8.1.0. IN EPIC THEATRE

Right from his early career as collaborator and director of Munich theatre, Brecht aimed at the negation of Realism as well as Expressionism, in his total production style, which included the aspects of set design and lighting arrangement as well. He had dreamt of 'smokers theatre' from the beginning of his initiation in theatre. Red plush, half darkness, evening dress, the cosiness of the middle-class theatre was not for him. Instead he became interested in sport, with its hard seats and bright lights. At the beginning of 1926, Brecht wrote an article where he asked, "How to apply the principle of good sports promotion to the theatre?" A conception which to some extent underlay the production of MANN IST MANN. Here the stage was being brought closer to the boxing ring. Also, early as in 1927-28, he suggested that slogans on placard be put in the auditorium for DRUMS AT NIGHT; subtitles to be shown between the scenes in EDWARD II; and in BAAL (1926) Twardosky (the actor) introduced the scenes as a compere; there had been a half-height linen curtain, and a song, sung verse by verse, during the scene changes in

1. Willett op. cit. p.140.
the production of MANN IST MANN. The Russian playwright
Sergei Tetriakoff at one point reported —
"Giant soldiers armed to the teeth and wearing jackets,
caked with lime, blood and excrement, stalk about the
stage, holding on to wires to keep from falling off the
stilts inside their trouser legs." It reminded him of
Mayerhold’s constructivism2.

Before the production of MOTHER, Brecht sent some
suggestions to Mordecai Gorelik, the American director of
Theatre Union. Here, Brecht clearly brushed aside the
commonplace ideas about settings.

"Let’s have a platform, and on this platform, we’ll put
chairs, tables, partitions, whatever the actors need. For
hanging a curtain, give me a wooden pole or a metal bar;
for hanging a picture, a piece of wall. And I’ll want a
large projection screen.....Let it all be elegant, thin
and fine, like Japanese banners, flimsy like Japanese
kites and lanterns; let’s be aware of the natural texture
of wood and metal ....we’ll place two grand pianos visibly
at one side of the stage; the play must have the quality
of concert as well as that of a drama.....and we’ll show
the lighting units as they dim on and off, playing over
the scene".

In 1933, Brecht, wife Helene Weigel and their associates had to leave Germany due to the Nazi crack-down. They came back to rejouvinate their theatre around 1948, and the first production of MOTHER COURAGE marked a distinctly new and technically as well as artistically developed style of play production, a definite leap forward from classical Realism and Expressionism.

Brecht was very lucky to have Casper Neher as the set designer for his Epic productions. While listening to the reading of the text in early rehearsals, Neher would quietly draw his sketches of various scenes which aimed at the narrative element of the style as well as the element of comment or social gest. Brecht while discussing the pattern of rehearsal schedule in his article on ‘Phases of Production’, clearly states that the actors should be involved in the discussion of settings for individual scenes, since the permanent structures, furniture design would decide and help, to some extent, in developing the physical attitudes of the characters\(^3\). In Epic production, the actor could use his costumes and properties from very early rehearsals, so that he could make them a part and parcel of his character’s personality. Each Epic play demanded a different solution to create A-effect. The set in Epic theatre told a story, yet it strongly disallowed the means used in Realistic theatre. The well-developed

\(^3\) BRECHT ON THEATRE. P. 241.
mechanism of modern stage-design was willingly used by Brecht to serve his own purpose. Film projections, sliding platforms, vertically moving platforms, revolving stage, all were used in the most unusual manner. Thus the set stood as an independent element commenting on the situation played in the scene, yet, at the same time, actors' complete acquaintance with it, turned the whole design into an inseparable part of the production.

The investigator has made certain observations about the methods used in the creation of A-effect in Epic theatre through specific approach to set designing and lighting. These observations will be referred and proved by stating examples from the three selected plays of Bertolt Brecht.

8.1.1. Abolition of the realistic set strikes at the root of creating 'atmosphere' and 'empathy' in the minds of the spectators.

In the very first episode of the play MOTHER COURAGE, an empty stage and brightly lit cyclorama gave a feeling of depth and openness, where rolled in the wagon of Mother Courage, with her two sons and dumb daughter; mother and daughter sitting on the wagon and the two young sons pulling the cart. They rolled across the bare revolving stage. In its Berlin production, the names of the countries were suspended above the stage in large black

4. Schroeder (article) BRECHT AS THEY KNEW HIM. P. 115.
letters. Mother Courage’s voluntary and active participation in the war was made clear by showing the great distance which she had travelled to get into it. The projected text informed that the events play in the thirty years’ war. For the audience, this was not a leap into the past but a fairy-tale extension into the present.

