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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall

- discuss history and development of English Drama in brief and
- study life and works of Shakespeare.

On completing this Unit, you should be able to

- know the history and development of English Drama in brief and
- know life and works of Shakespeare in brief.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Performing Arts is one of the oldest forms of human entertainment. In fact, the art of performing plays is older than the written literature. The history of performing arts, also known as ‘drama’, is inseparable from the history of religion around the world. In fact, the origin of performing arts, in general, is originated from the religious dispositions of mankind. English drama is also originated from ancient Greek and Roman drama, which were also almost always concerned with some religious

ceremonies or others. From religious preaching, dramas started getting performed in the marketplaces as a form of entertainment and indirect moral teaching as well. The art of composing and performing dramas on stage is known as 'Dramaturgy'. There are a number of authors, composers and performers around the world who developed the form of drama. Elizabethan Age in 16th century England is considered to be a turning point in the development of English Drama. William Shakespeare is one of the most notable authors, among others of the Elizabethan Age, who developed English Literature and Language in the Western world. His contribution to the English language in general and English Drama Writing, in particular, is unique and unmatched. William Shakespeare is a significant chapter in the history and development of English Dramaturgy who made it available to the masses. In the present chapter, we are going to study the history and development of English Drama in the first half of the Unit. In the second half of the Unit, we are going to discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare.

3.2 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH DRAMA

3.2.1 Origin of the English Drama:

The term 'drama' can be broadly defined as a piece of writing that tells a story and is performed on a stage. It is derived from the Latin term 'dramat', which meant 'deed' or 'to do'. W. J. Long defined drama as 'an old story...put into action by living performance'. Hence, drama is an artistic composition designed to be performed by actors on a stage in front of a live audience. It is, thus, a performing art. There are many theories of the origin of English Drama. Many historians believe that drama came to England with Norman Conquest during the 11th century. At the same time, others believe that it was Roman who brought drama and theatre with them. They had established a huge amphitheatre for the performance of the plays. However, when Roman's left England, they took theatre also with them.

In England, drama developed prominently with the Church as the part of religious services. Thus, the development of drama has a strong religious connection. However, the Latin Church had opposed Roman theatre and advocated repressing it for many reasons. It is only after the 10th century that the Church began to use dramatic elements as part of its services. Nevertheless, these performances were strictly limited to preaching and didactic themes. One of the oldest known church dramas was *Quem Quarritis*. The drama dealt with the conversion of three Marys and an angel at the empty tomb of Christ. The entire drama was limited to four Latin sentences in the form of questions and answers, including the title of the drama: *Quem Quarritis*, which literally means – 'whom are you seeking?' These Latin sentences were adapted and performed at the Church by the clergy in quite a straightforward manner. Gradually this drama was elaborated, and more details were added to it. These dramas

were called liturgical dramas. These dramas-cum stories taken directly from scripture were performed inside some churches by the clergy in the Latin language.

Later on, the liturgical drama Miracle and Mystery plays came into existence. In France, in Miracle plays, the lives of the saints were represented, whereas in Mystery plays, any scenes used to be adapted from the scripture and performed. However, in England, there was no such distinction between these two kinds of play.

In the later stage, the English drama evolved more towards artistic performance and less towards a moral point of view. In this stage, the English drama was influenced by Greek and classical Roman drama. In 1556, Nicholas Udall wrote *Ralph Roister Doister*, which is considered to be the first English Comedy. It was divided into acts and scenes and was written in rhyming couplets. Most English comedies followed the same pattern in the later period. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton wrote the first English tragedy *Gorboduc* around 1562. It was also divided into acts and scenes. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton had written the play in the blank verse, which was followed by their contemporaries and predecessors. The English drama flourished immensely during the reign of Queen Elizabeth in the 15th century. Therefore, the Elizabethan period was considered to be the golden period of English literature in general and English drama in particular.

