

# Theatre as a Medium of Mass Communication

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## **Abstract**

Communication is one of the most important elements for the existence of the human society. Communication plays a crucial role in day to day life of the human being. And communication which is meant for the mass is known as mass communication. There are various mediums of mass communication. And out of the various mediums of mass communication, theatre is one of the most oldest and influential medium. Theatre is an ancient form of media in India which was used as a means to convey messages to people. Not only in India, theatre is also one of the most effective methods of mass communication but in the whole world. This theatre form of mass communication is well known and appreciable among the rural people of the country. As a medium of communication it has to accommodate various functions of communication as well. This paper is a simple understanding to interpret theatre as a communication medium and also its importance in the sphere of communication especially in developing country like India.

**Keywords:** Theatre, Communication, Mass Communication, Medium, Theatre Communication, *Natyasastra*, Drama.

## **Introduction**

*“Theatre is 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.” -Shakespeare*

In India theatre was an eminent and important medium of mass communication. It is an oldest form of mass communication and it is being one of the most appreciable medium of communication. And as it communicates to the mass, that is why it is a medium of mass communication. It emerged sometime between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD and Flourished between the 1st century AD and the 10th, which was a period of relative peace in the history of India during which hundreds of plays were written. The earliest form of theatre in India was in Sanskrit. Theatre has its root from the ancient time of human communication. From the childhood days of theatre it caters preliterate community member’s

information, education, entertainment, socialization & also creates the platform of debate & discussion (Thakur, 2013). And theatre in India developed after the development of theatres in Greek and Rome and also in some other parts of Asia. Modern Indian theatre developed during the period of colonial rule under the British Empire; from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Theatre is the live performance or physical enactment in form of dance, singing or drama before a particular group of audience. Theatre is a best source of communication and it deals with the social problems and it presents in various forms before the wide range of the audiences. Theatre occupies a huge space in Indian communication system. Because Indian society is much favorable and idle place for art and theatre is one of the most praiseworthy art we have in our society as it communicates with the audience in the form of emotions, one of the major factor to get connected with the audience. And the word 'Drama' is more associated with theatre because mostly theatre programmes are presented in form of drama. And so far the history of drama is concerned it is '*Bharat Muni*' who is considered as the earliest treatise on dramaturgy. The Sanskrit meaning of drama is '*Natya*'. The various aspects of drama has been texted in ancient India known as '*Natyasastra*' and as per *Natyasastra*, *Bharat Muni* is the master of all emotions, actions and situations as well through *abhinaya*. '*Abhinaya*', literary meaning is to carrying the play of performance through actions to the audience with some messages. (Pandya, 1990).

But the toughest part is how to carry these meanings to the audience. Then the process of communication came into existence, which is how the actors use to communicate to the audience or in other words 'receivers'. It is the role and importance of communication. Where the communicator is the actor and the audiences are the receivers. As communication is one of the human functions and it is multi dimensional in nature, the whole aim is that one person or a group of individuals tries to make the other one or group of individuals aware about the thing which they are projecting before them. So communication refers to establishing commonness among the individuals and theatre is the platform where the establishment of commonness is fulfilled by the 'communicator' means the 'actor' and the 'receivers' means the 'audiences'. (Kapil &Debastuti, 2013)

### **Review of Literature:**

In his book “Theatre: An Introduction”, Cassady (1984) defines theatre as ‘imagination emotions and intellects which embraces all the world cultures and perspective, answers questions, predicts our tomorrows and mirrors our today.

For Shakespeare “theatre is a mirror for highlighting man’s humanity and also a tool for understanding why man also finds it so easy to transgress that same humanity” (Yerima,2007). Bernard Beckerman offered a broader definition when he said that ‘theatre occurs when one or more persons, isolated in time and or space, present themselves to another or others (Cassady 1984). Though definitions abound, practitioners seem to be in unison in what constitutes the nature and very essence of the theatre. They also seem to be in agreement that theatre is a highly collaborative endeavour and that it takes the form of drama, comedy or musical theatre. It is also widely held that theatre, with its artistic content emanating from the dramatist to the producing artistes to the audience through an ever widening and deepening symbol, is essentially symbolic in nature. As an art form, theatre represents an experience of an event or experience which can be real or imagined and which is communicated to an audience through a medium. Theatre can also be dramatic and non-dramatic. When it is dramatic, it is imagined and representational whereas when it is non-dramatic, theatre is real and presentational in form and characters. (Akashoro, 2010). Theatre is a very effective & responsive tool to foster the growth of development procedure. It starts off by the history of theatre in international & Indian context and with the origin & nature of development communication in third world perspective. Theatre remains relevant for its participative & flexible nature. In India theatre emphasizes on the social problems and themes such as agriculture, literacy campaign, social harmony, girl trafficking, child labour, gender discrimination, religious tolerance, women empowerment, prevention of HIV-AIDS, family planning, pulse polio, nutrition, environment pollution etc.

