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THE VILLAGE PLAY

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COMMUNITY PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION
GOVT. OF INDIA

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Drawings by Dinkar Kowshik

Foreword

When the history of the revival of Drama in India is written the name of Norah Richards will occupy in it a place of honour. It was nearly 40 years ago that she began the heroic task of lifting college drama from the depths of false sentiment and stark artificiality into which it had sunk. It was an uphill task since both actors and audiences were so enamoured of what the former were giving and the latter getting that they were mockingly opposed to any change. Nevertheless, with determination marked by sweet persuasion and led by the noble vision of resurgent Drama in India, she carried on.

Perceiving that dramatic art cannot advance in any country unless there are indigenous playwrights and plays she set herself to encourage a small group of students at the Dyal Singh College, Lahore, where her husband, the late P. E. Richards was a professor, to write plays in Punjabi on life around them.

It is interesting to note that among the young group were S. S. Bhatnagar, who later became an F.R.S. and the first Director of National Research; and Ishwar Chandra Nanda, who rose to be a noted Punjabi playwright.

The success which she was achieving suffered a set-back when her husband joined the Islamia College Lahore, where dramatic activities were not then countenanced. Mrs. Richards then formed an Inter-Collegiate Saraswati Stage Society that flourished for two years but during which period original plays were not being written. In 1918 Mrs. Richards founded *The Saraswati Annual*. At the untimely death of her husband in 1920, she left India for a period of 4 years, but before her departure the University of the Punjab took on the Saraswati Stage Society and the publication of *The Saraswati Annual* under the editorship of the late Dr. A. C. Woolner. Only one number of the Annual appeared, and by the time Mrs. Richards returned to India in 1924, the Stage Society too, had ceased functioning.

Now begins a new period in her life—a period which marks a complete reorientation of her work, abjuring town-life. A friend, the late Mrs. E. W. Parker, having gifted her a small estate now called 'Woodlands', she moved from Banuri to Andretta, a few miles off. Here her genius found greater scope and she showed by practical example how a cultivated person can live happily and comfortably even in primitive surroundings. This I consider to be Mrs. Richards' great gift for the betterment of Indian country life and I would strongly advise persons interested in such life to pay her a visit. All this time, however, her love of drama was still active and she made frequent visits, at great personal cost and discomfort, to Lahore and New Delhi to draw the attention of the powers-that-be to the tremendous contribution that Drama could make towards rural reconstruction. The Government of Punjab through its beneficent Departments was persuaded to make considerable use of her great dramatic talent and batches of *dehat sudhar* workers were trained at Andretta, in writing plays to stimulate new life in the village.

Her writings in the press on Drama and the need of its revival would fill a fair-sized volume. She has also written a number of short plays and it is gratifying to note that her book of *Historical Playlets* has been prescribed by the University of the Punjab for the Matriculation examination.

Since Partition the Punjab State Government has made use of her deep knowledge of Drama and the countryside by asking her to train Social Education Organisers in the Community Projects in the writing of plays for rural audiences.

The Central Ministry of Education too, last year, in its new Youth Welfare Section, acknowledged the value of dramatic training by her, by putting a batch of members of staff and students from various Universities under her directorship, to be trained in dramatics.

It is a great satisfaction to all lovers of Drama and particularly of Rural Drama that the energetic Community Projects Administrator has asked her to write a Manual on *The Village Play*. This is a tribute both to the value of Drama as a purveyor of ideas in striking form, and to Mrs. Richards.

The Manual, is full of sane guidance and is instinct with her experience of nearly half a century. Most people, as age advances, get rather set in hard moulds, but it is a mark of the 'aliveness' of Mrs. Richards that even at the age of 78, she has her vision clear and is awake to new movements around her.

This Manual is her latest work and I deem it a real privilege to be asked to write a foreword for it.

May the cause of Indian Drama and of Rural Drama in particular, ever advance.

G. D. Sondhi

Honorary Adviser on
Youth Welfare,
Government of India
Ministry of Education.

Subathu,
8th March 1955

INTRODUCTION

VILLAGE PLAYERS



BEFORE embarking upon this manual written for S.E.O's in the Community Projects, who have dramatic talent to be dedicated to the cause of the Village, it would be well to consider for a moment the meaning of a word that should be used more sparingly than it is. That word is *drama*.

When spelt into a capital D this word has a broad and all-inclusive significance. Drama, as a generic term, stands for the outcome of creative work that has covered a long enough period to have enabled many plays to come into existence that reveal either the genius of a people or the spirit of an epoch; such for instance as Greek Drama, Elizabethan Drama, Indian Drama.

When we speak of *a* drama with a small *d*, we mean a play, but it is better to avoid the use of *drama* in this context as being a word too big for a small thing. In our day certain words have become vulgarized by being hackneyed and one of them is drama, another is *art*.

What is Art? This is a question to which it is not possible to give a ready and concise reply. Art is as elusive as Life, Love and Truth. We may legitimately speak of the art of doing things, which simply means perfection in execution, as for instance in the art of swimming.

Since so many words have come to be meaningless through vain and vulgar repetition, let us chasten our vocabulary and call a spade a spade and a play a play.

The Village Play with which we are particularly concerned is a play that is within the range of appreciation by villagers. That range is not intellectual—it is imaginative, poetic, human, humorous. Intelligence and feeling, being more dynamic than intellectualism and theory, will go further than these in helping to enhance life in the village and in helping to acquire the art of living, which should be the fundamental aim of Social Education.

We should cease to use the banal and bald term of 'drama party' to designate the bands of S.E. O's who are to specialize in the dramatic line, for specialize they must. The art of drama is too vital and significant to be left to chance and to haphazard performance, lacking in artistry.

Moreover the term 'drama party' has now an association that links it with a *tamasha*, a show—with mere entertainment. The village needs more than this. True, the village clamours for recreation of a visual order and wherever there is a *tamasha* hundreds will flock to it. This vital and great incentive towards the development of Village Drama is something to which 'drama parties' do not appear to have responded to. How could they without inspiration and encourage-

ment? There is talent among them but it is undeveloped and untrained. They are the raw material of Rural Drama, splendid material as I have good reason to know, having recently had fourteen S.E.O.'s from "drama parties" to train in dramatic technique. Our time together was all too short, but in that short time a big stride was taken towards creating a standard for 'drama parties', to work up to. A better designation for these parties would be *Village Players*.