In the production of MOTHER, a firm arrangement of iron piping slightly higher than a man, was erected at varying intervals, perpendicular to the stage. Other movable pipes carrying canvas could be slotted into it to allow quick change. There were doors in frame hanging inside this, which would be open and shut.

Brecht never hesitated to show technical apparatus on stage. He believed in the frankly theatrical device which could destroy illusion of realism on one hand, and on the other, informed the audience about the story in advance, so that the spectators were not taken in by the surprise element in the plot development but concentrated their attention on the analytical part.

In the second scene of CHALK CIRCLE, Grusha’s long journey into the mountain was depicted through the use of moving platforms. These examples clearly point towards the negation of prevalent Realism in set designing, where

5. BRECHT ON THEATRE. P. 220.
the set as well as lighting design created an illusion of realism.

8.1.2 Suggestive design of the set gave opportunity to the imagination of the audience and raised the level of aesthetic enjoyment.

In the set of MOTHER COURAGE, structures like parsonage and peasant’s cottage were introduced three-dimensionally using realistic building methods and materials, giving only as much of the structure as served the purpose of the acting. Similarly in MOTHER, whether it was the two room structure of Palagea Vlassova’s house or the house of the teacher, the rooms constructed were not of the full size of the stage i.e. the total length of the two rooms was much less than the opening width of the stage. Also the chorus members (the revolutionary workers) would take their standing position in one corner of the stage whenever the song number appeared. Thus, the whole scenic design appeared like a set within a set.

8.1.3. The title of the scene written on the banner, hung at the top removed the suspense about the action on the stage and the audience could get a chance to judge or evaluate the process of happening, in a detached manner.

In the production of MOTHER, the titles of the scenes

appeared on one side mechanically, such as 'Vlassovas of all countries', 'The Swamp Kopek' etc. The titles of the songs were also written on the flies which could be descended during the song sequence in full light e.g. 'Song of the patch and the coat', 'In praise of Vlassova', 'In praise of the Third cause' etc.

8.1.4 The division of the stage by which a room was created in one corner of the stage, while rest of the stage was used as another location, a road or valley etc. Sometime the second milieu was made up of documentary material, a picture, or a tapestry.

It was an arrangement by which a room, a yard or a place of work was built up to half the height downstage while another environment was projected or painted behind, changing with every scene or remaining throughout the play. Many photographs of the production of the play THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE, Clearly show a huge painted scene at the back and necessary set props such as the seat of Azdak, the hangman's stand, few steps etc. carefully placed down stage. The titles on the banners, the screen projection and the division of the stage, these devices helped the designer to take up attitudes towards the action taking place on the stage. These methods quoted, narrated, prepared and recalled.

8.1.5 The realistic costumes and properties in contrast to suggestive fragmentary sets, written banners or film strips alienated the character yet helped to make it credible.

While praising the costume designs of MOTHER COURAGE designed by Palm, Brecht wrote—

"The costumes and properties in Epic theatre should be worked out in great detail. The costume should show the individuality and social class."

According to Max Schroeder, the economic use of properties in Brecht's stage was neither aesthetic trifling nor its opposite, ascetic contempt for art. This economy helped to make the content of the writer, transparent and graspable for the spectators.

While paying glowing tribute to his set-designer Casper Neher, Brecht wrote—

"This master knows every craft and is careful to see that even the poorest furniture is executed in an artistic way, for, the symptoms of poverty and cheapness have to be prepared with art."

The smallest object that was given to the actor such as purse, or weapon, cutlery or instrument etc. was always realistic, unlike the architectural design where the indications sufficed. The Epic sets were significant.

statement of reality. The chair, e.g. would be selected or designed by the set-designer with particular leg height, and the height of the accompanying table would correspond to it. Thus, the person sitting and eating or bending, or keeping his elbows on the table, would take up a specific attitude, which would signify his social class.

Epic set was another story-teller, it furthered the narrative and at the same time, provided social gest to the design. Series of photographs in the MODEL BOOKS, prepared by Brecht, of his significant productions would suffice the point.

8.2.0 SET DESIGN IN CLASSICAL INDIAN THEATRE

As stated in Natyashastra chapter 23 on Āhāryābhīnaya, the set, costumes, make-up and properties are considered as a part of actor's art (Abhināya) in classical Indian theatre. Āṅgik, Vāchik and Sātwik represent the aspects of acting which deal with actor's body, voice and emotional resources; Āhārya is the aspect of acting which helps the actor to get into the garb of another person (character) with the help of external elements.

Natyashastra elaborates on four types of Nepathyā (back-stage activity) - Alamkāra (ornamentation), Angarachana (make-up, wigs etc.), Pustha (the suggestive set pieces) and Sanjeeva (mechanically operated animals four legged,
two legged and reptiles). Bharata believed that the
dramatic performance should be able to represent the whole
world; real as well as one borne out of imagination.

