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Folk Theatre: An Effective Tool of Expression and Communication Going Back Centuries

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Abstract:

In this age of technology, we all have come far away from rustic life and in modern times, urbanization is increasing day by day. People have changed their ways of communication by social media platforms. Even then if there is some hope left to go back in centuries, that is alive just because of folk theatres. People in villages, still entertain by these folk dramatic presentations and think it a very valuable source of knowledge and social awareness. India is not only a name, but it is the delve of many cultures. With this identity of unity in diversity, India becomes its leader in the whole world. As we all know Indian culture is the oldest culture of the world, which is also known as the mother of all cultures. Whether it is the art of living, science or politics, Indian culture has its own identity everywhere.

Keywords: Folk theatre, myth, mythology, culture.

Here the focus is given on one of the important aspects of Indian culture which has been a part of it for centuries. It is not only an integral part of the country's culture but is also a medium to show its different colors. Indian theatre has been an integral part of our culture since ancient

times. It can be seen in different forms in different states of the country. If put in simple language, theatre is an amalgamation of different skills, that is the collective expression done for entertainment and social awareness. In this the story is presented through dance, acting, singing along with theatrical crafts like masks, make up and costumes. All these together make a good theatre.

Objectives of Research:

The objective of the study is to contemporize the past and bringing the importance of folktheatres in view for modern generation.

The second objective is to revive the blurred line between the folk theatrical era for this 21st century. It seeks to make reader understand the fact that how theatres have played a crucial role for awakening people about public concerns.

The third objective is to remove that typical picture about folk theatres that comes to mind when thinking about that era of prominence. After the reading of this paper, the readers feel that they have become able to collect a lot of information in concise form.

Folk theatre which is one of the important cultural heritages of India represents the local lifestyle, social values and customs. Mainly the roots of folk theatre are associated with rural India. In most of the folk dances, the role of woman is played by a male artist. Make up plays an important role in it. Folk theatre is generally considered to be for the entertainment of villagers by the unskilled people. It is created for and from folk culture. But it is not appropriate to state because folk may relate to any group be it educated or uneducated as Dundes says:

The term 'Folk' can refer to any group of people whatsoever, who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is-it could be a common occupation, language or religion- but what is important is that a group is formed for whatever reason it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally most groups may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the groups, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity. (quoted in Manoj Kumar 10-43)

In modern times we are connected to the ancient culture through folk theatre. It is through the folk theatre that we get to know the common people's life in rural areas. Besides being a means of entertainment, it also introduces us to the ancient culture, customs, norms, social values and its people. Folk theatre which is also known as Loknatya, is made up of two words lok+ natya. Lok stands for a group of people or common people of a big region or people in general especially living on the outskirts areas and natya means presentation or acting by an actor with a particular role to assign for performance. So loknatya means a kind of performance in which a general message is given to the public by dance, music, songs, rhymes etc. not by one person but by a group of people. Bharat Muni was the first to explain both the theory and practice of dramatic act. According to him, acting is the most important source, through which a theatrical performance is judged. It is a dynamic process that transcends a performer to the common man that he involves in society to the deeper level and connects with them deeply for effective communication on social issues. If the performers, truly adhere the rules of acting, then they become good actor and their performance as a good drama or play. Later on Bharat Muni has divided this acting into four sub parts, which are Aangik, vachik(verbal), Aaharya and Satvik.

Aangik is an acting in which different parts of body like hands, eyes, ears play a significant role to convey the message. In Vachik acting is done verbally. It means the words spoken by the actor during a dramatic performance whether in dialogue form or general sentences. In Aaharya acting, external elements like costumes, make up and decorations are in centre to make the play impressive. As far as Satvik acting is concerned, it presents the expressions of an actor like temper, fear, happiness, sadness etc. In short, inner feelings of the performer play a crucial role in this acting. In confirmation of the opinion of Bharat Muni, who tells that theatre has four types of acting like Aangik, Vachik, Aaharya and Satvik, verbal acting (Vachik) is the most important in all. Dialogue and conversation play a significant role in drama, as various characters express various emotions and feelings through conversation. While extending Bharat Muni's views regarding drama, it comes in notice that he has divided drama into two categories as Lokdharmi and Natyadharmi. These two terms can be understood with the parallel concept of materialists and spiritualists writers described by Virginia Woolf in her famous essay *Modern Fiction*. In Lokdharmi, dramatic performance is performed keeping in view the interest of people. A pure imitative presentation of the customs, costumes and even behaviors prevalent among the people of a particular region, is adhered. On the other hand, Natyadharmi is a practice to make a dramatic performance successful by full efforts. So it includes classical expressions, rules, instructions and actors' self taste to make their performance attractive. It means in Natyadharmi all efforts are put in use by the performers (characters) to make their audiences or spectators happy and satisfied, which can be compared with the materialists writers of Virginia Woolf. In short it can be said that spiritualists writers are like Lokdharmi plays, they write only for originality or on the issues which are prevalent in a society, but Natyadharmi are like materialists writers who try their level best to make their earning through writing or by acting. Virginia Woolf

herself states, “they(materialists) write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skills and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring”(Modern Fiction,159). On the other hand, in her opinion, the spiritualists are different because they “look within... (they) examine...an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (Modern Fiction,160). Like mythological stories, loknatya is a medium to transmit the message through mouth from person to person and one place to another. To quote *Facts and Details: Theatre in India*:

India is home to hundreds of living theatrical traditions. Some of them are archaic rituals that have been cherished by small rural communities for several centuries, some are age-old classical traditions of dance-drama related to the natyashatra, the ancient drama manual, and some of them are popular forms of folk entertainment reflecting the changing tastes of their audiences.