Where the Village Play is concerned new ground is to be broken and a fresh start made on artistic lines, based on good technique. We should realise that disciplined dramatic activity in the village is basic to the development of Rural Drama as a legitimate branch of Drama in India, as also is disciplined dramatic activity in colleges basic to the development of University Drama, another legitimate branch of Drama in India. It is not sufficiently realised that there is close relationship between the University and the Village and that the better the college play, the better will be the village play for it is those who participate in the one who will be directors in the other.

A new profession is on the point of appearing, which could absorb hundreds of young men and women fresh from their colleges—the profession of Dramatic Director for the Village Play. Before this new profession appears, the dramatic element in colleges will have to be systematically developed and trained. Centres there should be for such training, where dramatic enthusiasts could be put under artistic discipline of technique for periods of not less than one month.

FOR The Villager

In Village Drama would be two main branches of activity the one *for* the villager and the other *by* them. Disciplined dramatic art *by* the Village Players would be *for* the villagers, for those who would be audience. Be it said and remembered that the audience is an integral part of Drama and a part that needs development and training, training that can only be received implicitly by seeing plays worth seeing. In the Elizabethan period it was great plays that created a great audience, without which audience there would have been no Elizabethan stage at all. In those days there was no 'artistic' putting on of plays since production as known to-day, did not exist. There was no scenery and no special lighting. Verily, the play was the thing. This also should be the case with Village Drama—the play should be the thing, irrespective of 'production'. Artistically it must be inoffensive, but there should be no strain whatever for "artiness"—the curse of the modern stage, as also of modern "art". Beauty and Decoration are not the same thing—the one is intrinsic, the other laid on. Sophisticated dramatic art in the village should mirror rural existence in all its aspects. The villager would be thrilled and stimulated to see himself as he is seen. This would create interest in life, and also arouse self-criticism that would engender the desire for improved conditions and a fuller life.

BY The Villager

Folk Dance, Folk Song, Folk Pageant

These inimitable forms of play (in its literal meaning) should be fostered, but without creating self-consciousness. It is their sponta-

neity and their primitive emotional reaction to the basic facts of existence that constitute their intrinsic beauty. It is not likely that much will be added to folk art these days, for as education spreads primitiveness will disappear, and as the villager becomes more sophisticated, so will his art. The transition stage is bound to be ungainly—hobbledehoy—neither one thing nor the other, and imitative rather than original. As I can see it, the safest way is to do no forcing—to let things take their course, but with understanding, infinite tact and aesthetic sensibility. It would be quite useless and artistically futile to attempt to resuscitate folk art from which the living spirit had fled. Folk art can of course be re-expressed in disciplined art form by which it would both lose and gain, eventually to become transfigured in the hands of a supreme artist as was Russian Folk Dance through Anna Pavlova.

Seasonal folk festivals in the village are still a reality. There are Lohri, Basant Panchmi, Holi and Dussehra—all giving a vent for folk art. The only thing that outsiders, who are artists, can do in participation is to capture glimpses of surviving festival pageants with pen and brush thus preserving them, at least on paper, for generations to come who will have lost the opportunity of seeing them in the round. Artists and writers pinned to the Town beat up inferior subjects for pen and brush, whereas if they identified themselves with rural existence grand subjects would beset them that would both paint and write themselves with ease, had the painters and the writers but the seeing eye.

Genuine folk art should never be shown on the stage but only interpretations of it by disciplined art. These interpretations, might stimulate the villager to express himself once more in expression of folk art of an evolved type.

The Music Play

The coming together in the village of the sophisticated players and unsophisticated playfulness in the folk forms of song, dance and pageant, bids fair to bring into being the Music Play—the new dramatic form for which India is ready and waiting. A beginning should be made right away in the village on the simplest lines to combine music and drama as an integral whole. This form the villager would love and eagerly respond to. A spring festival play perhaps, relevant to the stirring of life in Nature and in Man, given at a *mela* in spring time. There would be no need to labour the subject, it is *there*, crying for dramatic and musical treatment in which all the arts would combine to express the joyfulness of Spring and *mela*-makers would return to their village homes invigorated as only art can invigorate, by enhancement of what is. Such a Music Play, simple and sincere, would be a stepping-stone to fuller achievement on the Indian Stage. Great things have ever small beginnings and a first step must be taken before one can move towards anything.

Given training in dramatic art, S.E.O's who have talent could galvanize the great work towards the Rise of the Village, that it may take its proper place in the creation of a New India on rural and cultural lines.

POSTSCRIPT

“At last the New arriving—assuming, taking possession. The New Society at last—proportionate to Nature.”

Walt Whitman

Since writing the foregoing Introduction, some months ago, I have had another training course in Drama for S.E.O.s—the same men that I had before, and I am constrained to write something about it. The course came to an end five days ago and it may be I am too near as yet to write coherently or in perspective about it. It was a great experience for us all, and the culmination at the Demonstration Performance—thrilling.

The programme was as follows:—

Bhumi Mata —Prologue, in Hindi.

Puttar Ghar Aya — a play of three acts, in Punjabi.

Rural Anthem — in Hindustani.

The rains are on, so we did little open-air work. This enabled us to concentrate, without which we could not have succeeded in getting the *Puttar* play written, rehearsed and shown. The subject of the play is a visit to his village home of a college student who has just sat for his B.A., his boredom and escape and then his return—not to the Old village but to create the New.

The training course that has just ended was an extension, as it were, of the all-too-short course held last October. That course was little more than an introduction to artistry on the stage and an eye-opener to the quality of the dramatic fare of the ‘drama parties’ to which the S.E.O.s had become accustomed and which they accepted without demur. Further knowledge and experience of these S.E.O.s deepened my appreciation of their worth as good raw material for Rural Drama and I was more than ever convinced that the influx into the Village of educated persons, mostly hailing from the Town was an exceedingly good thing all round—good for the villager but good also for themselves. They were in direct contact with the Village with which they had to identify themselves if their mission was to be fruitful. In their attempt to urbanize, or civilize, the villager, they themselves were becoming ‘civilized’, rurally—a mutual modification, by exchange, that might well lead to the pastoralization of an over-urbanized India, and thereby to the creation of true values in line with Nature—with Mother Earth.

