

Theatre as a tool for Social Development

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Abstract

The Indian society is a complex with the presence of different caste, religion, creed and tribes as well. This paper is trying to enunciate how theatre works as a tool for the social developmental and how it is helpful for the developmental aspects of the society. And as a medium of mass communication, how theatre is helpful for the change and the change which results in developmental things of the society. Theatre is an effective medium for the social development and it foster growth. Realizing the importance of theatre and as it is one of the most powerful medium for developmental activities. And how it conveys messages for both social and economical development of the society. In India theatre emphasizes the 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. This proposed paper is an attempt to ensure the use of Traditional media like theatre to reach the common people in the process of change and development of the country.

Keywords: Theatre, Development, Development Communication, Participatory Approach, Traditional Media etc.

Introduction

Community development is increasingly using theatre as a tool. This article analyses this use, arguing that for theatre to be successful to support social change and development, participatory practice must be at its core. Social development means as overall development of the areas social, economic, political and cultural advancement and growth - so that the people can to lead a pleasant life. Communication is an important human behaviour and that helps in the process of Social, Political and Cultural transformation of a society. Each and

every society around the world evolves its own appropriate systems of Communication to perform the function of societal transformation which ultimately gave birth to various performing arts. And the social transformation that invites development to stay on track and bring the developmental path to the society, which ultimately results in the betterment and wellbeing of the society. Different traditional forms of communication constitute a potential message which conveys messages for not only social development but also economical development. (Das-2013). According to Ranganath (1980) described folk media as living expressions of the lifestyle and culture of people evolved through the years. In India mass media proved impersonal and unbelievable in contrast with the familiar performance of traditional artists whom the villagers “could not only see and hear but even touch”. Traditional Media can be used to reach these people in the process of change and development of India. Even where modern media have penetrated isolated areas, the older forms maintain their validity, particularly when used to influence attitudes, instigate action and promote change. Extensive experience shows that traditional forms can be effective in dispelling the superstitions, archaic perceptions and unscientific attitudes that people have inherited as part of tradition, and which are difficult to modify if the benefits of change are hard to demonstrate. Practitioners of the traditional media use a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms. This cannot be rivaled by any other means of communication. (Many Voices, One World, Communication and Society: Today and Tomorrow, 1982) . After an initial period we felt that theatre for development should not instruct people on what to do, as our project had been doing, but should rather arouse the people’s capacity to participate and decide things for themselves’ (MDA, 1990, p. 354).

Theatre as a medium of communication and tool for social development

‘Development’ is one term that has become very difficult to define. The various attempts at defining the concept have left the definers at the door step of subjectivity and or political and ideological coloration. As a concept that is broad, the term development as observed by Adesiyani and Arulogun (2005), has not subjected itself to a single definition. Theatre as an ancient form of Communication is a deep-rooted tradition in India’s vibrant culture. But broadly speaking, development represents ideas and practices designed to bring about positive change in human societies. Folk Theatre is a composite art in India with a fusion of elements from music, dance and it is a medium of entertainment for the rural mass of the

country. The important and most relevant thing of folk theatre is having roots in native culture, it 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 showcase critical social, political and cultural issues in a very simple and meaning full way in the form of theatrical messages to create awareness among the people. As theatre is an indigenous form it breaks all kinds of formal barriers of human communication and appeals directly to the people. And the public gets the direct message and they influence a lot from the theatrical presentation and that's why theatre is happens to be the most influential medium of communication as well. As per history, it was during the 15th -16th century that the folk theatre emerged forcefully in different regions. It used different languages, the languages of the regions in which it emerged. Initially these were purely devotional in tenor and typically revolved around religion, local legends and mythology. Later, with changing times, it became more secular in content and began to focus on folk stories of romance and biographical accounts of local heroes. Then due to change of time it began to focus on the social issues in theatrical ways before the public just because to aware the public about the social evils. In the Third Development Decade there was a shift from the dominant paradigm model to people-centered development model, newer concepts of development such as self-help, grassroots participation, the two-way communication, development support communication etc. came to be used. Because peoples participation is the most important ingredient in order to achieve the mark of development for the society. Theatre for Development aims to offer an alternative approach and medium by which theatre can be of direct service to the marginalized urban and rural peasant masses. The theatre for development approach which is gaining slow ascendancy in developing countries collectivism and participation. It stresses community and inter-personal participation in self realization and uses existing and familiar performance forms in the various communities such as songs, dances, music, storytelling, puppetry and mime to either validate those cultural forms or serve as an adequate instrument to bring about social change in those communities

