

Evolution of Theatre as a means of Social Development

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Abstract: Theatre is a fusion of various art forms that produce dramatic actions. Theatre arts greatly influence the society's view of the world outside. Everything in society whether its history, philosophy, way of thinking, rituals, taboos all are linked to theatre as theatre throws light on all these sensitive issues through form of theatre arts like dance and drama. Arts and education engage and inspire individuals and communities to make healthy choices and here comes the role of theatre as medium of spreading awareness. Theatre can break down the social barriers and fear of talking about something that cannot be expressed in the public individually. Theatre is about bringing a group of people together to share a story; it gives a common understanding and theatre has always been an excellent way of provoking discussion and asking questions. Participatory theatre is a process in which views and opinions can be exchanged. Actors and actresses first enact the situation and then a facilitator helps the audience explore new solutions through improvisation. Forum theatre is an effective participatory theatre practiced in different parts of the world. The goal of forum theatre is not to discover the optimum solution but to produce a variety of options. This technique can be used very effectively to aware women about their rights and different legal aspects. The most effective form of forum theatre for empowering women seems to involve allowing the spectators to act directly rather than to direct the actors.

Theatre is a social tool that can function as a means of entertainment, instruction, education, development, persuasion etc. Forum theatre is a powerful tool to bring social change among people to confront reality of their situation of powerlessness and suggest measures for improvement. Different works carried by various organizations shows that theatre as a tool has a potential of bringing social development and should be tapped and used for larger growth and wider and effective dissemination of message.

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Introduction

Samuel Johnson called theatre 'an echo of the public's voice'. Shakespeare called it 'a mirror of highlighting man's humanity and also a tool for understanding why man also finds it so easy to transgress that same humanity'. The American composer John Cage said that "theatre takes place all the time wherever one is". The critic Bernard Beckerman claimed that theatre happens whenever "one or more human beings, isolated in time and/or space, present themselves to another or others" (Johnson, 1747).

The passion to express, to communicate and to share the ideas-opinions-emotions believes gave inception to performing art. Performing art has an enormous artistic value. Theatre is a major functional spontaneous expression of performing art. Primitive men adorned their caves with wall painting, artifacts, and hieroglyphics to transmit their experience from one generation to another (Basu, 2013).

Theatre is often associated with stage performances but theatre is often used beyond entertainment such as to convey religious, educational, social or political message (UNESCO, 2006). Theatre for development was initially inspired by Paulo Freire (1996), who believed that people possess knowledge through life experience but are persuaded by the oppressor to believe that their knowledge is irrelevant. Augusto Boal (2000), student of Freire developed the "theatre of the oppressed", a form of popular theatre, of, by and for the people which helped to learn ways of resisting oppression in their daily lives.

Theatre has its existence from ancient times. It has been part of the society and its culture. Initially theatre as used as ritual activities and in those times it did not required spectators. Theatre became the face of the society which reflects its social, political and economic dimensions. Theatrical performance is nothing out of the box element but in every sense it is the mirror of the society which helps to introspect its progress and development. It leads to the stories of the individual's feelings of joy, sorrow, comedy, errors through acting with the use of dialogues, expression, song and dance.

Theatrical performances is said to have its origin in ancient Greece. The word theatre has its origin in the Greek word '*theaomai*'

which means “to see”. Greek culture valued the power of spoken words and hence theatre became a mode of communication and storytelling.

European theatre had a setback during the period of 5th till 10th century. This was the time of ‘Dark Age’ also referred as middle age. This age witnessed a deterioration of the demography, culture and economy of the European society. At that time church had the dominant influence on the civilization. Theatrical performances were denounced by the church during that period.

Different periods of Indian theatre were marked by the rule of different rulers who invaded India from time to time. Indian theatre has its origin with the Sanskrit theatre almost from second century BC. Sanskrit theatre became an important medium of communication and expression till the 17th century. Later on Sanskrit theatre evolved as an art form and came to be known as ‘Indian Classical Dance Drama’. Indian theatre can be broadly classified into three stages on the basis of the development of Indian theatre from time to time: Ancient Theatre, Medieval Theatre and Modern Theatre.

