



Theatre as an evolving means to provide Communication, Education, Entertainment, and Development: An in-depth analysis of Shakespeare's Macbeth and Girish Karnad's Tughlaq.

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Abstract: The paper would attempt to understand the world of theatre in the way it provides communication in terms of the current surroundings and environment by looking at the relevance of Shakespeare's plays in education, entertainment, and development. This would be done by highlighting various aspects of the economy and the country at that time. The relevance of Shakespeare's plays exists even today in all the aspects that have been indicated above. This is to such a considerable extent that the plays have been translated and adapted in various languages and to various situations that prevail in diverse countries. Girish Karnad too took the same route and effectively used the entertainment medium to educate the audience and bring to their notice the socio-economic political lacunae in the development process. This analysis tries to understand Shakespeare's Macbeth and Girish Karnad's Tughlaq in this context.

Research Question: What is the extent to which theatre through its system of entertainment can provide adequate insight into the above areas? How relevant are these plays in today's scenario? Were they an apt medium to indicate situations of their time? Do the adaptations have relevance today? How effectively are the explanations important?

Key Words: Tughlaq, Historical Plays, Macbeth, Caste Discrimination, Poverty, Communication, Education, Entertainment, Development, Tragicomedy, Current Issues, Theatre, Aziz and Aazam, Daulatabad, Communal Harmony, Religious Coexistence.

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I. Introduction

Theatre is considered to be the most social of all arts. It is said to be one of the most influencing and impacting art forms due to the fact that real people play various roles on stage to raise awareness, bring about change or impact society. A drama is considered to be all-inclusive as it embraces all types of topics and represents all kinds of nature, due to the fact that it is watched and intended for all classes of people. Infact it is a mirror of human existence intended to be presented on stage. Victor Hugo says "If the mirror is an ordinary one, it produces a poor colourless image. It is essential that the mirror is a focused one."

Drama is primarily performed for the entertainment of society, but over time there is a belief that it does tend to impact a specific or a complete set of people. It has initiated and acted as a means of communication throughout the world in different hues of social and cultural groups. Infact, art and theatre have the power to change the world as art is so broad and each aspect of life can fit into the field of art by its ability and potential to impact individuals and society at large. Infact, this form of art impacts specific problems, as well as enhances self-knowledge and understandings. "Theatre and the performing arts teach society about itself, hoping to point out the attitudes and mindsets of current society."

Theatre not only displays various forms of entertainment and messages, but as there are real people acting, it tends to bring out empathy amongst the audience, involving them to such an extent that they are part of the specific mood of the play. Depending on the targeted audience, the language in which the plays are enacted can differ. If they are displaying the past, then the diction is of that era. If on the other hand, the need is to cater

to a regional audience, then that specific language is adopted. It creates a purpose, helps in self-discovery, expression, education, and enhances creativity.

It is not only theatre but all art forms that have the ability to communicate different ideas. Besides the plays that are performed on stage, there are what are known as ‘newspaper theatre.’ This really means enacting issues that are printed in a newspaper on stage to try and put across different points of views.

II. Background of Theatre

Theatre being an art of communication, its primary role is to inform, entertain, persuade, and provide a means for connecting people. Indian theatre used to be performed in ancient times, in the village square or in the temple. Such theatre still seems to exist. As time passed, the form of communication turns to mediated communication, which is communication interaction, using technology. Communication via theatre has been a key medium in addressing sociological issues.

Theatre in India existed since the beginning of civilization. In fact, the Rig Veda also suggests that theatre came in India in 8th century BC. Most modern Indian theatre is influenced by and draws information by various sources. It was when India was a colony of Britain, that the western style of theatre was introduced. The typical Indian theatre goer is perceived as middle class, educated, though not always professionally trained, or employed, and unseasoned in the culture of theatre. In the west, the spectators have a wide contact with the electronic mass media. Indian audience prefer watching films to theatre. This is the reason certain directors took the responsibility for audience development. Attempts have been made to include successful, innovative steps in creating new models of performance on the Indian stage to bridge the enormous material gap between theatre and films.