I had intended developing the Music Play at our recent course taking as subject *Basant*. This was not to be ; since, through force of circumstances, we had to do so much on the *Puttar* play that there was no possibility of tackling the Music Play. We made, however, a tottering step towards it by having a mysterious character in the play who was *maun* where the spoken word was concerned but he was willing to sing. After being a silent witness of all that went on in the home he sang to express the climax of each act while the stage

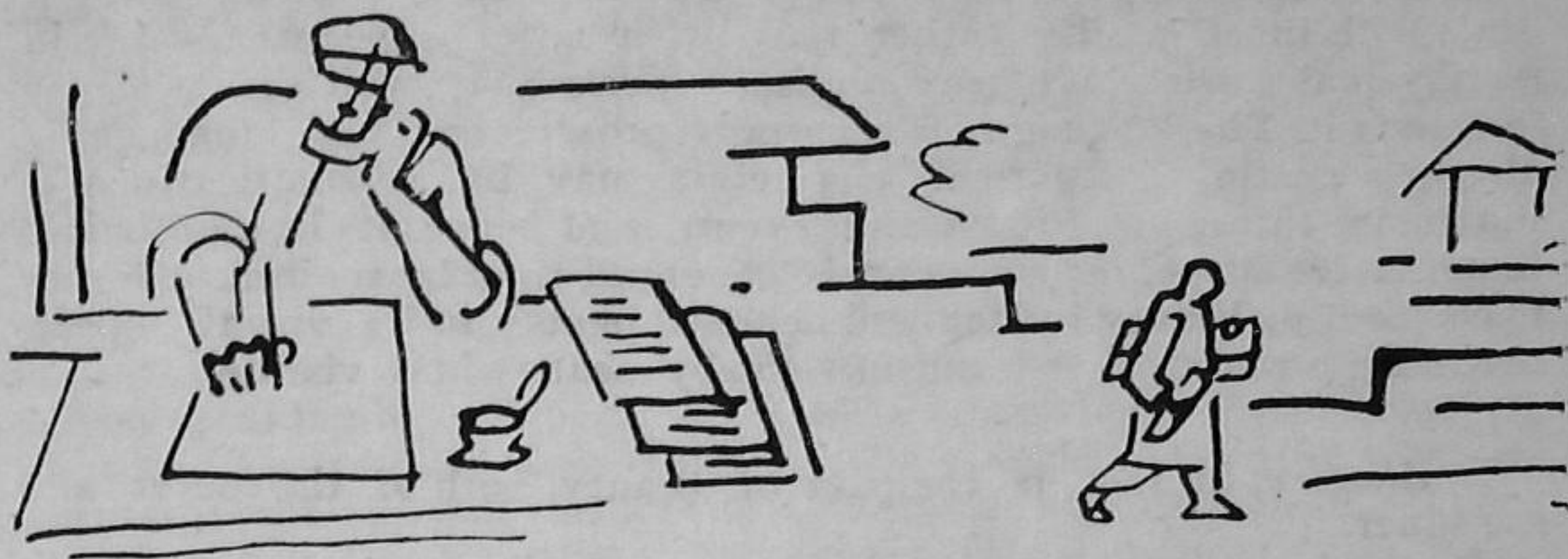
picture was held as a tableau for a few seconds before the curtain fell; and so the last 'word' of the act was vocal music, while the final song at the close of the play was its 'epilogue'.

In our play of *Puttar Ghar Aya*, the underlying significance is, as it were, a Return to Nature of the town-born and the town-bred—a move towards the New Society of Whitman's prophecy—"proportionate to Nature." This play that mirrors what happens today in so many village homes, the boredom in the country of the townsman, is also a vehicle for conveying the idea of a return to a more natural mode of existence for the civilizee—civilization on a higher spiral, with truer values than those of the Town. Towards this return, S.E.O.s are pawns on the chess-board of India.

N. R.

20th July, 1955

PLAYWRITING



REALISM, Allegory and Satire are three forms of play eminently suited for the village.



Realism on the stage is a representation of life as it presents itself to us in its physical aspect in the world around. It calls for naturalism in acting and a natural setting. It reflects life as it is in the day that is passing and becomes in time a *period* play; that is, a play of the past, a play that is considerably out-of-date—a faithful record of a time that is no more.

Times change but change slowly and a realistic play may be topical for about twenty-five years but after fifty years it is practically a *period* play. Until then it is called a *revival*.

To dramatize what is actual makes it more real since it comes to us through the transfiguring medium of art. Some thing that happens in real life does not make as deep an impression on us as it does when we see that same thing enacted upon the stage. There are many reasons for this but one is that the inessential is eliminated and we retain only those elements that send the play forward. The



fundamental difference, apart from the mechanistic, between a photograph and a painting is that a photographic lens leaves nothing out but the natural lens of the artist, his eyes, selects. So with realism on the stage. Selection and elimination are fundamental to the essential; and only that which is essential is permitted in a well constructed play.

Realism is compact of life as we know it in day to day existence.

Allegory is unrealistic in its physical aspect. Characters may appear on the stage that have no counterpart in life as we know it. And yet they may be more compelling than reflection of the actual by drawing upon our imagination and revealing depths that realism

cannot reach. Allegory, in fact, is a higher form of realism since it deals with inner reality rather than with outer appearance—life in its physical aspect. Whereas realism *reflects* that which is, allegory *interprets* it. The language of realism is prosaic but the language of allegory poetic. Allegorical characters may be personifications of inanimate things or of ideas and events and since it has unlimited imaginative scope, far more can be conveyed than by realism. Allegory is compact of beauty in idea and hence of beauty in its visual aspect, revealing a reality that is out of sight by means of the visible.

Allegory, in fact, is compact of beauty, both of the outer and the inner.

Satire is an extreme form of ridicule and on the stage an incomparable weapon against social and political ills and as a corrective of human weakness and folly. Ridicule has a deadly effect when it strikes the target, but however severe its blow, the saving grace of humour tempers the hurt. The mood of a play is caught by the audience and in the mood of satiric humour laughter is provoked that gives a shattering return to the sledge-hammer blows against life-obstructing habits, persons and events. It is out to create life by the destructive power of satiric laughter. No limit is imposed upon satire—it is pure extravaganzas. It goes beyond realism, beyond allegory, partaking of the nature of both, to something that is not only improbable but impossible. It is not a reflection of life in either its visible or invisible aspects. It cuts the painter with both and floats free on a high sea of laughter-provoking waters, allowing them to carry it wheresoever they will. The satirist is completely abandoned to the purposive power of shattering laughter.



