

## **THEATRE FOR YOUTH- OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS**

**Priyanka Roy**

Lecturer

Department of Journalism & Mass Communication

East Calcutta Girls' College

(Affiliated to West Bengal State University)

Kolkata-700089, West Bengal, India

Email: [pinka1985@gmail.com](mailto:pinka1985@gmail.com)

Website: [www.ecgcweb.com](http://www.ecgcweb.com)

**Book : Theatre, Youth, and Culture: A Critical and Historical Exploration; Author: Manon van de Water; Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan, New York; Year:2012; ISBN: 978-0-230-12019-8; Hardcover; Total Pages:201**

Theatre for youth and children has never been given the importance as it may demand for. Scholars from all over the world have neglected this aspect stating that they are not interested in theatre for youth. In this backdrop, the author of this book Manon van de Water shares her experience of working as an active member of the International Theatre for Young Audience Research Network. These experiences as the author expressed has made her culturally more sensitive and forced her down from the field of academics to the real world of research. Through her latest book she wish to share knowledge and experiences that she gained through interaction with international colleges, scholars and students. Each chapter elucidates various aspects of theatre and its impact on youths. Every chapter in this book explores relationship between theatre, youth and culture. It vehemently opposes the preconceived notion about theatre for youths and children in society.

The book is introduced with a sober acknowledgement and an appropriate introduction which genuinely set the scene for the chapters that followed. The concept of 'Theatre for Young

Audience' which is often referred to as TYA is clearly stated in the introduction. The book consists of six chapters; each one dealing with separate facets of 'Theatre for Young Audience'. The first chapter titled *'Framing Children's Theatre: Historiography, Material Context and Cultural Perception'* elucidates how theatre has played the role of cultivator of future audience in United States of America, as an emancipating force in youths of Netherlands and as a means of ideological indoctrination in Soviet Russia. Theatre has played a very important role in social life of children and youth of these countries.

The book further attempts to state that 'Theatre for Young Audience' has been unjustifiably placed in a marginalized position and is not at all considered as a factor that can contribute to cultural production. However, some opine that there is a correlation between the condition in which it is produced, the performance text itself and conditions for its reception. Thus the content of the second chapter goes well with its title- *Theory and Theatre for Young Audiences: Marginalization and Cultural Production*. There has been always a debate on various *taboos* that are attached both culturally and historically to various degrees when it comes to theatre for children and youth. To explain the same the chapter throws light on various papers that were presented and discussed in the first international forum on 'Taboos in Theatre for Children and Youth, in Argentina in 2010'. The third chapter titled, *Taboos in Theatre for Young Audiences* lucidly explains the concepts of taboo, child and childhood, which is a prerequisite for understanding the content.

When the whole world is set in ripples with debates and discussions on revolutions by Gays and Lesbians all over the world one chapter titled *'The Representation of Troubled Youths' in US Theatre for Young Adults* is an extension of the taboos deals with a specific area associated with representation of Lesbians and Gay and other such related issues in the 'Theatre for Young Audience' in US. The chapter portrays how the above issues are reflected in theatres in US though an analysis of five contemporary plays that caters to the issues of Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexuality etc with special reference to United States of America.

How theatre can act as a 'magic wand' in cases of trauma and distress is discussed in the chapter *'Theatre as Therapy in Volatile Region'*. Example of 'theatre therapy' program in Beslan in Russia is cited. How the hostage crisis in 2004 was resolved by a program funded by Bank of Moscow. The author shared her personal and professional experiences in this regard. The chapter is an exemplary guide about how to use 'theatre therapy' to resolve problems all around

the globe. The last chapter of the book; 'Theatre for the Very Young' explores the current phenomena of producing theatre for very young generation and babies. This trend is adopted recently in United States of America and Asian and Latin American countries as the author stated. The chapter elucidates the goals and practices of theatre for the children. It further analyses the theories behind such production.

Manon van de Water, professor of Theatre Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has shared her knowledge she has gained through her experience of directing and supervising the production of such genre of theatre. The book strongly focuses the fact that there is an interdependence of meaning and material conditions in theatre for adults and youth. It can give way to researchers and scholars to discover new dimensions of theatre especially for the young generation. It can also act as a guide to the prospective researchers in the field. All the six chapters are well blended and discover newer avenues in the field of theatre. Skewing towards a more uncommon arena this book is not like many others in the field that deals with the grammar of theatre production; it deals with practical areas of how theatre can play a role in the life of young generation and children.