

Folk Theatre – A Trusted Media to Create Awareness on Social Issues in Odessa

Dr. Akshay Kumar Panigrahi, Radharani Mohanty

¹*Ph.D, D.Litt., Lecturer in Odia, Baba Panchalingeswar Degree College, Sanataragadia, Balasore, Odisha. 756042,*

²*Research Scholar, Fakir Mohan University, Balasore*
Corresponding Author: Dr. Akshay Kumar Panigrahi

Abstract : Folk Theatre is a form of communication, which does not use technology as the primary channel. The primary role of such a medium is to inform, entertain, persuade, and provide a means for connecting people. Theatre in Odisha, as we see it, has a rich history, heritage and culture. Many people in Odisha folk theatre is very much alive. As time passed, the form of communication turned to a mediated communication which means the communication interaction using technology as the primary channel, around the world for which Odisha is not an exception. However, the theatre form of communication has been a key medium in addressing sociological issues. The objective of this paper is to examine the ace role played by the theatre in addressing the social problems in contemporary Odisha.

Keywords – mediated communication, Odisha's traditional media, drama, communication, cinema, rural, middle class, Sanskrit,

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I. INTRODUCTION

Theatre, music and dance are the three traditional art forms which have been part of human culture. Folk Theatre is a primordial aesthetic practice in Odisha. All existing evidences suggest that folk theatre existed in Odisha from the beginning of civilization. Folk theatre in Odisha gives the impression to the part of its origin from religion. In Odisha folk theatre, the two great narrative epics of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have a greater importance.

Street theatre as a form of communication is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition. In recent times this form has been used to propagate social and political messages and to create an awareness amongst the masses regarding critical issues. Street theatre breaks the formal barriers and approaches the people directly.

Street theatre is a situation where the audience has not come prepared to watch a play, and people may not have much time on hand. These limitations determine the parameters of the plays. They are short. The exchange is close, direct and intimate and, to be more effective, usually loud and larger than life. The script and direction is always significant. In order to draw crowds from all walks of life, the plays are humorous. Songs based on popular catchy tunes are included to add to its appeal. The choreography of the play varies from script to script. The play must be as inexpensive and mobile as possible, since no stage props can be used. A 'dholak' or choral song is used to attract people and once a large enough crowd has gathered the play being usually in a circular area with the audience all around. The chorus sings or speaks out the script. Sometimes one person narrates while the actors mime. No make-up is used unless mime is the medium. Then the face is painted white and the eyes an exaggerated black to highlight expressions. If the audience is very large and one person alone has to speak, a mike is used. There are no separate costumes for the actors. They might all wear a black robe but that depends on the theme. Being the kind of theatre it is there is not much scope for fine acting. The movements have to be very exaggerated.

In Odisha the folk theatre is as old as Vedas, for at least the seed of drama lies in the Upanishads. The more actual source of folk drama surely older than these scriptures is the sacrificial and festival ceremonies and religious procession. Many known and unknown factors worked together to produce Odisha folk theatre and give it a religious stamp that ambled throughout the classic age in the serious nature of the folk drama.

Although the dramatic literature in Sanskrit verses diminished gradually, the performance traditions transformed into various forms through the traditional and classical folk, just as the basic aesthetics of Odisha's folk theatre is influenced by and draws inspiration from various sources

Due to the great influence of Western proscenium style theatre, the indigenous traditional folk theatre and various other theatrical genres of Odisha got a great hit. Educated mass is attracted towards modern method of theater and cinema. Still then the rural folk remained attached to the folk theatre which was staged in the rural areas.

Social Evils Prevailing in Contemporary Odisha:

In order to understand the prevailing social evils in Odisha a deep insight into the rich heritage and culture of the state is required. These problems are deep rooted in the Odia heritage and from that it has outgrown to a serious crime reigning within the boundaries. India is definitely one of the fastest developing nations of the world. It has been 70 years that the country gained independence and became a republic but sadly the very purpose of attaining the freedom is defeated. However, issues rooted in our colonial past, cultural processes, and socio-economic changes have together led to the burning problems of Indian society. The gravest social problems faced by Odisha, at present are:

Poverty ,Unemployment ,Gender Inequality, Caste Discrimination ,Dowry ,Child Labor ,Drug Abuse ,Forced Prostitution ,Domestic Violence,Female Infanticide etc.

Further, many other social evils like corruption, illiteracy, and urbanization are also the momentous problems being faced by Odia society. All these social issues need a careful analysis and demand rational solution to help the society grow in all possible ways. There is no doubt that communication plays a vital role in this regard.

Role of Theatre in addressing Social Evils in India

Odisha has a rich heritage and culture that is more prominently palpable in the rural Odisha. Most of the social evils being faced by Odia society have its roots in the rural Odisha. It is also evident that in rural Odisha despite the vast opening out of the electronic media, theatre remains the predominant mass medium. Hence, in addressing the social evils, this medium has a great role to play.

The message intended to be communicated to the target audience should be well narrated and well scripted. It should make the rural audiences to think and analyze the problem. Also, it is very important to have an appropriate form of communication that deems fit to the audience interests. In order to note the effectiveness of the theatre communication in addressing the social evils, the feedback must be obtained. Often, theatre is misinterpreted purely as a source of entertainment. However, theatre can be so much more than just sequined costumes and pretty songs; in fact, it is often the perfect vehicle to provide education about current social issues and to inspire social and political change.

In general, the communication process involves only sender and one or more receivers. But unlike in conventional model of communication, a theatre communications involves two or more stages of senders. The message intended to be passed to the audience involves coding and decoding at minimum two levels.

Street theatre as a channel of communication is deeply rooted in Indian society. The modern form is different only in the themes enacted. The street theatre groups analyze the society as it exists, visualize its future, and then attempt to put the vision across.