Satire is compact of ridicule, throwing a merciless searchlight upon that which obstructs life.

Construction—Dramatic construction merely means the building up of a play with the least possible waste of material. As in the building of a house, it must be built with fore-thought—designed, carefully, worked out—well considered and proved, before a single brick can be handled. Then it must be decided not how many, but how few characters are needed. When the rough scheme is complete we must go over it again and endeavour to simplify it, retaining only what is absolutely essential for the particular dramatic effect we are striving for. Drama, it must be remembered, is *intense action*, as a poem is *intense thought*.

Characterization—Having decided how few characters we can do with, we must decide what type of characters would be most useful and we then proceed fully to characterize them. This can only be done by character-study from life.

Dialogue—Dramatic dialogue must be direct and to the point absolutely characteristic of the person speaking, and the speeches should be as short as possible. The character speaking must convey his own feelings and not those of others, by quoting. Under the stress of emotion he would speak haltingly, conveying his feelings in a direct manner: to describe his feelings in a fine flowing speech would be most unconvincing.

Dramatic dialogue is not natural conversation though it is based upon it. It must be carefully constructed and arranged with consummate skill to appear natural. In addition to being characteristic of the person speaking it must be interesting and arresting. Conversationally there can never be an excuse for very long speeches. Occasionally, the necessity may occur for oratory, narrative or description. These speeches should be interrupted and broken into occasionally, thereby stimulating the attention of the audience. In conversation long speeches are undramatic and tedious and may spoil an otherwise good scene.

Dramatic Element—Dramatic element consists of conflict and clash, either of ideas, persons or groups of persons. Suspense and surprise follow in their wake. Drama must stir the feelings or stimulate thought. The best plays do both. We may be intellectually conscious of a certain truth but until that truth has become part of our whole being, until we have been stirred and moved by it—until we have *felt* it there is little hope of its being changed from thought to action, from idea to reality. Drama sensitizes feeling and that is its great value and also, its great danger.

The One Act Play—This form of play preserves the unities of place and time; that is, there can be but one scene in which time is measured from the rise of the curtain to its fall. There can be no gradual dramatic development in a one-act play, the duration of which should not exceed forty-five minutes nor should it be less than half an hour. This kind of play can but dramatize an incident. It is a difficult form of composition as it works within restricted limits, but therefore, an excellent dramatic exercise for beginners in playwriting.

The Three Act Play—In such a play there are three definite stages of progression. In Act I, atmosphere of the play should be created and the development foreshadowed. In fact, Act I is preparation—leading up to the dramatic climax.

Act II is concerned with the development of the theme and the clash, ending with suspended expectation, leaving the audience wondering what will happen next.

Act III works up to the climax and conclusion.

In plays dealing with social problems, if the close of the play is inconclusive it is called a problem play—the problem to be tackled by the audience itself.

Atmosphere, in a village home for instance, can be created by indicating the environment of the scene of action by showing typical furniture and familiar utensils of use—such as, pihris, charpais, spinning wheel, pitchers, baskets, cooking vessels and so on. Also familiar sounds would create atmosphere, sounds that can be heard from without and catches of song within. Casual visitors could drop in for trivial purposes, incidentally giving opportunity for typical

village chat and gossip. Typical lighting would give the last touch to the creation of atmosphere.

Example of Development in a Three Act Play—

Act I A college student expected at his Village home for the summer vacation. Preparation in the home. Arrival.

Act II One week has elapsed. Clash of ways and ideas between son and family. He is bored. Receives wire from college friend—both have passed their B.A., will he accompany him in a march to Kashmir? Opposition from Father but Mother gives him some jewellery to be sold to defray his expenses for a trip to Kashmir.

Act III Next morning. The son has disappeared. Father remorseful—everyone sad and dull, except Mother who is secretly pleased, thinking he has gone to Kashmir. Eventually he turns up dressed in country clothes—has been working with his brothers in the fields since day-break. His mother's sacrifice had led him to forego his wish to go to Kashmir. Reconciliation between him and his father who practically orders him to go to Kashmir as a wind-up to his B.A. course. He had not made his son a B.A. to turn him into a cooly.

The Playlet—This is, as it were, a three act play in small—a short play in more than one scene; a dramatic composition that could be further developed. Though it is short it gives more latitude, in composition, than the one-act play. Requiring a comparatively short period of concentrated attention, it is well suited to school and village audiences. From the writer's point of view it is the skeleton of a long play that he is to cover with flesh and clothe—in other words to develop and polish. The playlet should come next to the one act play as a dramatic exercise before tackling the three act.

The Chronological Play is a long play in short scenes that covers a stretch of time that may be considerable—it may even cover the span of a life. When this is done it becomes dramatic biography. It may also cover a series of actual modern events which would make of it dramatic documentary. The chronological play lacks in artistic development, though natural development there is bound to be, in the successive events of a life or in the successive events of the life of a country. The Chronological Play, being a record of events that have taken place, is not fiction—a theme that has been invented and worked up. It is visual history, either in the life of a person, or of a period in the life of a country. Such a play would have an educative effect on an illiterate audience and a cultural effect upon an educated one—a valuable medium of enlightenment.

The Historical Play—We think of History as a record of the reigns of kings and queens, of politics and wars, which of course it is, but in the life of a country there is much else worth recording.

In spite of appearances, we are emerging from the power-political period of civilization into the civilization period that is culture-political. The word *power* links itself up with ruling, with governing—hence *Government*. Whereas the word *culture* links itself up with self-rule and self-cultivation—hence *Education*. In a cultural

civilization "Government would be a department of Education and not Education a department of Government" (L.P. Jacks). In other words, teaching would take precedence over ruling. It is the avowed aim of the Community Projects so to develop man that he may develop himself. This is indicative of progression on the Cultural Way.

