CHAPTER - 3

THE CONCEPT OF EPIC THEATRE
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3.1 THE NEED FOR A NEW THEATRE

"Brecht was a rebel. The Brechtian Theatre can be understood only in the light of what he rebelled against: the theatre as he found it in Germany around 1920 and as it still remains in many parts of the world to this day- a theatre in which bombastic productions of the classics alternate with empty photographic replicas of everyday life, whether in melodrama or drawing-room comedy; a theatre that oscillates between emotional uplift and after dinner entertainment."

(Esslin: 1961, 121-122).

This is how Martin Esslin judges one of the most influential theatres of the 20th century. While handling a critical sketch of Brecht, he emphasizes the need to understand the political and literary adversities of the time which provoked him to experiment with the theatre. Theatre was highly related to politics during Germany's political warfare. This close relationship is due to the fact that theatre is a very effective media to gain influence. Theatre, according to Hubner, is "distinguished from the other arts in that it is institutional and social in nature." (Hubner: 1992, 5). "These characteristics closely ally to politics, since they make it possible for theatre to be used as an instrument of propaganda." (Hubner: 1992, 5-6). The socialists were really aware of
this idea. In fact, they “believed in the idea that theatre should serve society.” (Hubner: 1992, viii). Consequently, considering that the popular bourgeois realism carried the ideas of capitalism, efforts were made by the revolutionaries to battle such theatres.

Before Hitler came to power in 1933, there were at least two dominant theatre ideologies in Germany that were against bourgeois realism: the social realism and the emerging cult (Nazi’s) theatre. These two ideologies at first looked alike in that they worked for the revolution. They all had influential theatre figures who made experiments to develop a new kind of theatre. “The avant-garde artists were denounced as ‘breeders’ of the proletarian world revolution.” (Zortman: 1984, 2). Brecht was supposedly one of them. However, since 1927 Hitler’s National Socialist Party began to develop their own kind of theatre, cult theatre, which was used to develop the idea of “Germany’s ‘pure’ and ‘genuine’ culture.” (Zortman: 1984, 1). This party “intended not only to curb the tide of bourgeois cultural dominant but to annihilate it.” (Zortman: 1984, 16).

This cult theatre reached its peak when Nazi ruled the country. “When Hitler came to power, the German theatre was flourishing, with numerous wonderful buildings and high artistic level assured by a nucleus of outstanding directors and actors.” (Hubner: 1992, 90). This, however, did not benefit Brecht and his friends since they were just empty propaganda in which creativity had to submit itself to political purposes. About this situation Zortman comments as follows:
Fettered by their extreme ideology, the Nazi could never appreciate that all artistic creativity spring from individual human inspiration ... They could never apprehend that though he may criticize or even ridicule his culture, he basically respects even reveres that culture, if it is worthy, and thrives on his association with it by the bestowal of his talents. (Zortman: 1984, 7).

Brecht suffered more since the Nazi “put a very definite stop to the development of such (epic and didactic) theatre.” (Worthen: 1993, 771). Brecht, being unable to work and having a Jewish wife, chose to avoid Hitler by living in other countries (starting from Denmark) where he continued to work on the epic theatre. Unlike the socialist-realist, although his theatre was also political in nature, Brecht’s experiments with epic theatre were not primarily meant to gain power. With some other Germany’s avant-garde artists, Brecht started from the fact that “in the nineteenth century theatre was synonymous with the cheapest and artistically most dubious form of entertainment. This state of affairs spurred into action socially conscious individuals who decided that they must provide the masses with artistically worthwhile theatre.” (Hubner: 1992, 106).

Brecht himself has said once, “Many people have noticed that the theatrical experience is becoming weaker. There are not so many who realize the increasing difficulty of reproducing the present-day world. It was this realization that set some of us playwrights and theatre directors looking for new artistic methods.” (Willett: 1964, 274). Brecht did want to see his society change, and the result was the birth of Epic Theatre.
3.2 THE MAKING OF EPIC THEATRE

Brecht was one of the most prominent figures of the early German avant-garde, of which literary Expressionism was a key element. By having his actors step out of character, or by using ironic captions to introduce episodes, he would never allow the audience to forget that they were watching a play and not real life. Through these techniques he hoped that he would provoke his audience into thinking more carefully about the events they had seen. During his youth he developed a violently anti-bourgeois attitude that reflected his generation's deep disappointment in the civilization that had come crashing down at the end of World War I. Among Brecht's friends were members of the Dadaist group, who aimed at destroying what they condemned as the false standards of bourgeois art through derision and iconoclastic satire. The man who taught him the elements of Marxism in the late 1920s was Karl Korsch, an eminent Marxist theoretician who had been a Communist member of the Reichstag but had been expelled from the German Communist Party in 1926. The strong impact of Marxism and love for theatre forced him to work on his own theory of drama, and, 1948, he started work on "A Little Organum for the Theatre"(1949), a book contains Brecht’s theory on drama. The essence of his theory of drama, as revealed in this work, is the idea that a truly Marxist drama must avoid the Aristotelian premise that the audience should be made to believe that what they are witnessing is happening here and now. For he saw that if the audience really felt that the emotions of heroes of the past--Oedipus, or Lear, or Hamlet--could equally have been their own reactions, then the Marxist idea that human nature is not constant but a result of changing historical conditions would
automatically be invalidated. Brecht therefore argued that the theatre should not seek to make its audience believe in the presence of the characters on the stage—should not make it identify with them, but should rather follow the method of the epic poet's art, which is to make the audience realize that what it sees on the stage is merely an account of past events that it should watch with critical detachment.

