THEATRE
ART AND LIFE

Roland Kharkrang SDB

About the Book

What this book is about is summed up in the title.

This book attempts at tracing theatre to its origin, not only the Dionysiac rituals at ancient Athens, nor in the temples of ancient India, but also in the native urge of human nature to share and communicate experience, thoughts and feelings through speech and performance.

Sharing and communication give expression to the immense and versatile inner dynamism and genius of mankind, and when that is done with purpose and grace it soothes the soul and brings about a sense of well-being and fulfilment. It becomes art.

This art has had its own story of growth and development, and its own ancient traditions in India, China, Japan, its own "moods and styles".

Finally, this book also explores the beginning and growth of the Khasi Theatre to its present day. The cultural experience, the Indian context of colonial rule and struggle for freedom, and the local factors and talents conspired to give a specific face to this universal and vital medium of human expression.

ISBN : 81-7717-122-2

Rs. 280.00

About the Author

Fr. Roland Kharkrang SDB is a member of the Society of the Salesians of St. John Bosco, a religious, educational organization. He graduated from the UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL (1971); the subsequent studies were done in the NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY : B.Ed. (1977), M.Ed. (1981), M.A. (1988) and M.Phil. (1992) in Anthropology. He was Headmaster of Sacred Heart Boys' High School, Shillong, (1982-89), Rector of the Residential Section of Don Bosco College, Tura, (1989-93), and is currently Parish Priest of St. John Bosco Parish, Cherrapunjee.

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OMSONS

OMSONS PUBLICATIONS
T-7, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi-110027

First Published : 1994

ISBN : 81-7117-122-2

Published by :
R. Kumar
OMSONS PUBLICATIONS
T-7, Rajouri Garden
New Delhi-110027

Laser Composed by :
Enen Grafiks
CB-178, Ring Road, Naraina
New Delhi-110028

Printed at :
EFFICIENT OFFSET PRINTERS
215, Shahzada Bagh Indl. Complex.
Phase-II, Phone : 533736, 533762
Delhi - 110035

To

Very Rev. Fr. C. Attard SDB,
who,
in 1961,
set in motion
the process that makes me me,

and

late Kenny Shympa,
founder of the RTC,
the man with a vision and courage,

this book is humbly dedicated.

Acknowledgments

After the last line of this book has been written, I take a lingering look to the days gone by and trace it all back to Prof. A.P. Sinha who, in the first place, suggested the **Khasi theatre** as the field of enquiry, and then ably guided the study to the dissertation form in which the study was presented to the Department of Anthropology, NEHU, under the title THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE KHASI THEATRE IN SHILLONG, in part-fulfillment of the requirements of the M.A. programme in Anthropology, 1986-88. Most naturally, my first thanks go the Prof. Sinha.

This book is the revised, enlarged and printed form of the above dissertation.

In the process of writing this book, I have been the beneficiary of the kindness of very many people.

To the teachers (1986-88) at Sacred Heart Boys, High School, Mawlai, I owe the thanks that is far more than I can ever put down in writing. Without their constant and unstinted cooperation, this book would never have been a reality.

My special thanks go to the present members of the RYMPEI THEATRICAL CENTRE who put at my disposal whatever source of information they possess, and for going through the manuscript of the section on RTC (V. 5). In particular, my thanks go to Bah Mihsuk A. Nongrum, who did not mind my exploiting the friendship between us.

In like manner, thanks to the surviving members of the SHILLONG PANORA CLUB, above all to Bah Opindro Benedict Lynrah, Bah Bijoy Chyne and Bah Heledi Warjri, who did not grudge me their spare time to sit and play-back to me their inside knowledge and secrets about their one-time club.

Many thanks to Rev. Fr. Leo Heriot SDB, my Rector at Sacred Heart College, who pointed to me the way at the very

start, and who, at several moments of this study, helped me tide over numerous obstacles. He was *the man behind* who is never tired of encouraging.

Thanks to Kong P.P. Dkhar whose enthusiasm was to me a source of inspiring energy.

I am grateful also to Rev. Fr. Henry Butters SDB, of Bolton (England) who, in his visit to shillong in 1989, made time to go through the manuscripts and improve the language.

I place on record my thank to Prof. P.S. Datta, presently Director of ICSSR, Shillong, without whose friendship and guidance, this book would never have been printed as early as he has made it possible for me to do. I am grateful to him for the several suggestions he made towards making the effort more worthwhile.

Very many thanks to my Salesian Provincial Superiors (1986-88), Guwahati, without whose magnanimity and support, this work would have never been accomplished.

Finally, to that galaxy of men and women, young and old, far and near, wise or otherwise, who, by word or deed, directly or indirectly, contributed, even if only their mite, to the substance, or borne upon the form of this work — in no less a measure : THANK YOU !

Shillong

Roland Kharkrang SDB

Preface

The unwritten history of theatre is the unwritten history of mankind, for in its essentials, that set of human actions which the Indians formalized as Natya-shastra, and the ancient Greeks as theatre, belong to no single, particular race, age, or culture. They are, rather, an act of language, one by which the dangerous phenomenal world is safely imitated, celebrated, and perpetuated in word and actions, in sound and colour. This act, lying as it did, at the very heart of ritual, has been common to all men — although in varying degrees — since the beginning. The sorcerer imitating the stag (in a scene painted on the wall of a prehistoric cave), and Ben Kingsley impersonating Mahatma Gandhi, Bill Rynjah creating the character of legendary Manik Raitong, Mihsuk Nongrum bringing alive on stage U Kiang Nangbah, and immortalizing u Tirot Sing, all these have a common bond in spite of the twenty thousand years and twenty thousand miles of time and space between them.

"Man has danced, sung, and mimicked life around him at least as long as he hunted and farmed. These acts, as old as civilization itself, lie at the heart of all forms of theatre, from the most ancient to the most avant garde. What gives modern theatre its astonishing variety is the manner in which those primitive ritual acts have evolved in widely different cultures."

The Orientals, with India at the head of them all, with their extreme attachment to technical control and mastery of gestures, movement and voice, have caught the imagination of the rest of the masters of this art. The Fifth Veda is an articulated form of professional dance and drama originated in the holy of holies of temples as a highly stylized act of worship. The divine origin of Natyashastra is further highlighted by the belief that it was ordained and formulated by Brahmadeva himself for the entertainment of the myriads of gods and goddesses, and as the unique means to man's self-realization and self-transcendence.

The ancient Greeks created the first true western theatre out of a desire to appease the gods while offering moral instruction to the play-going public. The playwrights of Rome, however, sought first and foremost to amuse and divert the restive populace with public ostentatious extravaganzas of unprecedented grandeur. In the footsteps of India and Greece, each place and subsequent generation made its contribution to the entire dramatic culture.

The history of theatre in the East begins in India. That culture spread to the neighboring countries, particularly in the Far East as a handmaid of the Buddhist faith. However, the impact on the secular existence and maturing of the art comes largely from the West.

In the West, the history of theatre begins in Athens, more than five and a half centuries before the birth of Christ. There, in a tiny bowl-like hollow, their backs protected from the cold winds of Mount Parnes and from the searing morning sun, Athenians celebrated those rites of the god Dionysus that were to evolve into theatre — no doubt, one of the greatest cultural accomplishments of the Greeks.

Indeed, this new art was so intimately associated with Greek civilization that every major town and colony possessed a theatre, the quality itself being an index of the settlement's importance.

Down the ages, at the end of memory lane, we can still see on stage peoples of every age, even those unknown to recorded history; there, events and beliefs, refracted for us through the prism of culture, customs, habits, and manners, still speak to us of times long gone and forgotten. Down the corridor of time, the soul of a nation still breathes, the pulse still throbs, the dead come back to life.

Foreword

Art is an expression of man's effort to transcend himself. While he imitates life and reality in his artistic endeavors, he becomes in the process a creator in his own right. Imitation itself is creative.

The rapid development of the dramatic art in Khasi society is indicative of the creative genius of the Khasi people. Despite the small size of the language group, and in spite of not having lavish patronage from any side, the flowering of the Khasi dramatic genius in recent years, is truly amazing.

Fr. Roland Kharkrang in his THEATRE : ART AND LIFE traces the development of the theatre from the primitive man's eagerness to act out his adventures to Ibsen's realism and symbolism, from Bharat's 'Natyashastra' to Uday Shankar's modern productions, carefully placing the Khasi Theatre against the background of these Eastern and Western traditions.

Fr. Roland studies the interests of the Indian theatre in general and the Bengali drama in particular, and explores the origins and growth of the Khasi dramatic art.

In 1891, with the publication of a translation of Shakespeare's 'Julius Ceasar' by John Roberts, the khasi theatre was born. Fr. Roland proceeds to describe the contribution of the Shillong Panora Club of Bah Peace Roy Pariat, Fr. Winkler, the Salesians of Don Bosco, Kenny Shympa and the Rympei Theatrical Centre, and the other Khasi and Jaintia Clubs.

If the past has been great, the future can be greater, because creativity stimulates creativity. The Khasi theatre is better poised today than ever before for growth and development. Not only do we notice specially gifted producers, but also an increasingly supportive public.

Fr. Roland has undoubtedly done the Khasi people, literature and arts a great service by presenting the Khasi theatre in the context of the dramatic tradition of the entire world. We look to the future with eager expectation.

Dibrugarh
April 20, 1990

Thomas Menamparampil SDB,
MA (Double) DD
Bishop of Dibrugarh

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I

History of the Theatre

1. EUREKA !

The people we use to call *primitive* were very much like children; they liked to play, as children still do (see page 46-51). They neither read nor wrote; their speech consisted of a few sounds and gestures. The cave drawings are an incalculable

Fig. 1 : Cave-men miming the killing of a bear.

legacy those *primitive* people bequeathed to us. These drawings, in a silent and infallible language, tell us about the life-activities of these men — that they lived by hunting game. After killing, say — a bear, the hunter took the game home; he wanted to

tell the rest of the family or the clan how he had killed the bear. But he did not have enough words; so he acted it out. Perhaps he sometime got a friend to put on a bear skin; that made the story of killing the bear more real, more eloquent and more impressive. Gradually, the story of killing the bear became a mime.

