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THEATRE - COMMUNICATION THAT CAPTIVATES AND ENCHANTS

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Abstract

Theatre is one of the oldest ways of effective communication methods across the world. Still today in a developing country like India where still sixty five percent of population lives in rural areas where mass media reach is very low the relevance of Theatre for Developmental issues and programmes is very much relevant and quiet essential. Theatre for Development (TFD) is more than simply making and performing plays. It gives target group representatives-who typically develop and perform the plays- the opportunity to tell their own stories, involvement and addressing matters that are relevant to them. This is one of the most effective ways of participatory approach method where people can participate and can see and talk about the taboos of the society which reflects the society openly.

Popular theatre is intended to empower the common man brings awareness with a critical consciousness crucial to the struggle against the forces responsible for the poverty, social evils and all the social and developmental issues of the society and tries to transforms the behaviour of the individual in a right direction for the self betterment. Many TFD productions are a mix of the two. "Theatre of the Oppressed" (TO), a technique created by Augusto Boal is a form of community-based theatre. Several organizations and initiatives have used theatre as a development tool: for education or propaganda, as therapy, as behavioural change communication and as a participatory tool, or as an exploratory tool in the process of development. This paper critically analyses about development and how theatre can be used as a tool of effective communication in the process of development and social change.

Keywords: Participatory approach, communication for development, reflection of individuals, behaviour change communication, public opinion, taboo related topics, real life conditions, empower groups.

Introduction

Theatre for Development means live performance, or theatre used as a development tool- in the process of development. It is the best source for communication for development. It encompasses the following in-person activities, with people or "puppets", before an audience:-a dance production, spoken-word drama or comedy; a music, singing; participatory or improvisational techniques using any or all of these. Theatre for development process can also be defined as a progression from less interactive theatre forms to a more dialogical process, where theatre is practiced with the people or by the people as a way of empowering groups and communities, listening to their concerns, and then encouraging them to voice and solve their own problems.

Theatre for Development (TfD) is more than simply making and performing plays. It gives target group representatives - who typically develop and perform the plays - the opportunity to tell their own stories, involvement and addressing matters that are relevant to them. While developing the plot, the actors will start analysing their own situation. After the performance, the analysis is extended to the audience by asking questions like: Why did the lead character do this? What could he/she have done differently? What can we ourselves do to prevent or solve such situations?

Penina Mloma, referring to the enterprise as Popular Theatre, describes its aims briefly as : it aims to make the people not only aware of but also active participants in the development process by expressing their viewpoints. Popular theatre is intended to empower the common man with a critical consciousness crucial to the struggle against the forces responsible for his poverty. Many TfD productions are a mix of the two. "Theatre of the Oppressed" (TO), a technique created by Augusto Boal is a form of community-based theatre. Several organizations and initiatives have used theatre as a development tool: for education or propaganda, as therapy, behaviour change communication, as a participatory tool, or as an exploratory tool in the process of development. The early use of TfD is the thesis *Theatre as a Means of Moral Education and Socialization in the Development of Nauvoo, Illinois, 1839-*

1845, which recounts how theatre was used to promote ideological and civil society development in a religious community in the US (Hurd 2004).

"Theatre for Development (TfD) is ...a changeable continuous process of development through theatre/creative forms of expression. It is cultural action for change. Cultural action is intervention in reality by cultural means. TfD is one tool in the wider development process. Theatre is used differently than before in TfD."

What is *Development* ?

'Development'- 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 Adesiyun and Arulogun (2005), has not subjected itself to a single definition. Some see development as a state or condition that is static, others see it as process or course of change. Economists, politicians and others freely use the term especially when discussion borders on state of growth of a given society, place or thing. The term which is somewhat closely bound with the evolution of capitalism and the demise of feudalism has many meanings such as there are numerous clashing perspectives, theories and deep differences of opinion. Broadly speaking, development represents ideas and practices designed to bring about positive change in human societies. Gene Shackman et al say *it is a function of society's capacity to organize human energies and produce.*