Erwin Piscator’s name is often placed with Brecht when it comes to pioneer the concept of Epic Theatre. But His epic theatre was related to history, i.e.: he believed in the portrayal of historical events as they truly happened. According to him, the main aim of drama was not to show the relationship between man and man, or man and God, but between the man and the society, whereas Brecht’s epic theatre contains more than only history. He denies the emotional attachment between the spectator and the drama performed, and derived a new technique called ‘alienation’. By putting emphasis on making the audience aware and thoughtful about the stage performance, Brecht has developed his concept of epic theatre. Piscator’s epic theatre relates only to historical events, but in Brecht’s epic theatre one can find history, fable, parable, or myth as well. Moreover the concept which has been added additionally was that of the neutral approach.

It is also believed that after the micro study of Asian traditional folk theatres, Brecht developed his own theory of drama which was given the name of epic theatre. Almost all the Asian drama traditions contain one common factor, which is to say they are of presentational kind that are highly conventional, non-realistic and stylized. Various folk types and drama traditions of Asia like Sanskrit dramas of India, Japan’s ‘Noah’
and 'kabuki', 'Peking Opera' of Chin, 'barong' drama tradition of Bali, Indonesia's 'Ludruk', Thailand's 'Likey', Malaysia's 'Bangswan' etc. include the mixture of songs-music-dance, mime, and acting in them. In all these forms, no illusion is being created to show the reality, but an event is portrayed by overtaking reality. In such conventional and symbolic drama traditions, plays were performed with the help of 'Stage Conventions'. So, they were known to 'Non-Illusionistic Theatre', which looks very nearer to Brecht's definition of alienation.

3.3 ON EPIC THEATRE

"Epic theatre was a theatrical movement arising in the early to mid-20th century from the theories and practice of a number of theatre practitioners, including Erwin Piscator, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and, most famously, Bertolt Brecht. Although many of the concepts and practices involved in Brechtian epic theatre had been around for years, even centuries, Brecht unified them, developed the style, and popularized it. Epic theatre incorporates a mode of acting that utilises what he calls gestus. The epic form describes both a type of written drama and a methodological approach to the production of plays. Its qualities of clear description and reporting and its use of choruses and projections as a means of commentary earned it the name 'epic'.” (wikipedia: 2012).

In his early plays, Brecht experimented with dada and expressionism, but in his later works, he developed a style more suited to his own unique vision. He detested the "Aristotelian" drama and its attempts to lure the spectator into a kind of trance-like state, a total identification with the
hero to the point of complete self-oblivion, resulting in feelings of terror and pity and, ultimately, an emotional catharsis. He didn't want his audience to feel emotions—he wanted them to think—and he determined to destroy the theatrical illusion and, thus, that dull trance-like state.

“Brecht’s principal early statement on epic theatre was his notes on *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, published in 1930, though he had used the term from 1926.” (Brooker: 1994, 187). The term ‘epic theatre’, which was first used in Germany in the 1920’s and has become firmly associated with the name of Brecht, cuts across the traditional divisions. Epic story telling is objective; the author stands back from his story as he tells it, and he may interpolate his own comment on events. It was the objectivity and the simultaneous scope for comment in epic writing that attracted Brecht, and the beginnings of epic theatre coincide with German experiments in the use of the theatre as an instrument of political instruction. From the beginning of his career Brecht had fought a running battle against the conventional theatre of his day which he dismissed as ‘culinary’, since, like expert cooking, it delighted the senses without impinging on the mind. He was a scientific demonstrator of a modern art, and hence he has always detested what was illusionary. In his essay *On Experimental Theatre* (1939) Brecht asked,

“How can the theatre be entertaining and at the same time instructive? How can it be taken out of the traffic in intellectual drugs and transformed from a place of illusion to a place of insight?” (Brecht: 1983, xxviii).
Exploring his new theatre, Brecht had noted some of the new features of Epic Theatre in the mid-1930s in the following manner,

"The stage began to tell the story. The narrator was no longer missing... Not only did the background adopt an attitude to the events on stage... the actors too refrained from going over wholly into their role...

The stage began to be instructive.

Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, the family, religion, wheat, the meat market, all became subjects for theatrical representation. Choruses enlightened the spectator... Films showed a montage of events from all over the world. Projections added statistical material. And as the background came to the front of the stage so people's activity was subjected to criticism... The theatre became an affair for philosophers, but not only for such philosophers as wished not just to explain but also to change the world." (Willett: 1964, 71-72).