If the mime was particularly good, with a lot of running around, screaming and shouting, the *'primitive'* performed it several times, with more and more of the tribe coming to

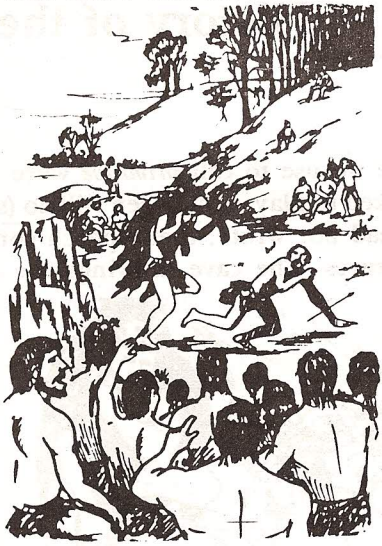

Fig. 2 : Primitive men learn to add humour to narration.

watch it. Sons took over from their fathers and acted it even long after their parents had been dead and consigned to the distant and murky recesses of unknown history.

In the meantime, little bits of what in the theatre is called "business" were added. Some performer introduced funny and humorous bits and pieces to tickle the spectators into laughter. Possibly an actor tripped and fell, dropped his flint-headed spear and fumbled, and was nearly caught by the bear. He panicked and yelled at the top of his voice, and everyone laughed even more hilariously.

As the mime became more popular, it was performed in some open and flat piece of ground, with the watchers sitting or standing all round. This was the first theatre.

This man, the *primitive* man, was the *homo ludens*, as John Huizinga,[1] among others, calls him— man the player, man the actor, the performer, the entertainer.

Something of this kind is still done by the Urueu-Waw-Waw Indians of Brazil. "To celebrate the killing of a rubber tapper who encroached on their indigenous lands, Urueu-Waw-Waw villagers perform a victory dance..... At the point in the dance where 'hunters return from the kill', women and often children join in. Then all stand and watch the warrior re-enact his victory. Letting the bowstring twang, he shouts a war cry and screams as an imaginary arrow peretrates the victim's heart."[2]

2. WESTERN THEATRE

A) The Dionysia and the First Dramatists

"Simple dramatic activity is found in various forms among all peoples."[3] It became elaborate and complex usually as a result of social and political changes, or the coming of new religions, as in Greece. A new religion disturbs or destroys old ideas and sets men free to think afresh. The cult of the wine god, Dionysus, had this effect in ancient Greece. Similar results accompanied the growth of Christianity in Europe, and the coming of Buddhism to Japan and the neighbouring countries.

When the cult of Dionysus reached Greece from the kingdom on the shores of the Black Sea, some people opposed it vehemently but it eventually made many converts, particularly in the northern city of Icaria. The citizens of Athens remained hostile until, worried by an outbreak of plague, they consulted the oracle of the god Apollo at Delphi, who advised them to accept the new faith.

The characteristic form of worship of Dionysus was a procession of "wine excited revelers", wearing an image of the god. Men dressed in animal skin and wearing animal heads and horns danced in the procession impersonating centaurs and satyrs. There are similar man-animal creatures in the

folk-lore of every race, generally because pre-Christian peoples did not think of animals as inferior beings. On the contrary, men thought they had animal ancestors, and they expected the gods sometimes to take animal as well as human shapes.

The goatmen in the Dionysiac procession took part in 'Satyr plays' performed during the festivals. (The word *tragedy* means 'goat song'. *Tragos* for goat, and *ode*, song.) *Comus*, the name of the procession of revellers, gives us the word 'comedy'.[4]

The dancing was referred to as *mimesis*, which was translated as 'imitation' and gives us the words 'mimic' and 'mime'. It originally meant a state of mind of the dancer who was 'inspired' by the spirit of his god. The mask was the sign of his being inspired; when he wore it, the dancer was 'taken over' by the god.

Eventually, these dance-dramas were performed in a special theatre dedicated to Dionysus. As part of the play, a 'chorus' of men danced and sang. This chorus grew out of old revelry processions but was not later limited to the original fifteen men. Women took no part, because this was an activity of citizens; Athenian women were not accorded the status of citizens.

The Greek word for an actor was *hypocrites* ('the answerer') because he answered to chorus. Thespis, an actor from Icaria (the early stronghold of Dionysus), was the first performer to do this, and actors are still called thespians. Because the actor wore a mask, the word *hypocrite* later came to mean a double-faced person, someone who pretends to be what he is not. Yet the Latin word for mask, *persona*, gives us the words 'person' and 'personality' by which we mean something real, as genuine identity. The drama has always had this dual character of sincerity and pretension. Actors wore stock masks to portray particular emotions or roles.

During the sixth century B.C. the little country town of Athens grew into the most important and cultured city-state of all Greece. Each year at midsummer, city officials chose the three poets who were to compete the following spring in the Dionysia. This was a festival that Peisistratus, a ruler of Athens,

instituted in honour of Dionysus, the god of wine and of fertility. He was considered to be the god of the poor, and the most "approachable" of all the gods. The Dionysia was to become the chief festival of the Athenian year; and the three appointed poets each prepared three tragedies for it (comedies were added only in later years).

Sometimes, but not always, the three plays were connected in theme (a 'trilogy').[5] Each poet became the official responsibility of a rich citizen who bore the expenses of his plays. To be chosen to be such a 'backer' (choregus) was one of the greatest honours Athens could bestow. The plays had to be written on themes taken from the history of Greece or from the legends of her princely families, particularly those incidents described in the poems of Homer. Sometimes, however, plays based on more recent events were accepted.

Attendance at the Dionysia was mandatory for all citizens. A sacred peace was proclaimed in the entire city for the five or six days that the festival lasted; no violence was tolerated, not even in the action of play. On the first day everyone went out in procession from Athens to the village of Eleutherae, where the ancient wooden statue of Dionysus was enshrined. A great vehicle in the from of a boat, commemorating Dionysus' mythical arrival from the sea, was drawn through the streets towards the precincts below the acropolis by performers disguised as satyrs. Atop the vehicle on a throne trimmed with vine, wearing the mask and garb of Dionysus, sat the chief player. From here they carried the statue in triumph back to the city. In the procession came city officials, priests, important guests, the poets, their actors, the wealthy backers, and the chorus representing the community of worshippers.

In the performing area of the sacred precincts, in view of all, stood the ancient wooden statue of Dionysus, a constant reminder that he was indeed the patron of this highly competitive set of ritual game. During the next three days the plays were acted during the hours of day-light. When all was over, the appointed judges (kritai) chose the prize winning dramatist. The festival closed with the *dithyrambs*,[6] choral songs sung, dances performed and poems recited in honour of the deity.

By the end of the 7th century B.C. performance of the dithyrambs had spread from Sicyon in the Dorian lands of the Peloponnesus,[7] where they are said to have originated, to the area around Corinth, where they gained literary prominence. Soon they spread also to the islands of Paros and Naxos.

The early productions of Periclean Athens, tended to be formal and refined, a fact which turned out to be very different two centuries later.

In the 6th century, Thespis, a lyric poet who travelled by cart from village to village organizing celebrations for local feasts, introduced the dithyrambs to Attica. With him dithyrambs became orderly, well formalized and articulated.

Athenian tragedies frequently celebrated the city-state's mythical past by presenting aspects of stories already well known to the spectators. In so doing, ancient Greek playwrights observed a uniform order of presentation, imposing rules of composition upon future playwrights and furnishing a familiar format by which the citizenry could judge the excellence of the works and their performance.

The order of performance of a tragedy required that there be a prologue in which the playwright introduced the myth and the particular circumstances that he had chosen to represent to the audience. Then followed the *parados* in which the chorus took possession of the orchestra, interposing itself between the audience and the action. Various episodes of the action were then presented, each linked to the other by the chants and dances of the chorus. The play ended with the *exodos*, during which the chanting chorus left the performing area.

The historic and social significance of the chorus, historically the oldest element in tragedy, is the conservative voice of the community against the individual actions of the characters to be judged. The chorus entered the theatre before the announced action began; it commented, sympathised, and disagreed — and it admonished spectators between episodes — thus fixing the action of the play in a decidedly social context.

Athenian audiences were avid and patient play-goers. Arriving at the theatre at sun-rise they customarily saw, in rapid succession three plays by the same playwright on the same mythical action. These were followed by a fourth play, called the Satyr Play in which the very myth that had just been performed with solemnity was broadly ridiculed — a healthy reaction, no doubt, to so much gravity. The four plays must have finished by noon, then everyone left the shadeless area after the satyr play to eat their only principal meal, and to take a nap until afternoon, when they returned to the theatre to see a single comedy before dark.

The Dionysia, like the Christian Easter, was a celebration of resurrection, the most important feast of the liturgical year. Held at a time of the year when the Athenians were usually at home and not yet too busy with planting, commerce, or war, it was observed by everyone. Visitors came from Athens' distant colonies, and emissaries were sent from tributary states with gifts for the Athenian treasury. Crowds of villagers swarmed Athens, thronging the streets and filling the taverns and inns with their revelry. On the very first day of the six-day celebrations, the new wine was broached, which even the abstemious Athenians drank in fabulous quantities, the natural appetite greatly enhanced by the mood of the occasion, and all to the honour of the wine-god. Dionysus being the deity of wine[8] and fertility,[9] it is not surprising that dances dedicated to him tended to be boisterous and disorderly, and the dancers being drunk both with wine and vinous liberation and euphoria.

The permanent theatre of Dionysus was begun under Pericles about 435 B.C., and was finished seventy-five years later under Lycurgus, the great ancient law-giver. Although that structure was later replaced, it established the spatial relationships between the circular *orchestra*, where the chorus performed, the *skene*[10] the domain of the actors, and the *theatai*, where the audience sat.