Before discussing the comparative study on the approach to
set design in the two theatre practices, it is necessary
at this point to describe the theatre buildings of ancient
times, as certain permanent features of these theatres play
an important role in the style of presentation. The
information about theatre architecture can be obtained
from the second chapter of Natyashastra, called
Prekshâgrihalakshana Adhyyâ. Here, Bharata informs about
nine types of the then prevalent theatre buildings and
recommends Vikrishta Madhya type as the best theatre for
classical performances. The ground plan of the same
(Fig.1) would give a fairly good idea of certain
permanently built structures on stage such as pillars,
fixed doors, two level acting area (Rangapeetha and
Rangasheersha), and the platform at the up stage centre
(Kutup) meant for the seating arrangement of singers and
musicians. The basic and permanent structure of the stage
itself, thus, helps the non-realistic nature of the
performance. Bharata does not mention about the lighting
arrangements. But the references of stree-prekshâ and
Purushprekha (the drama performances meant exclusively for
ladies and gents separately) speak of evening shows
(Pûrush prekshâ) which would continue till late in the
night. Therefore lighting the stage with oil lamps would
be an essential part of the performance. This practice continues till to-day in Kathakali and Kootiattam performances of Kerala as well as in some folk forms like Bhawai of Gujarat and Dashāwatār of Maharashtra, despite the availability of modern lighting techniques. The tradition of lighting oil lamps, either on both sides or in the centre of the stage, is still sacred in traditional Indian theatre.

The two doors in the back wall of the stage are permanent entrances for the characters. They are closed with the help of curtains, but once the play starts the curtains are taken up to facilitate the entries and exists of the performers. Four pillars on the stage demarcate the acting area and the wing space (as understood in modern times) through invisible lines (the two dotted lines in the fig.1). The wing space on Rangapeetha is called Mattavārani or the passage for the actors to take their positions before actual entrance. The actor who needs to take his entry with a dance movement, cannot do so if he enters dancing from the doors at the back. Such entry would be hampered by the upper level acting area (Rangasheersha which is a permanent feature). Therefore he needs to come downstage and stand in the wing space (Mattavārani), where he can take a proper body position to enter the stage in a prescribed chāri. The imaginary line thus transforms the actor into the character and this transformation takes place in full view of the audience.
since the mattavārani space is not masked by any set piece. A specific example from the play would explain the point better.

IN VIKRAMORVASHIYAM, the king and the charioteer, in the first act, enter in Churna Gati (as described in Natyashashtra) to suggest the movement of the chariot. The actors would enter from the doors on the stage. Standing on Mattavārani, they would start their movement and enter the acting area. So, it is clear that the two actors riding the chariot would take their position in full view of the audience, and then take their entries as characters at the appropriate time. Thus, the permanently built structures on the stage (like doors or pillars, etc.) help to develop a particular stage technique which is Nātyadharmī (stylized) in nature.

It is also essential to mention about the ritualistic properties which are used in every classical performance at the beginning of the play; such as golden pitcher and the jarjara flag. Purvarangavidhān chapter of Natyashastra describes the use of these properties in the preliminaries of the performance, conducted by the Sutradhāra and his two assistants - Pāripārshwiks - to purify the stage and the auditorium before the commencement of the performance. The researcher feels that these properties would also be permanently placed in a corner of the stage as they meant to ward off evil.
In Epic theatre, abolition of the Realistic set strikes at the root of creating 'atmosphere' or 'empathy' in the production. In Natyashastra, Bharata does mention about the creation of palaces, hills, mountains etc. according to the requirement of the performance, but, at the same time, he clarifies that such objects cannot be and should not be produced realistically. After studying the design of the theatre building, one finds the impossibility of any kind of illusionistic realism on stage, since the presence of the singers and musicians at the back would continuously remind the audience of the theatricality of the performance. Therefore, the above mention of sets in Natyashastra, though the design is abstracted from reality and to be made according to certain conventions, cannot be realistic. Clearly artificial skeleton frames of shields, banner staffs, palaces, peaks of mountains, ariel cars were to be made with pieces of bamboo and then treated according to the social status and the psychological state of the character, by covering them with cloth of requisite colour and texture\(^\text{11}\). e.g. the bullock cart in the play MRICHHAKATIKAM, can be just a frame of the cart painted and decorated according to the status of the character (Chārudatta or Sansthānaka) who owns it.

