

### **Introduction**

Theatre at every stage of the timeline, ranging from the time when patriots have been struggling for the freedom of the country to the recent times, are and had been committed to portraying the actuality and reality of the society. The Indian writers through their unrestrained and competent scripts have propagated for the freedom and eradication of the plagued society despite being suppressed or restricted either by the British during the colonial days and recently by any political party that forms the government.

India is and continues to be independent for 72 years, after attaining freedom from the British. Only to be defeated by social unrest and evils. There are numerous issues still prevalent that is still rooted in the Indian society, for instance:

- The inevitable Gender inequality.
- The everlasting caste discrimination.
- The unavoidable unemployment and poverty.
- The never-ending child labour, illiteracy, and forced prostitution.
- The indestructible corruption.

Various views favouring the fact that social evils mainly prevail in the rural areas of our country. But urban India too is inflicted by these communal evils. In spite of the increased awareness via the growing electronic media, the theatre continues to be the dominant or prime mass medium that addresses every aspects or problem of the society. Theatres through their skilful scripts and narrations can easily attract the interest and communicate with a large number of audiences and instigate them to analyse and think about the problems.

### **The way to freedom via theatre**

*Nildarpana* or the mirror of Indigo Planters, had been the first notable play that depicts the harassment, amusement, and torments that the British inflicted on the Indian Indigo cultivators when they refused to plant their crops. This significant play of revolution by Dinabandhu Mitra portrays the struggle, protest, and fight of the workers against the brutality, heartless, and cruel treatment of the British. This play not only gained the significant support

of the people of Bengal, but other writers too found encouragement to represent patriotism through their writings.

Other dramas also expressed the desires for freedom though in an allegorical way and imbibing Hindu mythology, including the Marathi play *Keechakavadha* or the killing of Keechaka, by Probhakar Khadilkar. The play is founded on the events of the *Mahabharata*. The play recounts the story of Keechaka, the brute brother-in-law of emperor Virata, who was killed by Bhima, the most strong brother of the Pandavas, and a husband of Draupadi, when Keechaka stealthily entered Draupadi's room to disgrace her honour. Khadilkar through Bhima, represented the distinguished Marathi freedom fighter, Lokamanya Tilak, and Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India, through Keechaka. Girish Chandra Ghosh too fabricated three dynamic allegories including the eminent, historical participants who resisted and challenged the political oppressors like Mir Kasim, Chatrapati Shivaji, and Sirajuddaulla. Also, every region of the nation started to portray their local freedom fighters, like in Assam, the fight of the Ahom emperors against the Burmese raiders was dramatized. In Mysore, plays including Tipu Sultan, Ecchama Nayaka, Kittur Chennamma, and Nargund Baba Sahib portrayed nationalism. Episodes of Ramayana, Puranas, where Rama gets a victory over Ravana and Krishna defeats Kamsa, symbolized the resistance of the freedom fighters against your foreign oppressors. But these plays were mostly banned by the British to cease the resistance of the Indians.

### **Theatre as an instrument of propagating fundamental rights**

Apart from the patriotic dramas, the theatre also depicts the issues of political oppression, economic exploitation, religious bigotry, and social abuse. Taking advantage of the Bengal famine in 1943, the British government made capital out of the famine's funds. This corruption was portrayed in Bijan Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* or the Bountiful Harvest. It attracted immense public interest. *Bhata* or Rice by Kalicharan Pattnayak deals with the issues of hunger and untouchability among peasants of Odisha. In the play, a brutal landlord's single boy rebelled and turned against him, but was fatally shot in a conflict. After his death, his father, the landlord turned an attendant of the populace. Pattnayak also wrote *Raktamati* or Red Earth, which deals with the issue of untouchability. Another play depicting the struggle for one's fundamental rights is portrayed through *Pattabaki* or The landlord's due, by K. Damodaran.

After independence, there were several plays that while portraying the communal evils, also propagated various ideologies of distinct political parties. For instance, the play *Ningalenne Communistakki* or You Made Me A Communist ( being a Communist ideology based play) depicts the plights of the labours. *Jnanippo Communistavum* or I Will Become A Communist Now, by Kesava Dev, (being a right-wing ideology based play) condemns the corruption within the political system. Also, other such plays include *Manthriyakkolle* or Don't Make Me A Minister, *Kootu Krisbi* or Collective Farming, and *Bhagawan Macaroni* or Lord Macaroni.

Utpal Dutta, in his various plays, depicted various social evils. For instance, in his *Angar* or Coal, he portrayed the inhuman working conditions of the miners. In his and Anal Gupta's plays, *Teer* or Arrow, or *Rakter Rang* or The Colour of Blood, portrayed the plights of the radicals. Establishment hypocrisy was portrayed by Dutt's *Din Badaler Pala* or Tale of the Changing Times.

### **Theatre as a device to eradicate social evils**

Plays like *Kulin Kulasarvaswa*, written by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna highlights the wrongful social customs like early marriage, dowry, polygamy, the rigidity of the caste system, and dominance of the Kulin Brahmins. Also, the play, *Buro Shaliker Ghade Rnow* or New Feathers on Old Bird's Neck, Michael Madhusudan Dutt depicted the hypocrisy of the Brahmins along with the westernized practices that had been acquired during that period. G.B. Deval's *Sharda* criticizes the early marriages of the girl children. *Ekach Pyala* or Only One More, by Gadkari, depicts the vile effects of alcoholism. Vijay Tendulkar's plays- *Ghasiram Kotwal* and *Sakharam Binder* criticize the conventional outlook of the society.

Joti Mhapsekar's *Mulgi Zhali Ho* or A Girl is Born depicts the dismay, distress with which one accepts the birth of a girl infant in India. Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen, Seven Steps Around the Fire*, voiced for the liberation of women from the clutches of patriarchy. Also, Vijay Tendulkar's *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* or Silence! The Court in Session is an attack on the patriarchal norms.

Hence, theatre has extensively utilized as a tool of communicating and expressing disapproval or protest against the oppression, exploitation, and injustices, of the society while incorporating the new perceptions regarding the social attributes. As this creative aspect of entertainment reaches a large audience, have always voiced and continues to protest against

the social, political, and religious evils, not only in India, but all over the globe. Theatre, according to Dutta, “must preach revolution; it must not only expose the system but also call for the violent smashing of the state machine.”

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