

THEATRE NEWS



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What is Theatre's Function ?

What is the function of the theatre? Diverse persons hold different opinions about it—and they are quite dogmatic and fanatic in their stands. There are those (and their number is legion) who strongly feel that its function is to entertain and to make audiences happy. There are those that maintain that its function is to make people think and stimulate their intellect. There are those that hold that its function is to educate and enlighten the people. There are those that believe that its function is to make the people politically conscious and alert.

There are those (particularly, the communists and socialists) who declare that its function is to propagate the ideology of the State and to indoctrinate the people. There are those who maintain that its function is to shape the morals of the society and uplift the soul. There are those who say that its function is to mirror life objectively. And so on ad infinitum.

But actually, none of the functions mentioned above is the true one, when you think deeply on the nature of art forms like the theatre. Recently, speaking at a lecture organised by the Lok Manch in Bombay, Dr. Shreeram Lagoo, the well-known stage and screen player, pointed out that it was wrong to expect

the theatre to perform the function of educating and entertaining, and that the theatre had no business to moralise and give messages to humanity. He stated that like all other art forms, the theatre's true function is to provide "an artistic experience," which provided an insight into human relations and life.

It is gratifying that Dr. Lagoo who knows the theatre inside out, has focussed attention on this view of the theatre's function which is held by the most discerning artists. The great novelist Conrad emphasised this aspect of the art forms' function. And so have a number of distinguished poets, writers, painters, and playwrights of international status.

It has to be realised that whatever may be the category of plays, the impact on the spectator should be in the form of an experience undergone. The spectator must feel some thing happening within him—and happening intimately. Every performance seen by him should add to his sum total of experiences. He should come out of the theatre with some insight and involvement. In this respect, it makes no difference if the play presented is a comedy, tragedy, or a thriller or a love story. For instance, Shakespear's comedies are as revealing as his tragedies.



As against this serious view of the theatre's function, there is the lighter stand taken by those who run commercial films and plays, who argue that the theatre succeeds at the box-office only if they entertain people, and make them laugh uproariously. The Bombay playwright, Mr. Adi Marzban subscribes to this formula.

We have no quarrel with those who go in for the formula of making the

audiences laugh and laugh. In fact, these people add to the slender stock of world's gaiety. In his earlier films, the great comedian, Charlie Chaplin did make people happy by offering them slap-stick fare.

But we do feel that the true function of the theatre lies in letting people undergo an experience of some sort. And those who can offer such dramatic fare are the salt of the earth.

MENACE OF INDISCIPLINE

All the theatre groups in the Capital are complaining of the problem of indiscipline on the part of a large section of the theatre players of both sexes. These artistes behave as if they were film stars of the commercial Hindi cinema.

They take the rehearsal dates lightly. They come late and make others wait—sometimes for a couple of hours. They go away at their sweet will, making one excuse or another. They demand all sorts of facilities, free passes for their families, and friends, free lunches, teas, and even dinners, free telephone service, free transport etc. Most of all, they flout most of the instructions and directives of the director. They gossip and talk most of the time, and many times interrupt the rehearsals.

They do not care to learn their parts and depend heavily on the prompters. They make no effort to do full justice to their roles. They even fail to follow the cues. In short, they do all sorts of things to prolong the rehearsal schedules.

What has happened to them? Why do they behave so irresponsibly? The theatre work requires true team spirit and discipline more than any other activity. It has resemblance to such game as football, cricket, and hockey. Like these

games, it has its set of rules which must be adhered to if anything worthwhile is to come out of it. In these games, every person on the field has to pass on the ball to another. Similarly, in theatre work, every player must follow the cues with alertness and agility.

By their indisciplined behaviour, these players nullify the efforts made by others—the director, the lighting man, the make-up man, the decor artist, the technicians, etc. They must cry a halt, to such doings. Don't they realise that they make our theatre a sorry spectacle?

Many theatre workers from abroad come to our country. And they invariably attend the rehearsals and the performances of our plays. They are amazed when they see theatre work being disturbed and wrecked by such artistes. Some of them keep their impressions to themselves. But others do speak out. They have described the scenes of indiscipline seen at many theatre groups as "scandalous" and "disgraceful".