The Mexican Nobel prize winner Octavio Paz shares when he described development as an act of opening out 'that which is rolled up, to unfold, to grow freely and harmoniously'. Rodney (1972) sees development as a many-sided process in which material well being is the ultimate goal at the level of individual, the achievement of which is very much tied to the state of society as a whole. Further conceptualization of development includes that of Schiavo-Campo and Singer (1970) who considers development in terms of better nutrition, low mortality rate, broad choice of consumption, standard of living, skilled labour formation and technological progress. Udoakah (1998) notes that some African leaders, at a farm-house dialogue convened by former Nigeria President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, defined development as 'a process concerned with people's capacity, period, to manage and induce change'. That is to predict, plan, understand and monitor change and reduce or eliminate unwanted change. Like most economist, alluded that increases in GDP, improved health, housing, and employment opportunities as well as knowledge, information and technological creativity are keys to development. But Todaro (1997) provides what we consider a concise

description of development when he says that 'development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system'. Todaro offers three objectives of development and argues that development involves the process of improving the quality of all human lives with three equally important aspects. First he identifies raising peoples living levels, viz. incomes and consumption, level of food, medical services and education through relevant growth processes as one of the fundamental indices of development. Todaro cites creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promotes human dignity and respect as the second objective of development while the third borders on increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables, for instance varieties of goods and services. Common to all these definitions however are the desire for changes that will affect citizens welfare positively and or liberate them from poverty and inequality. This makes development an act of freedom, just like the theatre.

Development media theory which relates to media structures and performance in developing societies provides a strong theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between theatre and the process of development. This is because the theory encompasses what Folarin (1998) described as a great variety of socio-cultural, economic and political condition which borders on the effective use of the media for development purpose. Specifically, the theory considers the role of the media in society as essential target at stimulating and sustaining societal development in such area as cultural, social economic, political and technological development. The theory also advocates a situation where the theatre also should accept and help in carrying out the special development task of national integration, socio-economic modernization, promotion of illiteracy and cultural creativity (Folarin 1998). The 'Reflective-Projective' theory of Broadcasting and Mass Communication by Leo Loevinger presents a similar position. The theory provides yet another basis for understanding the relationship of theatre and the process of development. Leovinger position is that the media 'mirrors the society' and that while the media themselves reflects society as organized group, individual audience members project their own individual reflections into images presented. Indeed the theatre as a media of communication constantly mirrors and reflects the society. The country's theatre are direct reflections of the yearning of the people and bestowed on the theatre, the role of a vanguard, a watchdog, the barometer of the society and a major factor in nation building (Yerima 2007).

Participatory Performances- In African or Asian countries different forms of theatre were and still are very common in the sense of bringing information to the people in an oral way. Different theatre traditions developed worldwide and re-lived in colonized countries after independence. During the last three decades Development Communication gained significantly and traditional communication through methods participative theatre methods.

The organisers of the performance or Tfd-project must know the society and the problems people face. The play that is going to be performed and worked has to be developed with indigenous people, who know cultural behaviours and social problems of the society. It is helpful to have local authority persons and opinion leaders in the team of a Tfd-project, whom the regional society listens to and trusts and in this way it will be most effective and it have due publicity also. Mostly Tfd programs the performance played on a community or gathering place. The plays are performed to build awareness about critical topics which are mostly within a political or developmental context. A lot of creativity is needed for writing and performing a politically critical play that is a very important feature of Tfd methods. Besides political issues common topics are non-formal education, hygiene, health education, social evils, disposal of sewage, environment, women's rights, violence against women, child abuse, malnutrition, prostitution, drugs, street children, literacy etc.

Street theatre Methods like e.g. 'invisible theatre' or 'image theatre' can be acted in the streets, seen by people passing by. 'Invisible theatre' seems like a real situation to the audience, which mainly functions as a thought-provoking impulse to the people who observe the situation. Every kind of Tfd-programme trusts in the strength of the word of mouth via people who face the situation, are part of a project or watch a critical play. 'Invisible theatre' in the streets reaches people who wouldn't attend a workshop or watch a play, thus the coverage of addressed people can be even higher and social change is another step closer.