The major traditional form of theatre in India were Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Kathak and Manipur dance originating in religious background or folklore. In these forms, the colour, design, movements, and gestures were symbolic, choreographed, and codified. The mode of dialogue delivery were normally the narratives sung by the Sutra or chorus which were interwoven with the dialogues. The elaborate painting on the face and body is a unique feature in Asian theatre forms. The character’s social status, qualities, and temperament are demonstrated by the makeup. Music is an inherent part of this form of theatre.

Figure 1: Indian theatre depicted by traditional Indian forms



Sources: Media India Group, ThePrint, iStock, Imphal Reviews

In India, social evils like the ones listed below have been depicted through theatre and various other forms of entertainment. The issues below have been woven into interesting stories and at the same time they bring out a social message:

- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Gender inequality
- Caste discrimination
- Dowry
- Child Labour
- Drug Abuse

- Forced prostitution
- Domestic violence
- Female Infanticide

Indian theatre has a great history and a heritage that highlights the social evils being faced by Indian society. Most of these are rooted in rural India. Theatre thus has a key role in bringing to the forefront such issues so that the various levels of governance can address them.

It is wrong to say that theatre is only a source of entertainment. More than just flashy costumes and pretty songs, it is the perfect vehicle to provide education about social issues and inspire social and political change.

Figure 2: Indian theatre depicting anti-colonial sentiments



Source: Google Image

The depiction of evil social issues in India involves activists and grassroots bodies, governments, and Non-Government Organizations (NGO), as well as socially aware theatre groups, these work with Dalits, women, children, sex workers, and other marginalized population.

Theatre has the freedom to ask puzzling questions and the ability to make people feel heard and the power to affect social change. In western theatre, the concept of drama consists of plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. They could be further divided into tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, melodrama, farce, and musical. It teaches society about itself through reflections, surrounding attitudes, and/or mindsets of past and current societies. The greatest talent in the western theatre has been William Shakespeare. Most of the western classical plays and Operas include entertainment and a moral lesson at the end. Broadway, which is the street running the length of Manhattan in New York City has been associated with American theatrical activity since 1735. The trends with respect to integration of songs with a plot into a cohesive whole began in 1920s and achieved immense success especially with ‘*My Fair Lady*’ in 1956. In 1960s, youth culture was celebrated with rock, musicals, and dance. This was seen in *Chicago* in 1975. After this there were years of decline and theatre was resurrected with lavish musicals like *The Beauty and the Beast* in 1994, and *The Lion King* in 1997. Most of the ones performed were also eventually turned into movies. In the 21st century, Broadway produced more new work, wherein they employed musicals for social commentary. There was theatre being performed *Off Broadway* and soon the two were remarkably like each other. Besides these, the Asian-American theatre groups also emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century. These plays addressed concern ranging from the powers of the state to social inequality. At this time, women and “gay theatre” also emerged. British theatre was performed in the west end and then slowly moved to the east end of London in the late 1960s. There were some theatres that just catered to Shakespeare’s plays while others dramatized Charles Dickens’ novel *Nicholas Nickleby*. The theatre movement spread to all other countries of the world and were competing with movies. Theatre required help from the government to sustain itself. But it was an immensely powerful medium to impart history, culture, and issues faced by society in general.

Figure 3: Depiction of social values through western theatre



Sources: Britannica, iStock

Theatre in the beginning was a ritual activity that was confined through simple imitation of either the phenomenon or object observed, associated with them. With passage of time in Europe, rational men started questioning religion, rituals, beliefs, and life and death, and theatre took on an art form. As it matured and became independent, it started depicting common people. The masses who went to see theatre liked to see it themselves. Theatre as it exists today is a performing art form where the actor expresses his feeling and thoughts by the medium of spoken words, sounds, body movements, music, poetry, dance, and mimes.