Naturally, they compare it with the conditions in their theatre groups and associations. And they point out to us that such behaviour on the part of the players would not be tolerated by any director and producer. Says, Mr. Richard



STAGED DOOR

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Theatre Alive or Dead?

Some years ago, a question was raised by Mr. E.J. Burton on the place of drama in the life of the community. What use does the educationist make a drama? How can living theatre not merely survive but flourish? What can be done to bring people to theatre and theatre to people?

This and several allied questions were discussed at a meeting of a group of people which represented a critic, a playwright, a manager, an organiser, a producer and an actor. Regretably, there is little space for the lively discussion in full but in brief the main contentions were presented somewhat on the following lines:

Critic : I have been accused of trying to keep people out of the theatre but this is an opportunity to see if we can't devise ways of bringing people into the theatre. How to make people, specially young people, actively interested in theatre through amateur groups and other adult organisations? What kind of plays do we want, what kind of acting? Are we at the moment producing a vital and exciting theatre? What kind of theatre is needed? Those are questions we want answered, and if we can answer a few of them, I shall be satisfied.

Educationist : The educationist is absolutely aware of the need of children and human beings to dramatise, to explore through drama. In education we are quite familiar with the

need for dramatisation. From the moment the child comes to infant school, through the Junior department and on into the secondary school, there is plenty of dramatic activity of some kind or another. How does that develop into theatre? How to make children grow up into theatre? Well, by big occasions, processions, rituals, if you like.

Organiser : The young people look upon the theatre as an obsolete form of film. For them, the appearance of a theatre rather confirms that feeling that it's something rather old-fashioned. The big problem seems to me: what plays young people are to go to. They are often not interested in the kind of plays their local amateur dramatic societies are doing. They enjoy witnessing any form of revolt against established discipline

Producer : I do not think that people who actively participate in dramatic affairs in the University or in many amateur dramatic societies are necessarily those who have had the most active dramatic life in schools. Theatre can strike you at almost any time of life, once the opportunity arrives, and you can be excited and interested. A great deal more work must be done to broaden the general basis of the theatre population. This is not primarily a task for educationists. The theatre has to do some work for itself. Goodness knows, we try hard enough on behalf of the theatre.... we really do trywe work and we try to persuade people that theatre the theatre ... is worthwhile. But there are times when the theatre

makes us absolutely despair. Then there is the question of selecting plays. There is a tendency to seek to be contemporary at all costs. It seems such plays set out to slap the face of the audience, to tell them that they are vile, detestable horrible creatures.

Playwright : Contact between writers and audience, between actors and audience is extremely important. There is this barrier between the audience and the writer and actor, so that the docker can turn around and say the theatre is a place for snobs. We know this is ridiculous and somehow must be broken down.

Another point is that of government backing. It is tragic that we live in the sort of society where, let's face it, art is just one of "those things" somewhere in the background of human activity.

Actor : I believe that every art is an essentially aristocratic form. There are some people who believe that an aristocratic culture should be replaced by a popular culture. Well, now it seems to me that this is a cosmic contradiction in terms. "Aristocratic" is a dirty word now though it simply means the best of it's particular kind. It has nothing to do with birth, rank, or privilege. Such are the confusions and dangers that we incur in this vast, unthinking, flood of 'social culture'. Every art is essentially an aristocratic form.

The atreger : Behind discussions like ours, I think, there frequently lies a very common and natural fallacy, that is, that people are all alike, or that people ought all to be alike. Now the fact is, of course, that people are very, very different indeed. Some people like going to a football match; some people like going to the picture; some people like going to the theatre, and some people like sitting at home, watching their television. Quite a lot of people,

fortunately, like doing quite a number of these things; they have different sorts of sets of taste; some people like football matches and theatres, other people like concerts and the pictures and so on. I don't think that one will necessarily get more people interested in the theatre, and more people coming to the theatre, by a particular sort of play, or even a particular sort of organization, because a great many people won't like the plays which a lot of other people do like.

I don't think the theatre is one of the mass-media. I know a play that can be seen by a thousand to fifteen hundred at a time but that isn't "mass-media" in the modern sense... television, radio and the press.