Ancient Indian theatre has always showcased the rich tradition and culture of its time. It mostly started with the religious rituals of the Vedic Aryans. In medieval times theatre started to highlight the realities of life with the additional use of dance and music. During the 16th century *lokmatya* got introduced which became very popular among the audiences. The modern times theatre culture mostly got influenced by the British rule. The theatre during that period focused on the political changes that took place during the British rule of 200 years. Theatre at that time focused on the naturalistic and realistic forms. Modern theatre became manifestation of day to day life activities. Social, political and economic problems were focused through different plays and activities. Bengali theatre became a vehicle of mass education, an effort in reflecting the then society. The history of Bengali theatre is thus the saga of changing tradition. Bengali theatre soon became a strong medium of expression to mirror the socio-political and contemporary issues to the common Indians. The main aim was then to make the mass aware of the then socio-political scenario. One such play of that time was Nildarpan, which depicted the misery of the indigo cultivators. With the establishment of Indian

People's Theatre Association (IPTA), the history of Bengali theatre took a new turn. Theatre in Bengal then became even closer to the people.

In 1942 people with progressive or the leftist thought of mind formed (ITPA), which was led by intellectuals and was intended to serve the uneducated masses. It relied on age-old indigenous institutions, including religious and mythological plays, wandering bards, folk dances, and village mimes and clowns, used in a direct, simple approach intended “to propagate anti-fascist ideology and espouse the cause of world democracy” (Abbas, 1942). The most important contribution of the IPTA is that it has awakened people from all levels of society to the fact that India can and should develop a modern indigenous form of drama (Waltz, 1977).

Theatre and its various forms

There are various forms of theatre which has emerged historically; few forms are highlighted below: Theatre can be classified broadly as theatre – Proscenium theatre i.e. theatre for the stage and flexible theatre for the field and of/for oppressed.

Theatre for the Stage (Proscenium Theatre)

Classical Indian Dance Drama - Developed in the early 15th century Classical Indian dance drama gradually became a much cherished art form of the classical Hindu temple culture. It became such a harmonious art form where ideas, thoughts, dramaturgy and *natya* gained an articulate dimension through rhythm, *mudraas* and timber.

Traditional Indian Theatre -The forms of Indian theatre acquired a rather a whole new facet with the emergence of the traditional Indian theatres. The *mudraas* and *rasas* of the classical Indian dance drama was rather rationalized with the traditional aspects of Indian theatre. '*Jatra*', '*Rasleela*', '*Bhavai*', '*Theyyam*' and several other types of traditional theatres are performed in the country (Bamber, 2001).

Folk Theatre in India - Folk theatre as it has been named this art form actually has its roots associated with the times of the ancient rimes. Folk theatre as a typical theatre form gradually emerged as a regional form of drama based on the attributes of local religion, legends, art, vernacular, history and mythology (Bamber, 2001).

Indian Puppet Theatre - Forms of Indian theatre witnessed a marked change with the introduction of the Indian puppet theatre during the fag end of the medieval period. String puppets, rod puppets and glove puppets are amongst the different forms of puppet theatre which are quite popular in India (Bamber, 2001).

Modern Indian Theatre - Modern Indian theatre can be traced back to the British era. After independence of India and with the alteration in the socio-political set up in India, Indian theatre and drama became lot more realistic and naturalistic (Bamber, 2001).

Theatre for the Field and of/for Oppressed

Third Theatre - Grew out of Badal Sircar's dissatisfaction with conditions of proscenium theatre. Direct communication was the cardinal feature of Third theatre. Third theatre depends entirely on the performer's body on the one hand and the spectator's imagination on the other. As only human presence was to be emphasized, the other paraphernalia of the theatre became superfluous. Third theatre is also often loosely used synonymously with street theatre because both are flexible, portable, and inexpensive. As per Badal Sircar "Street theatre in a way is Third theatre. But all Third theatre is not street theatre". Sircar used theatre as a tool to bring change. Though he knew that theatre by itself can never change the society, he firmly believes that theatre can be one of the many facets of a movement to bring about the desirable change (Mitra, 2004).