The contests were originally held in the city's *agora* (market place or square). After the collapse of the bleachers there in 499 B.C., the event was transferred to a *theatai*[11] ('a place for seeing') scooped out of the nearby Acropolis hill,

close to the temple of Dionysus. There actors performed in a circular dancing place called an *orchestra*. It was either Thespis or his successor, Phrynicus, who, by distinguishing one performer from the rest of the chorus, created the dramatic dialogue and so invented the form known as tragedy. The new form received official approval in 538 B.C., when the tyrant Peisistratus ordered the first Athenian tragedy. Peisistratus ensured its permanence by assigning to it a precinct in a busy sector of the city, a slope between the steep south escarpment of the upper city and the Street of Tripods. The land was consecrated to Dionysus and is to this very day known as the Theatre of Dionysus.

From the very beginning the principal feature of the performing area was the circular orchestra (from *orcheisthai*, 'to dance') where the chorus sang and danced. Adjacent to this area were an altar to the gods, a tithing house or tent, where

Fig. 3 : An artist's sketch of an early Greek theatre.

offerings were received and kept, and a retiring house, where performers dressed and from where they proceded to the circular dancing ground. The Greeks called the retiring house *skene*, which word mothered our modern term 'scene'. In later years the tent was replaced by a wooden building called the 'proscenium', in front of which the actors played on a raised platform. Later, the wooden building was replaced by an

elaborate stone structure. It was here that the poet Aeschylus[12] (525-456 B.C) had his first successful play performed in 484 B.C. To the single actor originated by Thespis (or his successor), Aeschylus added a second, and later, a third. He not only acted in his plays; he also trained actors and the chorus.

It is clear that the festival was religious in its origin. By the end of the 4th century B.C., it became largely social with people of both sexes vieing with one another for the off-stage limelight. Everyone wore festive clothes, and garlands of ivy leaves were an almost obligatory head-dress.

Seats closest to the stage were reserved for the city dignitaries and foreign ambassadors. The ones furthest away and apart from the rest are thought to have been meant for the attending prostitutes.

Tickets were made of lead and people who were dissatisfied with their seats could buy others from one of the many scalpers (or tickets touts) doing business outside the gates. The scalpers' best customers were the snobs, uppishers and the social-climbers who, according to the late 4th century writer Theophrates, would do just anything to be seen sitting along-side some important officials.

In 458 B.C. Aeschylus presented his great trilogy, the *Oresteia*. But by this time other, younger poets were coming to the fore. Among them were Sophocles (about 496-406 B.C.), Euripides (about 480-406 B.C.), and Aristophanes (about 448-380 B.C.).

To Sophocles the gods gave every good gift: wealth, health, long life, talent, and fame. Euripides, on the other hand, was regarded with suspicion as a trouble maker and a skeptic. The great comic dramatist was Aristophanes, whose plays mocked everyone from the philosopher Socrates to warmongering politicians.

Following Allardyce Nicoll, Michael Gonsalves gives another version of this development. Around the 6th or 7th century B.C., individual poets composed songs from legends about Dionysus for the celebrant. The crowd joined in and was led by a leader. Gradually, the crowd-leader detached

himself from the crowd bringing about the possibility of one man representing the crowd. Thespis later added an actor to the choral leader. The actor evidently impersonated several characters in the legend through the use of masks. Herodotus introduced spoken lines into the lyrical songs; Aeschylus introduced the second actor, and with him formal Greek drama began in about 560 B.C. Sophocles introduced the third actor.

By 400 B.C. the plays of Athens were famous throughout Greece. They were carried from place to place by professional actors organized in troupes under the protection of Dionysus. After the death of Aeschylus, the older plays began to be revived in his honour and performed at other festivals besides the Dionysia. Theatres were built in every city. But a new breed of comedy was coming into fashion. No longer topical, like that of Aristophanes, it was based on a few stock situations and characters: obstinate old men, talkative wives, gossiping and witching old women, gay and irresponsible youngsters, and sly, plotting slaves. The great period of Greek drama was over.

The Greeks have left us our oldest and some of our finest plays. We owe to them two things: the theatre and the drama. We owe to them the basic dramatic vocabulary and art. Both the words theatre and drama come from the Greek for 'a place for seeing', and 'the thing done'.

B) The Audience and the Judges

Audiences shouted down and booed out substandard performers, thumbed up and cheered good speeches, and sometimes there was even physical violence. Noisy partisanship was rife, since the Athenians offered a prize for the play judged by the *Kritai* to be the best. The reward was an ivy crown, the most coveted trophy. There is a story that when, in the 5th century B.C., Sophocles won the crown with his first attempt at tragedy, which is now lost, the old master Aeschylus, who had joined the competition for that year, left the country in a fit of rage. And Euripides too left Athens, perhaps because his plays and ideas were not accepted by the Athenian audiences.

As time went on, audiences became more and more sophisticated, fastidious and harder to please. They were increasingly more and more ready to hiss and boo, throw stones, fruits, nuts, and such other missiles, if the performance dropped below their expectation.

A crane-like device called *machene* was contrived and sometimes used for accomplishing the descent of the god toward the end of a tragedy, and this *dues ex machina* in the form of an unfortunate actor swinging into view dangling from the end of a rope, invariably struck the audience as truly exotic and extremely funny.

Only a few of the great Greek tragedies of the 5th century B.C. are still extant: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes.

Menander reached the peak of fame in about 300 B.C., and wrote more than 100 comedies most of which were translated into Latin, or imitated a century later by Terence and Plautus of Latin fame. In 1959, complete papyrus manuscripts of Menander's comedy *Dyskolos* (The bad-tempered man) were unearthed in Egypt and subsequently published.

Ruins of ancient Greek theatres are still to be seen at places like Athens and Epidaurus. When the Romans started building theatres, they copied those of ancient Greece.

In Italy and France, and even in England at St. Albans, the Roman town of Verulanium, one can still see the ruins of Roman theatres.

The Romans were very practical people; they changed the natural form of the theatre. The round orchestra, where the Greek chorus had performed religious dances, became much smaller and finally disappeared. The stage was increased in size to accommodate many more actors than merely the three allowed originally by the Greeks on their stage. The plays often dealt with ordinary people, instead of telling stories about gods and heroes.

Some such Graeco-Roman theatres are found in Taormina, in Sicily. They lie in silent ruins, but articulately speak of the artistic grandeur and architectural feats of ages

long past, and exquisitely blend with the landscape in eternal, quiet harmony.

The mortal remains of the most majestic Graeco-Roman theatre existing in Sicily after the one at Syracuse, is one with a diameter of 357 feet, orchestra 115 feet. Nothing much has survived from the original Greek construction. It is believed that it was begun in the Hellenistic age, perhaps, during the rule of Hieron II (3rd century B.C.). It was originally designed as a true-theatre, that is, a public place for scenic performances (especially religious in character) generally given in the late afternoon, after the sweltering heat till before dark, with the ever watchful Mount Etna over-seeing the entire goings-on.

In Greek times the theatre consisted mainly of the orchestra (around which the choir was arranged in a circle), the scene with a stage in front, and the *cavea*, that is, the tiers on which the spectators sat divided vertically into wedges separated by flights of steps and horizontally by ring corridors marking off the order of seats.

Taormina's Hellenistic theatres presumably must have had this structure and shape, but smaller — with the *cavea* built on the slope of a hill — and less stately and less richly decorated than the later Roman theatre. From the Hellenistic building the orchestra, some blocks of the stage and the bases of a little temple on the eastern side have survived.

With the Romans, the work on several occasions (perhaps from the Augustan age to the middle of the second century A.D), underwent changes in size, ornamentation, the relationship of the architectural elements, and, of course, its purpose. The theatre was in fact converted into an amphitheater, that is, a place dedicated above all to spectacular bonanzas of hunting wild beasts, gladiatorial fights and, perhaps, naval battles. The *cavea* was, therefore, enlarged — no longer by excavating the hills, but by creating structures — divided into nine wedges of tiers, and crowned at the top with a majestic double portico comprising flights of wooden steps. The front of the stage was brought forward into the orchestra and sumptuously embellished with an overhead double order of columns with alternating niches and arches.

The stage was flanked by 'parascaenia', corresponding to the actors' dressing room (the *skene* of the Greeks), and the store-room for scenery and equipments in modern theatres. Behind the stage there are remains of porticos built to give protection from the rain.

The most important change, from the functional point of view was the conversion of the orchestra to an arena. This was surrounded by protective platforms, while the water facilities were improved and expanded by the elimination of the forestage.

It is said that recently, the town of Taormina arranged high level performances within the framework of ancient remains and the poetry of nature.

Attached to the theatre is the antiquarium where relics of the ancient theatre and the Graeco-Roman Taormina have been collected and preserved.

The photograph give below is that of the Graeco-Roman theatre at Taormina. When a friend of mine, who was studying abroad, went there in 1984 he visited the theatre. He was standing within the theatre at point A, and two other tourists and their guide at point B. The guide was talking and explaining to the tourists speaking at a very normal pitch of

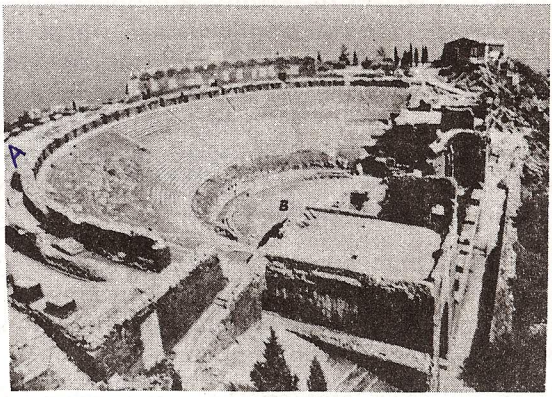

Fig. 4 : The amphitheatre at Taormina.

voice. Yet the voice carried so well that my friend could hear distinctly every single word. We can imagine the perfect acoustics of the structure. That means, even the spectators in the farthest rows of the *cavea* would have been able to follow the entire conversation on the stage. Such architectural and engineering acumen is till today a saga that is baffling to us moderns.