III. Extent of theatre being used as a means of communication and representation of current issues

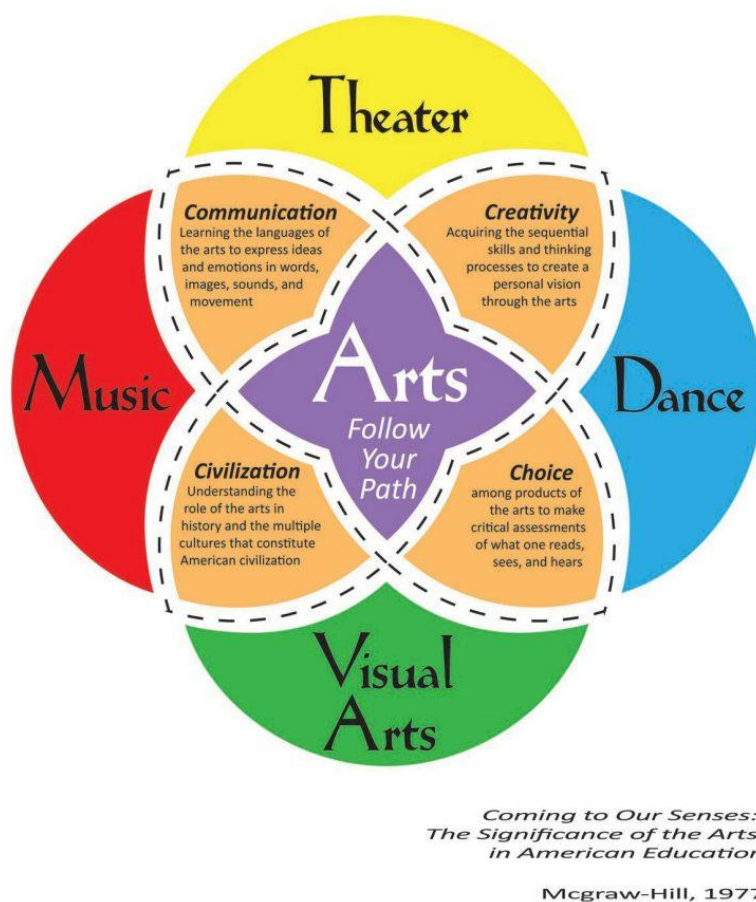
Theatre as a social tool includes functions such as instruction, persuasion, education, entertainment, development, etc. Drama occupies a significant place in Indian culture. This has been discussed in ancient India known as *Natyashastra*. It is an imitation of various emotions and situations through *Abhaynaya* (acting). It is a transmission of ideas which a group of people attempt to make other groups of people aware of. It translates into communicating information. It is this information, which is collected, stored, processed, and disseminated in the form of theatre that help receivers understand and react to the existing environment. (Andal 2004)

The relevance of theatre is an important medium of informing the masses. This was used extensively in states like Odissa, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to uprise the rural population of the Kargil conflict.

Theatre is also used as a form of command or instructive communication. According to Bertolt Brecht “Oil, inflation, war, social struggle, the family, religion, all become subjects for theatrical representation. This medium enlightens the spectator about facts unknown to him. Right and wrong courses of action were shown. People were shown who knew what they were doing and others who did not. The theatre became an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers who wished not just to explain to the world but also to change it.” (Mukhopadhyay 1999)

Yet another important function of theatre is the persuasive function, which means that this form of communication is used to influence people and persuade them into a particular way of thinking. Education has been one of the most essential functions of communication. Mostly, it has been limited to formal communication, but theatre can be used effectively in imparting difficult subjects or topics in a fun manner.