Properties in the Classical Indian theatre are of manifold nature. They are conventional, realistic, artificial, can be shown through gestures or can just be verbally

\(^{11}\) : Ghosh NATYA SHASTRA Vol. I P. 439.
Yawanikā or Rangapatti is a conventional property used in every Sanskrit play to emphasize the entry of the major character. The design of this squarish piece of cloth which hides the character standing behind it, is suitably decorated according to the nature of the character, held vertically by the two stage-assistants (Pāripārshwik). On the beat of the drum, they enter dancing, holding the cloth in front of the character, and at the appropriate moment, leave the stage with their property, thus dramatically revealing the character.

In the play SWAPNAVĀSAVADATTAM, the old mother of Padmāvati, residing in the Ashrama, enters behind the curtain, takes her sitting position on the stage, the stage-assistants leave the stage and the play gradually progresses. In this manner, the convention of Rangapatti stops the flow of the play to REVEAL the character in a premeditated state.

Further, there are some realistic properties used, such as, water jug or basket of flowers or garlands, etc. In the first act of the above mentioned play, Brahmachārī is offered water to wash his hands and feet. The jug, in this case would be realistic, but the real water would be absent, forcing the actor to use mime.
Bharata writes about the making of weapons and ornaments to be used as stage properties. Weapons should be made of real sizes, he says, but not of real material and weight. He instructs that a weapon especially, should be made of lighter material so that while using it, the actor does not feel tired or fatigued. The ornaments were to be made of thin sheets of mica, dyed in red, blue or green to depict precious stones.

Wigs of artificial hair (pratishira) were also used to create the get-up of different characters. The king would have short hair; the sages, the knotted and long hair, and the Vidushaka would have three patches of hair (kākapādamastaka) on his head.

Yet, certain other properties are to be shown through gestures. E.g. in the second act of SWAPNAVASAVADATTAM, Padmāvatī and Vāsavadattā enter playing with a ball. Naturally the ball would be invisible and artistically shown through Padmakosha gesture established with proper physical attitude. In VIKRAMORVASHIYAM the letter written by Urvashi on the ‘leaf’ is shown through the Patāka gesture and ‘writing’, through Hansāsya gesture. The dice playing by Dyutādhyaśa and Dyutakar in MRICHHAKATIKAM attracts the attention of the audience because the properties as well as the action would be mimed in detail through highly stylized gestures and postures.

Lastly, through verbal mention, certain properties and some
times, locations are created in the imagination of the spectator. The fourth act of MRICHHAKATIKAM is an ideal example to prove this point. Here, Maitreya has come to offer precious Ratnāvali (ornament) to Vasantasena in return of the jewellery she had kept in the house of chārudatta, and which is stolen by Sharvilak. Here, Maitreya is taken through various rooms of the large palacial house of Vasantasena. He takes one round, suggesting the change of location (room) and describes the large enclosure, and takes another round, to describe another. And the audience has no problem in travelling through the house with him.

The costumes in Sanskrit plays are not stylized (like the ones in Japanese Noh or Kabuki performances). On the contrary, they are very much realistic. The costume of a character not only informs about his/her social status, but also comments on his/her regional identity as well as the psychological state. In SWAPNAVASAVADATTAM, Vāsavadattā - the queen and wife of King Udayan - is in disguise as an ordinary woman of Avanti state, whose husband is away. Therefore, the actress performing this role, would be wearing a white costume with few ornaments (the one prescribed for Proshitabhartrikā Nāyikā) in a style which would be different from that of Padmāvati—the princess of Magadha and her female attendants. Similarly, overdecked and richly dressed Vasantasena stands in contrast to the barely clad Chārudatta. Sensitive
playwrights always make use of the costumes of their characters to provide meaningful comment on the performance.

CONCLUSION

Though the suggestive and essentially non-realistic design in the set pieces, is a common element in two theatre practices, yet, entirely different socio-historical conditions place the two theatre styles poles apart.

In Sanskrit theatre, the costumes of the characters are made of requisite material to express their emotional as well as social status. In epic theatre too, costumes are meticulously selected and made to the last detail, not to depict the emotional state but primarily to underline and inform about the social class.

The props in epic theatre are, again, real but carefully selected and artistically made. Also they are designed to emphasize the physical attitudes of the character. In classical theatre, props are either ritualistic, conventional and even realistic (made artificially) or they are shown through gestures or sometimes just verbally mentioned. Basically, the classical theatre uses the props to tell the story and therefore they are frankly theatrical.
Also, epic theatre was performed in relatively bigger spaces where 700 to 1000 people could be accommodated. The dimensions of the classical theatre (Vikrishta Madhya) clearly states that it was meant for selected elite audience.

Brecht had to use innovative methods to turn the existing proscenium stage into a non-realistic space, keeping firmly in view the social purpose of his epic theatre. Classical theatre had in-built characteristics which helped to maintain the aesthetic distance on one hand and on the other, reminded the audience of its non-realistic, frank and openly theatrical character.