Perhaps another very important innovation that the Romans introduced was the curtain across the front of the stage. This curtain did not open or rise as it does in most theatres today; it fell into a sort of trench. Once it was dropped it could not be raised again during the same show, but it did hide from the audience some specially prepared and mounted scenery till the time that the play was ready to begin. The Romans added trap-doors and other such mechanical devices, and occasionally an awning which could be drawn over the audience to protect them in bad weather.

C) **Actors as Entertainers**

Man is ever as creative as can be. He needs to be entertained too. Drama began in magic rites, but it has also mocked, astonished and delighted.

The clown, or 'comic', is an entertainer whose history is closely linked with primitive ritual. Because the 'fool' or madman was once regarded as 'touched' by the gods he was looked upon as a bearer of fertility, a prophet, and an utterer of the unexpected. He could indeed rush where even angels feared to tread, with impunity at that, and could say what he liked. If in his travels he crossed the borders of his own country and language, he took to pantomiming, and nonsensical jabbering. The clown is an essential figure of medieval drama as portrayed in the Italian comedy, and the English theatre in Shakespeare's day.

In his great epic poem the *Odyssey*, Homer (about 8th century B.C.) described how, at the feast of king Alcinous, the floor was cleared and dancing boys mimed the action of a story as it was being sung by a blind poet.

Hundreds of years later, another Greek writer, Xenophon, related a similar incident, that at a banquet given for the

philosopher Socrates, an entertainer from Syracuse told the story of the love of Dionysus and the princess Ariadne. While he related the tale, it was mimed in dance and gestures by a slave boy or girl. Not only did the girl act in plays, she also performed as an acrobat and sword dancer.

Here for the first time we meet the 'actress'. For centuries to come, women players belonged *only* to the theatre of entertainment. A woman of 'low social standing, the actress could take no part in religious ritual in the theatre of Dionysus, the *No* plays of Japan, or the Christian drama of the medieval church. Even in the professional theatre of Elizabethan England, young boys played all the female roles'[13].

The episode described by Homer and Xenophon are almost identical in character with the popular Greek and Roman *mimes*. These were originally danced as silent accompaniment to the singing or recitation of a poet, but the mimes later developed into spoken dialogues between two, three or four performers. They became little plays, full of intrigues and realistic or homely details. Each character was identified by the masks he wore. The gods were often left in very absurd situations, kings and queens fooled into compromising circumstances; the language was light, frivolous or even obscene, and the stage threadbare.

When the barbarians came down from the north in the 6th century and destroyed the civilization of Rome, the theatre virtually disappeared. The actors were all out of work. In order to make a living, they took to the roads of Europe, performing mimes or simple plays at fairs, or wherever a few people were gathered together.

For hundreds of years this was the only kind of theatrical entertainment in western Europe. The minstrels of France and the gleemen of England kept alive the love of simple shows. Often these were long and rather dull tales of adventure, sung by a single performer, occasionally two or more men would travel together and perform rough comedy scenes.

The gleemen who came to England with the Saxon and Danish invaders recited tales of heroic battles and adventures

to the accompaniment of a sort of harp. A long and occasionally exciting poem called 'Beowulf', performed about the year 600, is the oldest example of such an entertainment.

It was not until the 11th century that the minstrels were made welcome in the castles of the noblemen of France and Norman England. They were highly skilled entertainers, and one of them, Rahere, at the court of Henry I, became so rich that he founded a priory out of his own funds.

The players tramped the roads from town to town. Eventually, some of the hitherto unwritten, extemporized plays were now written down, or imitated, by literary men in Rome and other leading cities, but few examples have survived. Because of the lack of written evidence, most people are not aware of the great influence of the early theatre of entertainment upon the later development of the drama in the west.

D) **The Tramping Actors.**

Throughout history, the entertainer has always been uncertain of his place in society. They were the 'rogues and vagabonds', as they were legally called until the 19th century. They have always suffered both indifference and suspicion on the one hand, and poverty and insecurity on the other. Many players, however, won social acceptance — from Roscius in ancient Rome, who became a knight, down to the English actor Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905), who 'for the sake of his profession', accepted from Queen Victoria the first knighthood ever offered to an English stage personality.

Wherever the city authorities were against them, as was often the case, the actors of the road sought the support of the nobility. At the end of the Middle Ages,. Italian travelling companies became fashionable and under such names as the *Confidenti* ('sure to please') were hired to enliven weddings of royalty and nobility. In England, at about the same period, actors gained some security by taking service with the nobility, but that did not prevent them from opening their own public playhouses. And in summer and times of plagues they tramped the roads again.

E) Theatre Goes to Town

In its most elaborate from, the theatre has always belonged to the city. In the city there are enough people with enough money, talent, and resources to put up large buildings and to engage actors, painters, carpenters, musicians, dancers, writers, producers and architects. The city is the setting for all kinds of public celebrations. There too, live the rich, and sometimes, idle people who require diversion and pastimes.

The city, however, can assume many attitudes towards the drama. In ancient Athens, around the 4th century B.C. the drama was both a state ceremony and a religious ritual created for citizens. But the place of drama in the life of ancient Rome was something very different. There, conservative opinion saw it as a demoralizing and corrupting spectacle created by foreigners and slaves. The first Roman playwright, Livius, was a Greek slave.

Plautus (about 254-184 B.C.), who probably came to Rome from the northern Italian province of Umbria, began his career by acting in mimes as a *planipes* (flat-footed clown). Terence (about 185-159 B.C.) was born a Berber[14] in Carthage, became an African slave, and brought to Rome as a slave to a Senator. Both Plautus and Terence developed in a line of work indicated by Menander,[15] developing the situation comedy of cross plots and mistaken identities. They also created a collection of stock characters who were to take up permanent residence in European literature, among them Maccus, the wily slave, 'miles gloriosus', the braggart soldier, and innumerable other victims of mistaken identity. Both Plautus and Terence were major influences on such Renaissance writers as Shakespeare, Tirso de Molina, and Lope de Vega.

All these were writers of comedy. Even the comedies themselves smacked of something foreign: Greek names and Greek thoughts. Many plots were imitated from the Greek comedies of Menander, but spiced with the clowning and sharp, pithy, down-to-earth Latin sayings. In Rome, tragedy was never a revered state ceremonial, but the literary activity of a learned minority. The only examples of tragedy that have survived are

those of Seneca (about 4 B.C. - 65 A.D.); they were probably written not for the stage, but to be recited at public assemblies and in private homes.

F) Drama Comes to Church

Christian drama, like those of Greece and Japan, grew out of religious ritual. But Christianity learned to identify masks with pagan gods. In medieval religious drama, therefore, it was only devils who wore masks. In Europe, the traditional use of masks survived until the 18th century only in Italian improvised comedy, the *Commedia dell'arte* (a descendant of ancient pagan mimes). There it ended. Yet such is the dramatic power of the mask that many modern playwrights have revived its usage.

By the end of the 5th century A.D. the northern half of the Roman empire had been over-run by the vandal Germanic and Celtic tribes from the north. The theatres were deserted, and many fell into ruins. But dramatic activity far from stopped entirely. In the records of monasteries, for example, there are references to travelling actors. From the few non-religious play-texts that now survive we know that these players still wore masks, recited dialogues and performed farces. The character of their performances was entirely pagan. This naturally caused the theatre to come into serious conflict with religion which tended to discourage such activities.

Texts of some Roman plays were preserved in monastery libraries, but for 500 years there was little or no organized dramatic activity. By the 10th century, however, a new form of drama began to appear. Religion was softening its disapproval of play-acting, and began tolerating it.

Christian drama was promoted, in a large measure, by the fact that even in the 10th century only a very few people in England, and in Europe in general, apart from the priests, could read and write. Printing had not yet been invented, and every book had to be hand-written.

In the churches all services were in Latin, and to the common people it was as un-intelligible and strange as Greek.

But when a simple play was acted in English in the market place, everybody went to see it, everybody understood it, and even enjoyed it.

The men and boys who acted such plays were often well known rogues and vagabonds and often set in the stocks on the village green. But the priests saw that the people enjoyed them, so they decided to use them to teach simple people religious doctrines through the stories of the saints or from the Bible. It all began with very simple tableaux, without movement or dialogue. At the most there were only a few simple questions and answers. Gradually more short scenes were added, and staged in different parts of the church.

Very soon there was not enough room in the church for all the people who wished to see the plays. So the plays were taken outside to the steps at the entrance of the churches. The time came when priests could no longer satisfy the demand for plays, and the task of presenting plays was handed over to the craft guilds.

By the 12th century the people had banded themselves together under their particular trades and formed guilds. The cutters, goldsmiths, the tailors, and so on, all had their separate trade associations, many of which remain to this day.

When the guilds took over the performance of the plays they often chose the story best suited to their trade. The ship-wrights acted the story of Noah and the ark, the builders the erection of Solomon's temple, the tailors the story of Joseph's coat. Special stages were built round the market place and the audience moved from one to the other, seeing the scenes in the proper order. Apart from the play stories from the Bible, known as *Mystery* plays, there were also the *Miracle* plays about the saints, and *Morality* plays, stories using imaginary characters to show the struggle between the forces of Good and Evil.

On holy days like Easter and Christmas, such scenes — called *tropes* — were acted. Later, the tropes became detached from the religious rituals and developed into a series of separate playlets.

Phrases and songs in local languages were added gradually to the Latin texts, and eventually the plays were performed throughout Europe in different national languages. Platform stages were built, first inside, then outside churches. Various scenic effects were introduced.

There is a great deal of written material about the church drama of the Middle Ages because the texts were copied by the monks and preserved by them in monasteries. Many of these texts are very long and include music, stage directions, pictures of scenes and costumes, and drawings of mechanical devices and effects. The tropes which had begun as part of church services, had become a show for an audience. All sorts of dramatic themes were soon drawn from the Bible.