Figure 4: Depiction of various forms of art



Source: Leverage Edu

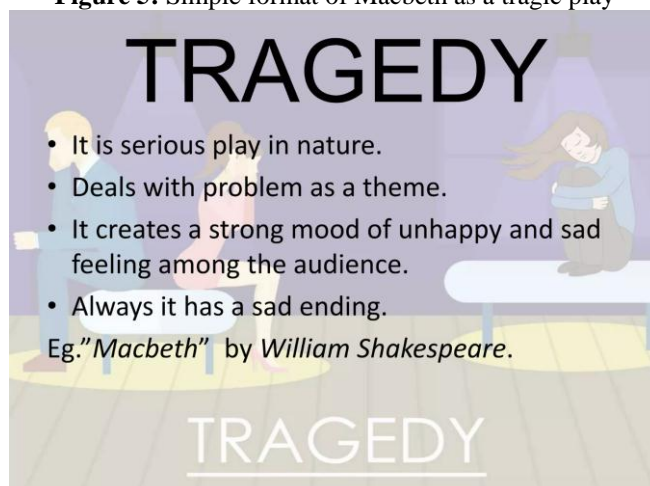
Theatre is one of the cheapest media available as it does not rely on literacy, audiences can participate in a genuine two-way medium for communication. It is more than entertainment; it is a complete emotional experience and creates a state of receptivity in which messages can be effectively transmitted. In India, it is an art which contains fusion elements from music, dance, pantomime, epic-ballad recitation, religion, and festival peasantry. It imbibes ceremonials, rituals, belief, and social systems. It also has religious and ritualistic overtones.

IV. Shakespeare's plays as a demonstration in highlighting current issues with special reference to Macbeth

The character Macbeth is the protagonist in the sense that he is the focus of the narrative. He often acts against his own best interests as well as the interests of the other characters and his country, in which case he is also the antagonist. The main theme of Macbeth is how destruction wrought when ambition goes unchecked by moral constraints. Macbeth is a courageous Scottish General who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, yet he deeply desires power and advancement.

In Elizabethan time (this era is the epoch in the Tudor period of the history of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Many historians depict it as a golden age in history), the time in which this play was performed, it was seen as a very moral play. This was because death was the worst punishment one could receive. This story teaches lessons against violence, cheating, lying, treachery and trusting the voice or voices that makes you believe that you are above moral, legal, or ethical laws. It also warns the audience and the readers that ambition, guilt, and desire to gain power can destroy even the most powerful men and women. It is a lesson which is relevant even today that power is never 'enough.' The more one has the more one needs it to stay in power.

Figure 5: Simple format of Macbeth as a tragic play



Source: SlideShare

Figure 6: Macbeth depicted



Source: Tricycle: The Buddhist Review

Macbeth is a play that clearly depicts life and the lessons to be learned from it. It indicates that ambition is universally accepted as a positive driving force behind one's success, but it also reminds us that being obsessed with ambition at the cost of losing out on basic humane feelings can be detrimental. Macbeth resorted to destroying his competitors by killing them or attempting to kill them to further his ambition. Resorting to such levels will always have a negative impact on achieving success.

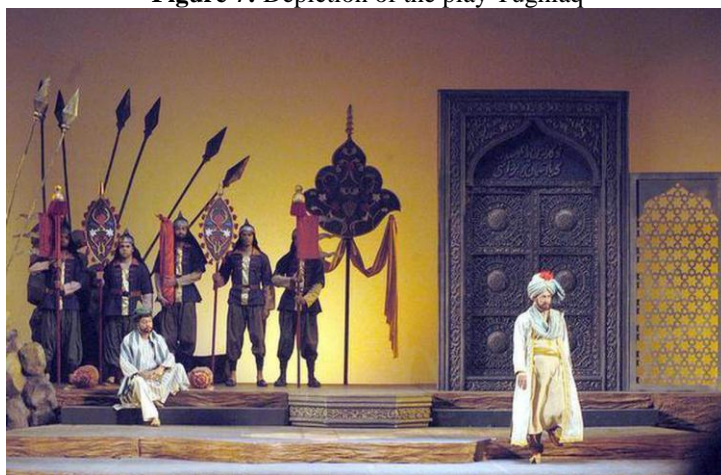
The use of occult tends to close one's mind and thought process leads one to believe in the impossible. This may lead humans to perform acts that are insane. Care must be taken to avoid believing in such practises.

The play also brought into focus that politics can corrupt even a person as noble as Macbeth was. All the above are extremely relevant in today's world and the extreme lengths that Macbeth went are even being attempted today.