Thus, he envisioned the theater as more of a debate hall than a place of illusions. The result of Brecht's research was a technique known as "verfremdungseffekt" or the "alienation effect". Brecht's concept of alienation forms the base of his epic theatre. Etymologically the term 'alienation' is believed to be derived from the Latin verb 'to alienare' which means to take away or to remove. In his 'Social Contract', Rousseau has used the term with reference to individual's rights in social structure, which was further developed by Hegel and made it important in Marxist and Communist Philosophy. Hegel's alienation has two German synonyms: 1) Entfermdung, 2) Entdusserung. Karl Marx, who was only
thirty at the time of Hegel's death, was very much influenced by his definition, and discussed fully both the terms in his 'Philosophical Manuscripts' written in 1844. Martin Buber has also discussed the term in his book 'Ich Und' (1923) in the name of 'Verfremdung'. Brecht has also taken the term 'Verfremdung' to talk about the theory of alienation and called it V-effect (which in English is known as alienation effect: A-effect). It was designed to encourage the audience to retain their critical detachment. He wanted the spectator to think because theatre was an intellectual process to him. He didn't want the spectator to see life on stage, but to think about life. He wanted the spectator to see how the theatre "demystifies relationships between individuals and institutions, individuals and individuals, institutions and institutions, so as to show first the nature of passion and economic and social laws, and second to demonstrate methods by which human beings can control both themselves and their institutions." (Szanto: 1978, 76).

Brecht himself is of the view that in order to produce A-effects (Alienation Effects) the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. His muscles must remain loose, for a turn of the head, e.g. with tautened neck muscles, will magically lead the spectators' eyes and even their heads to turn with it and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gesture may bring about. His way of speaking has to be free from parsonical sing-song and from all those cadences which lull the spectator so that the sense gets lost. Even if he plays a man possessed he must not seem to be possessed himself, for how
is the spectator to discover what possessed him if he does?... His feelings must not at bottom be those of the character, so that the audience's may not at bottom be those of the character's either. The audience must have complete freedom. Brecht says,

"The first condition for the achievement of the A-effect is that the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite gest of showing. It is of course necessary to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage action is taking place in reality and without an audience. That being so, it is possible for the actor in principle to address the audience direct." (Willett: 1964, 136).

'The Fourth Wall' refers here is an imaginary wall separating the audience from the action on the stage. In realistic productions this wall remains intact and the performers do not acknowledge that they are being watched. The spectators are observers who are conditioned to believe that the world of the play is 'real'. It is a suspension of disbelief. Like most theories of realism, Brecht wanted to disrupt the notion of the fourth wall. 'Breaking the fourth wall' involves the characters directly addressing and acknowledging the audience, whether they break character or perform with an awareness of being watched. It is made clear that the characters and their actions are not real and the spectators are aware that they are witnessing fiction. The theory behind this technique links back to his definition of Epic Theatre. By taking away the fourth wall the audience must face the action, make decisions and have the opportunity to be aroused to action.
Brecht also emphasized the dependency of A-effect upon the actor and the acting style, the point which distinguished his Epic Theatre from that of Piscator's. And while discussing this, he referred another important key word 'gestus', the term which helps his concept of epic theatre strong enough to develop. Gestus is both gist and gesture; an attitude expressible in words and actions. A basic equation for gestus is a gesture of the body (gest) + a message (gist) = gestus. The message is an essential part of this equation, because without a broader social context, the gesture is redundant. Gestus, as the embodiment of an attitude, carries at least two distinct meanings in Brecht's theatre: firstly, the uncovering or revealing of the motivations and transactions that underpin a dramatic exchange between the characters; secondly, the 'epic' narration of that character by the actor. In the first, that of anatomizing the character, a Gestus reveals a specific aspect of a character: rather than his metaphysical, subconscious or other psychological dimensions, a Gestus makes visible a character's social relations and the causality of his behaviour, as interpreted from a historical materialist perspective. In the second sense, the actor's attitude as embodied in acting as an act of epic narration, Brecht refers to the 'political' basis from which an actor interprets his role and its place within the storytelling scheme of the production as a whole. In this way, gestus is a theatrical technique that helps define the emotion within a character and the context they are in. It is the combination of a gesture and a social meaning into one movement, stance or vocal display. It can be alienating and jar the audience, as it is an unusual and non realistic way of forcing them to see the bigger picture of a situation. It is sometimes referred to as the 'social gest', as it is an action that allows the
audience to understand something specific about the social circumstances presented on stage.

3.4 CRITICS ON EPIC THEATRE

Defining the theory of Brecht, Peter Brooker says, "Brecht's Verfrermdungeffect is usually translated as 'alienation device', and this suggests a debt to Marxism. Yet in Marx 'alienation' describes the condition of dehumanized labour and social relations under capitalism which Brecht wished precisely to transcend. There is an echo but no direct derivation therefore from Marx. With his closest 'Marxist teacher', Karl Korsch, Brecht viewed Marxism as an historically specific, critical philosophy of revolution which assist social transformation through ideological struggle. As the central concept of 'epic theatre' Verfremdung was a weapon in this struggle, a description on the way in which art 'by its own means' could 'further great social task of mastering life'. It would do this not by reinforcing alienation, in the Marxist sense, but by uncovering and revealing it, thereby encouraging a knowledge of the condition of alienation as historically produced and open to transformation in the real world. Brecht's debt to Marx therefore was less to the concept of alienation than, once again, to the methods of dialectical materialism. As an entry in Brecht's Arbeitsjournal confirmed, 'klar, dass das theatre der verfremdung ein theatre der dialektik ist' (it is clear that a theatre of Verfremdung is a dialectical theatre). What this further suggests is that the term 'alienation' is an inadequate and even misleading translation of Brecht's Verfremdung. The terms
‘defamiliarisation’ or ‘estrangement’, when understood as more than purely formal devices, give a more accurate sense of his intentions.”

