems get solved – creates many other problems. For example, it is believed marriage will be the solution for men like Avinash. The whole responsibility of looking after him is quickly shifted to Vasu as soon as they are married. She has to cope no matter what with the situation

7. Feminist Reading of the Play *Avinash*:

Even if Dattani has said about the play that women in the play are quite docile and confined to being just nurturers, the fact that the play represents the plight of women, the plight of disabled women makes the play a feminist play without hoarsely lashing out at patriarchy and inequalities. The play is grounded in reality and that is why the way the characters react doesn't make them appear contrived and unrealistic. The play leaves space for the reader to read, interpret and reflect on the social reality so as to at least understand the complex issues involved. The play doesn't offer populist shiny but superficial situations. On the other hand, as the author has said it often, the play "encourages conversations" around not just depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia", but also around the issues of the disabled women, the aged, the unemployed youth, a family coping with financial problems and with a chronically depressed son on its hands.

4.3.5 Check your Progress II

Q 1. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase or a sentence each.

1. What did Shanta Gokhale's real life female colleague and her surgeon husband do to 'cure' their daughter with some mental problem?
2. Kiran's wife Anu is a student of
3. How many characters does the play *Avinash* have?
4. Who is Lokhande?
5. What is the play *Mengoubi The Fair One* about?
6. Which Marathi novel of Shanta Gokhale was translated by her with the title *Crowfall*?
7. In which town was Shanta Gokhale born?
8. Who says- "Big words. Despair. What was he despairing about? Work till your bones ache. And then there is no time for despair"?
9. Who says the following?
"We need the warmth of families. Loneliness can drive you crazy."
10. According to whom, "Too much family can also drive you crazy"?

4.4 Summary

This unit focused on two areas – the Modern Indian Drama and the play *Avinash* by Shanta Gokhale. We looked at the developmental history of modern Indian drama and some of the significant contributors (playwrights, directors) from diverse languages, states, and periods.

In the second section we looked in detail contribution of Shanta Gokhale to Indian theatre and translations. Different interpretations of the play, the major themes or issues raised in the play and the plot structure, characters, etc. were also discussed.

4.5 Answers to Check your Progress I

1. B. V. Karanth
2. Girish Karnad
3. Sharada

4. 1876
5. IPTA
6. Shambhu Mitra
7. Habib Tanvir
8. The real development of Indian English Drama started with Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilization*
9. in 1959
10. 1-f, 2-d, 3- a, 4-h, 5-b, 6- c, 7-e, 8-g, 9-j, 10- i

4.6 Answers to Check your Progress II

Q1.

1. they decided they should exorcise the evil that had possessed their daughter
2. Psychology
3. Eight
4. Lokhande is a neighbour of Tatya and is almost of the same age
5. It is a docudrama on Manipur's Irom Chanu Sharmila and her strike
6. Tya Varshi
7. Dahanu
8. Tatya
9. Durga
10. Vikram

4.7 Exercises

Q1. Answer the following questions in about 600 words:

1. Write a detailed note on the double marginalisation in society of women with disabilities with reference to the play *Avinash*.
2. What is disability studies? Discuss the play *Avinash* in the light of the perspective offered by Disability Studies.

3. Evaluate the play *Avinash* with reference to the statement ‘*Avinash* is a tragedy of Tatyā’.
4. Bring out your views on the main character of the play *Avinash* with proper justification.
5. Discuss in detail the female characters from the play *Avinash*.
6. Attempt a critical note on ‘*Avinash*’ in the play *Avinash*.

Q2. Write short notes on the following topics (in about 200 words):

1. Gerontology and the play *Avinash*
2. The significance of the title of the play *Avinash* (The Indestructible)
3. The ending of the play *Avinash*
4. Vikram
5. The character of Prakash
6. Lokhande’s role in the play

Q3. Answer the following questions in detail.

1. Attempt a note on the development of modern Indian drama with reference to the phases through which it progressed.
2. Elucidate the main features of modern Indian drama.
3. Discuss the problems involved in defining ‘modern Indian’ drama.
4. Write a note on important Indian playwrights and their contribution.

Q 4. Write short notes on:

1. Problems faced by Indian Drama in English
2. Indian People’s Theatre Association
3. The ‘theatre of the roots’ trend in Indian drama
4. The contribution of women playwrights and directors to Indian drama

4.8 Books for Further Study

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