India in the name of Community is turning round upon herself, which is the fundamental meaning of the word *revolution*—re-volution (again revolving). We should realize that a new testament is being added to the old, in history, in which the word *administration* is displacing the word *government*. This is a straw that shows the way the wind blows—a cosmic wind; against which humans are powerless, but they can harness it for cultural power as water can be harnessed for electric power. "Fate leads the willing but drags the unwilling." There is no resisting the Time Spirit.

The rural urge of the day will find vital expression, for rural India is to become aware of itself and the part it is playing in creating a new India—an India pastoralized, in which the gulf and the discrepancy between Town and Village will be lessened and eventually bridged. This rural awareness could be brought about by the "historification of the unobserved commonplace" in what—according to Bertold Brecht, a modern German playwright—is called *Epic Theatre*. For this "historification" of obscure but significant happenings in the villages under development today, the supreme medium of expression would be those of dramatized song and dance, stimulating the spirit and the feeling that must become widespread to animate and galvanize the people before the New Rural Order can appear. In this, the Town must descend before the Village can rise. Community in India is a meaningless word unless the Town is drawn into its orbit. There is evidence of this happening by the influx of the town-bred to take a hand with the village-bred in creating the spirit of Community. They are called Social Education Organizers—S.E.O., for short.

PLAYMAKING



WHEN the play is written it still has to become visible—by being *made*. The first step in this direction is to rehearse it. To begin with, actors should be chosen who are physically fitted for a certain part and then tested in acting. A good deal of weeding out will have to be done in which the capacity to act will overcome appearance. The play should be read out to the actors before they are asked to give a reading themselves, in character. The last thing they are expected to do is to learn their parts by heart. First, they are to study them and become familiar with the characters they are to impersonate; and they must trust to right feeling before true enunciation will find itself. Enunciation consists in cadence, emphasis, speed, intensity and so on. Emotion should not be expressed until the actor is free to abandon himself to his feeling; that is when his hands are free and he has mastered enunciation. His position on the stage must also be mastered because his movements affect the whole. His entrances and exits are decided for him. No actor, when on the stage, can roam about as he pleases nor do as he likes except in the supreme moments of abandonment to his part. All through he is under stern stage discipline, for however important or unimportant his part, he is but a fraction to the whole to which his stage behaviour is subject. It will be seen that to participate in the performance of a play is an exercise in social education. The art of Drama combines, as does no other, the harmonious blend of Individual and Team—of the *one* and the *many* - in other words, *Community*.



Costuming

In *Realism* costuming presents no difficulty, as costumes are a replica of what are worn in the present. The stage picture, however,

must always be considered and the colour scheme; harmonious, or thrilling in its contrast or even clash. In all art beauty is the moving factor, even if ugliness is portrayed.

In *Allegory*, costume is to be imaginatively conceived, for allegory is not bald realism and the stage picture should always be particularly beautiful in colour, composition and lighting.

In *Satire*, costuming may be fantastic—an exaggeration of *what is*. Satire, implies an over-statement and an over-doing by caricature. Anything that is ridiculous in life should be made still more ridiculous in satire.

Stage Lighting

The very first principal of stage lighting is that no single ray should escape to the audience which must be in complete darkness. All light must concentrate on the stage, whether it be brilliant or dim.

Standard Stage lights must have a semi-circular metal screen to focus light on the stage. If a brilliant light is used—Kitson or Petromax—one is sufficient and being placed at one side would cast shadows that would greatly enhance the beauty of the stage scene, throwing up colour in costume and providing a background echo of the moving figures of actors. In stage lighting, equal distribution of light from all quarters should be avoided; to have two brilliant lights on either side facing one another, shadows are obliterated and therefore faces and figures become flat in appearance, merely two-dimensional.



The Music Play

Both Song and Dance are detached forms of art that lend themselves easily to folk expression. Of the two, Dance is the more spontaneous, rhythmic movement requiring no preparation in moments of great happiness and jubilation but rhythmic sound that

is Song does not so readily spring upon the lips. These two forms of art expression come naturally to country folk and enhance their life. Seasonal festivals inspire them and stimulate expression as also do cultivation of the soil and its harvest. The peasantry have created their own primitive song and dance closely related to their own way of life, and we should now integrate these with acting and create the music play, as an evolved form of folk song and dance that would result in Folk Drama. It will not be easy so to weave them into the texture of a play with congruity. The word *weave* gives us the clue as to how this could be done. The threads of song and dance are to pass in and out unobtrusively alongside of one another forming the texture, and the pattern woven into it would be the dramatic design. Subjects must be found that lend themselves to this form of play. Why not Harvest? or why not the cultivators' seasons?—an Earth play.

The Music Play is a new art form that is slowly and somewhat haltingly appearing in the Theatre world. In the Village it could appear swiftly and with little effort and what the Village does today, the Town might do tomorrow. Those who are sophisticated in the arts might work upon the primitive village Earth play, interpreting it with artistry that would find instant responsive appreciation by the Town and thereby the pastoral idea might be furthered in the minds of the people. Their hearts are ready, for there is Earth-hunger abroad though it may not be fully conscious.

Curtains

In an open air theatre no curtains should be allowed except those that form background screens and the colour of these should be mellow earth colours to blend with natural surroundings. To put up a "proscenium arch" with its tawdry embellishments is preposterous—a violation of every tenet of open air production. At plays without a front curtain, as all open air plays would be, the dramatist must get his characters on and off with artistry. He must contrive an effective *beginning*, and an *ending* with finality, with-out the help of a curtain. Simplification is the very essence of open air performance and when daylight shows are given the sun's rays must be harnessed for stage lighting.