(Brooker: 1994, 193).

Theodor Adorno believed that Brecht’s theatre of alienation intended to motivate the viewer to think. Brecht’s postulate of a thinking comportment converges, strangely enough, with the objective discernment those autonomous artworks presupposes in the viewer, listener, or reader as being adequate to them. His didactic style, however, is intolerant of the ambiguity in which thought originates: It is authoritarian. This may have been Brecht’s response to the ineffectuality of his didactic plays: As a virtuoso of manipulative technique, he wanted to coerce the desired effect just as he once planned to organize his rise to fame.

Bamber Gascoigne depicts,

“The didactic plays are chiefly interesting because it was in them that Brecht fully discovered his own style of theatre, the style on which he was to base his major plays. Their starkness and simplicity make them the clearest exemplars of this style. At the end of The Exception and the Rule the players comment:

We beseech you then:
Whatever is not strange, find that the strangest,
Whatever is usual, find in explicable.

The German for ‘strange’ is ‘fremd’, and these lines express the intention of Brecht’s famous Verfremdungseffekt – usually referred to
in English as the ‘alienation effect’. The intention of this ‘making strange’ was to force the audience to respond intellectually to the action of the play and to question it, instead of responding emotionally and accepting it. To achieve this and Brecht thought it would be sufficient to break the illusion of the theatre, by which the spectators can become so engrossed in a play that they temporarily forget where they are, and the most obvious techniques of the alienation effect were all device to remind the audience that it is sitting in a theatre. So, Brecht left the stage apparatus visible, presented a synopsis of each scene on a play card, or had narrators directly talking to the audience. It is by now a common place that his techniques failed, fortunately, to eliminate the audience’s emotional involvement with the characters; and it is one of the major paradoxes about Brecht that instead of inspiring, as he intended, a simple working class audience to dispassionate thought, he moved and excited an international audience of intellectuals.”

(Gascoigne: 1962, 123).

Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature defines it as “form of drama presenting a series of loosely connected scenes that avoid illusion and often interrupt the action to address the audience directly with analysis or argument (as by narrator) or with documentation (as by a film). Epic theatre is now most often associated with the dramatic theory and practice evolved by the playwright-director Bertolt Brecht in Germany from 1920s onwards. Its dramatic antecedents include the episodic structure and didactic nature of plays by Georg Buchner, the pre-Expressionist drama of
Frank Wedekind, and the Expressionist theatre of Erwin Piscator and Leoold Jessener, both of whom made exuberant use of the technical effects that came to characterize epic theatre. Brecht’s perspective was Marxian, and his intention was to appeal to his audience’s intellect in presenting moral problems and in reflecting contemporary social realities on stage. He wished to block their emotional responses and to hinder their tendency to empathize with the characters and to get caught up in the action. To this end, he used ‘alienating’ or ‘distancing’ effects to cause the audience to think objectively about the play, to reflect on its argument, and to draw conclusions.” (Merriam Webster: 1995, 382).

Here is the reference to Brecht’s modernist approach to literature he has produced. The modernist liked to go against the grain on the one hand, the end of epistemological strand of thinking made the writers think about the human condition and human situation on the other as a mark of breaking with the tradition they purposely made their work loosely constructed. The thinking about human condition made writers give up construction tightly knitted plots. In an immoral world, Brecht must be trying to irritate people with his moral-didactic concerns. So the plot is episodic and didacticism is at the centre. This reminds one of Proust’s novel *Kemembrance of The Things Part* where one of Marcel’s modernist friends comes for dinner wearing clothes all soaked in water and with muddy boots, he enters the room. Never try to, or fulfill the expectations of the people in the modernist motto.

According to Walter Benjamin, “Brecht differentiates his epic theatre from the dramatic theatre in the narrower sense, whose theory was
formulated by Aristotle. Appropriately, Brecht’s art of the drama is non-Aristotelian, just as Riemann’s non-Euclidian geometry. This analogy may bring out the fact that it is not a matter of competition between the theatrical forms in question Riemann eliminated the parallel postulate; Brecht’s drama eliminated the Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of the emotions through empathy with the stirring fate of the hero. The special character of the relaxed interest of the audience for which the performances of the epic theatre are intended is the fact that hardly any appeal is made to the empathy of the spectators. Instead, the art of the epic theatre consists in producing astonishment rather than empathy. To put it succinctly: instead of identifying with the characters, the audience should be educated to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function. The task of the epic theatre, according to Brecht, is not so much the development of actions as the representation of conditions. This presentation does not mean reproduction as the theoreticians of Naturalism understood it. Rather, the truly important thing is to discover the conditions of life (one might say just as well; to alienate them). This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings.” (Benjamin: 1973, 152).