Theatre for Development is a famous means of communication for the people especially in less developed societies. Basically theatre for Development is used not for catering entertainment to the people but is used to educate people. It educates people not only in human rights, social issues but also in development, civic rights, health hygiene and civil society participation. The actors often speaking their own language can convey their message in an effective way. They share the same lifestyle with the audiences and are members of the same community. Audiences feel themselves as a part of the same culture of the players and apply the lessons learnt from the theatres in their real lives. Development theatres motivate audiences for self-help in sectors such as health and education. Such motivation can be

created by the culturally-appropriate dissemination of health education at the community level. While the players represent the real life conditions of the local community they offer solution to the problems such as health, family planning, youth/adolescents issues, women related issues, violence against women, human rights, child development, education, social evil practices, trafficking, drugs and poverty etc. further we prefer to take each theatre with full specific concentration and customize as per objectives and expected outputs. Theatre for Development is as an effective method of rising awareness on such issues and can therefore play a key role in community education and development. It is a non confrontational way of addressing problems and it makes talking about sensitive and even normally taboo subjects. After a performance, people can discuss the actions of the people in the play instead of criticizing individual members of their village. They can test potential ways of problem solving on stage in front of the whole village and then discuss them. Daring to take action within the playful situation of a theatre play, villagers realize that they have just performed an action they could also undertake in real life. It helps in shaping public opinion about certain topics and moulds the public opinion in the desired direction.

Development theatres have been used for the development communication in our neighbouring countries, like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and African nations. TfD is an instrument of social change within the framework of development approaches. It's related to development much more than to theatre. For a long time TfD has been seen as a relatively inexpensive educational tool involving local people as performers. It seems to avoid the problem of illiteracy by using the language of the people and deals with local problems and situations with which everyone can identify. Theatre would not only change their behaviour but also give them a hope for a brilliant and secure future. We believe that theatre for development has the potential to change people's mentality and behaviour. After 1950 many dramatic techniques were utilized in an entirely new area called theatre for development. Theatre has been used, primarily in the developing world, to foster literacy programs, population planning campaigns, and agricultural development programs. In Indonesia, for example, Wayang shadow puppets have been used, with the content of traditional plays altered to include most popular topics for the development and social change.

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. 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. The process according to Byam involved information gathering, interviews and discussions, play making, presentation of the play and after presentation discussion. Both Wasan, Manoma and Wasan Samaru were classic example of theatre as an instrument of social mobilization and conscientization.

TFD can be used to bring change in the community as it is a powerful tool for triggering dialogue on sensitive matters such as taboo-related topics, religious conflict situations, and inequalities based on caste, creed and religion. Drama techniques such as mirroring, exaggeration, and ridiculing can help to put daily challenges in perspective and transcend hurdles for change. By inviting people to act out their own solutions on stage, alternatives can be collectively visualised and community ownership enhanced. Applied theatre is used in the field of development through a group of practices often referred to as theatre for development. These performances frequently work with rural and marginalised communities employing performance, including drama, song, dance and puppetry to convey pertinent health and educational messages (Kamlongera, 2005; Prentki T. 1998). As a tool for development work, performance may be particularly useful due to performance artists abilities to work with groups of people who are not literate, who do not share a language, or who don't have access to other types of media. Where mass media reach and availability is not there TFD is the best way of communication for the process of awareness and social change. Theatre for development may offer a way of looking at how performance can work with communities to create their own approaches for transforming.

It is not only a method of communicating health and educational messages to communities, theatre for development aim to create a forum for people to negotiate their own change for development. The pedagogical theories of Paulo Friere (2002; 2006a; 2006b) offer a framework for working with communities and have been instrumental in developing concepts of theatre for development. Friere initiates a 'bottom-up' approach to education, in which students institute their own solutions to problems. In the spirit of Friere's theories, when considering theatre for development Kennedy Chinyowa (2001; 2007; 2008a; 2008b) writes that the process assumes 'people are capable of transforming themselves if they are afforded the space to participate in their own development' (Chinyowa, 2008a, p. 5). Theatre for development is influenced by a Frierean framework and aims to become 'the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (Friere, 2006a, p. 79).

Performance is participatory, awakening people from a passive state of acceptance, into a critical consideration of their realities. The dynamic process stimulates thinking and debate and has enabled children, youth, women and adults to identify and act upon alternative solutions for problems faced by people and the community. TfD is being used in research, evaluation, monitoring and for advocacy. TfD involves tools and processes such as Conceptualizing, writing, making plays and performing; Art, music, song and dance; Analysing problems and finding their root causes; Children engaging with adults and other children for bringing about positive changes; Negotiations with those in authority.