Organiser : It is very easy for me to say that the theatre is, and can have mass appeal. The cinema is mass appeal. Any great film star who deigns, for a short time, to appear in a play, suddenly transforms a theatre which is not mass appeal into mass appeal. What we are discussing is how we can induce an audience, in increasing numbers, to some what, for want of a better expression I call worthwhile plays.

Critic : our concern is to get those people into the theatre who might not have the opportunity of discovering it if something isn't done. I feel that (in the end) all we can hope for is to give the people an opportunity of finding out whether or not they do want to go to the theatre. Throughout this country, there are vast areas of population who have absolutely no conception of what the theatre is about. Do critics really drive people away from the theatre or do they bring them into the theatre?

The critic has a very difficult job. I would love to have a month to think about every play and then sit down and write five thousand words



about it. I'm sure nobody would read my article but it would be interesting, anyway to be able to do it. Unfortunately, one has to make a snap judgement. Heaven knows we make out mistakes as well as other people in theatre makes theirs.

(Abridged from "Education through Art")

Delhi Scene : Coriolanus and The Winter's Tale (William Sakespeare) English Sakespeare Company. Sponsored by Indian Council for Culture Relations and British High Commission (British Council Division) Kamani.

Over the years the plays of Shakespeare have lent themselves to serious academic analysis & many tomes have been about their literary construction and dramatic values. The English Shakespeare Company run by two astonishingly dedicated men Michael Bogdanov & Michael Pennington gave an exciting and vibrant approach to the text of Coriolanus and the winter's Tale

In "The Wars of Roses" written jointly by the above two artistic directors of the Company the authors claim that "bored with their lot in 1985, they went to the Arts Council with plans to do a tow-handed plays on a single set, with a modest budget." they walked out with a grant of 1000,000 pounds to form the Company.

In both the plays, the director has created a modern dress production. It is not an original idea because according to one source Sir Barry jackson as far back as 1928, alternated between khaki, tweeds and a silk dressing gown in Mackbeth.

Coriolanus is evidently a political play but an attempt has been made to give it a contemporary relevance. The events have been shifted from ancient Rome to modern Europe giving

a vivid picture of recent rising in the East European countries.

Coriolanus has good deal of verbosity but Pennington's performance was flawlws. There were very good performances from Andrew jarvis, james hyes and June Watson.

That jealousy can make humans so cruel and vicious was brilliantly developed in "The Winter's Tale". Michael Pennington as leontes who suspects his queen of infidelity revealed a sadly pathatic mentally deranged victim of his own vivid imagination. The praying of guilt on the mind of Leontes seems so evidnet when the real truth came out and gave Pennington an opportunity of virtuose display of his acting. Very good performances came from Lynn Farleigh as Hermione, June Watson as paulina and Benard Lloyed as an old Shepherd.

Director; Michael Bogdanov

Usne Kaise Jhoot Bola

Danga

Vidushak

Sponsored by Sahitya Kala Parishad
Sapru House

During the last one year I have had the misfortune of witnessing atleast 6 plays which have drastically interfered with the text. There is a copyright law, yet some people have the guts to play havoc with the originals.

Recently, a colleague who witnessed "Usne kaise Jhoot Bola: tells me that if Bernard Shaw was present at the Sapru house he would have burnt the premises because it was his delightful play [REDACTED] which was torn to bits in its adaption and production.

I happened to see "Danga" and "Vidushak". The scripts were badly edited and wondered



why the authors had not initiated legal action. The productions do not call for any critical reviewing but may one ask how the selection committee if there was one, passed the scripts in the form these were presented.

Scorpio

Quotes

“There are no problems for the theatre, there is only one problem: success. Without success there is no theatre. it is the only law of our profession.”

Louis Jouvet

“The problem and the law of the theatre; above all other consideration the theatre must be first of all a business, a flourishing commercial enterprise - it is only then that it may obtude into the domain of art. There is no dramatic art without success. No dramatic work is valid unless it finds a public to listen to it and make it live”.

Louis Jouvet

“Art of all kinds seem to rebel against organisation. Yet the art of the drama must for obvious reasons, be organised.

Harley Granille Barker

FORM IV (See rule 8)

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I, I.L. Dass, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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