Indian Street Theatre - One of the most important and contemporary forms of Indian theatre is the Indian street theatre. In the recent era street theatre has segregated itself as a means of illustrating the socio-political issues and an effort to reach the common people. These short, direct, intimate and effective street theatres are a significant ways of handling issues.

Forum Theatre - The creator of Forum Theatre, Augusto Boal, states in his book 'Theatre of the Oppressed' that Forum Theatre 'is the reflection of reality and a rehearsal for future action'. It is theatre of the oppressed, not theatre for the oppressed. Forum Theatre can be defined as something that creates space for dialogue. This means that Forum Theatre is a process in which views and opinions can be

exchanged. Other definition is Forum Theatre is interactive, it promotes dialogue for joint learning, it talks about a participation that allows people to understand the manifestation of national, global problems in a local situation. It can also be defined as a space where actor and spectator act intellectually, engaging themselves in a dialogue to understand the problem sociologically and to determine the various ways of how to apply them in real life. Forum Theatre is the theatre in which the oppressed themselves are the actors. The actors are amongst those who work in fields and toil in the factories, many of whom are either illiterate or semi-literate (Abbas, 2015).

Playback Theatre - the concept of playback theatre was conceived by Jonathan Fox in 1975. This theatre is performed in collaboration of the actor and the audience. Playback Theatre done through story telling and acting helps the community to understand themselves better. The various forms of Indian theatre thus portray the journey of Indian theatre from the eposes to the contemporary theatres. India boasts of numerous types of regional theatre, which involve the types of theatre prevalent amongst different inhabitants of the various Indian states (Bamber, 2001).

Theatre and Development

Due to the community power structures, most grass root level communities, particularly in rural areas, have been experiencing extreme deprivation, oppression, and discrimination for a long time. Irrespective of political structures, democratic or otherwise, the current social, economic, and political arrangements are commonly advantageous to local elites and feudal leaders. Poor and marginalized people who have been suppressed and weakened over a long period are not in a position to see beyond their current situation (involving apathy, indifference, helplessness, and powerlessness) and changing that situation is an essential task for social workers. Through theatre of the oppressed the oppressed groups can be made to realize that the cause of their situation lies elsewhere in socio-economic and political structures, and that they can change that situation by redefining their conditions and taking responsibility for changing that situation. Breaking the entrenched power structure in communities and altering dictatorial and often violent leadership styles are challenges in many

communities (Pawar, 2014). To use local resources during its process and the final decision of getting out of the oppression is taken by the community people and they themselves act upon it. This process acts on helping the community to become self reliant.

Theatre plays an important role in the indigenous development of the society and its people. Indigenization refers to the ideas that the theories, values and philosophies that underlie practice must be influenced by local factors because indigenization emphasizes a cultural dimension, a cross-cultural aspect in and approach to social work. To be indigenous is to be relevant in an appropriate context, all activities, ideas, processes and techniques must capture the socially constructed reality of a given society as it relates to its own social experience, shares images, stock of knowledge and institutional framework (Osei-Hwedie, 2002). Indigenization implies finding new ways or revisiting local ideas and process of problem solving and service delivery. This involves understanding and articulating local indigenous resources, relationships and problem solving networks; and the underlying ideas, rationale, philosophies and values (Osei-Hwedie, 1996). The purpose of indigenization, therefore, is to make social work education, research and practice fit local contexts.

Theatre can make concepts coherent for people. It involves its audience both intellectually and emotionally, it sensitizes audiences to issues, ideas and people portrayed, and it engenders a personal connection with the events and characters on stage. Community-based theatre goes a step further; when a play is directly relevant to audience members' lives and concerns, a process begins which can lead to deeper understanding and change. Audience recognize the characters and their dilemmas and identify with the people portrayed. And because they can watch rather than live the experience, they also objectify the problems, and in so doing begin to be able to think critically about possible solutions or alternate actions and so have the ability to change.