According to Diaz-Bordenave (1989) "Participation is not a fringe benefit that authorities may grant as a concession but every human being's birthright that no authority may deny or prevent". Communication is inextricably related to participatory approaches. If development is to have occurred in real sense it must perceive the people's real own needs, their problems and solutions of these in their own terms. Before Independence, Folk Theatre was effective in

arousing the conscience of the people against the colonial rule of the British. It became effective in many political and social campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi. After Independence the Union Government continues to utilize the Folk Theatre forms to convey messages and to generate awareness of the development programmes in the rural areas. In 1940s, Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), and it was aimed to reach the rural mass with the national message. And it was quite successful so far the aim was concerned. Theatre successfully projects the social and the cultural needs of the people in the region and serves as a vehicle of political education. The author of *History and Theatre in Africa* Eckhard Breitingen opines "The rise of Theatre for Development also marked a change in international relations. It was both the symptom and the result of the failures of 20 years of development policies that had insisted on the implantation of the materialist and technological culture of the North as the only possible road to the development, irrespective of the cultural and social environment."

Generally theatre communicates with its viewer at interpersonal level & small group level of communication. Because of physical proximity, emotion, trust worthiness message content became more relevant to the viewer. Direct communication with live reality makes receiver active in communication process. Participation of local people, the use of local languages and dialects & addressing local problems increase the acceptability of theatre. Viewer feels cultural affinity with the self development mode of the medium. As a result they spontaneously involves with the process of communication. Dialogical theatre initiates active participation of receiver. (Thakur- 2013) Traditional folk forms in India can be effectively utilised for social developmental communication. The communication potential of India traditional performing art has been proved time and again by many instances of national importance. The traditional media are close to the hearts and minds of the people, so there appeal is a personal, intimate level, Further familiar format and content, as also the colloquial dialects used. Make the clarity in communication cross-cultural communication hurdles are not encountered here. The numerous groups and different forms available for specific homogenous groups and for specific purposes can be exploited to cater to people of different region. The Folk media in India seems to be used as supplement to the mass media rather than as the centre of communication efforts to reach 80% of India's total population who live in the villages. In India, mass media continue to be limited largely to the urban population traditional arts forms have survived for centuries and they will survive in future for their flexibility. They could be the media for the social change and social development in rural

India. (Kumar- 2006). 'Theatre for development' was initially inspired by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian cultural and educational theorist and practitioner, who believed that people possess knowledge through life experience but are persuaded by the oppressor to believe that their knowledge is irrelevant. Stimulating people to become conscious and to generate knowledge in their own interests is called the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire,1970). And that has influenced his own student Augusto Boal, who developed the 'Theatre of the oppressed' a form of popular theatre, of, by, and for people designed to help people learn ways of resisting oppression in their daily lives (Boal, 1982). (Scott-Danter, 1999) has realized that the use of theatre in a development environment has involved performing plays to convey strong social messages, with little or no audience participation. Gradually, the potential of theatre as a platform of discussion and of exploring pertinent issues within a particular community in order to tackle the adverse situation of the society. Theatre also serves as a participatory tool by inviting audience to participate in the act, making it a genuine two way medium for communicating information (Kasoma, 1974). Forum theatre or playback theatre, for instance, transforms the audience into actors and creators of the drama. Members of the audience are encouraged to actively engage themselves in the process, critically reflect on, challenge and change the course of the play and try out different solutions. They can interrupt a performance and suggest different actions for the actors who in turn carried out their suggestions, thus giving the spectators themselves an opportunity to come up with different solutions of a collective problem.

Conclusion

Theatre as a medium of mass communication has been one of the most effective medium and at the same time it is also a medium which helps the society in achieving the developmental goals and objectives. In order to adequately evaluate the role of theatre in development, it is vital to understand the nature of the theatre and the concept of development. Theatre is a mechanism of social analysis which can make deep impression among the audience. The principle of participatory communicational nature of theatre is very much impressive. The need-based approaches of theatre in India empower the marginalized people of grass root level. As it is the way of traditional medium of communication and it enriched the cultural heritage of the society. And basing on that it has the potential to convey messages of social and economical advantage, which will results in both social and economical development of the society. But the participation from the common man's side should be high and effecting

in nature. So the people should come forward to ponder about this thing and how they can develop the idle things of theatre for the social development.

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