• **Check Your Progress : 1**

Q.1 State whether the following statements are TRUE or FALSE:

1. English dramas originally were religious in nature and context.
 1. Latin Church always supported the performance of drama.
 2. Initially, the plays were performed by the clergy inside the Church.
 3. English drama started becoming more lenient towards morality under the Greek and Roman influence.
 4. English drama flourished greatly during the period of Queen Elizabeth.

Q.2 Match A with B.

- | A | B |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Gorboduc</i> | a) a play adapted from scriptures |
| 2. <i>Quem Quarritis</i> of Saints | b) a play based on the lives of Saints |
| 3. <i>Ralph Roister Doister</i> | c) the first English tragedy |
| 4. Mystery Plays | d) the first English Comedy |
| 5. Miracle Plays | e) the liturgical drama |

3.2.2 The Elizabethan Drama

As discussed in the previous section, Elizabethan Age was the Golden Period for English Drama. Queen Elizabeth ruled England and Ireland from 1558 to 1603. This period was also referred to as European Renaissance, where Europeans were breaking the traditional restrictions enforced by the mediaeval Church. The great thinkers of the time were fearlessly turning away from Church and shifting towards mankind in an enormous humanistic movement. This humanitarian approach to life led to a novel flowering in every area of human efforts such as art, music, architecture, religion, science, philosophy and literature.

The Renaissance influence was spread across Europe but had different flowering in the different European cultures. In Germany, it was manifested in religion and philosophy, whereas in Italy, it was expressed in the forms of art, architecture and sculpture. However, in England, it was seen greatly voiced through drama. Throughout the Middle Ages, English drama was exclusively religious and didactic in nature and theme. Miracle Plays were adapted from the Biblical stories and lives of the saints that were performed in and around the Church. They were primarily concerned with the divided life and not the ordinary lives of the people.

However, by the time the Elizabethan era came to an end, there were as many as twenty theatres in London. All theatre used to house the plays that were quite worldly in nature and theme concerning the lives of common people. Thus, there was a thorough revolution in theatre. People started going to the theatre for seeing the reflection of their lives and for laughing and crying and not for receiving any moral or religious lessons. This new Elizabethan theatre and drama attracted many talented writers who tried their luck and started getting names and fame. Many writers, like Shakespeare, also became rich. It was for the first time that human life and experience were presented on stage. It was also for the first time that, unlike the great Greek godlike heroes, the heroes of the Elizabethan plays were more human characters with human qualities such as hate, anger, jealousy and so on. And unlike the great Greek tragedy where the fall of the hero was caused by fate, the fall of the Elizabethan hero was due to a flaw in their character. Thus, the rise and fall of an Elizabethan tragic hero are more human and realistic compared to its Greek counterpart. Dr Faustus, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* are some of the immortal Elizabethan heroes created by Christopher Marlow and William Shakespeare. Although most of the Elizabethan plays have primary pro-Christian supposition of the time, they all have an underlying secular humanitarian spirit of the Renaissance period.

As Elizabethan drama was more leaning towards people than God, there can be seen a lot of emphasis on humour. Elizabethan comedies, too, were based on Greek comedies. However, they were modified by William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. It should be noted here that Greek

tragedies strictly consisted of tragic elements, and comedies strictly consisted of comic elements. In Elizabethan tragedies, especially of Shakespeare, there were comic elements even in the gloomiest tragedies, such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* or *Kind Lear*. On the other hand, his comedies too consist of tragic undertone in it, for example, his *As you Like It*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*. In fact, the credit of inventing a blended form of drama goes to Shakespeare. This blended form of drama was condemned by contemporary critics as a corrupt form of art fit only for the pit class. Nevertheless, his predecessors followed Shakespeare greatly and regarded him as an immense source of inspiration.

• **Check Your Progress: 2**

Q.1 Answer the following questions in brief:

1) What were the salient characteristics of the Elizabethan Age?

2) Which are major Shakespearean tragedies and comedies?