By 1300, trade expansion had contributed to the growing size and independence of the towns of Western Europe. To maintain the influence of religious teaching orders of monks were established. In 1311, a new processional summer feast, *Corpus Christi,* was established. This with *Pentecost,* became a recognized time for dramatic activity. There were some towns where a procession of decorated wagons carrying actors would stop at a number of points, and at each place a play would be given. More often, the town square was prepared with tiers of benches for spectators, while, across one end, *mansions* (houses) for the various scenes were built on a wide raised platform.

In some places plays were given by guilds of craftsmen; in others there were special drama clubs, whose members met throughout the year to prepare for the annual performances. The most ambitious clubs engaged professional *presenters*, who could rewrite scripts, design scenery and costumes, supervise music, and plan such tricks as making an angel descend from heaven, or cutting off the head of John the Baptist.

Oldest in origin, but the last form of medieval drama to develop, was the *morality* play. The morality plays were often short, like *Everyman* (about 1500). But they were sometimes very long, like the ambitious English *Castle of Perseverance* (about 1425), which took half a day to perform. Their hero (protagonist) was man himself. Sometimes he was tempted by

the Seven deadly Sins, and sought refuge with Wisdom or Charity. In others, betrayed by Avarice, arrested by Death, and tried before the throne of God, he was saved from the horrors of hell by Mercy and Peace.

Because these performers were still looked upon as 'undesirables' they were not able to set up semi-permanent stages in the market squares. So they mounted their scenes on wagons and moved from one street to another, blowing trumpets as they went along. Hundreds of years ago a man who saw all this wrote the following :

> *.....a high place made like a howse with two rowmes, being open on ye tope: the lower rowme they apparelled and dressed them selves; and in the higher rowme they played: and they stood upon 6 wheeles.*[16]

The professionals played some of the more popular religious plays like *Everyman*, but more often they acted what was called 'merrie conceits'; these were knock-about comedies or farces with a lot of action and broad humour. Women

Fig. 5 : Professional troupes performing atop a waggon. A dragon's open mouth represents the hell.

characters were played by young boys; the setting was usually realistic. When players wished to show the place of punishment,

like hell, they built a dragon's mouth out of which came out fire and smoke.

G) **The Actor's House-warming.**

From the end of the Roman empire until the end of the 16th century (more than a thousand years) not a single permanent theatre was built in Europe. Once a year the religious plays were performed in the open air, and elaborate, but temporary, settings were prepared for them. City squares and the courtyards of palaces were filled with scaffolding and stages. Once a year, on the festival of Corpus Christi or Pentecost, the great decorated pageant-waggons made their rounds. But all these things were 'insubstantial pageants', as Shakespeare was to call them later, prepared for the occasion and then put away for another year, unless required for a special day of public event, such as a royal wedding.

Then quite suddenly, two things happened, both of which are very important in the story of the growth of the theatre, especially the English theatre. The wandering professionals came down from the waggons, and started performing in the open courtyards of inns. This proved to be a change for the

Fig. 6 : A play in progress in an open inn courtyard. A gallery is seen at the rear.

better. Up and down the country, as at Gloucester, for example, these old courtyards have survived and can still be seen.

Most of these old inns had an open gallery round the courtyard at first floor level. Here the rich people could sit in comfort and watch the play. Standing in the courtyard below were the riff-raff, the artisans and apprentices who were at times very noisy and unruly. It was the task of the players to make them listen: if the play was good enough, they often succeeded.

The second thing that happened was the change in the way plays were produced and performed.

In the long history of the theatre, authors wrote plays to suit the stage on which they hoped their play would be performed. In ancient Greece and Rome the stages were open-air, and the auditorium accommodated thousands of

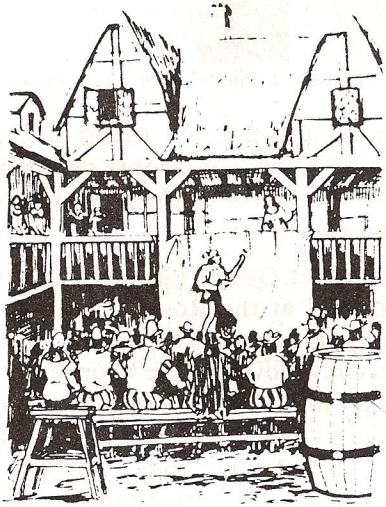

Fig. 7 : "Romeo and Juliet" being perfromed.

spectators; in medieval England stages were without roofs, but audiences were much smaller and nearer to the actors.

With the movement of the players into the courtyard of the inns, more educated people came to watch them, and so playwrights had to take to writing for better audiences. The

inns of those days were places of importance. They were the fore-runners of the hotels of today.

Fig. 8 : A theatre-goer pays his fee.

It became the practice for the inn-keeper to take the money paid by the nobles or people of quality and standard for the seats in the balcony; the players received only the takings from the courtyard.

Particularly under Queen Elizabeth and the Stuarts, plays that were performed at the Royal Courts brought unlimited amounts of money. Those plays included dancing and the lovely music of the period. Above all, the courtiers loved a spectacle. The man who early in the 17th century introduced into England what is called the picture frame stage and elaborate scenery, was an architect named Inigo Jones.

Patrons were less likely to be interested in drama than in pageantry and spectacle, for that was what court entertainments had always been based on. The court of a king or a nobleman could afford to spend large sums on machines for stage effects, curtains, and painted sceneries, and to engage the best artists to prepare them. So stage sceneries probably began in court theatres. It spread gradually to the playhouses.

The people of London were very fond of large pageants and gorgeously dressed processions through the streets of London. When Elizabeth I went to Westminster to address the Members of Parliament and to tell them what they were to think, say and do, it was a very colourful cavalcade which the people enjoyed seeing. This influenced art and stagecraft.

Queen Elizabeth loved and promoted the theatre, but the Puritans hated it, and fifty years later they closed them altogether. The corporations of many towns and cities, including London, were controlled by Puritans, and the acting of plays was forbidden. Fortunately things were different at Stratford-upon-Avon. Many of the companies of players who were driven out of London, visited the quiet little market town where a young man, named William Shakespeare, was in his teens.

In those days, plagues were regular events in London, and large gatherings of people were not allowed. But outside the city things were different. Streets were less crowded, and there were less rats. The theatre was outside the control of the Lord Mayor of London, but near enough for Londoners to visit them. Theatres there were built in the style of the courtyards of the inns but without the inns; the galleries round the courtyards had been kept. This style continued right up to the break of the Civil War. In the next century the galleries developed into the 'dress circle', so named because members of the audience were expected to wear evening dress when occupying them.

The first plays which Shakespeare ever saw were acted on an open Elizabethan stage, and because he wrote for money, he wrote to suit the stages and theatres of his day.

Running a theatre soon changed from an informal to a regular business. Sometimes this was organised on the basis of what we today call a cooperative, with shares. The father of Shakespeare's colleagues, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage, built the first English playhouse in 1576, and gave it a Greek-inspired name: *The Theatre*. It was erected on leased ground; and there were so many disagreements with the landlord that, after their father's death, the brothers moved away and built a new playhouse: *The Globe*.[17] It was here that some of Shakespeare's plays were performed for the first time.

The Burbage company was a cooperative enterprise, as were the French players at the Hotel de Bourgogne in Paris and the famous Comedie Francaise, established in the 17th century.

There was keen competition to choose the best sites for theatres, to build them larger and more sumptuous, and to get the best actors and the best plays. But professional companies were not the only ones to open playhouses. A private patron — a king, prince, or rich merchant — might build a theatre of his own (as did Cardinal Richelieu in the Palaise Royal in Paris in 1641). A society, corporation, or academy might do the same. For instance, the Academia Olympica, founded in the northern Italian town of Vicenza in 1556, built the famous *Teatro Olympico* in order to give occasional performances of ancient Greek and Roman dramas. Private patrons, however, rarely maintained their own companies of players, but only engaged them when required.

In Shakespeare's time, because the theatres had only the sky for a roof, the audiences were exposed to the vagaries of the weather. Elizabethan England could be severely cold. One of the later theatres, *The Blackfriars* in the city of London, was entirely protected by a roof, and a few open braziers of burning charcoal might have raised the temperature a few degree. It is not surprising, then, that in those days, audiences were rough and noisy. Their behaviour frequently put an abrupt end to the performance.

Shakespeare was fighting against conditions in which his plays were performed that he often succeeded in overcoming them only tells us what a genius he was.[18]

With the victory of the Parliamentary forces in the Civil War, the history of the theatre in England became virtually a blank for almost twenty years. Cromwell was fond of music, and he liked simple country dancing on the village green, but he and all the Puritans looked on the theatre as utterly wicked and malicious.

Whereas playhouses were either closed or even demolished in England, they flourished in Paris and Bruges. King Charles and his followers were living in exile in France, with so little to occupy his time, the theatre must have been among his chief pleasures.

In 1600, King Charles II returned to England which had become a country starved of beauty and entertainment. He brought with him not only a love of the theatre, but also the determination to see it flourish once again in England.

The unroofed playhouses of Shakespeare's time were no longer in use, but many of the old actors were still living, and when a theatre was built in Drury Lane and a covered tennis court, Lincolns Inn Fields was fitted with a stage, there was

Fig. 9 : Nell Gwyn performing on the Drury Lane stage.

no shortage of players. Moreover, Shakespeare's god-son, Sir William Davenant, who had written and produced plays under Charles I, had during the Cromwellian period been able to stage plays in the houses of noblemen outside London.

There was yet another change. In France, Charles II had seen the earlier comedies of Moliere, a French playwright, in which comedies women took part. When Charles returned to England he made sure that women went on stage to play female roles.

Once both players and audience got under cover plays could be performed at any time of the day in artificial light. Two hundred years after, the part of the playhouse occupied by the audience was called *auditorium*. The audience was no longer the rough and unruly types, but the more wealthy, though often not better mannered, aristocracy. Sceneries were

elaborate. They usually represented times a century earlier, whereas costumes were those of the day. Shakespeare's Hamlet was played by the famous actor Betterton in 1670 in the huge periwig of the period of Charles II.

