

Relevance of Drama and Theater to the society with special reference to Odia Drama and Theatre

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ABSTRACT: *Odisha had, and still has, a rich tradition of folk performances. Jatra (opera) and suanga (farce), Ramlila Bharatlila, Dandanata and Prahlada Nataka are some such forms. There was also a tradition of Sanskrit drama in Odisha. Murari Mishra, Vishwanath Kabiraj and King Kapilendra Deva wrote and staged plays in Sanskrit. Ray Ramananda, the Minister of Pratap Rudra Deva, built a stage in the Jagannath Ballav Math at Puri. It is even said that King Kharabelas Hathi Gumphra was used in the second century A D as a stage for dramatic performances. Most of the Sanskrit and folk performances were based on religious myths and were often a part of festivals or religious rituals.*

Key Words:

Odia Drama , social values, life choices, and their consequences, Theatres , public imagination, Odia drama Babaji, contemporary social situation during British rule in Odisha, colonial prose dialogues , social satire ,English-speaking ,refined version of Jatra.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Theatre is the recreation of life on a stage, every action performed, words spoken, gestures made are representations of real life, plays, novels, and similar works are personal expressions of the writer who attempts to pass a message to society. Comedy or Tragedy, both are representations of the society and deal with issues that happen in a society (historical, family issues, political issues, religion, the list is endless.

Social relations thrive in spoken dialectics and colloquies which find adequate expression in drama/theatre. Drama is a literary composition to be acted by players on a stage before an audience. Its successful portrayal depends on the cooperation that must exist among writers, actors, producers and audiences in accepting the limitations and the conventions of the stage. Since the turn of the twentieth century, modern drama has become the greatest form of mass entertainment in the western world. Experimentation and innovation are basic to this century's dramatist. Through movies and television, everyone has experienced the excitement and emotional involvement that gives the drama its important place in our lives today. Drama and theatre have their origins in the cultural settings of the past and the vicissitudes of the present. The theatre tradition has been part of the ritual and social life of the people embracing the totality of their way of life, habits, attitudes and propensities. Although looked at as a form of entertainment, theatrical activities and performances are regarded as informal ways by which the quality of lives of people can be inculcated and enriched.

Like the novel and the short story modern drama was the product of Odia authors exposure to English literature. The first Odia play was Babaji (1877) by Jaganmohan Lala (1838-1913). Like Radhanath Roy, Lala was educated in the Western system and worked under the British Government. He started a theatre of his own, Radhakanta Rangamancha, named after his family deity, and staged his plays, Sati (1886) and Priti. Lala had social reform as his major theme, Though the first play in Odia, Babaji is a successful play in the realistic mode. Ramashankar Roy (1858-1917), a contemporary of Lala, was a prolific dramatist who wrote historical, social and religious plays. The other important playwrights before independence were Bhikari Charan Patnaik (1878-1962) and Godavarish Mishra. Past glory of Odisha and social reform were the themes of most of the plays written before independence. The most popular playwright soon before and after independence was Vaishnab Pani (1882-1956). He wrote operas with themes borrowed from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. But he had also new themes like the Freedom Movement and economic exploitation and introduced prose dialogues and ordinary men and women as characters. He seems to have written as many as two hundred operas. Pani truly continued the age-old opera tradition but made it contemporary and relevant. Pani staged his operas in different parts of the state. His popularity clearly proves the Odia audience's love for the traditional form.

Brief highlights of Odia Dram

Ashwini Kumar Ghose (1892-1962), Kali Charan Patnaik, Gopal Chhotray and Bhanja Kishore Patnaik were prominent before and after independence. They had history, mythology and social problems as their themes and introduced various innovative techniques on the stage. Cuttack continued to be the center of dramatic activities and there were more than one professional theatre which staged plays every day of the year. Ghoses Konarka, a historical play, and Patnaiks Bhata (Rice), a social play, were great success, These playwright tried to be serious as well as entertaining and they laid the foundation of the post independence dramatic tradition.

Playwright, who have dominated the dramatic scene in the last three decades are Manoranjan Dash Pranabandhu Kar, Kartik Chandra Rath, Bijaya Mishra Bishwajit Das, Harihar Mishra and Ramesh Chandra Panigrahi. Compared to their predecessors, this group has explored a greater variety of themes and techniques and have been more influenced by the western dramatic tradition. In their attempt to be modern they have sometimes alienated themselves from the masses, The growth of the electronic media and the death of the professional theatre have marginalised modern drama and some of the successful dramatists have turned to the traditional opera form which is still popular among the masses.