In recent years street theatre has picked up pace and has acquired an image of a more moral nature with just the right kind of fun. Better known as ‘nukad natak’ today, is perhaps the best way to connect with the common man and the youth. These are much intimate, brief, direct and address the social/political message head-on with the help of drama. The catchy phrases and songs, crisp script, humor and loudness help in making a long lasting and powerful effect on viewers. These plays if targeted towards youth can really stir up emotions, create awareness and lead the way towards positive change. Nukad natak are an important tool in creating awareness, empowering the youth and utilizing our right to freedom of speech and expression positively. This colloquial form of drama connects with the youth instantly. The lack of properness and formal atmosphere adds to its appeal and gives it a real lifelike look. It not only enlightens people but gives us, the citizens to voice our opinion too. These plays have similar impact like Mark Antony’s speech on Julius Caesar’s death. The stirred up crowd and their displayed and fuelled up emotions may be considered parallel, plays having to do more with our mind. Similar to the results of Mark Antony’s funeral speech, these plays have the strength to start a social revolution. This enthusiasm if used in the correct manner can lead to drastic changes in our society. Changes we wish for. Changes that make us blame the government for mishandling the affairs concerning our nation. It’s all up in our head-right in our brain- the change. Changes in society does not mean only having enough capital for putting up street lights for women’s safety but it is about thinking or better, having the attitude of not adding to the problem and helping people mitigating the situation. Change in society comes with the change in the mindset of the people and street plays can rightly achieve that goal.

As youth is a country’s tomorrow, making them the target audience is a great idea for bringing about a change. Hence, issues that parents miss out on discussing with their children or topics that haunt our youth in general can be tackled through these street plays and change the society slowly into a better place to live in.

Through street plays, one can present in a very intriguing way the seriousness of a particular situation or an issue at hand. This is done by a group of performers suddenly popping up in a crowded place, gaining attention of the maximum number of people possible, and performing in an entertaining way subtly switching on to the serious message.

Case Studies on Effectiveness of Theatre in Addressing Social Evils in India:

In Odisha, over the years, street theatre has been playing a significant role in spreading awareness. One such success story comes from Nilgiri ITDA Block of Balasore district in Odisha. The tribal based theatre groups have come forward to spread awareness among the tribal people on such issues ranging from sex education to social issues like corruption and rude treatment. This is the best way to get a message across to the people in an effective manner for it is staged right in the middle of people and not on an elevated platform, creating distance between the performers and audience.

More so, it could be staged at the shortest of notice, without the paraphernalia associated with organized plays staged at predetermined venues. Theatre actors believe that change is each and everyone's responsibility, and whoever wishes to see it, needs to add their bit, to see it. They believe in vocalizing and bringing to fore different issues that plague our society at large, and the few steps that can be taken towards larger and greater solutions. Till date, number of group, specially the nearby college students through their NSS units, have scripted and performed street plays that deal with issues such as women's empowerment, child labor, children's education, usage of solar energy, the need to vote, examining the state of democracy, anti-sedition etc. They have partnered with non-profit, grassroots organizations and conducted workshops not only in Nilgiri but surrounding rural areas – spreading awareness regarding decisive issues such as menstrual hygiene and post-natal care. In order to tackle serious issues such as child abuse, the group conducts workshops with children

Suggestions & Recommendations:

Likewise like every other medium has its own advantages, the theatre medium has its advantages too in disseminating the information among the masses, especially the rural masses. Most of the social evils being faced by the contemporary Odisha are required to be addressed at rural areas; and for this the best suited medium is the theatre. The following suggestions & recommendations may be considered for effectively utilizing the theatre medium in informing and educating the rural masses.

1. The local bodies and government requires patronizing the artists and encouraging this medium.
2. The concept of street theatre has been proven very effective. Hence, due encouragement is solicited at all levels.
3. All concerned departments in universities across the country should be tasked to give performances in rural areas as part of their course curriculum.
4. Under National Service Scheme (NSS) at all colleges, performances through street theatre in educating social evils to the rural masses should be encouraged and promoted.
5. It is evident that a great threat has been imposed to theatre from various other media. In this prevailing situation, new innovative programs that utilize applications of both theatre and new media are to be derived.

II. CONCLUSION

In Odisha, the theatre has been used for addressing social evils, social progress and for bringing various changes in the society. Theatre for this purpose includes activist and grass-roots bodies, government and non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as socially-aware theatre groups or individuals. The groups working with Dalits, Tribal women, children, sex workers, and other marginalized populations, all qualify as practicing theatre for addressing social evils

Administration should utilize the advantages of theatres for information dissemination in a country with low literacy and high population. Especially, theater group has been depending on the street theatre, which provides a low-cost and immediate means of reaching the illiterate in India.. The purpose was to include given social messages in their particular repertoires.

The government's model of development was purely focused on education, family planning, hygiene, building of pit latrines, and other such national concerns. NGOs, non-partisan activist societies, and grass-roots groups all over the country increasingly began to use street theatre as a means of social change.

Throughout the history of Indian theatre for addressing social evils, there has been a belief that folk forms are uniquely suited to communicate to the multitudes. In contrast to the governmental approach of providing messages for distribution, some traditional performers themselves have taken up issues relating to social evils. So much initiative has been taken by the volunteer groups, groups patronized by the government and various groups of college students in addressing social evils, in Odisha.

But, it can be said with an assertion that the potentiality of theatre as a medium to diffuse information on addressing social evils has not been utilized, effectively. It should be an endeavour for all concerned stakeholders to promote this medium for effectively addressing social evils in contemporary Odisha and also to safeguard this medium from extinction.

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