3) How were Greek dramas different from Elizabethan dramas?

1.3 LIFE AND WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Elizabethan age is considered to be the most prolific period of English literature in general and English drama in particular. As discussed in the previous chapter, Shakespeare has occupied a unique position in the Elizabethan period, and therefore the period is also known as the Shakespearean Age. There are other Western poets and novelists such as Homer, Dante, Leo Tolstoy and Charles Dickens, who also became famous internationally. Nevertheless, there is no literary artist whose name and fame could be compared to Shakespeare. There are dramatists who were, in fact, more popular during their own time but later on, their popularity die out with the passing of time. Shakespeare's contemporary, Ben Johnson, for example, was more popular than Shakespeare himself.

But there are not dramatists whose plays are still today read, performed and adapted in more than one country and in more than one language. Thus, it has turned out to be true what Ben Jonson had stated about Shakespeare that he “was not of an age, but for all time.”

Shakespeare was born in the year 1564 at Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England. He had been an actor, poet and dramatist during his long and diverse career. Shakespeare did not receive any formal education beyond school. He wrote more than 150 sonnets and around 37 plays during his lifetime. His plays consist of comedies (also known as tragic-comedies), tragedies, and history plays. Some of his famous history plays include *Henry VI - Part I, II and III* (1592), *Henry V* (1598), *Richard III* (1592), *Richard II* (1595) and *King John* (1595-96). Some of his most popular comedies include *The Comedy of Errors* (1594), *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594-95), *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96), *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597-98), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), *As You Like It* (1599-1600), *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (1601), *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), *Measure for Measure* (1601), *All's Well that Ends Well* (1604-05). At the same time, his most popular tragedies of all time include *Hamlet* (1600-01), *Othello* (1603-04), *Timon of Athens* (1605), *King Lear* (1605-06) and *Macbeth* (1606). Thus, we can see he was extremely productive as a dramatist and a sonneteer.

At the age of 18, Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway, who was eight years elder to him in the year 1582. They had a daughter Susanna and two – twin sons Hammet and Judith. Around 1590, he shifted to England and started working as an actor initially. Within one decade he became every popular and successful dramatist of his time. He received a severe blow in his personal life when his 11 years son Hammet died. He spends his later life at his native Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England. He died in the year 1616. His birth and death anniversary falls on the same day that is 23 April. Years after his death, his friends published the *First Folio* in 1623, the first authorized collection of his works which is one of the main sources for the texts of his plays.

Though William Shakespeare was writing 16th century England, his plays have been translated, adapted and performed in almost all languages and countries of the world. His popularity has kept on increasing years and centuries after his death. It is due to the fact that his works appeal to all kinds of masses of all time around the world.

• **Check Your Progress : 3**

Q.1 State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) Shakespeare was a university graduate and a scholar.
- 2) We can say Shakespeare was quite productive during his career.
- 3) Ben Jonson was not as popular as Shakespeare during their time.
- 4) Shakespeare got married to Anne Hathaway, who was eight years younger than him.
- 5) Shakespeare's date of birth and death are the same.

- 6) Apart from plays, Shakespeare wrote novels and short stories.
- 7) Shakespeare's plays include comedies, tragedies, and history plays.
- 8) Ben Jonson praised Shakespeare by calling him 'not of an age, but for all time'.
- 9) Shakespeare wrote more than 150 sonnets.
- 10) Anne Hathaway published the collection of Shakespeare in the *Frist Folio* in 1623.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have learnt

- about the history and development of English Drama in brief and
- about life and works of Shakespeare in brief.