India is famous for legendary kings, knights, rich culture and traditions which have been always integral part of its history. All the tales of legendary kings, knights and traditions have been motivational for their dramatic representations. The presentations of these folk tales are not done by any individual but collectively created by the masses. These tales are being passed by generation to generation orally or by their dramatic performance.

Folk theatre is heavily based on mythological stories from the Indian epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Stories of wisdom and power are represented by folk theatre basically inherited from the mythology. But even though folk theatre is completely different to mythology. Folktheatre is concerned about to transmit every material to the culture whether it is story of Gods and Goddesses by the worldly characters or it may be any love romance or superstitious thing. But mythology is based upon the stories of Gods alongwith to know about

the facts how the things are so and why. Mythology is represented to make people understand the world around them. Through some of the folk theatres like Ramleela, Rashlila, Nautanki etc. story of the greatmen from ancient india are shown to the people through which message of struggle, sacrifice are conveyed in the society. In Ramleela, Ram is depicted as Maryada Purushotam, who never transgressed the boundary line as a Hero, Laxman is Shown as an ideal brother and Sita as a loyal wife of Ram. So through this presentation a moral message of brotherhood, an ideal son and a loyal wife is conveyed to the society. On the otherhand, in Rashleela, some glimpses of Lord Krishna's life are found. In the words of Vikram Singh: "The mythological stories across cultures are viewed as an embodiment of beliefs, values and philosophies that serves the national interest of the people." (03)

But even though it can be concluded that both folktheatre and mythology have persuasive nature to attract the people. They have tried to shape holistic lifestyle of human beings throughout times. There are many examples in history which prove that theatre has been a great source to bring issues on stage for social change. To cite an example from Suchi Samita Mishra's "Women Identity and Self- Assertion: A Study of Two Contemporary Retellings of Mahabharata" where she has put an example of JanaNatya Manch of Safdar Hasmi (People's Theatre Front, formed in 1973) formed a political play on street namely *Aurat*, which dole out the issue like dowry death, child marriage and domestic abuse. Here the main character in the play is an Aurat (woman), who is unnamed, no religion of her own, no self identity, she is just an example for all women who have the same problem to society and at the work place. Brinda Karat, the general secretary of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) from 1993 to 2004, said about the play, "Aurat spoke in a multidimensional voice that not only

inspired women from the working classes but had a lasting relevance for women's movements in India and across the world."

So it can be assumed that this play of 1970s bow the seeds of emancipation or awakening among women, which is still relevant. In other words, it can be said that that line of women empowerment is still going on which was earlier emerged from folk theatres. Monika Gupta and Nisha Thakur quotes to Rakesh Chandra, according to whom, empowerment is: "...a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns (77)."

Although the play was staged in 1970's, yet it has a relevant effect in 21st century. Through a series of episodes from home to working place(whether it is market, educational institute, any social ritual or ceremony) the play depicts the connection between patriarchy and capitalism and their joint efforts to exploit a woman. In this way, the play not only effected to the working class woman, but it has a lasting effect upon the woman of 21st century. In this way, folk theatre plays a significant role in understanding the ancient history, culture, costumes and social values. It works as a mirror through which one can get glimpses of the past lives, living standards of a particular region and experiences of the people how they survived. In spite of being a medium of entertainment, it works as a messenger between the past and the present. By watching a folk theatrical performance, people can easily get an idea of the customs and traditions of the ancient culture.

Very few of the Asian countries had their own indigenous form of spoken drama. So being an indigenous form, it is more interactive and near to the people's heart. In all genres of

theatrical performances, folk theatre is considered to be the most effective tool to reflect in detail the harsh realities of the society in which it produced. Folk theatre move to inward a society and stand away from the outside world. It attempts to expand the social issue to such a way that can effect the audiences or spectators interiorly. Folk theatres are focused on the interior nature of feelings, emotions and thoughts foremost. It seems that the true objective of the folk theatre is to look inwardly and at life in general. It (folk theatre) has a transformative influence on the people of a society. It has influenced the Indian cultural tradition very much. The stories which are represented by the folktheatres revolve around the society. In short, it can be said that even the psychology of men and women, regarding their situation may be changed for their upliftment through such theatrical performances. People can be made aware about many social evils. Women can be awaked about their situation by presented folk plays on women empowerment, on child marriage, female feticide etc. In nutshell, it would not be an exaggeration to say that folk theatre is the best medium to understand the ancient Indian Culture and it's values.

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