Theatre provides a space for appropriation and transformation of collective norms and provided possibilities for long term social change, while at the same time it continued to reflect some of the wider intersectional social context in which the participants

lived and related to each other. The theatre medium is particularly useful for the participants to reproduce and expose some of the oppressive social and governmental practices directed at them and other members of their communities. Working with participatory theatre techniques provided an excellent tool to examine the relationships between identity and social action and the ways performance can dislocate and challenge performative identity constructions as well as provide a range of strategies for empowering social actions (Prentki, 2002).

Theatre, especially third theatre, has been a very powerful tool for communication. It has formed a major part of social action and across centuries theatre has also served as a means of protest and a portrayal of the social injustices. It has received wide acceptance and its inherent grassroots approach has helped mobilize the most vulnerable (Banerjee, 2013). Theatre as a means of development communication is a very powerful tool for social change and social action. One cannot deny the inherent role of theatre being the grassroots voice and a medium to raise voice against oppression.

Functions of Third Theatre

Sircar focused on doing theatre than writing plays, because he had profound knowledge of Indian society where physical, psychological, cultural, mental, political, and spiritual dichotomies reigned. To bring about a change Sircar used theatre as a tool. He was conscious that the dichotomy in the cultural field cannot be removed without a fundamental change in the socio-economic situation, and he knew that it cannot be done through theatre. Though he knew that theatre by itself can never change the society, he firmly believes that theatre can be one of the many facets of a movement that is needed to bring about the desirable change, and that makes the idea of Third theatre, a theatre of change meaningful to him.

1. Theatre as the Servant of Nationalism

During the exploration Sircar realized the existence of two cultural trends ran parallel to each other giving rise to a fundamental dichotomy between urban and rural lives, with this understanding he had come to realize the existence of two distinct kinds of theatre in rural

and urban areas of India. As he was basically a middle class man of Calcutta, he was attached to the city of Calcutta. A city of alien culture based on English education repressing, distorting, buying, promoting for sale the real culture of the country. Sircar had an intimate feel of the urban conscience of this city and had a profound understanding of the middle class life, and through almost all his major plays, he is found probing into the Calcutta middle-class mind. Sircar produced plays that hit the rural and urban dichotomy as he wished to create a link between the two theatres through his Third theatre, a theatre of synthesis.

2. Theatre as a Tool of Political Ideology

Sircar was active member of undivided Communist Party of India in 1940s, the decade of Independence. Thereafter he says he criticized the Party and was suspended. After a year of his suspension still he continued in organized politics. Though in the early 50s he left politics never to return, his political ideology has not changed. As he said party had let him down but the ideology of Marxism has kept him alive. Sircar depicts the accusations of his detractors and his defense against them in an autobiographical play *Shesh Nei* (There's No End). Later he confesses: "After I left politics, there was a huge void. Many things came into my life then, one of them was theatre" Though he left the politics, it can be visualized that he was closely attached to the Communist principle. His shift from proscenium to open-air theatre is also a kind of Marxist development. His play like *Hattamalar Oparey* depicts Marxist philosophy.

3. Theatre as a Handmaiden of Democratic Socialism

As Sircar believed in Communism, he wished to work for the society. He wished to make the world change. The transition from depicting the alienation of the middle classes to writing about the lives of workers and peasants is arguably a Marxist progression. It is best outlined in his play *Hattamalar Oparey* (Beyond the Land of Hattamala, 1977). The story of two thieves—named *Kena* (Bought) and *Becha* (Sold), obviously representative of the evils of capitalism—chance upon a land of no money that operates according to the Communist principle of each to the best of his ability and to each according to his need. After many escapades they decide shame-

facedly to give up their evil ways and live in this new land, one as a mason and the other as a gardener. *Hattamala* ends with the chorus singing "We'll share what we have together. Come, let's share everything together".

Theatre and Social Change

"Theatre is a form of knowledge: it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it" (Boal, 1992).