Despite the impact of Friere's participatory framework upon theories and practices of theatre for development, performance processes may continue to silence women participants. While women may be visible in theatre for development shows, performance theorist Esi Dogbe (2002) argues that they do not necessarily have a voice in the process. In her analysis of theatre for development in Ghana, Dogbe writes that plays may deliver messages of women's strength and decision-making abilities, yet these same performances do not allow women to become active decision makers in the play-making process. While participation is a key tenant of theatre for development, without a critique of gendered practices, theatre for development cannot offer alternative ways for women to participate. Chinyowa maintains that while 'community theatre remains in search of social change, it seems to be confronted by ambiguities in terms of the agency, power and representation of its participants' (Chinyowa, 2008b, p. 11). According to Chinyowa, those working in the field of theatre for development, who are often outsiders to the communities with which they work, can fail to fully observe and understand the cultural norms of target communities. He examines how notions of participation involve more than simply performing plays in local languages, and post-performance discussions (Chinyowa, 2008a).

Taboo topics like HIV/AIDS infection, atrocities against women, dowry harassments, can be showed through TfD. The magnitude of the HIV/AIDS infection is varied in the countries of Asia. India also is at an alarming situation and largest number of infected people. There is an urgent need for greater understanding of issues around sexual health and sexual behaviour. In many ways, HIV has forced discourses on sexual behaviour out of the closet but discussion on sexual behaviour is still taboo and certain sections in the society fear that these interventions will promote sexual activity in children and young people leading to erosion of their culture. Programmes addressing sexual health and sexual behaviour are often misinterpreted to have arisen out of a western or donor driven agenda and seen an imposition

of western morals and values. Providing information is not sufficient it should translate into behaviour change.

The emphasis on collective exploration generates spontaneity that facilitates identification of issues that are often associated with taboos, shame and fear. TfD ensures that communities and children are active participants not as passive recipients to information. This encourages community ownership and participation and helps in identifying and exploring the root causes, questioning of practices that increase risk or harm, the power relations and other determinants of sexual behaviour and responding to these issues in ways that are contextually and culturally appropriate and not on prescriptions from outside. The whole process increases the sense of control of children and communities over their existing situation. The approach incorporates principles of good development practice and rights based approach to work.

Conclusion: Four approaches which Nasidi (2003) says demonstrates the potency of theatre as a tool in the process of development. The first approach is theatre as entertainment in which case it can engage and hold the interest of large numbers of people, many of whom have been alienated by traditional approaches. The second approach is theatre as an oral medium. Here, it can involve many people who are left out of development activities because of their illiteracy or lack of understanding of the official lingua franca. The third approach is theatre as a means of cultural expression which everyone in the community is capable of and which can be kept within the control and use of the local people. The fourth approach is theatre as public or social activity which brings a community together and creates the context for cooperative thinking and action. Theatre, in any society, should be considered a simple activity concerned with people trying to understand their world. It should be similarly posited that it is an activity of consciousness designed to influence minds, and to either change or maintain their perception of the world.

Lack of funds and the lack of an enabling environment needed for the theatre to thrive as reasons for its slipping into coma in India as well as in most other countries. But the theatre needs to be urgently re-invigorated so that it can continue to play its role of nation building and government has a role to play in this direction. The problem of a lack of active government participation in cultural empowerment and promotion has assumed a very worrisome dimension. It is theatre's ability to break through language and cultural barriers; ask its audience to think about what they have seen; challenge them to face up to aspects of their lives that they try to ignore; challenge societal beliefs and forces and to mould the mind

while still entertaining that makes it such a vital medium for conscientization, mobilization and communication. Theatre should be viewed as a relational means in coordinated programmes targeted at sustainable development. It is the basic role of the theatre, to give form, order and expression to our collective socio-cultural and political sensibilities. The policy makers must also encourage TfD to spread communication regarding development activities so that where mass media reach is not there especially in those places TfD can be best tool of communication for development especially for a developing country like India where still sixty five percent of the population lives in rural areas where mass media reach is low. The Dance and Drama Division under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting must fund and sponsor programmes for TfD so that through that it can spread developmental programmes.

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