Thus rather than Aristotelian Catharsis, now we have education in astonishment. The aim of drama is not representation but discovering the conditions of life. Needless to say, this existentialist slant human existence has number of possibilities, number of ends. A writer is supposed to discover what governs and conditions lift.
“The alienation, or estrangement, effect”, says Tzvetan Todorov, “is not the only distinguishing characteristics of epic theatre, but it is its hallmark, as it were, the quintessential feature to which all other distinctive features of that theatre can be related. Brecht also stresses the narrator’s presence on stage; thus the narrator embodies one of the functions that used to belong to the actor, and materializes the existence of the author-spectator exchange. The fact that the play occurs in a ‘past’ time while the performance takes place in the ‘present’ must not be obscured; the two time frames must be coexist overtly. Referring once again to Doblin, Brecht picks up the Schillerian idea of scenic autonomy in epic drama: the individual episodes do not contribute to a single action, do not all lead to a single culminating point; their juxtaposition (the ‘montage’ effect) points up their heterogeneity. As we have learned, the author chops up a play into little autonomous pieces, so that the action advances by fits and starts. He challenges the imperceptible sliding from one scene into another. Epic theatre itself is defined, then, by this stress on the heterogeneous and the plural.” (Todorov: 1987, 40).

Todorov’s account make Brecht postmodernist dramatist. He rules out the idea of single meaning and homogeneity in structure and puts stress on plurality of meanings and heterogeneity of structure.

3.5 AS NON-ARISTOTELIAN THEATRE

In Aristotle’s popular dramatic form, the spectators are being drawn into the stream of emotions, where a play is not possible without the plot. But in epic theatre, Brecht denies the popular tradition of plot development.
Instead he accepts the non-progressed plot construction and a performance with interruptions. In the dramas with strong plot development and sentimental dialogues, the spectator creates emotional attachment with the characters. Because of this attachment he identifies himself with the character and looses the control over his thoughts, and thereby feels the same which the character is feeling on the stage. In order to be more clear about the basic concept of Epic Theatre, we must look at the following Brecht’s table which differentiates the Epic Theatre from the Dramatic Theatre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramatic Theatre</th>
<th>Epic Theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicates the spectator in a stage situation</td>
<td>Turns the spectator into an observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wears down his capacity for action</td>
<td>but Arouses his capacity for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides him with sensations decisions</td>
<td>Forces him to take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Picture of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spectator is involved in something</td>
<td>He is made to face something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>Argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instinctive feelings are preserved recognition</td>
<td>Brought to the point of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience</td>
<td>The spectator stands outside, studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The human being is taken for granted</td>
<td>The human being is the object of the inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is unalterable</td>
<td>He is alterable and able to alter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes on the finish</td>
<td>Eyes on the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One scene makes another</td>
<td>Each scene for itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Montage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear development</td>
<td>In curves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary determinism</td>
<td>Jumps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man as a fixed point</td>
<td>Man as a process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought determines being</td>
<td>Social being determines thought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feeling                                    Reason

(Willett: 1964, 37).

The table clearly lists the characteristics of epic theatre's form. Epic theatre uses narrative (not plot), episodic scenes, montage (not dramatic development), curves (not linear development), and scenes that jump (not cause and effect). These characteristics are needed as methodological tools to achieve the desired purposes. Since plot tends to draw the spectator into the story, Brecht introduces the use of narratives, in which the spectator only becomes an observer. Moreover, it is presented episodically with scenes that can jump to any places or time without the spectator's anticipation. This will make the spectator expelled from the story anytime he is drawn into it. Even more surprising, as a montage, the scenes can be presented in a series of non-linear scenes in which the
spectator could not but think about what is going on stage. The stage should also be set differently. Since the spectator is made aware that he sees a theatre, not representation of life.

Brecht doesn’t want the spectator to be involved in the events performed on the stage, but wants to make him a conscious critic. In the dramatic form, a spectator is made confused because there is a series of illusionistic elements. Such illusive performance takes him to the non-realistic world and the spectator just stares at the stage finding out the answer of ‘what next’, where as Brecht is in need of the spectator who is searching an answer of ‘why this’. Brecht, in his essay ‘Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction’ (1936), says,

“The dramatic theatre’s spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too-Just like me- It’s only natural- It’ll never change- The sufferings of this man appeal me, because they are inescapable- That’s great art, it all seems the most obvious thing in the world- I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it- That’s not the way- That’s extraordinary, hardly believable- It’s got to stop. The sufferings of this man appeal me, because they are unnecessary-That’s a great art, nothing obvious in it- I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.” (Brecht: 1982, 110).

Thus, Brecht wants to make his spectator thoughtful about the activities on the stage. In the scripts, performance and acting, he has followed the Asian tradition. After searching out ‘alienation effect’ from Chinese
drama, he has employed it to his own dramas, acting and performance. By promoting interrupted performance, lack of suspense, the character’s direct approach to the spectator, poetic element, etc., Brecht tries to project alienation effect in his dramas. He advocates such techniques in theatre to produce the audience with great intellectual and analytical powers. He remarks,

"The first condition for the A-effect’s application to this end is that stage and auditorium must be purged of everything ‘magical’ and that no ‘hypnotic tensions’ should be set up. This ruled out any attempt to make the stage convey the flavor of a particular type (a room at evening, a road in the autumn), or to create atmosphere by relaxing the tempo of the conversation. The audience was not ‘worked up’ by a display of temperament or ‘swept away’ by acting with tautened muscles; in short, no attempt was made to put it in a trance and give it the illusion of watching an ordinary unrehearsed event. As will be seen presently, the audience’s tendency to plunge into such illusions has to be checked by specific artistic means."

(Willett: 1964, 136).

