

THEATRE AND COMMUNICATION : RELATION BETWEEN ACTOR AND AUDIENCE

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Theatre is a dramatic art of communication. Communication means, "the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium"(Oxford Dictionaries). Theatre is mankind's natural instinct. We gather the experience from our world . experience = information . So we gather lots of information or sensory information through five senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Through theatre we express in such a way that we experience something from our world. Theatre is an experience. Theatre also informs. Actors share experience or information and audiences become expressive. Audiences also recall their experiences at the same time to watch the theatre. It is the basic relation between actor or performer and audience.

Theatre is informative . Theatre is educative . Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansadeb spoke "thaetaar korle lokshikkhe hoy" (Theatre is the medium of mass education). Theatre can reach a wide segment of the society. It access valuable information and change mankind's attitude and behavior. Theatre can capable of communicating information and increasing awareness about human rights, positive health issues to specific target audience.

Actor or performer and audience are primary and unique elements in theatre. Theatre happens when actors and audiences meet and come together. Time and space are the main criteria in theatre. Theatre's main deference from other media such television, internet , painting , is

physical presence of two living elements . Theatre is living breathing art form , Where live actors present on stage in front of live audiences . According to Brook, 'the only thing that all forms of theatre have in common is the need for an audience' (Peter Brook, The Empty Space, p. 142) . S. Barranger Comments at 'Theatre: A Way of Seeing': “. . . theatre’s living quality – its immediacy, aliveness , spaces and spectators .”(Milly S. Barranger , Theatre: A Way of Seeing , Cengage Learning, 2005 , page 2) . Badal Sircar commented , “Communication is essential in every art form; the artist communicates to other people through literature, music, painting, acting. But the methods of communication are different. A writer writes—he does not have to be present when his writing is being read. So it is with the painter and the sculptor. In cinema, the film artists do not have to be present when the film is being projected. But in the theatre, the performers have to be present when the communication takes place. This is a fundamental difference. Theatre is a live show, cinema is not. In theatre, communication is direct; in cinema it is through images” (Badal Sircar , “The Third Theatre” On Theatre, Calcutta: Seagull Books 2009.). British theatre director Peter Brook stated, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.”(Peter Brook , The Empty Space , London, Penguin , 1968 , page – 11) Theatre creates human connection. Peter Brook insists “hidden impulse of man” which is the main inherent human emotion . This human emotion produces communication between actors and audiences. In theatre, there have 5 ways of communication :

Actor -> Character

Actor-> Actor

Actor -> Audience

Audience -> Actor

Audience -> Audience

In Bharat’s Natya Shastra , ‘natya’ is known as “Drishya-kavya”(visual poetry) .Its means an epic poem that is enacted . Compare with classical theatre , folk theatre achieves quick mass appeal . It is more direct contact with audiences . Actors frequently converse with the audiences during the performances . Audiences participation is the essential part of the folk theatre . In folk

theatre is basically based on mythological themes but often actors improvise with current socio-political issues . In West Bengal , ‘Gambhira’ is one of popular folk theatre where actors deliver the crisis of the time to ‘Nana’(Lord Shiva) . It is the main concerned with problems of life , selfishness of the people . In modern time political messages and contemporary social issues are included in ‘Gambhira’ .

Oberammergau is small town of Germany , where ‘Passion Play’ have been performed every ten years since 1634 . The next will take place in 2010 . All performers are inhabitants of the town . Rabindranath Tagore went to go to watch the play in 1930 . More than 2000 villagers take part in this play . Each performance lasts about seven hours . The play recounts the life and death of Jesus Christ . "The town's residents vowed that if God spared them from the effects of the bubonic plague ravaging the region, they would produce a play thereafter for all time depicting the life and death of Jesus. The death rate among adults rose from one in October 1632 to twenty in the month of March 1633. The adult death rate slowly subsided to one in the month of July 1633. The villagers believed they were spared after they kept their part of the vow when the play was first performed in 1634."(Wikipedia) . James Shapiro described , "important look at the unpredictable and sometimes tragic relationship between art and society, belief and tolerance, religion and politics." (James Shapiro , "Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play" , Vintage , 2001)) ‘Bhagavathams’ a folk theatre of Andhra Pradesh , where actors and audiences both are participate in this theatre as a ritual .

In the present century theatre activists emphasis on the concept of “intimacy” and “audience participation” to develop the relation between actor and spectator or ‘spect-actor’ . In proscenium theatre high level stage is used to keep distance from the spectators . During the performance actors are acted in light and audiences are sited in darkness . Later 20th century , theatre’s “fourth wall” concept was broken down . Audiences were vital part of the theatre practice . They are assumed to be a character in a play . In 1947 ,The Living Theatre of New York City , engaged direct personal and physical contact with spectators .