Impact of Odia Drama and Theatre on Society:

There is a lot of established research about the positive influences from **drama, theatre** and the performing arts, especially on young people. The benefits are physical, emotional, social, and they help to develop a healthy appreciation of culture and the arts. Theatre has been an influential factor in many people's lives. **Creativity** can flourish, academics can improve, and means of **self-expression** can be developed. It is important to have mandatory theater classes because when a student participates. **Art** is more than just self-expression and self communication; it allows us to escape into the refuge of our fantasy, to leave behind the stress of the modern day world. ...**Art** has a major **importance** in modern **society** because it defines us individuals and make us better people.

Aspects of performing arts, especially improvisation helps young people to understand how to appraise situations, think outside the box and be more confident going into unfamiliar situations. Students learn to trust their ideas and abilities. Confidence gained from learning performing arts skills applies to school, career, and life. Being creative and learning to make creative choices helps students to be better at thinking of new ideas, allowing them to view the world around them in new ways. Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Understanding characters, roles and the subtext of plays and musicals allows students to relate better to different situations, backgrounds, and cultures. It encourages them to show compassion and tolerance for others. Theatre is a collaboration of different players and in many cases the quality of any performance reliance on an ensemble performance. Combining the creative ideas and the abilities of all participants is required for the best outcomes. This requires all those taking part to engage in discussions, feedback, rehearsing, and the performance. Playing, practicing, and performing will develop the ability and skills to be able to focus the mind, the body, and the voice.

It seems obvious to say that drama, theatre and the performing arts improves verbal and nonverbal communication, but it is worth stating that this benefits young people through their life. It improves vocal projection, articulation, tone of speech and expression. Importantly is also develops listening and observation skills. Drama brings elements of play, humour, and laughter to those taking part – improves motivation and reduces stress. Acting and drama games allow students to express a range of emotions and encourage them to understand and deal with similar feelings they may be experiencing. Aggression and tension are released in a safe, controlled environment – often allowing for a period of reflection afterwards. Performing, even the most passive performances, requires intensive movement over a prolonged period. Many performing arts exercises improve flexibility, coordination, balance, and control. Rehearsing and performing lines and movements will improve memory. Your memory requires exercise, just like a muscle.

Orissa on the Eastern part of India experienced multiple cultural encounters for about five hundred years. It needs to be mentioned here that Orissa was subjected to many foreign invasions such as the Mughals, Afghans, and Marathas before the arrival of British in 1803. From 16th to 18th century, it was the Islamic empire in which the theatrical activities were marginalized eventually from public life and royal courts and temples of Hindu kings. The Afghans occupied the northern portion of present Orissa and ruled for more than one hundred seventy years i.e., from 1468 to 1578 and this empire succeeded by Moguls who remained from 1578 to 1751. During this period the social and economic changes occurred substantially. The British ruled for a few years in early 19th century and the Bengali administrative class followed them and settled in the coastal plains of northern Orissa. 1866 marks the outbreak of the Great famine and the consolidation of the British rule. By the end of this century the imperial tradition through Bengalis had already entered into the roots of the Oriya culture "which attempted to subvert the traditions of Orissa with techniques of spreading cultural imperialism that seemed to have been adopted from the Europeans"(Panigrahi;1996: 20). During British Raj, the Madras

presidency ruled over Southern Orissa and Western Orissa in turn was controlled by the Central Presidency. It needs to be mentioned that southern Orissa had come under the sway of Telugu a dominant language in the region. Similarly, Western Orissa was closed to Singhbhum and Bihar and was subjected to a dominant Hindi language and literature. Thus, the regional culture in different parts of the state witnessed various cultural responses to the colonial rule.