Samuel Pepys was a great theatre-goer. He was very often behind the scenes with the actors and actresses. From his diary between 1660 and 1669, we learn a great deal about the theatre of those days, for example, that seats were not numbered nor reserved, but servants could keep them for their masters.

One description of the theatre of this period, written in 1700, at the time of William III, tells of the rush for the best seats when the doors were opened. These seats were often benches with no backs to them, and everyone climbed over them to get to the front. the women were severely disadvantaged by their large hooped skirts. Once inside, there were frequent fights among the sword wielding gentlemen.

In the early 18th century, all the theatres of the city of Westminster were under the control of the Lord Chamberlain. Every play to be performed had to be passed by him, originally, to prevent anything from being said against the Government. This power was later extended to cover the entire country and empire, and in England, it lasted until 1968 when censorship was abolished.[19]

Fig. 10 : Guards throwing out an unruly member of the audience.

The theatre owes much to David Garrick. It was he who refused to allow anyone on the stage except the actors, and he engaged soldiers from the Guards to keep order in the auditorium.

The theatre of the next one hundred and fifty years may be said to have begun with three comedies produced between 1773 and 1777. Sheridan rebuilt the Drury Lane Theatre, and wrote two of the best comedies in the English language. The Drury Lane Theatre was designed to accommodate 3,600 people. It was lit by candle light and oil lamps.

Sheridan's comedies were a novelty: he introduced natural speech. Till then, the lines were only recited aloud and not

Fig. 11 : The words of a Sheridan play were lost in the vast audience in Drury Lane.

spoken by actors. This change had the effect of bringing the actors and the audience closer to each other.

Two chief theatres of London were destroyed by fire: Covent Garden in 1808, and Drury Lane in 1809. It was impossible to replace them.

In the 19th century, better lighting and better equipment were introduced from 1820 onwards. In about 1860, machinery was introduced to make stages submerge or revolve, and scenery to be changed quickly.

Queen Victoria ascended the throne and took a keen interest in the theatre. The better-class people who had deserted it at the beginning of the century, made a come-back. One innovation was the installation of upholstered seats in the stalls and the dress circle.

In 1800 there were ten theatres in London; fifty years later there were more than forty. This was partly due to the industrial Revolution, which doubled the population of Greater London. Another reason was the difference in the type of audience in the first half of the century. The more cultured section of the population lost interest in the theatre. The music hall became more popular, but with a different class of people. They developed from the musical entertainments in taverns where the audiences sat at tables, smoking and drinking. Managers were quick to answer the demand, and music halls were built. The audiences came mainly from the working classes.

Two world wars put an end to the lavish setting of plays; theatre made a full about-turn to the simplicity of the ancient Greece and Rome.

In 1911, Gordon Craig experimented with the use of screens as a scenery in the staging of Hamlet. It was not a success, but the spirit of experimentation had begun.

H) ..... **and there was Light !**

From the time of the Greeks around 400 B.C. to the days of Shakespeare, lighting was never a problem: light was free, because all the plays took place in daylight, and the theatre was open-air.

With the covered tennis court of Charles II's time, some sort of artificial light became necessary. Candles, torches, simple oil lamps were used. The use of coloured lights was more ingenious. In Italy light was directed through glass bottles filled with clear, coloured liquids; in England, in Charles I's time, frames with stretched, coloured silks were used. Coloured light thus obtained was very dim.

The trouble with candles, or lamps was that once they were out, they were not so easily relit. Night scenes on the

Fig. 12 : A snuffer : in the days of Charles-II.

stage could not have been effective, because even if the lights on the stage were put out or removed, those in the auditorium were still on, Candles also needed to be snuffed when the wicks became charred. This was done by attendants (snuffers) who moved freely in and out, about the stage, the auditorium, snuffing out candles as required. Usually no one took any notice of them. Snuffers were part of the apparatus.

Footlights, or 'floats' as they are still called in the theatres, were first installed in 1660 in a theatre at Dorset Gardens built by Davenant. They were called floats because they actually floated. To avoid the danger of fire, the candles were in small basins which floated in a long trough full of water.

The coming of the gas soon after 1800 revolutionized stage lighting. Gaslights were much better and could be controlled from a central board. They could be turned on or off, or dimmed, from a place behind the proscenium.

A row of gaslights could be very hot, and the grease paint often melted down the faces of actors, making them look very fierce. In 1860 the first 'limes' were introduced. These consisted of a jet of oxy-hydrogen gas directed on a small cylinder of a lime-like substance, producing a spot of intensely bright light.[20]

Electric lighting came to the Savoy theatre, London, in 1880, and a new era may be said to have begun. Electric lights were far safer and more flexible. Realistic settings and effects were now practicable. This also opened infinite possibilities for experimentations that were to be carried out from then on.

I) Moods and Styles

Four moods — *baroque, classical, romantic* and *realistic* — predominated the arts between 1600 and 1900. Among the arts, the drama was often the best public showcase for displaying the characteristics of each mood.

a) The word BAROQUE probably comes from the Portuguese word *barocco*, a large, curiously shaped pearl. One characteristic of the 17th century baroque art was its delight in the irregular, odd, and grotesque. As a result of the fierce religious divisions and wars in the first half of the century, man's earlier faith in himself and his powers was badly shaken. Thus madness, ruin, and death are pre-occupations of baroque art and drama. All baroque art is, so to speak, theatrical, but the outstanding dramatic achievements of this period were costly court entertainments, famous as lavish shows pieces rather than for their literary or artistic quality.

b) The term CLASSICAL, when applied to art, usually means that of ancient Greece and Rome; but it is also used to describe the art produced by a society or period that has decided upon certain fixed values or code or rules that are accepted as a justifiable discipline. In terms of drama, these rules are the 'unities' of time, place and action (a play must have a single story, set in one place in one day) derived by Renaissance theorists largely from the writings of Horace. Disciplined classical art need not be cold; the plays of Racine, for example, deal with the deepest human emotions. Balanced and regular, the scene would be placed squarely before the audience. The adornment is simple and dignified, yet elegant and splendid.

c) The ROMANTIC artist does not speak for society, but rather as a rebel. He may well regard civilization as corrupt because it has departed from a 'natural' way of life; thus the past is judged better than the present, and the country preferred to the town. The savage is seen as more 'natural' than man in civilized society, the child than the adult. The most important experience for a romantic artist is 'romantic love', in which the beloved is an unsophisticated 'child of nature' — a peasant girl, for instance, (as Wordsworth's "The Reaper") or a stranger from a foreign land. Romantic drama of the late 18th and early 19th centuries also loved the exotic and the remote — above all, knights, castles, fair damsels of the Middle Ages. Romantic drama delighted to show the dramatic face of nature: mountains, moonlight, and storm. At its worst, it escaped both from reality and true feeling into the exaggerations of melodrama.

d) REALISM grew out of romanticism in two ways. Romantic love of the past led to the desire to present past events realistically in the theatre, with convincing period costumes, armour and architecture. Then this painstaking accuracy was transferred from the past to the present, and the 'box' set created, with *real* doors, and windows, furniture and like equipment, down even to a *real* roof. The realist may share the romantic view that civilization is corrupt, but he tries to show the world for what it is, in all its aspects, rather than to escape from it. Thus, playwrights of the 19th and early 20th centuries claimed the right to speak in every day language of any subject they chose. Scorning 'light entertainment', they gave a new seriousness to the role of drama in modern society.

J) Realism Triumphs

Drama has usually aimed at convincing the audience that the events happening on the stage are *real*. Medieval players decorated their scenes of Paradise with real oranges and dates, and even with a naked Adam and Eve. Actors in the time of Shakespeare stabbed a concealed bladder of pig's blood to

make their wound convincing. However, no one expected to meet on the street, the real Hamlet seen on the stage.

The theatre is a place of 'let's pretend'. Realistic drama is an art of illusion; it wants the audience to forget that it is pretending, and to believe that for the time being scenes of real life are actually happening on the stage.

To make things look as real as possible : (i) the stage was separated from the audience by the proscenium; (ii) stage lighting made it possible to darken the audience, so that attention could be concentrated on the stage. Until then the theatre was a rendezvous where people came to meet, to eat and to flirt; (iii) dramatic verse gave way to colloquial prose. Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is an example of extreme realism that dominated the stage for a good part of a century.

K) New Dramatic Movements

Dramatic realism produced great master-pieces such as the plays of Ibsen, but at a great price. First of all, it was a wasteful way of working. The realistic play must occupy itself with many theatrically unimportant matters: answering doors, explaining the presence of characters, serving them food and drink,....Realism took away from the actors not only the economy of expressiveness of verse, but also such dramatic forms of prose as rhetoric and declamation. Realism limited the actor's use of his body; he was restricted to the gestures of ordinary life, and he could dance or sing only if the plot gave him a reason for such activities.

The dramatist became worried over minor matters and plagued with the problem of details, such as — should the actors be able to speak with his back to the audience, as in real life? Finally, realism was reduced to absurdity in the hackneyed three-act play with its unchanged set: windows to the garden, staircase to the bedroom, and telephone messages from afar. But the cinema came along and stole the show, as far as theatre is concerned.

Opposition to slavish realism had been growing for a long time. It began in the 1890s. People like the Swiss designer Adolphe Appis (1862-1928), the English designer Gordon Craig

(1872 - ?) came to the conclusion that the task of the drama was to *make*, not to *copy*. The revolutionary scenic effects achieved both by Appis and Craig often relied on the subtle arrangements of bare, uncluttered masses and the imaginative use of colour and, especially, lighting. Instead of simply illuminating a painted setting, the newly introduced electric lighting was used as a dramatic element in the total stage picture.

In Ireland, the poet and playwright, W.B. Yeats, brought a *No* actor from Japan to help train the actors of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Yeats got Gordon Craig and the French artist, Edmund Dulac, to design masks, and asked that they should represent 'heroic or grotesque type, *keeping always an appropriate distance from life*'.