### **Theatre as a mass media in India**

The passion to express, to communicate & 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. The presence of theatre in India has been very ancient and the worker of theatre has also been passed away since a long time ago. But the popularity of theatre is still there in everyone face because of its uniqueness. And the unique platform to project and present the social problems and giving

solution and also aware the receiver about the concerned theme on which theatre work is based on. Before going to the detail description of ancient Indian theatre workers mentality towards theatre communication, it is important to understand who the theatre workers in ancient India were. In the thirty fifth chapter of the *Natyasastra*, there is a list of members of a theatre group, which helps us to understand about the people who were considered as theatre workers or theatre related persons in ancient India. A theatre group (according to *Natyasastra*) should have persons specialized in seventeen types of works like, *Bharata* (stage manager or producer or a person who can perform everything related to a production, a multidimensional person); *Vidusaka*(person to make fun i.e. Jester); *Tauripta* (Person skilled in music, expert in all musical instruments); *Nata*(person perform as an actor-Dancer); *Sutradhara* (person specialized in applying the songs and music during the performance) ; *Natyakara* (one who in accordance with the *Natyasastra* expresses the various *rasa-s* ,*bhava-s* natural to the the people though different character); *Nandi* (person praising in Sanskrit or Prakrit);*Nayaka*(person engaged in directing dance during a performance); *Mukutakara*,(person engaged in making head-gears for every character); *Abharanakara*,(person engaged in making ornaments for a performance); *Malyakara* (person engaged in making garlands for the characters of a performance); *Vesakara*(person engaged in making costumes for a performance); *Chitrakara*(person engaged in painting for performance),*Rajaka*(person engaged in cleaning the costumes); *Karukara*(person engaged in decorating hall with wooden idols or sculpture); *Kusilava* (person who can dance and play musical instrument during performance. (M.L Varadpande, 1983). This list helps us to understand the components of a theatre group.

Interestingly, *Natyasastra* not confining itself to the discussion of the work of acting, includes name of each and every allied works considered necessary for a performance. (Malabyan, 2013). Theatre, as an old form of Communication is a deep-rooted tradition in India's vibrant culture. Folk Theatre is a composite art in India with a fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, religion and festival peasantry. The Folk theatre having roots in native culture is embedded in local identity and social values besides providing mass entertainment helped Indian society as indigenous tools of interpersonal, inter-group and inter-village communication for ages. Folk theatre has been used extensively in India to propagate critical social, political and cultural issues in the form of theatrical messages to create awareness among the people. As an indigenous form it breaks all kinds of formal barriers of human

communication and appeals directly to the people. Each folk theatre form has a particular community, language, area and way of life. But music is the only binder which attaches all the forms together. Theatre in India started as a narrative form, with recitation, singing and dancing becoming its integral elements. This emphasis on narrative elements made our theatre essentially theatrical right from the beginning. That is why the theatre in India has encompassed all the other forms of literature and fine arts into its physical presentation: literature, mime, music, dance, movement, painting, sculpture and architecture - all mixed into one and being called '*Natya*' or Theatre in English. It involves the traditional use of music, dance, drama and religious rituals to express human emotions and feelings. Folk theatre in India made its first presence in Vedic and Buddhist culture. Based on oral tradition, it was used to disseminate the stories of human lives in real context. (Das, 2013)

Theatre as a mass medium is very much ancient and popular in Indian context. It is regarded as the peoples medium because, through this mass medium, a common man is able to get awareness and critical nuances about the things which is happenings around him/her. And most importantly in developing country like India, where sixty five percent of people lives in rural areas and for them theatre is the prominent and most reliable medium of mass communication. Due to theatre common people get an opportunity to get involved directly and will try to find out certain solution to the existing problems which is hampering the lifestyle of the common people and which is blocking the road of development of the society. So it is not only a medium of mass communication but also a tool for development as well. (Manukonda, 2013).

### **Conclusion:**

After all communication is required to express, share, convey the meaning of the message to the recipient of the message. It establishes commonness and uniformity among the individuals who are residing in the society. It is this feeling of commonness and uniformity that is the driving force of communication in this universe. The theatre being a miniature representation of the same is no different. Theatre communication and theatre as medium of mass communication has been one of the most reliable and effective means of communication, it deals with the social problems and it engages the people from the society directly and creates a sphere of consciousness, so that the common people can be aware and will avoid the existing problem of the society to some extent. (Das, 2013). Theatre can play a range of roles bringing people together and creating contexts for collective reflection and

action; drawing out participation and expression of popular concerns, and analysis; overcoming people's fears and rationalizations and building confidence and identity; stimulating discussion and a critical understanding of problems, contradictions, and structures underlining everyday reality; clarifying the possibilities and strategies for action; stirring people's emotions and mobilizing people for action. (Warritay, 1988)

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