7.1.0 IN EPIC THEATRE

Physical attitudes of the character shown by the actor in Epic theatre are based on how he needs to show a particular class and social aspect of the character thereby all the time making a social comment. The gestures chosen are thus generated from the actor's understanding of the contemporary socio-political situation. This process is quite different from the one practiced in classical Indian theatre where the gestures are either descriptive or they underline the emotional state of the character. At one point Brecht observes:

"The actor must make himself observed standing between the spectator and the event. This making oneself observed, also contributes to the desired effect."

In fact the same thing happens in Indian traditional theatre. The actor allows himself to be observed between the spectator and the object he is depicting or the emotion he is showing.

While describing the theory of Alienation effect in Epic theatre, this investigator had made certain observations regarding the methods used in Epic productions in developing physical attitudes of the character. The investigator would like to continue the discussion on same points, elaborating them with necessary examples given from the three selected plays of Bertolt Brecht.
7.1.1 The actor should check the complete transformation of himself into the character. At the same time, his portrayal should have full substance of a human gesture\(^1\).

As described in the first section of the fourth chapter (Preparation of the Epic actor), the technique used in the early readings of the play, gradually develops a story-telling attitude in the actor while performing his character. At the same time, he tries to separate the character through his two-toned reading method i.e. along with the dialogues, he also speaks aloud the stage directions during the rehearsals. Again, the actor’s tendency to review the behaviour of the character, presents the character as an inseparable part of a particular socio-political environment. This forces the actor to choose from the observed facts those attitudes which are suitable not only to the situation but also to a specific social being in that situation. This offers specificity to the actor’s reactions and the reactions of the other characters towards him. In fact, this inter-related process develops the right physical attitude in the actor’s performance. The example from MOTHER COURAGE would further clarify the point. Brecht considered that Courage’s depravity reaches its lowest point in scene 4 when she dissuades young soldier from making his protest. Nevertheless when Helene Weigel, the actress, while playing this scene showed a glimmer of nobility

\[^1\]. BRECHT ON THEATRE. P. 137.
in her speech and physical attitude, Brecht approved, because, as he explained, the depravity is not so much of a person as that of her class. Thus Helene Weigel managed to convey that, while Courage as a social being was behaving as an example of the petite bourgeoisie at its most noxious, as an individual she retained certain dignity, a hint that in other social circumstances her behaviour would have been different. Truly, Epic style of acting needs, not just technical virtuosity but a high degree of social awareness too. The physical attitudes, therefore must reflect the socio-political constraints of the character. The choice of the viewpoint is a major element in the art of epic actor.

7.1.2 The actor should show the alternatives or the other possibilities in his behaviour. Whatever he does not do, must be contained and conserved in whatever he does. In the second scene of the play CHALK CIRCLE, governor's wife and her servants run away leaving Governor's child behind. Grusha also leaves the child and runs away. But she returns to find that child is safe and the Ironshirts have not been able to locate him. She quietly sits next to him, at night brings a lamp and some milk for him, waiting - thinking that probably governor's wife would return to take her baby. No one turns up. All this is narrated by the singer. At the end, Grusha makes the decision which is emphasized by the narration of the singer and corresponding physical action by Grusha.

2. Schroeder. (Article) BRECHT AS THEY KNEW HIM. P. 115.
The Singer: She rose, she leaned over, she sighed,
   She lifted the child
   She carried it off.

[She does exactly what the singer says]³

The poor, young, unmarried maid-servant accepts all the responsibility of the child, the heir-apparent of the governor, whom everybody wants to kill. The action of lifting the child and taking him along, should clearly show the other alternatives that she could have left him and run away like others or she could have handed him over to assassins to gain money or position etc. But she makes a deliberate choice reflecting in her body attitude a certain class character.

Another example can be cited from the play MOTHER. Brecht has described this scene after the performance of the play in 1933 in Berlin.

"The May Day demonstration was spoken as if the participants were before a public court. At the end, Smilgin collapses and Mother during her final words, carefully stoops and then picks up the flag that had slipped from Smilgin's hands."⁴

Vlasova: Give me the flag Smilgin. I said. Give it here, I'll Carry it. All this is going to be changed!