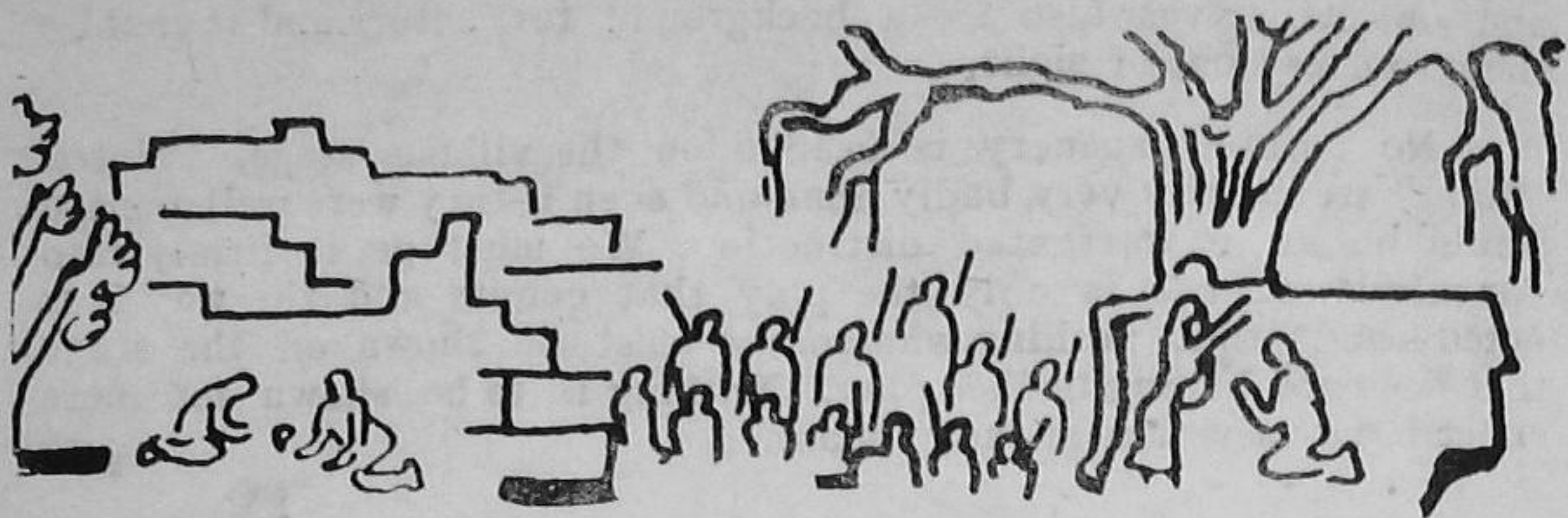


The Stage Scene—In [a Village Open-Air Theatre] the stage scene does not call for much attention. Background curtains are of course essential, preferably of hessian, as a screen. Nothing whatever is

to vie with the actors on the stage in the way of outside objects or movement. This screen that hides all back stage movements and objects serves also as a background for actors and it enables them to dress out of sight.

No painted scenery is needed on the village stage. Painted "flats" are usually very badly done and even if they were well painted would be an unwarranted distraction. We must get it firmly into our minds that it is only the play that counts and the way it is acted and that nothing whatsoever must be shown on the stage that does not belong to the play. Nothing is to be shown for mere effect in an ornamental showy manner.

THEATRE



THE open air stage is not an open air theatre even though plays may be performed on it. A theatre consists of a raised auditorium for the audience and a raised platform, a stage for the actors. When this ground structure lacks walls and a roof it is an open air theatre. The difference between a *hall* and a *theatre* is that in the hall the seating accommodation is on the flat and in the theatre it is raised higher and higher as it recedes from the stage. In a theatre every person in the audience must be able to *see* what is going on on the stage, whereas in a hall it is only necessary that the seated audience should *hear* what is going on the platform—either a lecture or music. There cannot be an open air hall, as a hall is always enclosed by walls and covered with a roof. A closed in theatre is indispensable to Theatre proper but the open air theatre is indispensable to the village.

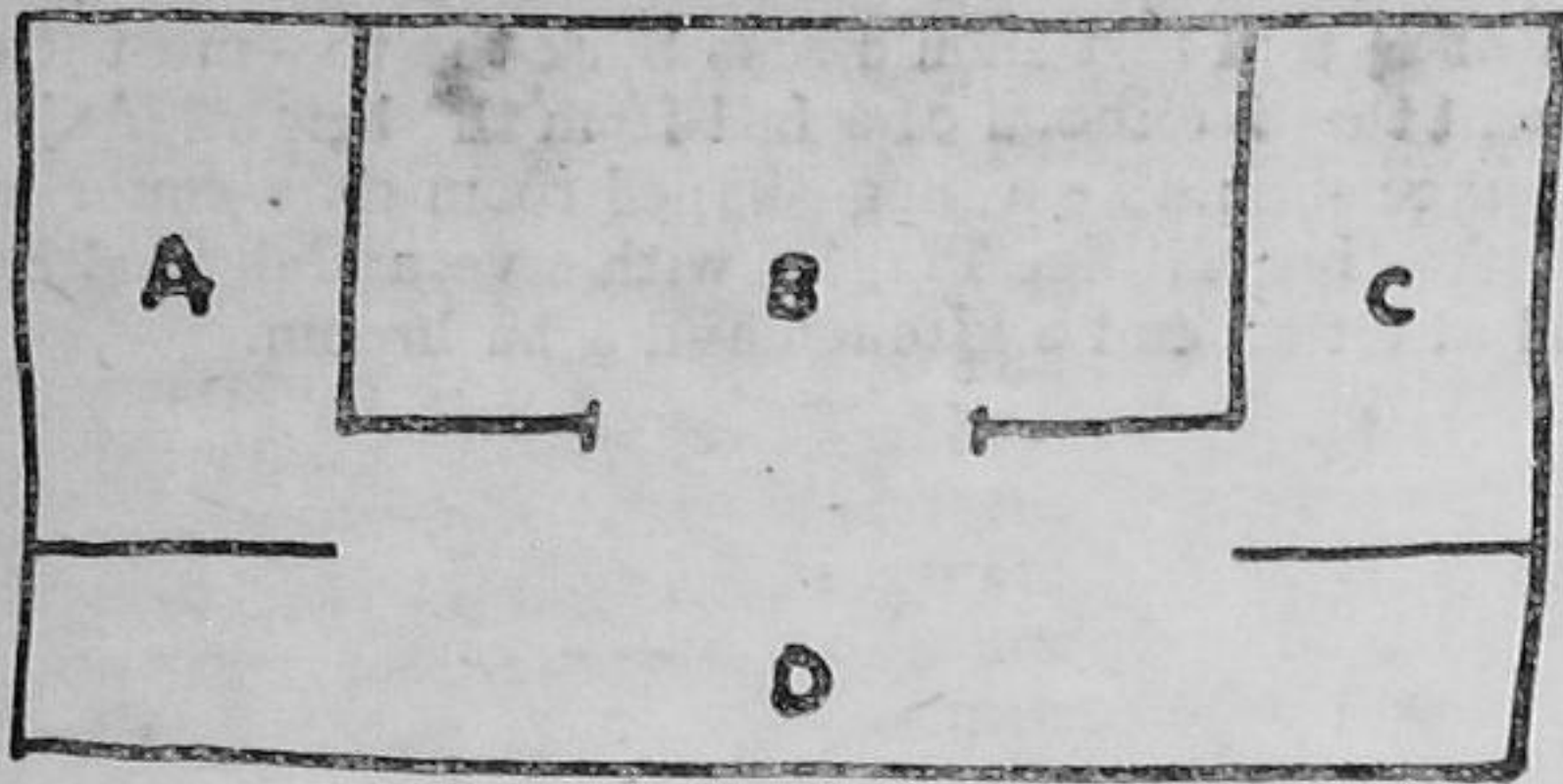
It is possible to contrive an open air theatre without structure if natural earth formation is taken advantage of by utilizing a mound for the stage and rising ground for the audience. These requirements do not often co-exist, and where they do not it is better to have a "stage" that is a flat arena and the audience only, raised. In an open air theatre the area occupied by the audience is called amphitheatre, whether it is natural or constructed. It is possible, of course, to combine a natural amphitheatre and a constructed stage, which combination becomes an open air theatre.