Like other modernists, Brecht has also come to distrust ancient trio of plot, character and thought of narrative structure, and exclusively puts stress on the spectacle. In a way Brecht rejects the authenticity of dramatic theatre and makes some necessary changes in scripts, presentation and acting to support his epic theatre. "The first change of emphasis Brecht advocated was in the manner in which events were presented to the audience. Dramatic theatre enacted plots, involved the audience and stimulated their emotions only to dissipate this
active response. Epic theatre was to tell a story in a way that invited the audience to consider the events involved and then to make their own assessment of them. To achieve this, adjustments had to be made to the form of the play. The dramatic play was a closed system of interdependent scenes, each one involving inexorably from its predecessors, but with the plot so structured that the audience was kept in suspense, wondering how it would all end. The epic play was to be assembled as a montage of impendent incidents which showed a process taking place; it would move from scene to scene by curves and jumps, which would keep the audience alert to the way in which things were happening, so that they would finally be able, would indeed be compelled, to judge whether that was the right way. Brecht sometimes compared his plays to scientific experiments; specimens of human behavior were subjected to scrutiny to see what principles could be improved. Change for the better lay at the centre of Brecht’s thinking, and this meant altering the classical notion that the hero of a play should be a fixed character. The conflict between such immutable ‘characters’ and their world was the stuff of traditional drama, but Brecht rejected the notion that human nature was fixed, and that man’s own thinking governed his being, in favour of a concept of human nature as capable of change. In epic theatre man’s thinking is conditioned by his social situation and will change if that changes. At the same time he is the agent of social change, so that there is a constant dialectic, or process of reciprocal influence and change.”

(Brecht: 1983, xxix- xxx).
Thus, Brecht rejected Stanislavsky’s ‘feel’ and Aristotle’s ‘catharsis’. According to him the dramatic theatre creates an illusion in the spectator, and that very illusion puts a wall between the stage and the audience. Brecht’s intention through epic theatre was to break that wall and to make the spectator aware and thoughtful.

3.6 THE STRUCTURE OF EPIC THEATRE

The main objective of the epic theatre has been to make the spectator aware of the problem performed on the stage and to promote him to evaluate it neutrally and self dependently. To justify the sole aim of his movement, Brecht has employed some unique features to his new kind of theatre, and these features can be discussed in the following manner.

3.6.1 PLOT

In Brecht’s epic theatre incidents are not dramatically woven with one another, but they are independently separated. What Brecht calls ‘Aristotelian’ or ‘dramatic theatre’ has a plot at the centre, which is also known as the soul of the play. In such dramas, various events are connected through ‘organic unity’. But, by calling his theatre ‘Non-Aristotelian’, Brecht rejects the concept of ‘organic unity’. Instead, he likes to have an episodic structure in the play. Thus, in the epic theatre, various events are juxtaposed, and if, while the performance, one or two events are being dropped out, it will in no way be harmful to the overall effect of the play. A well known drama critic Martin Esslin in his ‘Brecht- A Choice of Evils’ says,

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"The construction of the plays of the epic theatre, which rejects the logically built, well made play, is free from the need of creating suspense, loosely knit and episodic, instead of mounting to a dynamic climax, the story unfolds in a number of separate situations, each rounded and complete in itself. The total effect of the play will be built up through the juxtaposition and 'montage' of contrasting episodes. While Aristotelian drama can only be understood as a whole, the epic drama can be cut into slices which will continue to make sense and give pleasure, like favourite chapters of a novel that can be read by themselves, or extracts from plays of great length that are performed as self contained units in the Chinese classical theatre."

(Esslin: 1959, 113).

In this manner, in realistic theatre the story line is well maintained and the plot is at the centre. The chain of events is woven in such a way that one can feel movement of action. In it the incidents, with a definite speed, reaches to certain climax, and then there is a result or conclusion. On the contrary, in epic theatre, one episode is attached with another one like combination of pearls, because of which the plot becomes weak. One can eliminate any of the episodes. Moreover, the use of narration, chorus singing, music, dance, etc. in epic theatre makes the plot weak. The following figures will make this thing more visible.
In the epic theatre, the dramatic scenes full of tension and emotionality are never portrayed. The stories, which are known to the audience, are presented with historical context, and thus the element of eagerness is vanished. With its reference Martin Esslin says,

"In the epic theatre the author can tell the audience in advance how the play will end, thus freeing their minds from the distraction of suspense." (Esslin: 1959, 113).

Brecht's thinking about the element of plot makes it clear to us that epic theatre partakes something of existentialist thinking (the situation of man) and the theatre of absurd, the episodic structure in place of logical plot with the chain of cause and effect. This may be born of Brecht's experience of First World War and its impact on human life as well. In short, he is utterly unconventional both in life and art. As an existential term we have served meanings of alienation. For instance, in Brecht's play, through alienation Brecht implies that now we no longer can identify with another person's situation which brings alienation. Still another way of putting is the loss of common ground. Sartre said that
system is born of the alienation of man. His implication is man tries to create the common ground through system and it never comes to life.