A certain stretching of the action and making it little longer than the usual picking up of some object,

³ Brecht. THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE P. 25.
⁴ BRECHT. ON THEATRE P. 59.
separates the gesture from the normal action of the play. The actress thus alienates the action and makes a
gest which is historicized by stretching in times. An
uneducated, old widow gets into the mainstream of
revolution transcending her personal affection towards
her son.

7.1.3

The performance should completely omit sponteneity as prevalent in Realistic theatre as if the action on the stage is happening for the first time.\(^5\)

The structure of the epic text is episodic, ‘each scene for itself.’ The structure of a Realistic play where certain kind of continuity in the action is maintained to reach the climax, helps the actor ‘to believe’ in whatever he is doing on the stage and that he is doing it for the first time. A Realistic actor, especially in the leading part, ‘carries’ the play and needs the capacity for coherent and unhurried development. Against that, the epic actor needs to show his character’s integrity despite, or rather, by means of interruptions and jumps. Developing the physical attitude, balancing various verbal patterns, the musical score if there is any, the fragmentary set, all these ‘obstacles’ take him away from Realism. Like an Indian classical dancer, the epic actor rehearses the play again and again and the sheer repetition itself shows him the way and method to find a deeper coherence in the portrayal of his character.

\(^5\) Brecht, \textit{op. cit.} P. 136
Sometimes Brecht helped the actor by adding a non-realistic prop to his character’s personality. Example can be given from THE CHALK CIRCLE. In the first scene, the masks are mentioned and shown by the Chief Singer Arkadi. Later they are used by a set of characters belonging to royalty. The governor, his wife, her lieutenant Shawa, Fat Prince, his nephew and the doctors wore masks. This prop certainly demands different style of acting. This is how Brecht shows a group apart on the stage. Very ornamental (some of them) leather masks separated the users from the other characters and also underlined the class difference through specific physical attitude that these characters had to develop because of masks. Such significant additions to the over-all picture of the character completely destroys ‘spontaneity’ or the illusion of Realism of a particular nature.

7.1.4. The use of gesture should appear as a finished and rehearsed one. Final impression should be that of ease and complete mastery over the technique. Special elegance, power and grace of the gesture bring A-effect.

The apt example of this statement can be given from the play MOTHER. The mother goes to meet her son in prison who has the addresses of certain important party workers engaged in revolution. No one else can go and meet Pawel. Mother uses her relationship with him, convinces

6. Brecht. THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE P. 8
7. BRECHT ON THEATRE P. 136.
the jail guard of her sorrowful condition and curses her son for doing such ‘dirty’ work which has brought him to this horrible place. The guard extends his sympathies towards a battered mother. "This is an example of active mother-love, where the actress exploits her knowledge of the old familiar reaction, now of out-dated kind."

This complicated scene has to be played with great clarity. The actress playing Mother needs to develop two sets of reactions of voice and body; fooling the guard by crying and cursing her son loudly and using whisper to ask him the addresses of his fellow-workers, showing discreet concern for him, yet, at the same time very carefully showing the audience as how she is fooling the guard. A unique body language is needed to play this scene. The battered-mother-image which will appeal to the guard on one hand and a discreet intelligent party worker on the other, shall have to be depicted in both tonal as well as physical attitudes of the actress.

Another poignant example can be cited from the play CHALK CIRCLE. Fat prince has killed the governor, people are running for their life, Ironshirts are massacaring the sympathizers of the governor, war has broken out, and in the middle of all this, Grusha bids farewell to her lover, Simon Sashawa. The separation of the two lovers appear like a ‘close-up’ in a film.

Grusha: Simon Sashawa, I shall wait for you
      Go calmly into the battle, soldier
      when you return from the battle.
      No boots will be before the door
The pillow besides mine will be empty
My mouth will be unkissed
When you return, when you return
you will be able to say: All is as it was.

The moment of departure is stretched by the use of song and particular physical gesture, performed in the most formal manner, like raising a hand, historicizes the action and imprints the scene on the minds of the spectators.