It is not true that no theatrical tradition existed in the state prior to colonial rules. In fact it was the age of indigenous performances of Leela, Suanga, and Jatra that were confined to rural Orissa. The proscenium stage surpassed the indigenous theatre like Jatra and could reach both rural and urban masses. Jatra was confined to the rural areas as an occasional performative tradition. Both modern and traditional theaters coexisted while fulfilling the entertainment needs of a diverse audience. Similarly, the Jatra also saw a tremendous growth in Orissa parallel to the court theater in Southern Orissa and commercial theaters in Cuttack and Balasore. Kings, members of royalty and zamindars, largely patronized Oriya theatre financially. However, in most instances playwright-directors-producers themselves made the actual effort. The financial support during the commercial ventures were offered by the business class i.e., Marwaris and Mahantas of Mathas. After sixties till present time it is through personal donations and occasional Government support Oriya theatre is patronized. Now one needs to go beyond the empirical facts and should examine as to how theatres work in history vis-à-vis in society and culture. Thus, it may be useful at this stage to review briefly the major narratives that depicted in the Oriya theatre.

Impact:

Symbolic objects and actions-vestments, altars, censers, extensive sets of visual designs and pantomime-were used to communicate to a largely, illiterate audience. Over the years, the dramatic, performing and theatre arts are often misconstrued as professions based only on acting, singing and dancing. A theatre practitioner could be a playwright, critic, costume designer, make-up artiste, choreographer, filmmaker etc. The following are points of reference where drama and theatre serve in our various day-to-day activities.

Drama and theatre are tools used to sensitize the general public on matters that affect them on daily basis. These include matters of family planning/child-spacing, conduction of census, campaign against sale and distribution of fake and illegal drugs, HIV/AIDS and other STDs, abortions, child abuse/neglect etc. A perfect example is the TV series, I need to know, which focuses on the enlightenment of the youthful generation on the dangers of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, STDs and teenage pregnancies and the need to abstain from such vice,s in order to protect their future. Drama, as one of the core genres of literature, is the mirror of any society because it documents what is happening and throws it back at the same society.

II. CONCLUSION:

Theatre, which has served certain ends since it came into existence, mostly strives to make changes in the traditional structure through its effective power of expression. This branch of art has acquired a privilege with its educational priority in the realisation of smooth and natural flow of the social transition which takes place during the journey from the traditional to the universal with political, religious as well as economic concerns. From the ancient times to the present, attempts to educate society through theatre have assumed a considerably potential role as a means employed in circumstances where dominant systems of thought were intended to be disseminated into broad areas. However, in spite of its unifying role within the social life, theatre has not only undertaken the appropriate messages, but it has also served the ends to impose some tendencies aimed to meet interests, leading to social hesitations against arts. This artistic activity, which has been sacrificed for the sake of conflicts of interest, has been isolated from the social life by the minds that regard enlightenment of the society through awareness-raising as a threat. Drama has a very large impact on a persons personal growth.

In the early twentieth century, lyrical dramas of Baishnav Pani, Krushna Prasad Basu, Balakrushna Mohanty gained immense popularity. The greatest popular dramatist was Baishnab Pani. During early part of the twentieth century, Oriya Drama took a new turn in the hands of new and bold dramatists like Ashwani Kumar Ghosh. Between 1937 and 1962 he wrote many social, historical and mythological plays. After him, came Kalicharan Patnaik whose immortal creation was 'Bhata' (Rice) depicting man's inhumanity in times of famine. These dramas had a social impact to a large extent in Odisha.

Odia Drama is proud to offer at present a wide selection of thought-provoking plays about social values, life choices, and their consequences. Many of these plays, without being preachy or trite, open up discussions about ethics, remaining true to yourself, friendship, love, and loss. Other plays have timely, topical themes such as bullying, gossip, gangs, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, depression, suicide, and more. All are ideal for contest or other dramatic presentations.

Theatres have the power to bring important issues to the forefront of public imagination and to reach out to the communities and individuals affected by them. The current economic climate is a genuine threat to theatres – the government, local authorities and audiences must do all they can to support them.

Best example is first Odia drama Babaji which is the reflection of contemporary social situation during British rule in Odisha. Babaji contained colonial prose dialogues and presented social satire that narrated the life of a corrupted Babaji of the colonial days. It criticized the English-speaking Babus (respected gentlemen) who spread alcoholism in society. Ramesh Panigrahi says that the stage was an avenue for social correction of the 'follies' that percolated... to Babaji of Orissa as a parameter of modernity and as an attempt at the redefinition of the dramatic form. However, it is still a controversy among the theatre historians whether this play should be called a pure theater or not, as it contained songs and rhetorical language and was described mostly as a refined version of Jatra.

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