3.6.2 CHARACTERIZATION

In epic theatre major characters are chosen class wise. Compare to the individual characteristics, the author puts emphasis on some unique class wise qualities, no effort is being put forward to bring out the inner personality of the character. Thus, here, the character is not at the centre but the relationship between the characters is important. In Brecht’s plays, the characters like Mother Courage, Grusha, Azdac, Macheath contain invidual name but they represent certain class of the society. We also find some characters like Recruiting Officer, Sergeant, cook, commander, chaplain, soldier doctor, etc. which don’t contain individual names and still represent certain class of the society. In the epic theatre fixed and individualistic characters are never portrayed. The character gets birth out of person’s social action and with the change in action the character also changes. About such change because of the character’s unique social approach, Brecht writes,

“Character should not be regarded like a stain of grease on a pair of trousers, which, however much you try to rub and wipe it away, will always come up again. In actual fact the question is always how a given person is going to act in a specified set of circumstances and conditions.” (Esslin: 1959, 113).

According to Brecht, in the realistic theatre, the character is created by the playwright’s own sensibility, and the actor tries to be faithful to the
character while giving the performance; there is no chance for him to mask off the emotional attachment with the character. Where as, in the epic theatre, the character is constantly changing, so it doesn’t have a fixed line to follow. Moreover the character’s outer approach is more focused than its inner process. Martin Esslin says,

“In the theatre of illusion and identification the actor works through introspection. He delves into the character he is to portray and tries to merge with him. Only after this work is accomplished are the characters brought into relation with one another. The nature of the characters determines their relationships. The basic unit of such a theatre is the single character. Brecht’s theatre, on other hand, is extrovert. The inner life of the characters is irrelevant to him except in so far as it is expressed in their outward attitudes and actions for the smallest social unit is not one human being, but two human beings. The eyewitness in the example of the street accident derives his characters wholly from their actions. He imitates what they have done and thus permits inferences as to their nature. A theatre which follows him will a large extent break with the habit of the conventional theatre, which derives its action from the nature of the characters.” (Esslin: 1959, 118).

In this way Brecht, through character’s class wise features, their unique social approach, social behavior, importance of their outer personality, etc., employs the technique of alienation in his dramas. Yet again, Brecht’s portraying characters without inner beings reveals his existential stand that existence proceeds essence and not vice versa. His saying that
characters represent their class shows his postmodern tendency where he is gradually highlighting importance of local narratives.

3.6.3 DIALOGUES AND LANGUAGE

Like other elements of Epic Theatre, Language is also a unique ingredient for its structure. As a dramaturge with a purpose, Brecht used the language in his plays which was suitable to its theatre. In Brecht’s plays folk language, prose and poetry are used in bulk. In his plays the narrator contains much importance: the story teller introduces the characters. Some times the characters develop the direct conversation with the audience, which helps to create an alienation effect in the performance. Such conversation needs a support of friendly language than a high sounding literary one. Therefore, Brecht’s characters use the language of day to day life, not the literary one. In his essay ‘Brecht’s language and its sources’, Martin Esslin says,

“Brecht’s language cast off all ornament and became functional and austere. The ‘lehrstilche’ and ‘school operas’ are meant to be ‘teaching aids’ rather than art and their language is severely factual. In the ‘Flight of Linderghs’, for example, the chorus, which embodies the personality of the hero, introduces itself:

My name is Charles Lindergh
I am twenty five years old
My grand-father was Swedish
I am American............” (Esslin: 1962, 178).
In Brecht's plays, we find a good relationship between the song’s words, music, emotion and the behavior. Many a times the songs are not merely sung, but are acted. And sometimes, Brecht, in order to create an alienation effect, tries to project the songs which are very contradictory to the atmosphere. Brecht’s employment of school opera also shows his postmodernist tendency whereby he is closing the forms of opera, song and music. Postmodernists use variety of minor forms like satire and parody to arrive at truth. Brecht is not different from them. The dialogues of his plays are never written in a high manner, they are simple in tone and manner as he always advocated use of dialect for better effect. He says,

"Our theatrical language is based on High German, but over the years it has grown very mannered and stilted, and has developed into a quite special sort of High German which is no longer so flexible as High German everyday speech...The people speak dialect. Dialect is the medium of its most intimate expression. How can our actors portray the people and address them it unless they go back to their own dialect, and allow its inflections to permeate the High German of the stage?" (Willett: 1964, 234).

3.6.4 ACTING

The main objective of Brecht’s epic theatre is also that in spite of moving by the characters and atmosphere of the play, the spectator must observe and evaluate whatever is going on the stage. To create his desired effect, Brecht has established his new method of acting. There has been a radical change in the actor’s relationship with the character as well as with the
The actor of dramatic theatre identifies himself with the character’s body, language, emotions, and intellect, and then creates an illusion in the minds of the audience. Brecht’s actor, instead of identifying the character, suggests the character and events. Brecht’s actor does not only bring out the character’s inner world, his beliefs, his desires, and his sentiments, but also gives his own individual opinion as an actor. In other words, he does not merge into the character, but, by separating his own self from the character, tries to give his independent point of view. He says,

“The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying. He is not Lear, Harpagon, Schweik, he shows them. He reproduces their remarks as authentically as he can, he puts forward their way of behaving to the best of his abilities and knowledge of man, but he never tries to persuade himself (and thereby others) that this amounts to a complete transformation. Actor will know what it means if I say that a typical kind of acting without this complete transformation takes place when producer or colleague shows one how to play a particular passage. It is not his own part, so he is not completely transformed; he underlines the technical aspect and retains the attitude of someone just making suggestions.