Theatre Structure

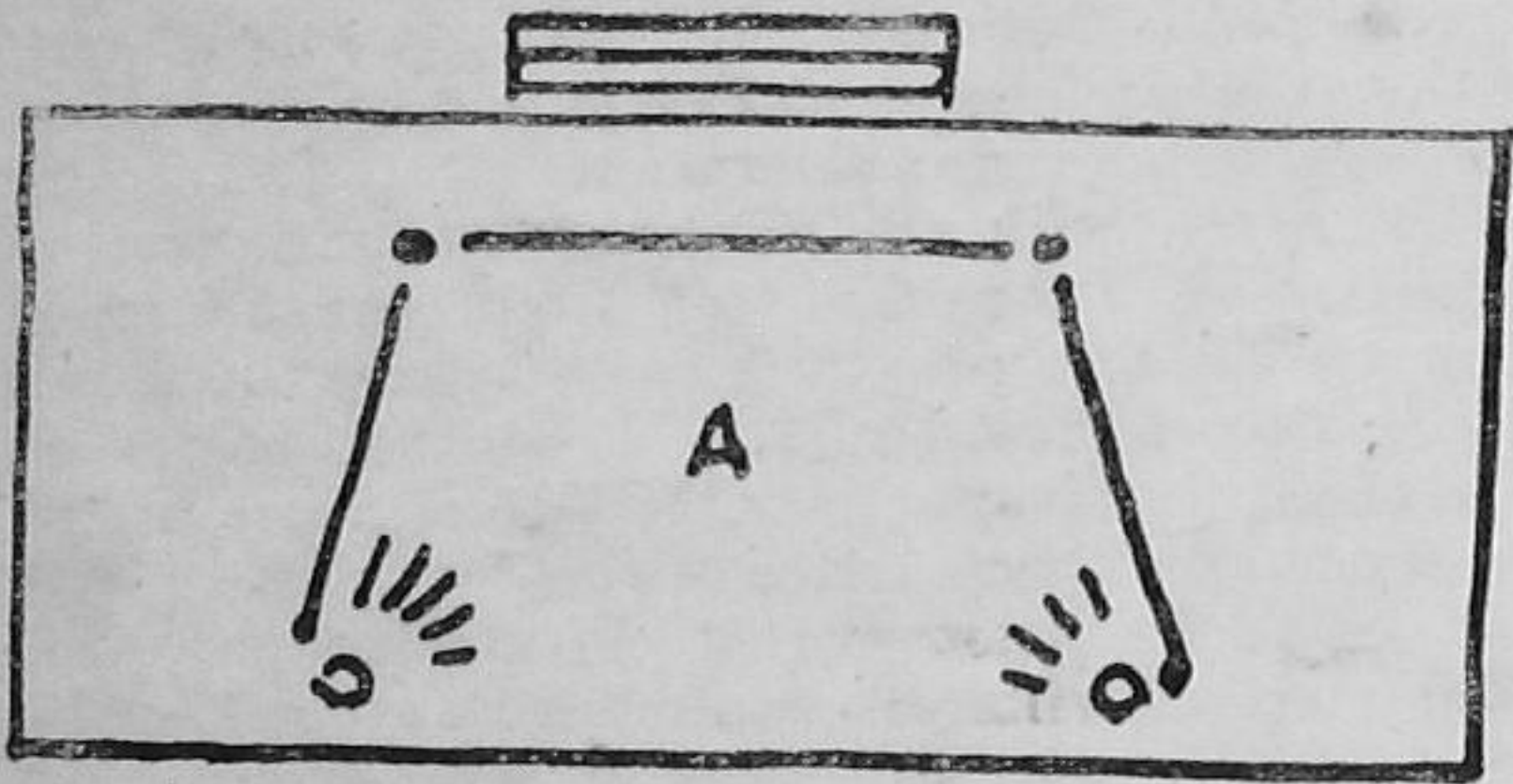
In the plains, complete theatre construction for open air performances is essential as there would be no natural mounds or rising ground. The minimum and maximum structural requirements are stage and amphitheatre. The stage should not be raised too high—2½ feet is ample and the floor of it could with advantage have a slight rake, a rise of not more than 1 foot in 25. The amphitheatre would consist of a "pit" and gallery. The pit provides ground-floor seating with a fairly steep rake, say a rise of two to three feet in 35. The gallery backs the pit in tiers of raised seats of about eight rows in the formation of broad stairs of which the steps would be 1 foot in height and sufficiently wide to be squatted upon. This gallery should be more or less semicircular and could have one or two rows at the sides

of squatting accomodation. The amphitheatre should be fan-shaped. The stage should have a back wall with a central entrance, to be curtained. A wall of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 feet should also back the top-most tier of the gallery to prevent the likelihood of a fall from the height. Adjacent to the back of the stage should be a long-shaped room that could serve as a dormitory for strolling Village Players with a verandah as dressing room for actors and at either end a kitchen and a bathroom.