The historical origins of Theatre for Social Change are most obviously to be found in the popular and community theatres of the 1970s, the happenings and alternative theatres of the 1960s and the political theatres of the 1930s; but its roots are also evident in the theatre and democracy ideals of the Ancient Greeks, the subversion of early carnival, the inflammatory writing of Ibsen and Shaw and, of course, in the radical theatres of Brecht and Boal.

One of the most concise definitions of social change is characterised as the "significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns through time" (Harper, 1993). And this social structure is made up of "a persistent network of social relationships" (Harper, 1993). In which interaction between people or groups has become repetitive. The resultant changes can affect everything from population to the economy, as industrialisation and shifting cultural norms and values, are also established agents of social change (Popenoe, 1995). In another words social change is the transformation of culture and social structure over time.

There are various causes of social change. One of these causes is culture which is a system that constantly loses and gains components. Also values, beliefs, and ideologies have certainly shaped directions of social change in the modern world, such as Nationalism, Capitalism and others.

Theatre for Social Change is potentially amorphous depending on how one chooses to interpret the ideas of change and society. The term is deceptively straightforward: clearly this is a "theatre in the service of social change" (Prentki and Preston, 2009). It waves its politics like a flag with the inherent assumption that society needs to change. It implies that theatre can contribute to change, so has an

instrumental value. It is a “hyphenated genre” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005) bringing together the two distinct worlds of theatre and the social.

Social change can occur because of lots of reasons that mean there is always a demand for change, whether by individuals or through a larger forces which leads the community in some cases to a comprehensive change. Theatre is considering a mean to reflect people lives and re-create it for a deeper insight, it might be a tool to understand the real problems of society and contribute in finding solution for them as continues attempt for change.

Theatre for Social Change is often based on community development principles (Goldbard, 2006) and works in partnership with community based organizations to engage participants and audiences. Theatre for social change seeks to reveal more clearly the way the world works: to make strange the familiar and expose the systems and tacit understandings that remain largely invisible in our everyday lives. Theatre for social change seeks more than raised consciousness, it seeks conscientization: awareness’s leading to action. This idea is borrowed from Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1996) and has been influential in shaping the methodologies of Theatre of the Oppressed and other forms of Applied theatre. The Theatre for social change aesthetic draws on an outsider narrative, telling stories that are often hidden or ignored: “Sometimes the plays speak what everybody knows; sometimes they speak what nobody says. Sometimes they open paths or unveil truths; sometimes they challenge the way things are done or understood” (Leonard and Kilkelly, 2006). Performances aim to give voice to the voiceless, but the assumption that giving voice is a necessary good is contested.

It is generally perceived that Participatory theatre for social change can bring people together, bridge difference, heal divisions and shatter stereotypes; that it can help to build community.

Effectiveness of Theatre for Social Change

Theatre is as an effective method of awareness raising on such issues and can therefore play a key role in community education and development. Theatre is a non confrontational way of addressing problems. It makes talking about sensitive and even normally taboo

subjects such as prostitution, possible. After a performance, people can discuss the actions of the people in the play instead of criticizing individual members of their village. They can test potential ways of problem solving on stage in front of the whole village and then discuss them. Daring to take action within the playful situation of a theatre play, villagers realise that they have just performed an action they could also undertake in real life.

The success of this process depends on the skills of the facilitator, the power relations at play, the context of the project, and the pedagogical processes employed. It is troubled by the rise of instrumentalism and relationship with social policy agendas; and by questions of marginalisation, inclusion and representation.

Implications of theatre in social work

1. Using Theatre to Showcase Social Issues

On the premise that making people think about a social issue or an evil is more important than finding or giving solutions, the third theatre movement is gaining momentum among social workers and social work students. Schools, colleges and non-Governmental organisations are transforming theatre into an effective tool to reach out to the grassroots and also to the urban poor. While many are evolving ways to shape the plays according to their abilities, there are some that are going the formal way by engaging professionals to train their students. (The Hindu, 2012)

2. Political Theatre and Social Work

In the history of theatre, there is long tradition of performances addressing issues of current events and central to society itself, encouraging consciousness and social change. The political satire performed by the comic poets at the theatres had considerable influence on public opinion.