Theatre uses as a development tool in our society . Theatre has the potential to address something . There are many theatre forms : theatre for prisons , feminist theatre , theatre for positive health , theatre for deaf , community theatre , homosexual theatre, theatre for education , theatre for aged , theatre for development , black theatre etc. . Helen Nicholson uses “applied

theatre” as “a shorthand to describe forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies” (Helen Nicholson, Applied Drama : The Gift of Theatre , Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, page 2) . Where theatre is practiced “for the people” and “by the people” as a way to develop communities to listen their problem and raise their voice and solve their own problem . In 1970 , Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal developed the theory of “Theatre of the Oppressed” . Here actors are acted as a social servants . And spectators are treated as a ‘sepct-actor’ . It aims not only awareness to the people , they also active participate in the development process .

Actor--> Theatre <--Spectator

Theatre -> Entertainment + Education + Participation

Victoria Target Theatre Society is a senior’s drama group in Victoria BC Canada who performs plays relevant to aging . They use theatre to address senior’s issues . All plays are performed by seniors .

The Workers' Theatre movement(WTM) was set up in 1926 . It developed “agit-prop” theatre as a vehicle for political agitation .It invited working class audiences to agitate political change . It introduced contemporary social and political issues about and for workers . The 19th century in Europe , labourers and party workers wrote and performed plays .

Agit-Prop Theatre: It offers to create on social issues. Actors or group are engaged to investigate the particular social issues, analyze and research the issue , create characters and dialogues , formulate a possible solution and present the drama to specific target audiences .

Agit-Prop = Agitation + Propaganda

In India, political parties use street theatre as a tool for the purpose of arousing political and social consciousness. Here street theatre is more essential than other forms.

Participatory Theatre: It grab people of the street corner and them become characters in protest of the play. It is amazing and important impact spreads widely in audiences.

“Street theatre is a combination of theatre and activism . . .”(Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media SAGE reference , Editors John D. H. Downing, John Derek Hall Downing , SAGE, 2011 page - 513) . Street theatre used to raise issues in the local and community. It is a form of theatre where audiences have not prepared to watch the play. They do not have much time in hand . Street Theatre produces in short time. Nita Jain said in Audience Participation on street plays , “Street theatre is generic term for all manner of performances conducted where people are on the street or in the marketplace . Performances can be short and impromptu . . .” (Perspectives and Challenges in Indian-English Drama , Editor - Neeru Tandon , ‘Audience Participation on street plays , Nita Jain , Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2006 page – 99) . Street theatre writes keeping in mind of the passers .

Street Theatre movement began with political and social agenda. In 1951, IPTA produced Umanath Bhatyacharya’s “Chargsheet” on communist leaders imprisoned without trial. Panu Paul directed the play. Panu Paul, Utpal Dutta , Ritwik Ghatak and Mumtaj Ahamed acted in this play . It was the first street play where Utpal Dutta acted. The duration of play was only 45 mints. The first election of West Bengal in 1952 , Panu Paul wrote and directed “Voter Bhet” street theatre . Utpal Dutta acted in this play . Panu Paul wrote ‘Maloer Soinik’ , ‘Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai’ , ‘Kato Dhane Kato Chal’ etc. . Utpal Dutta was the left-wing activist theatre director of West Bengal who performed and wrote almost 25 street plays in support of Bengal’s communist party candidates. His plays have radical edge . He used street theatre as a political and social weapon. He believed , “ Street theatre is the medium where political consciousness of millions worker people and political perception of actors both are enlarged on stage “ (Utpal Dutta , Sada Poshak o Kalo Hat , Gananatya , 1980 , Page – 176). In 1965, Utpal Dutta was arrested and jailed. His most notable street plays are ‘Special Train’, ‘Din Badoler Pala’, ‘Gerila’ , ‘Samajtantrik Chal’ etc. .

Badal Sircar also extended street theatre as ‘free theatre’ addressing political issues . In the 1990s, he took his group to villages. He said of his theatre, “There is no separate stage—the performance is on the floor; that is the Performers and the spectators are within the same environment. ... This is intimate theatre. The performers can see the spectator clearly, Can

approach him individually, can whisper in his ears, can even touch him if he wants.”(Badal Sircar , “The Changing Language of the Theatre” On Theatre, Calcutta: Seagull Books , 2009) He defined his theatre from street theatre as , “Street theatre in a way is Third Theatre. But all Third Theatre is not street theatre”(Badal Sircar , “Voyages in the Theatre: IV Shri Ram Memorial Lecture” On Theatre Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009) . Prabir Guha’s Alternative Living Theatre is working since the 1990s.

During the 1960s and 1970s , theatre was more anti-establishment in nature . During 1970s to 1980s was the golden period of street theatre in India. A large number of artistes involved in street theatre . M .K. Raina was the director of theatre who did a notable drama of Gorki’s “Mother” in front of many factories. In 1970s to 1980s many artistes were suffered by political ‘gunda’ and police repression . Jana Natya Manch’s director Safdar Hashmi is killed during the performance of his production ‘Halla Bol’ in front of a factory of Shaibabad , New Delhi . In India , Gursharan Singh in Punjab , Prasanna’s Samudaya in Karnataka , KSSP in Kerala , Gadar in Andhra Pradesh are using street theatre as a tool of communication .After 1990 , street theatre uses for brand campaigning . Corporate companies, governmental and non-governmental organizations(NGOs) adopt the street theatre to create a awareness various development issues .