Once the idea of total transformation is abandoned, the actor speaks his part not as if he were improvising it himself, but like a quotation. At the same time he obviously has to render all the quotations’ overtones, the remark’s full human and concrete shape; similarly the
gesture he makes must have the full substance of a human gesture even though it now represents a copy.

Given this absence of total transformation in the acting, there are three aids which may help to alienate the actions and remarks of the character being portrayed.

1. Transformation into the third person.
2. Transformation into the past.
3. Speaking the stage directions out loud.”

(Brecht: 1982, 116).

Brecht believed that an actor should present a character in a way that wasn't an impersonation, rather, a narration of the actions of the character. He did this because he wanted to constantly remind his audience that they were watching a play. He also believed that if the audience developed an emotional attachment to the characters, then they could not evaluate the social realities of the play. Stanislavski thought that if an actor believed he was a character, then the audience would believe this as well, and feel the emotions that the character was feeling. Brecht did not want this to happen; he wanted the audience to question, make comment and interpret what was on the stage.

The Brechtian theatre does not show the human nature of an individual but reveals collective human relations. The story is the point of interest, not the characters. The story is the sequence of events that is the social experiment, allowing the interplay of social forces, from which the play's lesson emerges. If the audience does not maintain a distance between the
characters and themselves then this cannot be achieved. Acting in Epic Theatre means that an actor is required to play characters believably without convincing either the audience or themselves that they are, indeed, the characters. To assist in achieving this, Brecht often used a device or theatrical technique called Gestus. Gestus is a gesture or position that an actor takes up at crucial sections in the play. The gesture or action aims to encapsulate the feelings of the character at the one time, and also briefly stops the action. There is an audible and visual distance between the actor and their character and the actors will often 'break the fourth wall' and address the audience, play multiple characters, and use exaggerated or repetitive actions to make their distance and social commentary known. The physicality of the Brechtian actor is always highly stylised and often exaggerated uses of gesture, intonation, and tempo, which is unfamiliar and causes the audience member to look closer. Perhaps most importantly, the characters are less like real people; they are intended to represent broader social groups. This is why Brecht considers that the building of a role must always begin on a social level, so that it is able to represent the society it is being performed for.

3.6.5 STAGECRAFT AND PRESENTATION

In the dramatic theatre, the director creates an illusion of reality through light effects, settings, costumes, music and sound effect, etc., but in the epic theatre, no effort is put forward to create an illusion of reality. Whatever the spectators are watching is not the exact place of action but it's merely a stage setting- such kind of clear idea is given to them, and so there is no necessity of 'masking'. In the epic drama very few stage properties are used, even there is no curtain on the stage, because of
which there is no illusion of reality on the stage. In dramatic theatre, sometimes the spectator forgets that he is watching a play, where as in the epic theatre, the spectator is not allowed to forget even for a single moment that he is in the theatre and watching a play. The plays of dramatic form are generally performed in the proscenium theatres, but the plays of the epic form are performed in the theatre called ‘sport arena’. With this reference Margaret Eddershaw has something important to say about the element of ‘sport arena’ in Brechtian play,

“Brecht wanted the atmosphere in his theatre to be similar to that of a sport arena and the spectator could then be expected to sustain the kind of dispassionate, critical awareness that Brecht saw and admired in the crowds at sporting events. In contrast to the well behaved Moscow Art Theatre audience, the Brechtian spectator was even to be encouraged to smoke. And this change in atmosphere was to be aided by the use of an open platform stage with no front curtains and with minimal scenery. The mechanics of the production were not to be hidden or disguised and so the reverential or polite hush invoked by the sudden revelation of an illusion of reality could not occur.” (Eddershaw: 1982, 136).

Brecht envisaged the Epic Stage as a place for discussion. The audience is presented with a topic of social or political relevance and an opinion or message on said topic. The epic stage provides its audience with questions, possible solutions and actively encourages them to think, determine and act. Brecht had no desire to hide any of the elements of theatrical production. Lighting, music, scenery, costume changes, projections and any other elements he called upon were in full view of the
audience, as were their operators, to ensure actors were seen in the same world as the audience. Light would indicate passage of time or change of scenes rather than create mood or atmosphere. The music, too, must have a visible source - musicians may even be on the stage. Interruptions for songs are announced or indicated by projection of a title, or flags and trumpets will descend from the flies. He also wished to change the scale of the properties used, and then also use them out of context. For example, using a skyscraper that makes up part of the set and turning it over to use as a judges table in a courtroom. The set and props were only on stage if they were necessary for telling the story; if something was not used or spoken about then it was not needed and could therefore be dispensed with. The stage would therefore be almost bare and empty, and any set changes would be made in full view of the audience. Props themselves were often symbolic representations rather than real objects. This challenged the audience, and also reminded them that they were watching something that was being manufactured, and not real life.

Thus, when we take into consideration the basic tenets of the epic theatre, we can draw a distinct line of demarcation between the epic theatre and Aristotelian theatre. Not only that the study of epic theatre reveals that Brecht's preoccupations as a playwright are quite modernist, to some extent existentialist and postmodernist. Every which way, he breaks with the traditional manner of representing the story, plot, character and thought. According to all major critics *Mother Courage* is one of the representative plays of Brecht. In the next chapter, we will try to examine the play in the light of Brecht's theory of epic theatre and see to what extent, he has succeeded in his venture as a playwright of this school.
WORKS CITED