3. Theatre and Anti-Corruption movements

The role of theatre in generating public awareness to the people about corruption is very much undeniable. The main role is to empower the individuals in oppressed communities to demand for their rights and to demand for accountability from their leaders. (Madada, 1999)

4. Theatre as a Tool to bring Social Change

Theatre as a form of communication in recent times has been used to propagate social messages and to create awareness amongst the masses regarding critical issues. Theatre breaks the formal barriers and approaches the people directly. This is a means of reaching people of all strata and creating an awareness of events around them, calling them to change what they believe are the social ailments (Mangattuthazhe, 2010). With street theatre the preliminary point is not an attempt to shift the public towards something, but to work towards a full perceptive and look of what is occurring and the core social values. (Allen)

5. Theatre for Development

Methods like street theatre, seen by people passing by seems like a real situation to the audience, which mainly functions as a thought-provoking impulse to the people who observe the situation. Every kind of Theatre for Development-programme trusts in the strength of the word of mouth via people who face the situation, are part of a project or watch a critical play. In the streets, it reaches people who wouldn't attend a workshop or watch a play, thus the coverage of addressed people can be even higher and social change is another step closer. It involves a spoken word drama or comedy, a music, singing and/or dance production, a production with movement but no sound, participatory or improvisational techniques using any or all of these (Digital Media, 2013).

Theatre as Social Action uses theatre to explore a social issue of pressing importance to young people and the community at large. Boal (1992) stated that "Theatre is a conflict, struggle, movement, transformation, not simply the exhibition of states of mind. It is a verb, not an adjective. To act is to produce an action, and every action produces a reaction-conflict". In forum theatre audience are encouraged to decide what forms of social actions and interventions would be suitable in particular situations, inspired by their experiences.

Popular theatre sets out to be part of a movement towards greater empowerment on the part of participants. It tries to be part of social and political change as well as individual change. It tries to enable those who are marginalized in some way to examine collectively

their issues from their perspectives, to analyze causes of these issues, to explore avenues of potential action, and to create an opportunity to take such action. Popular theatre shares goals with participatory research. This kind of theatre is a useful approach to participatory research, a research process which is owned and used by the groups most involved in an issue. Popular theatre presents and elicits people's stories and anchors discussions in lived experience. It offers a humanized look at what sits behind statistics, concepts or rules. In difficult or dangerous situations, where there are fears about speaking out or speaking about personal situations, it can offer fictionalized, and therefore safer ways to story tell and name issues. It offers embodied ways to discover stories which relate to community's issues and to test possible actions before 'trying them for real' (Boisvery, 2006).

Theatre can be useful in developing social work practice and facilitating research process (Vaggerhoy, 2008). Role plays can be used to integrate theory and practice.

Conclusion

"There is no freedom if one reflects without action and there is no freedom if one acts without reflection" (Paulo Friere, 1990).

With the passing of time theatre has become an important tool for development that helps to improve the quality of life for all communities that have suffered from oppression.

Theatre through history had a great role on affecting people's lives, by helping them to see their lives and problems more clearly. It is a tool to understand the real problems of society and tries to find an effective solution for them. It enables those who are marginalized to examine collectively their issues from their perspectives, to analyze causes of these issues, to explore avenues of potential action, and to create an opportunity to take such action. Through dialogue by raising the level of awareness it contributes to the empowerment of all involved. It also mobilizes people to take action and support them in processes of social and political change.

Psychodrama and drama therapy are creative action methods of therapy. Psychodrama can be used in a group or individually for

therapy and personal growth. It clarifies issues, increases physical and emotional well being, enhances learning and develops new skills. It can also be applied to family and couple therapy. Through psychodrama we can address phobias, post traumatic stress, eating disorders, self harm, alcohol and substance abuse. Even problems of relationships, including marital and family stress, can also be addressed. Drama therapy provides a context for participants to tell their stories, set their goals, solve problems, express feelings or achieve catharsis. Drama therapy can be used in mental health facilities, schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, adolescent group etc.

Thus, different form of theatre plays an effective role in bringing about social change from individual, group to community.

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