

## **THEATRE AND COMMUNICATION: EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF LIFE**

**Debilal Mishra**

Communication Research Scientist  
Department of Communication Management and Technology  
Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology  
Hisar-125001, Haryana, India  
Email: debilalmishra@gmail.com  
Website: www.gjust.ac.in

Theatre, as a term, bears almost a universal familiarity. It has several reasons; the best being the sense of closeness that it carries for the human life. When we search for the theatre, it dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Greece. Theatre refers to the writing and production of plays or drama in general. It comes from the Greek word 'theatron', which again comes from 'theaesthai' meaning 'to see.' So, theatre, in all broadness, can be defined as something that lets us see the life and its various realities in the entirety. The most significant aspect of theatre is communication since theatre communicates life for better purposes all of the time. Each play or dramatic performance is all about communication of a different dimension. Theatre is essentially an art of communicating life and creating an impact. The better is the communication, the clearer is the impact.

Communication, as an activity, is as natural as breathing. It is there in the very nature of all life. When we come to define human communication, it is found at the heart of all social intercourse. Without communication existence is impossible. Communication is the essence of all life and civilization and as a never ending phenomenon it is always instrumental behind the constant sustenance, survival and growth of the established order of the universe. According to S. F. Scudder, 'all living entities, beings and creatures communicate. All life communicates through movements, sounds, reactions, physical changes, gestures, languages and breath. Communication is a means of survival. The crying of a child communicates that it is hungry or suffering; the browning of a leaf communicates that it is dehydrated or thirsty or dying; and the cry of an animal communicates that it is either injured, or hungry or hurt. Everything living communicates in its quest for survival.'

Theatre is all about effective communication. When we dwell on effective communication, we need to focus on the communicating elements involved in the process. Effective communication is just a process of sharing something meaningfully and achieving mutual commonness based on the effective contextual understanding. It also refers to the whole process of relationship building based on a meaningful stimulus or response. When we say effective communication, we can't ignore the factor of commonness or oneness between the communicators. Wilbur Schramm, a noted media scholar, has also said that an effective condition for communication is commonness as communication is always a process of sharing of experiences based on commonness. In the theory of Sadharanikarana by Bharata Muni, a significant definition of effective communication comes out. According to the theory of sadharanikarana, communication is a process of attaining mutual oneness or commonness between communicators. This theory is greatly related to the theatre. The goal of communication as envisioned in the theory is certainly achieving commonness or mutual understanding. But, the goal would not be limited to just this extent. Just as Hinduism always emphasizes to achieve all of the purushartha-chatustayas (i.e., four goals of life: Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha), the concept also conceives communication capable of attaining all these goals. Communication can rise beyond the surface plane of the consciousness and achieve the subtler spiritual goals of life.

As far as the theatre is concerned, communication is capable of influencing life and vibrating its subtle facets through the effective management of the inner movements of the pacified emotions. The theatre communicates the human conditions in the best way and arouses the deeper feelings. Moreover, it deals with the different aspects of human life such as tragedy, comedy, laughter, heroism, humour etc. All these aspects are inherent in human nature and the theatre helps them out for a subtler experience. According to Samuel Johnson,

'The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,

For we that live to please must please to live.'

The theatre as an art form takes into account the emotional content of the people and their conscious viewpoints. That's why the great playwright, George Bernard Shaw has said that it is an extremely difficult thing to put on the stage anything which runs contrary to the opinions of a large body of people. The theatre allows for a greater commotion of emotions and a direct appeal to the deeper feelings. It always generates the process of consciousness building through the reflection of human realities and possibilities through the power of the

performances of the human actions. According to J.N. Synge, 'the drama, like the symphony, doesn't teach or prove anything'. That means the theatre always seeks for the Truth that lies in the varied states of the human thought, action and behaviour. G.K. Chesterton has said that what makes the difference between the drama and all other kinds of art is that you crowd a mass of people together, not as you would crowd them in a prison, in such a manner that it is humiliating for anybody present to make any protest. The play or the theatre is just another way of life; to rise above its surface tortures and the agonized quagmires. According to Shakespeare,

'Where is our usual manager of mirth?

What revels are in hand?

Is there no play,

To Ease the anguish of a torturing hour?'

He has also said:

'The play is the thing,

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king'

The concept of the theatre has grown through the constant change of the human conditions involving the psychological and sociological influences. Goodman in his book, Quintessence of Literary Essays, has said that tragedy is the major form of drama. According to him, 'tragedy is that major form of drama which deals with the serious aspects of life and presents man as blundering blindly towards an unhappy end. Generally speaking, it is the opposite of comedy. Although thinking and feeling are demanded of both the tragic and the comic audience, it is certainly true, that in tragedy, the emotions are more profoundly-stirred than in comedy. Tragedy is, perhaps for this reason, more universal in its appeal, and must be regarded as the highest aspect of dramatic art.'

Aristotle has defined tragedy quite comprehensively. According to him, 'tragedy is a representation of an action, which is serious, complete in itself, and of a certain length; it is expressed in speech made beautiful in different ways in different parts of the play; it is acted, not narrated: and by exciting pity and fear, it gives a healthy relief to such emotions.' In this definition of Aristotle, the role of communication can be felt more intensely; as it is all about

touching the emotional human sensitivity through the penetrating power involved in the softness of the contextual communication. Firstly, Aristotle has defined logically what tragedy is and what it represents. Secondly, the form it employs is clearly elaborated by him. Thirdly, he mentions the manner in which it is communicated, and lastly, the function it fulfils.

Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, has set forth the rules that guided the playwrights in the ancient world. And they require that a drama should observe the three unities: Time, Place and Action. These three unities, if observed minutely, better the process of communication. Unity of time meant that the duration of the action or story of the drama was to be confined to one day and no more. Unity of place required that the scene or locality in which the incidents of the drama are said to take place, must not be changed; it must be the same throughout the play. Unity of action meant that there should be only one and complete plot; there should be no interweaving of stories and subordinate incidents or episodes. According to Aristotle, we must guard against confounding the unity of action with the simplicity of the plot. Unity and simplicity are two different things in dramatic composition. The plot is simple, when a small number of incidents are introduced into it; but it may include a large number of persons and events, and yet not be deficient in unity of action, provided all incidents are made to tend towards the principal object of the play, and are properly connected with it.

In the world of the ancient Indian playwrights like Kalidasa, Bharata Muni etc. the communication rises to a different level of human experience. It is all about creating a mystic relationship and aspiring to the sublimity of the consciousness. W. R. Goodman in his book of literary essays has mentioned that in the India of Kalidasa, dramatic action was defined by a set of regulations comparable to the prevailing social code. The Hindus developed a delicate art of stage movement, but theirs was not a tragic culture. The *Natyasastra*, sometimes called the Sanskrit *poetics*, defines drama as an imitation, not of an action but of the conditions in which men are placed. The same work sets forth elaborate rules of playwriting. And amidst everything the priority is given to effective communication.

The concept of the theatre has always been associated with the several dimensions of the human communication as it has evolved through the journey of time. Almost all the evolutionary facets of artistic communication, including surrealism, expressionism, impressionism, naturalism, symbolism, poetic determinism, mysticism, and the imaginative

creativity, have a theatrical significance of their own. All of these artistic tendencies have widened the scope of communication and moreover, they have made communication a broader means of dealing with the truth that has a dynamic relationship with the human circumstances. For an example, Theatre of the Absurd of the 1950s mirrored the absurdity and irrationality of the human condition in a dramatic form involving unreal situations without traditional narrative continuity or meaningful and coherent dialogue, as in the works by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, etc. One of the most interesting of the theatrical and dramatic experiments was the establishment at Dublin in 1904 of the Abbey Theatre which was part of a nationalistic movement. The modern theatre has sustained on so many purposely designed communicative techniques executed through the dialogue, character movement, elaborate stage direction and the overall symbolism or suggestiveness in the treatment of the theme. All these techniques have redefined the nature and scope of the communication to a great extent.

The theatre is the house of all human natures. Through different forms, themes, characters, dialogues and plots, it communicates the mystic experience of the journey towards the victory of humanity amidst all the intensified impressions of life. In the words of John Dryden, 'a play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind'. Aristotle has used a term- *Anagnorisis*- in the *poetics* to introduce the moment of recognition in which a character moves from ignorance to knowledge. By that, Aristotle hints at the triumph of the virtue at the climax. And it is the basic theory of the theatre that Virtue must win since the theatre seeks an order in the prevailing circumstances of human uncertainty aspiring to the truth. According to Jeremy Collier, 'the business of plays is to recommend virtue, and discountenance vice; to show the uncertainty of human greatness, the sudden turns of fate, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice, it is to expose the singularities of pride and fancy, to make folly and falsehood contemptible, and to bring everything that is ill under infamy and neglect.' In this context, Richard Steele has gone to the extent to say that 'Athens herself learned virtue at a play'.

Communication in the theatre is always based on the effect factor which is achieved through harmonizing the several communicating elements including logic, emotion, familiarity, background, understanding and movement. The theatre is one of the most effective

communication vehicles (Stambaugh and Gonzalez) as it communicates with all the real human elements. In the ancient Greek, the theatre was used in the process of psychological treatment based on the concept of catharsis. And the newer versions of it have been coming up ever since. The Greeks believed that a person could get rid of grief and misery by going to a play that featured other characters that were grieving. Feshbach, a communication theorist, simply extended the idea of catharsis to media violence. He reasoned that a person could cleanse pent-up feelings of anger by watching other people act aggressively. The theatre communication is a powerful one as it appeals to the human understanding directly by being more personal and intimate in approach. That is the only reason why this theatre communication is preferred over the other forms of communication in pitching a message relating to human development or development communication even today. The power of theatre communication is getting constantly utilized in different socio-human contexts. And the more it is used, the more it is explored. According to David Hume, 'the value of a theatrical piece can less be determined by an analysis of its conduct than by the ascendant which it gains over the heart, and by the strokes of nature which are interpreted through it.'

In the modern society the need for theatre communication is felt more intensely to deal with some of the severe communication crises. According to the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo , communication as a process should aim at achieving higher levels of the human consciousness and, ultimately, its transformation. In the fast-changing modern world there are myriad problems and miseries caused by several communication failures. And, theatre communication can be an effective solution to all these obstacles. Communication is necessary for human existence and a necessity for the achievement of all of the human goals ranging from personal growth and personality development to societal transformation. And what's more, communication through the theatre is always an internal process inspiring the self to expand into the various sublime pursuits and purposes.

One of the most important things about the theatre and communication is that the communication gets all its human sides in the theatre and it aspires to a conscious self-hood. It is not just about effectively communicating a message for information, entertainment or expansion of self; rather, it is more about reflecting life and letting others experience its various facets by bringing together the pleasure and the truth through the different frames of feelings and cognition. That is to say, communication in the theatre is all about inspiring the minds by way of seeking inspiration from them. According to W.M. Thackeray,

'The play is done; the curtain drops.

Stone failing to the prompter's bell:

A moment yet the action stops,

And looks around, to say farewell.'

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