In Sweden, August Strindberg (1849-1912) who had been a leading dramatist of the realist theatre, began, in his last two plays, to write something quite different: plays in short scenes, with generalized characters labelled with general, descriptive titles (The Officer, The Bill Poster, etc.) instead of individual names. These plays, beginning with *To Damascus* (1899), are filled with the quality of dream and fantasy, uncovering the unconscious motives from which our words and actions spring. This new kind of play developed especially in Germany and America, into what was called *expressionist* drama, like those of Gorg Kaiser (1878-1945) in Germany, Sean O'Casey in Ireland, W.H. Auden in Britain, Eugene O'Neil (1888-1953) in America.

In the period since the end of World War II the rival attitudes of realism and expressionism came closer together. Realism continued to survive because of the prestige of its masterpieces, and because it has become the common artistic language that everyone understands. But it admitted that it could never do without the make-believe of the stage, and so it has learned moderation. The realist playwrights may now choose an illiterate delinquent for a hero and let him speak a language characteristic of his type. They were also ready to concede to long speech as in prose, or even in verse, and to make use of song and dance.

Rebellion has affected the stage itself. For some plays, everyone now agrees, the proscenium stage is not the best setting, and so new styles of theatre are now being designed. Experiments continue on the stage for more effective theatrical styles — at 'an appropriate distance from life', as Yeats said.

L) **Summing up**

Recorded history tells us of recorded events; but in the drama, history becomes a living re-enactment. The workings of the inner mind that created the past and inhaled its very atmosphere emerges clear and true. For all its license, theatre gives us true values as well as face values, because it deals with impelling forces, and not just make-believe.

The dramas of ancient Greece are now in disuse: the language dead, the choral declamation unknown, the music lost, and the dance gestures forgotten. Still, when extant texts are staged they tell the story of the Greek past that, in a certain sense, transcends time. They give thought to cold marble statues; they enliven, almost haunt, the ruins with meaning and motive, with dead and living people. The validity of the theatre lies in its power to span time and space and to bridge the gap for a better understanding among peoples.

Freud, oddly enough, was the first interpretative artist to pinpoint the secret eternity of the Greek drama. By disclosing Oedipus double realization of father destruction and mother possession, he exposed more of drama than of psychiatric content. Before psychology, it was the artist who intuitively tapped the sources of human nature.

One historical axiom seems to emerge from this history: drama portrays first the gods, then the kings, then persons of high rank, and finally the common man. The dynamics behind this seems to be that if theatre enlarges life so as to appeal to large numbers rather than to a few individuals, then it must deal with the most exalted theme — the gods. As time occasionally proves gods are less than omnipotent, and the strong power of temporal rulers is keenly felt, it follows that relationship between rulers and men have greater consequence. It is a real mark of theatrical evolution, however, when audiences perceive that depth of feeling should not depend on

the character of one's station in life. Drama treated the sorrows and sufferings of the common man with the same dignity as that of the gods and kings, and portrayed plights other than lost thrones, abandoned queens, or the slighted and vengeful gods, portrayed in earlier dramas.

3. INDIAN DRAMA

Like daylight, all things begin in the East. The "collective imagination" of India has always been rich and active; here the status of the myth has not lost its primitive power, nor has it disappeared into the unconscious as it has in the West. Myths, to the Hindu, are merely one expression of the reality — illusions by which man, in his limited way helps himself comprehend the vast, incomprehensible universe. The Indian, therefore, prefers to consider the phenomenal world not as a battle-field of principles but as a theatre for the display of natural forces, created by the divinities. The world is but a stage.....!

The drama in the Indian tradition began in the dialogues in the Vedic hymns around 1500 B.C. Traditionally, the Indian drama is believed to have had a divine origin. Bharat is considered to be the father of the Indian drama and theatre. Bharat wrote a treatise on dramatics in which he called drama 'Natyashastra'. In his legend he called Natyashastra "the fifth Veda", which was intended to be a feast to both eye and ear, and at the same time to transmit ultimate, divine eternal truths.

According to the legend, after the creation of the universe, the gods felt that something was still missing in their total happiness, that the Creator had not given them every thing. They took the matter to Brahmadeva, the supreme god, for help in their situation. Brahmadeva graciously listened to the plea of the carping and fastidious gods, and took the essence of recitation ('plot')[21] from the Rig Veda, harmonious melody ('music')[21] from the Sama Veda, sentiment and emotion ('moods' or ragas)[21] from the Atharva Veda, and mimetic art ('acting')[21] from the Yajur Veda, and put them all together. The Fifth Veda was born. At the behest of Brahma himself, the divine architect Visvakarma, constructed a playhouse — Theatre was born.

Brahma did not invent the Drama merely to keep the pleasure seeking gods humoured; it was primarily to help man achieve in this life the four 'purusharthas' or aims:

Dharma	:	ethical and spiritual development of the individual;
Artha	:	social and civic life, and acquisition of wealth;
Karma	:	conjugal love and sensual pleasure;
Moksha	:	attainment of ultimate salvation.

Ancient Indian drama has been to a great extent a religious act of worship which was performed in temples. It included dance, recitation, music — both vocal and instrumental. The better known temples in India have temple-theatres (Nata-mandiras), "where dancer and actors propitiated the god and goddess with a representation of their art".[22]

Indian theatre does not indulge in many great and cumbersome properties, nor in the use of elaborate sceneries, effects being produced chiefly by gestures. Actors are called *nata*, and *actresses nati*. It is not uncommon for the heroine to play to main part.[23]

A dramatic performance became an art when recitation, gestures, movements, dance, were successfully used to rouse emotions and sentiments in the minds and hearts of the audience. Drama itself is called *nataka*. The dramatist or the playwright delights the audience by the perfection of his art, its variety, its music and its moods. He can do so only if he is a man of learning and intense spirit.

To arrest the attention and to hold the affection of peoples across time and space, the Indian drama aims at being qualified by maturity of mind and greatness of spirit; without these two qualities drama may, indeed, arouse tumult in people's minds, but it could never strike a chord in the deep recesses of their being. A truely great drama should overwhelm, devastate, annihilate the audience; it should sweep the ground from under their feet, and finally it should renew and exalt them to fresh heights of existence.

Authentic Indian drama does accept the presence of good and evil, but rejects Manichean dualism which believes in the

ultimate and final supremacy of conflicting contraries: good and evil. Indian dramatic philosophy is an avowed believer in the final triumph of goodness, truth and beauty (comedy).

Pain and suffering are strands in the fabric of life, but not its finality. That could possibly be the real reason why Indian dramatic tradition does not have tragedies. There are, no doubt, scores of even extremely tragic situations where man is at grips with fate, where character and circumstance, chance and choice interplay, but one does not see tragic endings.

It can be assumed quite safely that all major Oriental theatre forms had their beginnings in India, for even after centuries of growth the initial Indian influences are still discernible in theatre forms in China, Korea and Japan in the north, and in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia in the East and South. (Significantly, the ancient Greeks believed that Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry and later, of the theatre, had come to them by sea from the East.) India can, then, be called the birth place of theatre, since theatre existed in Indian as an established art at least a thousand years before it was recognized as such elsewhere.

Indians, like the ancient Greeks, were colonizing traders. Centuries before Buddhist missionaries from India began their successful conversion of Asia, Indian traders had established their trading colonies everywhere in the East, organizing an effective network through which the cultural heritage of India could be easily relayed. As a result, the foundations of theatrical art and the attitudes toward theatre discipline everywhere in the civilized Orient bear a distinctive Indian character.

When, in the 3rd century B.C., Buddhist monks began the mammoth task of attempting to win converts outside India they taught not only the precepts of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, but also the ancient teachings of their five Hindu Vedas and the two Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These epics were to furnish the mythical subjects and themes for theatre in all the mission countries. Moreover, the *Natyashastra*, or the Fifth Veda, set up exacting rules for theatre training and performance. Fortunately for theatrical history, the *Natyashastra*, until then an oral teaching, was set down in Sanskrit by the prophet-patriach Bharat towards the

beginning of the Christian era, and is studied even today. Besides laying down the rules for construction of the playing area, this extra-ordinary 'theatre Veda' outlines the seven-year apprenticeship of the actor and the intricate details of his education. It also stipulates that performance must be completely controlled and never impulsive nor original in execution. Since the actor must play the role of god and hero, he must achieve perfect art through selfless discipline.

Indian acting and dance are covered by the same expression, *Natya*; consequently, every gesture used by the actor has been choreographed. The *Natyashastra* rules that the action, not the actor, is the essential attitude in performance — and during his long apprenticeship the novice is carefully taught this attitude by master performers whose daily rounds of duty are largely devoted to teaching the students. With no realistic sets and little or no scenery to assist him, the Indian actor must arouse specific emotional reaction in his audience. His art is provocative rather than literal and realistic, and his audience is expected to use its mythical imagination to create the setting for the drama. The performing area itself is simply more than a square area set off by a border from spectators, it is moreover considered a sacred precinct, upon entering which the performer invokes the deity.

Every detail of the Indian drama is regulated by tradition — the stories are all known; the songs, dances, and gestures are always the same — every spectator is able to judge the excellence of the performance for himself. Drama has been a part of his cultural experience form earliest childhood, and consequently he is capable of discussing the relative merits of the execution of the *mudras* ('gestures'), the stage presence of the actors, and the *rasa* ('flavour') of the artist's work.

A) Ancient Indian Playwrights

The ancient Indian playwrights fall broadly into two categories.

Ashwagosha (1 c. A.D.) who wrote *Sariputra Prakarana*, and Harshadeva (640 A.D.) who wrote *Ratnavali* (The Pearl Necklace), *Priyadarshika* and his best known play *Nagananda* were Buddhist playwrights. They were propagandist in their

method and intention. Ashwagosha was particularly preoccupied with making Buddhism acceptable to converts from Hinduism and other cultures.