7.1.5. Mime is an independently developed art in Europe. Brecht does not specifically mention its necessity for the training of the actor. Nevertheless he makes restricted use of mime where he finds it helpful to 'narrate' the story. This element is conspicuously absent in his earlier plays but abundantly present in CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE and some later plays. In the third scene of CHALK CIRCLE, Grusha starts walking on a swinging bridge, holding the child in her arms, she wants to save herself from the Ironshirts. The merchant woman screams when the bridge appears, almost, to be breaking. Grusha walks on and reaches the other side. Scene involves expert miming in the absence of a real swinging bridge. Mime here destroys realism and conveys the content in a visually interesting and graceful manner. Brecht has clearly stated. 10

"It is essential that the stylization should not remove the natural elements. On the contrary, it should

heighten them."

10. BRECHT ON THEATRE. P. 205.
He believed that innovative mine can greatly help the story. Therefore the physical attitudes of an epic actor are developed from the already existing body language but for an entirely different artistic goal.

7.1.6 MODEL BOOKS OF BRECHT

The investigator here would like to mention about the ‘Model’ books of some selected productions of Berliner Ensemble, such as, MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN, PUNTILA AND HIS SERVANT MATTI, SENORA CARRAR’S RIFLES, and THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE.11

The model book of MOTHER COURAGE consists of a complete and detailed photographic record of Brecht’s production and also its various revisions which it later underwent.

The opening scene of the play where two young, strong and grown-up sons of Courage are pulling the wagon and the mother and the daughter kattrin are sitting in it; the scene where Courage is doing great business because of the war and at the back, her son is being taken away by the war; the scene where Courage’s dead son is brought for identification; the dumb girl beating the drum wanting to inform about the sudden Catholic attack; and the last scene where despite loosing her whole family to the war, Courage is alone pulling the cart to do more business — these pictures have become immortal in the history of great theatre. Through the carefully arranged groupings and classicity in the minutely worked out physical attitudes, every picture turns into a statement and the chain of these statements tell a story

11. BRECHT ON THEATRE. (Note by John Willett) P. 222.
which has a clear cut social point of view. Brecht explains at one point. "The use of models is a particular kind of art and just so much can be learnt from it. The aim must be neither to copy nor to break away from it at once.

These models demonstrate the practicality of Brecht's theatrical work and show us how an ordinary day-to-day physical action can acquire meaning and artistic technical virtuosity of the actor.

7.2.0. ACTOR'S PHYSICAL ATTITUDE IN CLASSICAL INDIAN THEATRE

In classical Sanskrit theatre, the techniques of achieving non-realism in the physical attitudes of the actor are quite different from those in Epic theatre. Here, because of a high degree of stylization, the whole body of the actor is involved. Not just one hand gesture or posture but facial expressions, foot movements, and codified hand gestures, together create a body language which takes the actor far away from the day-to-day movement. To illustrate the point, the investigator would like to give examples from three selected Sanskrit plays. The discussion would adhere to the similar points already mentioned in the first part of this chapter.

7.2.1. In Epic theatre the actor needs to check the complete transformation of himself into the character. At the same time. Brecht believed that the portrayal of the character should have full substance of a human gesture. The complete transformation of the actor into the character in Western sense is an impossibility in
Sanskrit theatre. Here, it is necessary to remind the reader about the preparatory methods prescribed for the classical actor by Bharata in Natyashastra. The element of classical dance is not limited just to the training part but it has also influenced the whole language of classical theatre. The text, settings, theatre architecture and Abhinaya, all form a single unified language of communication which has no trace of realism. Series of stylized movements while serving a narrative purpose, in essence, give physicality to subtle emotional states which every human being has in his consciousness.

In the first act of SWAPNAVASAVADATTAM, at one point the character of Tāpasi enters ‘sittings.’¹² This convention is still prevalent in Kathakali and Kootiattam plays in Kerala (where till to-day, these theatrical forms adhere to the dramatic conventions of Sanskrit theatre). The character in such a situation, enters behind a squarish curtain called Yawanikā or Rangapatti which is held little above the ground by two stage-assistants (Pāriipa rshwiks). Stretching it straight vertically, they completely hide the character standing behind. Rangapatti is decorated with appropriate design and colour to suit the sthāyibhāva (basic emotion) of the character behind the screen. The character takes the sitting position while hidden by the half-curtain. When she completes here action, the two stage-assistants leave the stage in rhythmic movements. The whole action completely negates realism.