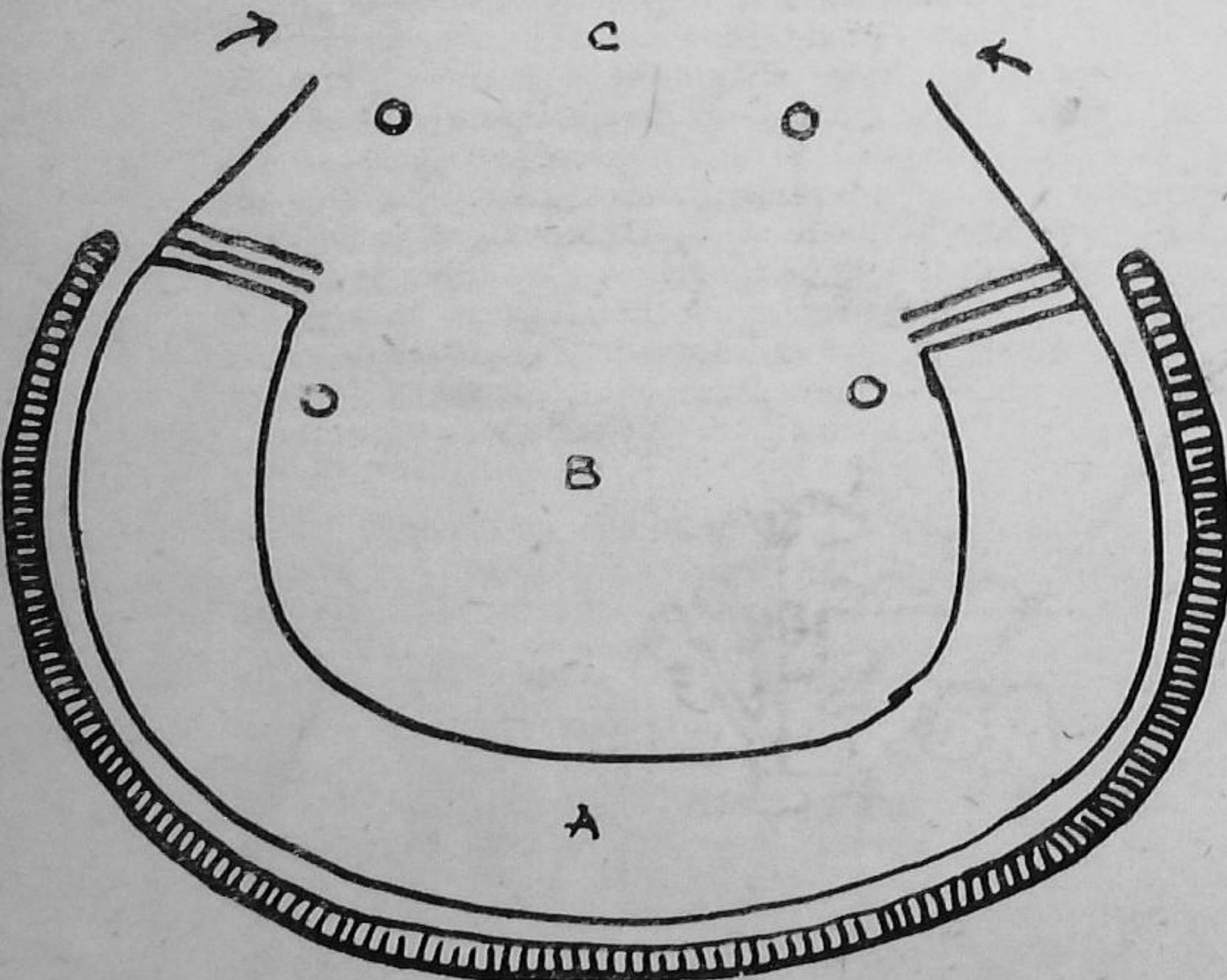
OPEN AIR VILLAGE THEATRE



- A. Kitchen
- B. Dormitory
- C. Bathing Room
- D. Verandah



- A. Stage



- C. Entrance to amphitheatre

4 0s Trees

- B. Pit

- A. Gallery

The Arena "Stage"—The classic Indian example of this is that of the Ras Dharia, in which was no construction—merely a flat arena around which the village audience seated itself. This is a primitive form of open air "theatre". It was, however, no theatre at all—just a casual pitch for strolling village players. It served its purpose well enough and still survives to a limited extent. There are elements in the Ras Dharia that could with advantage be adopted by the "community" Village Players of today. They were an organised group that went from village to village in gipsy fashion, and like the snail, they carried their house on their back—cooking pots, bedding, drums and stage properties—also babies. They were a domestic as well as a player unit. A couple of pack ponies served for transport. Of theatrical paraphernalia they had the absolute minimum—no scenery, no curtains, no special lights and practically no costumes.

On the basis of Ras Dharia could be raised a Strolling Player Unit for the Village on more or less civilized lines with the necessary but minimum equipment. Their prime necessity would be a really good dramatic programme performed by trained players that would amuse, enlighten and elevate the villager. This should be a semi-professional undertaking, the actors receiving a living salary and living, according to the "Gospel of Sufficiency", with the approximate minimum of everything—*Sufficiency* standing for neither too little nor too much. Like the Ras Dharias they would live gipsy fashion—cooking their own meals and dossing anywhere when giving by-the-way rustic shows, but sleeping in comfort when they were playing at a Village Theatre in the dormitory primarily intended for them. Three of such companies, with a different programme, could be allotted to a certain defined area with an arranged tour by which all villagers would have an opportunity of seeing, at a Theatre centre, three worthwhile dramatic performances at least once a year. The same programme should be repeated after a six-month interval, at the second showing the audience would be more receptive. Every year there should be a new and original programme which would be the outcome of dramatic training courses in play-writing, song-making and so on. College students should compose these groups of strolling players for succeeding periods of one year—the experience would be for them a valuable extension of their higher education. Some day it may be thought a good thing to have a form of conscription for cultural service for rural areas that would raise the cultural tone of both servers and served. The students could have a Ras Dharia pitch wherever they chose but their main performances would be given in a village open air theatre for one-week stands.



THE VILLAGE PLAY

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