3.5 Key Words

Clergy	people such as priests who are the leaders of religion and who perform religious services, particularly in Church
Comedy	a play that is meant to make people laugh and that has a happy ending
Conquer	to take control of a country, city etc. through the use of force
Drama	a piece of writing that tells a story and is meant to be performed on a stage
Dramaturgy	the art and technique of composing a drama and theatrical representation
Medieval	of or related to the Middle Ages
Middle Age	the period of European history from about AD 500 to about 1500
Norman	one of the people from northern Europe and France who conquered England in 1066
Norman Conquest	conquering of England by Norman people in 1066
Novel	a long written story usually about imaginary characters and events
Predecessor	someone of something that comes before something else
Prose	writing that is not poetry
Protagonist	the main character in a novel, play, film etc.
Renaissance	the period of European history between the 14 th and 17 th centuries when there was a new interest in science and in ancient art and literature, especially in Italy
Tragedy	a play that is serious in nature and theme and has a sad ending (such as the death of the main character/s)
Tragic Verse	comedy: a play that has both tragic and comic element writing in which words are arranged in a rhythmic pattern; a part of a poem or song

3.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- Abrams, M H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999. Print.
- Long, W. J. *English Literature*. Noida: Maple Press, 2012. Print.
- Hudson, W. H. *An Outline of English Literature*. New Delhi: Rupa Publication, 2015. Print.

❖ ANSWERS:

- **Check Your Progress – 1**

State whether the following statements are TRUE or FALSE:

1.5.1.1 English dramas originally were religious in nature and context.

TRUE

1.5.1.2 Latin Church always supported the performance of drama.

FALSE

1.5.1.3 Initially, the plays were performed by the clergy inside the Church. **TRUE**

1.5.1.4 English drama started becoming more lenient towards morality under the Greek and Roman influence. **FALSE**

1.5.1.5 English drama flourished greatly during the period of Queen Elizabeth. **TRUE**

Join A with B:

A

1. *Gorboduc*
2. *Quem Quarritus*
3. *Ralph Roister Doister*
4. Mystery Plays
scriptures
5. Miracle Plays
of Saints

B

- a) the first English tragedy
- b) the liturgical drama
- c) the first English Comedy
- d) a play adapted from
scriptures
- e) a play based on the lives
of Saints

- **Check Your Progress – 2**

Answer the following questions in brief:

1) What were the salient characteristics of the Elizabethan Age?

Answer: Elizabethan Age was the Golden Period for English Drama. This period was also referred to as European Renaissance, where Europeans were breaking the traditional restrictions enforced by the mediaeval Church. The great thinkers of the time were fearlessly turning away from Church and shifting towards mankind in an enormous humanistic movement. This humanitarian approach to life led to a novel flowering in every area of human efforts such as art, music, architecture, religion, science, philosophy and literature. Thus, Elizabethan Age marks the new beginning for humanism, and more and more emphasis is given to mankind than the Church and religion. All forms of literature in general and drama in particular flourished.

2) Which are the major Shakespearean tragedies and comedies?

Answer: Shakespeare's major tragedies are *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *King Lear*. At the same time, his major comedies are *As you Like It*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*.

3) How were Greek dramas different from Elizabethan dramas?

Answer: Greek tragedies were strictly consisting of tragic elements, and comedies were strictly consisting of comic elements. In Elizabethan tragedies, especially of Shakespeare, there were comic elements even in the gloomiest tragedies and comedies consist of tragic undertone in it.

• **Check Your Progress – 3**

State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) Shakespeare was a university graduate and a scholar. **False**
- 2) We can say Shakespeare was quite productive during his career. **True**
- 3) Ben Jonson was not as popular as Shakespeare during their time. **False**
- 4) Shakespeare got married to Anne Hathaway, who was eight years younger than him. **False**
- 5) Shakespeare's date of birth and death are the same. **True**
- 6) Apart from plays, Shakespeare wrote novels and short stories. **False**
- 7) Shakespeare's plays include comedies, tragedies, and history plays. **True**
- 8) Ben Jonson praised Shakespeare by calling him 'not of an age, but for all time'. **True**
- 9) Shakespeare wrote more than 150 sonnets. **True**
- 10) Anne Hathaway published the collection of Shakespeare in the *Frist Folio* in 1623. **False**