Another example can be cited from the first act of VIKRAMORVASHIYAM where the king enters riding a chariot. Kalidas effectively introduces his Nāyaka (hero) by offering him a dramatic entry where the downward flight from heaven to earth, occur through the dance movements. Here Puraravā the king enters the stage as if riding in a chariot. Dummy chaiots were permitted on stage, but from the stage directions of this play, we infer that it is through Āngikābhinaya (body movement) that the movement of riding the chariot was depicted.

The King: (Looking at the speed of his chariot) Well, with this speed I may overtake Vainateya even if he has the start of me; what then of this offender of Lord Indra.

Here, the charioteer and the king both perform the suchi type of Abhinaya where the movement expresses the action or mood and the words follow the same. The ground too is a reality. The chariot movement is impeded by the unevenness of the ground. This is suggested by a special movement of the actors. A pair of Katakāmukha hand gesture, (according to Natyashastra) relaxed or taut, indicate slow motion or increase of speed.

7.2.2. "The actor in Epic theatre should show the alternatives or the other possibilities in his choice of action. Whatever he does not do, should be contained in what he does." This particular characteristic of Epic theatre, points towards the actor’s socio-political understanding.

of the contemporary situation. Brecht used it in showing how the so-called ordinary, uneducated working class people, belonging to the lowest strata of the society, rise to the occasion and take certain important decisions, make choices, which not only change their lives, but also of others too. Brecht believed in the belief of common man in humanity, and his grit to face the consequences of any kind.

The purpose and function of classical Indian theatre is quite different from that of Epic theatre. The performance of Sanskrit plays (Nātaka or Prakarana) running in many days, aims to offer spiritual bliss and not social awareness to the spectator. There is little room for questioning, inquiring or commenting on a social situation. Therefore this particular idea cannot be discussed in the context of Sanskrit theatre. Here the choice of the action is predetermined by the form.

7.2.3. In Epic theatre, performance completely omits spontaneity as prevalent in a Realistic theatre, as if the action on the stage is happening for the first time.

The stylization in classical Indian theatre is achieved through long and arduous training of the total body. The actions of the character, though remotely based on realistic motivations, are expressed in highly stylized manner. Strict codification of gestures, charis, body postures, minute facial expressions rule out 'Spontaneity' as understood in Realistic theatre of Western origin.
In the third act of VIKRAMORVASHIYAM, where Urvashi comes to live with Pururawā, Shloka no.-20 is a Prāśādika Dhruvā which will be sung with Ānanda (joy) and will end with a Nṛṛṭta sequence (pure dance) by the king and Urvashi emoting utmost pleasure and happiness. Such a scene would demand exquisite choreography and long preparations; thus the kind of spontaneity mentioned in Realistic theatre is not possible here, like its Epic counterpart.

Another example can be given from the play MRICHHA-KATIKAM (Act 4), where the bullock carts are shown on the stage. Two actors, one wearing a bullock mask and other standing in a particular position, wrapping themselves with cloth can represent bullock. The cart driver, in the play, refers to a pair of bullocks, so there should be four actors with necessary equipment. Such situation would need careful rehearsals with additional props. Frank theatrically, in fact, is a special feature of Classical Indian drama.

7.2.4. Brecht often insisted that the use of gestures should appear as a finished and rehearsed one. The final impression should be that of complete ease and mastery over the technique. According to him, special elegance, power and grace of the gesture bring A-effect.

The apt example to prove this statement can be given from the play MRICHHA-KATIKAM. In the third act, Sharvilak appears on the stage to steal money from rich people's house at night. He mentions that it is a dark night as the moon has disappeared. He would react to the
darkness by making necessary eye movements (Nimilita drishti) and would spread his hands forward as a blind person generally does. Sharvilak's making a hole in the outer wall of the house of Charudatta is a scen of exquisite Āngikābhinaya. Each gesture and movement is rehearsed to ultimate perfection.