V. Analysis of Girish Karnad's Tughlaq as a showcase of current scenarios

This play is centred around the chronicled character of Mohammad Tughlaq in the 14th century. It was composed in 1964 in Kannada by Girish Karnad and is set during the reign of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq. It was first performed in Urdu in 1966, then later in English in Mumbai Delhi in 1972. It depicted Tughlaq as possessing exceptional thoughts and tremendous dreams, but his reign was a wretched failure. He started his term as king with enormous goals, but instead led his kingdom to chaos. Tughlaq emerges as a headstrong and idealistic ruler who is vulnerable and constantly admits his mistakes, allowing himself to be punished publicly.

Figure 7: Depiction of the play Tughlaq



Source: The Hindu

Though it is a historical play, it is also a commentary on the contemporary politics of 1960s. Girish Karnad uses symbols to represent universal thoughts and emotions. His use of various symbols in the play, such as chess, Aziz and Aazam, prayer, python, Daulatabad, Rose, and words like vulture, add greater emotional and associative significance to the circumstances of that time, besides he uses characters like Barani, Nazib, Aziz, and Sheikh Imam-ud-din to bring across the essence of the play.

The play is extraordinarily complex, with a mixture of facts and fiction in its narrative. It has been set at the time when Tughlaq moved from Delhi to Daulatabad. Karnad follows history while writing the script of the play. He gives great emphasis on the shifting of the capital, which is the turning point in Tughlaq's career, causing great suffering to the common people. According to Tughlaq's reasoning, he needs a capital that is at the heart of his empire, and Delhi is too near the border, susceptible to invaders.

Karnad indicates that the Sultan used force to teach people a lesson when he was moving his capital. Problems like lawlessness, corruption, rebellion, and drought are highlighted in his reign as well as in the play. Karnad portrayed Nazib as an important character who influences his Sultan. He has also included Aziz and Aazam with the purpose of creating humour. These two characters suggest rampant corruption in Sultan's kingdom. Karnad projects the contradiction in the complex personality of Sultan, who was once a dreamer and a person of action but was being benevolent and cruel at the same time.

Muhammad Tughlaq ruled for twenty-six years. He introduced copper coins, and during his time, he degenerated his kingdom into a "kitchen of debt." The comparison was that India had descended within twenty years since Independence from a state of idealism to disillusionment and cynicism, and hence the play found a chord that resonated in the minds of many people at that time. The way in which Tughlaq claimed the throne by killing his father during prayer time indicates the dubious way in which he tried to run and manage his kingdom. Eventually, he is left alone, and his kingdom is in utter chaos and misery, which is what India, according to Karnad, was going through under the garb of nationalist notion of communal harmony and religious coexistence. The ideals were put on a pedestal before independence but later turned to an anti-climax with the partition of India. The play indicates the way ideals change during a rule. Karnad brings out the contrast during Tughlaq's rule and the type of disappointment of Indian citizens faced after independence.

Plays are an effective medium to indicate the social nuances that are prevalent in a country. Eminent playwrights work cleverly in camouflaging various messages via old historical facts. More than just reading, plays are an extremely effective medium in sending socio-economic and political messages across to various sections of society be them the powerful, the common person, and the educated.

VI. Conclusion

Plays have been and are an extremely powerful way to highlight various messages in a subtle way. This was noticeable in all of Shakespeare's plays where he portrayed the historical context as well as the mannerisms of society in a form that the audience could understand and correct if they felt the need to. Girish Karnad, in an equivalent way, used a historical king 'Tughlaq' to bring out the disappointment that the masses were feeling after attaining independence. All the citizens were extremely happy and hopeful that their miseries would end once India became independent, but this did not happen and was portrayed by Karnad in his play which had an extremely long innings. The reasons for disappointment were also indicated in the play and it was a clear message.

Plays are one medium in which effective communication is possible, but with the advent of digitalisation and the Over the Top (OTT) platform, there are several mediums that exist today whereby socio-political

economic messages are effectively portrayed. In a free, democratic economy, it is essential that these mediums are allowed to prosper such that the issues can be addressed effectively.

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