Bhasa (300 A.D.), Kalidas (500 A.D.) and Shrudraka (600 A.D.) were literary dramatists. Bhasa's *Svapnavasavadatta*, Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, and Shrudraka's *Mruchchhkatika* (The Little Toy Cart) were literary dramas.

B) Schools of Traditional Theatre

Indian has had the distinction for producing four great and outstanding schools of traditional theatre, all of which exist even to this day — thanks largely to the efforts of India's great nationalist poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Two of them, *Kathakali* and *Bharata Natyam*, are indigenous to the south; two others, *Kathak* and *Manipuri*, belong to the north. *Kathakali* is a flamboyant, virile version of an epic that demands intricately applied make-up, heavy, skirted costumes, and bejewelled head-pieces. It features monsters and demons along with the epic heroes, and it specializes in battles. As can be expected, Kathakali relies exclusively upon male actors, and as a result all females roles are taken by boys or young men. It is the only Indian theatre that requires a curtain, and bears little resemblance to the like as used in Western theatres. It is rather a rich adornment held up at the beginning of each performance so that the principal actor, about to begin his entrance dance, may peer over it to announce his presence. Sometimes this curtain serves as an imaginary boat, rising and falling with the actor. Kathakali is performed to incessant drumming, and the actors' voices are supplied by a narrator.

India's other southern theatrical form is *Bharata Natyam*, which is typical of Madras. In contrast to *Kathakali*, *Bharata Natyam* is subtle and feminine, a descendant of the early temple dances traditionally performed by women. As the name implies, the style adheres strictly to the dictates of Bharat, the author of the Veda Theatre.

Kathak uses a sensuous style which, although it goes back to ancient Hindu sources, survived the Muslim invasion. It is excessively intricate in its strictly regulated serial rhythm and movements. It is performed by both men and women, although the latter currently outnumber the former.

The *Manipuri* style, associated with Manipur, is famous for its delicate excellence. Unlike other forms of Indian theatre it moves in a swaying action without abrupt breaks or sudden endings, rather than elating the epic, it dramatizes episodes in the life of Lord Krishna. Particular to Manipur is the *Ras Lila*, a kind of opera in which dancing, singing, and music are beautifully combined. The flowing quality of these dance-dramas has found its way into the dance-dramas of Thailand and far-away Bali.

During the British occupation of India, ancient theatre forms began to decline. Indeed, they might have disappeared altogether had not nationalist amateurs held fast and refused to let the old forms die out. When India became independent, the state, eager to save its national heritage, helped to revive the four regional styles by granting subsidies to properly constituted centres of instruction. Then in the 1930s, Uday Shankar made the outside world aware of the excellence of Indian theatrical traditions, chiefly by interesting such influential persons as Gordon Craig and Ruth St. Denis in research into the Indian theatre. As a result there exists today a fabulous body of authoritative sources for research into India's ancient theatrical forms, whereas a hundred years ago those traditions were close to dying a natural death of asphyxiation and malnutrition.

C) Indian Folklore Drama

Even today, folklore drama thrives in the villages as a source of entertainment and as a vehicle for instruction and social issues and ideals. As such they always strike on a lighter vein, they do not need to be literary, but they have to be useful. It is usual for the performance to begin with the obeisance paid to Nandi, the popular god of the masses, or with a song to call for the blessing on the people and the performers. Such popular drama was employed during the Moghul invasion and Buddhist revivalism in order to keep the Hindu faith alive. It is said that the Vashnavaite like Shankar Deva (or Sankar Dev) and the Krishnaite sects used drama extensively in their cult.

The rural drama exists in many states, and is known as *Doddata* in Karnataka, *Lalit* and *Tamasa* in Maharashtra, *Bhand*

Pathar in the Kashmiri Muslim villages, *Ankiya Nat* in Assam, *Chavitu* in the Kerala Christian villages, and *Burra* in Andhra Pradesh.

4. CHINESE DRAMA

Like the ancient Indian theatre, Chinese drama has its beginnings in religious rites involving processions of effigies, dancing, singing, and pantomimes. Not until the 6th century A.D., the cultural apogee of the T'ang dynasty, was the element of text, song, dance and comedy combined in a single presentation. These dramatizations commonly involved two men: one playing the role of a drunken husband, the other his maltreated wife. Their hilarious antics were performed inside a chalked circle, and the spectators, who stood around the periphery, sang familiar refrains between the episodes. This early rough-and-tumble form of market-place entertainment already possessed the features that were to distinguish the 18th century Peking Opera: a simple storyline, capable of being extended and embellished, and two distinct leading roles, each with a set of characteristic stances, gestures and movements. The play was sung and danced, but there were also spoken dialogue and orchestral accompaniment. The acting consisted largely of mimed gestures, and the plays themselves were presented out-of-doors.

Unlike Indian theatre, which set up a sacred precinct for all performances, Chinese theatre — always much more secular in its Taoist attitudes — used only the conventional chalk circle to designate the performing area. For centuries, therefore, it was possible to set up a playing space anywhere merely by drawing a circle on the ground. Actors quickly learned to assume a given character when entering the circle, only to drop it when they left it. This famous in-and-out convention, which seems always to have been a distinctive characteristic of Chinese theatre, fascinated the 20th century German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who incorporated it into the acting technique of his Epic Theatre. Brecht also favoured a highly episodic dramatic structure, breaking the flow of the action with songs and narration in a manner that was traditionally Chinese.

The Chinese, like the Indians, have never really subscribed to the notion of realistic setting or props. Although both theatre traditions insist on elaborate costumes, headpieces, and make-up, both rely upon the evocative talents of the actors and the imagination of the spectators to localize the action of the plays. While both make use of symbolic props, Chinese theatre also includes a few simple props such as tables and chairs, which might serve as stairs, mountains, thrones — whatever the story required.

Throughout their history, Chinese actors have been experts at illusionism, creating the impression of a vast. magic world through their astounding mastery of physical dexterity. In one scene ferrymen row their boats across imaginary rivers as they battle their way through the rapids, their squeamish lady passengers protesting in perfect coordination.

The Indian influences on Chinese theatre, brought to China two centuries before the Christian era, can still be seen in the harsh, demanding apprenticeship for actors that traditionally lasts seven years. Rigorously imposed by master teachers who are the watchdogs of style in gesture, movement, and vocal expression, this apprenticeship regulates every phase of the aspirant's progress until after he has graduated to the rank of a nascent actor.

The renowned Peking Opera represents the very best of Chinese theatre tradition. Its texts, by no means extraordinary as literary pieces, are mere pretexts for virtuosity in acting, singing, declamation, mime and acrobatics. Lyric scenes alternate with splendid battle scenes in which the performers display their amazing skills; fantastic lions caper, circle and challenge each other, disappearing with gigantic leaps; warriors, mounted on imaginary steeds, wheel and attack, veer and retreat. The actors specialize in one of four main types of roles: *Cheng*, the role of the young leading man, the warrior, or the bearded patriarch; *Tan*, the serious woman, the frivolous maiden, the amazon, or the crone; *Tsing*, — literally, a 'painted face' — one of the many legendary character roles requiring elaborate, stylized make-up; and *Tch'eou* or *Tch'eon-tan*, comic roles.

Women were forbidden by decree to appear on stage in China, and consequently Tan roles became a speciality of many Chinese actors. The greatest of contemporary Tan specialists is Mei Lan Fang, who performed the roles of courtesan and maiden until he was in his seventies. The proscription against woman has been lifted in present-day China, and the superb training of the Peking Opera, once confined to the capital, has now been made available in new training centres throughout China. Predominantly didactic and moralizing, the Peking Opera's repertoire has been adopted as a teaching device in China today, and many new pieces of old familiar plays, have now replaced less relevant ones.

5. JAPANESE DRAMA

The development of drama in Japan closely parallelled that in Greece. Again it began with the arrival of a foreign religion - in this case it was Buddhism, spreading to Japan from India through China and Korea. It brought with it ritual dances in which, as in the Greek Comus processions, men wore animal masks and skins. These folk and temple-processions soon grew much more complex as a result of festivals held in Buddhist monastries: they were given their final form in the 14th century through the genius of Kaname Kiyotsugu and his son, Zeami Motokiyo, who, like the Greek dramatists, were both actors, musicians and dancers as well as playwrights.

As in Greece, these developments were associated with political and social changes. In Japan it was the growth of feudalism. The local lord (*daimayo*) and his knights (*samurai*[24]) took over as their exclusive possession the *No* dramas (as these plays are known), forbidding ordinary people even to witness them. As in Greece, each performance began with a religious ritual. Originally performed out of doors, they were, unlike the Greek plays, soon acted exclusively in palaces of the nobility. The *No* plays are still performed today — the oldest drama in the world with an unbroken tradition of acting. They are short, with subjects usually based on Japanese history and legends and are now arranged in sets of three or five. These are the *kyogen* ('mad words'). In them, servants make fun of their masters with sheer impunity; the gods and Buddhism

itself are mocked. In traditional *No* plays, there are only two masked actors, plus a chorus.

6. CONCLUSION

In summing up the most salient differences between the theatre of the Orient and that of the West, one is struck by the powerful, continued use of the collective imagination in the East; in the theatre of the West what little use of the imagination ancient Greek and Elizabethan theatre demanded, was soon supplanted by an ever-increasing desire for realism. This supposed proximity of art and every-day reality in Western aesthetics, led to the popular belief that actors simply act out their real, every-day experiences and consequently require little training. This is the contrary to ancient, deep-seated attitudes towards actor training in the Orient where, following an almost absolute directive from ancient Indian sources, actors must train for a minimum of seven years before they are allowed to appear in public. The Oriental answer to the Western actor's prejudice against too much technical training in acting, is that only through supreme control of technique is one liberated from it, an attitude that expresses the radical difference between the theatre of the Orient and that of the West. Ironically enough, it is just this cardinal difference in attitude that accounts for the rich variety of Oriental theatre forms and those of the new homogeneity of Western theatre.

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