Many more examples can be cited from Sanskrit plays since in Classical theatre, all situations, stories and characters can be shown only within the strict discipline of the form already developed by the Masters. It is true that a great actor sometimes improvises and even innovates, but this too can be done within a framework of the form he has chosen to express himself in. It is therefore always clear to the spectator that he is in the theatre watching a show.

7.2.5. Brecht refers to mime in a limited manner. He states ---

"The stylization should not remove the natural element but should heighten it. Elegant movements and graceful groupings can alienate the action and innovative mime can greatly help the story".

Here, the influence of Chinese classical theatre on Brecht is conspicuous.

In Sanskrit theatre, mime plays an important role. It condenses the meaning in a single gesture thus presenting the essence of the situation. Any location, any season, any place, any object can be conveyed to the audience through mime. (But there is obviously a great
deal of stylistic difference between the Western mime and the mime in ancient Indian theatre. To underline the importance of mime, there can be many examples from the three selected plays.

The first act of VIKRAMORVASHIYAM takes place in the mid-air. Apsaras—the heavenly nymphs—enact the movement of flying which would accompany suitable instrumental music; the king enacting the ascent of the chariot; Urvashi’s necklace getting entangled in a creeper, all these actions are shown with appropriate mime. In the second act, Urvashi at one point, uses the gesture called Tripatāka to communicate her status as an invisible character to the audience. Later, she writes a letter to the king on a leaf (Bhurjapatra). The leaf is mimed by Patāka Hasta, and the action of writing is shown by Hansāsyā Hasta. Urvashi gently lets the letter fly towards the king, Vidushaka notices it, lifts it and gives it to the king to read. All this action is enacted by using various hand gestures without using any kind of property.

7.2.6. In Epic theatre, everything to do with emotions has to be externalized i.e. the emotional expression has to be developed as a physical gesture. The actor needs to find a sensibly perceptive outward expression for his character’s emotions.

In externalizing deep and subtle emotions, the classical actor is a past master. The elaborate body language developed by Bharata aims at this only.
In the third act of SWAPNAVASAVADATTAM, Vasavadatta enters in a sorrowful condition. Her husband, king Udayan, is getting married to Padmāvati due to certain political considerations. The actress enacting Vāsavadattā enters behind a Rangapatti or yawanikā (half-curtain), the stage-assistants holding the curtain would come forward in a slow tempo (Vilambit lays), the Dhruvā (Song appropriate to the mood) expressing pathetic emotion would be sung. When the curtain is removed, the spectator would see Vāsavadattā sitting with two Patākā hand gestures, right one placed on the right cheek and the left one, giving support to the right elbow. She would sit bending a little forward, giving a diagonal side glance (Sāchi Drishti) to convey her forlorn condition. Her nose and cheeks would tremble (Vikunit Nāsika and Kampita Kapola respectively). Sometime she would take a deep sigh (Sochhwās Nāsikā). Thus the enactment of the gestures of facial muscles would itself convey the emotional state of the character.

The similar example can be given from the play VIKRAMORVASHIYAM where the king is sitting forlorn after the departure of Urvashi in act five. Therefore it is observed that the breaking of Realism in classical Indian theatre is achieved, in the most imaginative and sculpturesque manner, by imbibing the discipline of classical dance. But it does not provide any comment on the situation, on the contrary, enhances the emotional experience of a semi-spiritual level.
The comparative study of Epic and classical Indian theatre shows some outward similarities, most notable is the total acceptance of actor-character duality. Yet while discussing the purpose and function of the two theatre styles, the investigator notes that the formal similarities are merely external. Bharata uses an extremely well-defined language of classical dance as the basis for actor’s physical expression; on the other hand, Brecht who was deeply influenced by the elegance and condensation of meaning in the physical expression of Chinese theatre, did not or perhaps could not develop a grammar of acting. In fact Brecht’s theories were developed in reaction to a decadent Western theatre which had lost its social space. Therefore, though revolutionary in many ways, Epic theatre remains a development in a certain tradition, to be precise, in the Western tradition in which he created innovative dramatic structures which served his political purpose.