

## THEATRE: AN ESSENTIAL TEACHING TECHNIQUE

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### ABSTRACT

*Learning must be a spontaneous activity for learners, and the process may be functional and practical; it must be participatory. If students bring in their emotional participation in the learning method, they can understand concepts from the basic level and sustain that information in their psyche forever. In this context, the relevance of theatre as a text method has gained importance through noteworthy research studies worldwide. A brief overview of Theatre in Education (TIE), with particular reference to National Education Policy-2020 (NEP), has been reviewed in this paper. Teaching through theatre enlightens the children about their role in society and its relation. Students need to enjoy their studies to perform the best result. In this regard, theatre is employed by teachers, educationists, and researchers as the most appropriate teaching tool for children to create an enthusiasm for learning. The present paper explores how text understanding evolves through interaction in a drama-text-based student theatre production. The paper conceptualizes theatre as an educational practice and its output as a goal-oriented and co-creative activity where the presentation of the stage text requires an elaborated common text understanding.*

**Key Words:** Theatre in Education (TIE), Education, Learning, Drama in Education (DIE), Theatre Text, Teaching, National Education Policy (NEP.)

### INTRODUCTION

India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from antiquity. The Vedas are the oldest texts in the world, and the Vedic education system was of the highest order. The language of the Vedas was Sanskrit, and the subject material was varied and elaborate. The Gurukul system for teaching was prevalent, where there was no fee for education, accommodation, food, etc. In the Gurukul system, the children of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas used to be admitted after the Upanayana ceremony. Because there was no provision for the Upanayana ceremony in Shudra families, children of Shudra

Varna were not allowed to get admission to a gurukul. This system was independent and controlled and governed by the Gurus. The Vedic education system's primary objectives were developing knowledge, health protection and promotion, earning a living and education of art skills, preserving and creating culture, and moral and character development. Teaching methods included imitation, memorization, explanation, illustration, reasoning, storytelling, and demonstration. Art skills, military education, medical education, etc., were imparted through the demonstration method. After that, this demonstration was performed by the disciples as a practice. Thus, the performing arts, including acting, were prevalent in the Vedic period.

Although women had an equal right to education in the early Vedic period, in the later Vedic period (Brahmin period), their education opportunities became limited due to women's prevailing child marriage age. Thus, Shudra Varna and women of all Varnas were deprived of the chance of education. It is believed that through the great sages, the group deprived of education met Lord Brahma Ji and said they could not read, and they forgot what they saw and found it challenging to learn Vedic knowledge. All of them requested Brahma Ji to solve this critical problem. At this request, Brahma Ji took the essence from the four Vedas. He took text (dialogues, narration) from Rigveda, music, and dance from Samaveda, acting from Yajurveda, and elements of rasa from Atharvaveda and entrusted the task to Bharata Muni. Natyashastra, known as the fifth Veda or 'Natya Veda', was composed by Bharata Muni and taught Natyashastra to his sons.

In India, the art of acting and theatre was formed in the Vedic period. After that, Sanskrit theatre reached the culmination of its progress – Bharata Muni's Natyashastra is proof of this. 'Nat' and 'Nati' are cited in Ramayana, Mahabharata, Harivansh puran etc. Panini has mentioned two Natsutrakars named 'Shilali' and 'Krishasva'. Therefore, the opinion of some western scholars that the theatre originated first in Greece is factually incorrect. India's theatrical heritage dates back over 5000 years. Its origins are deeply rooted in Vedic ritualism and socio-cultural anthropology, which delineated the development of various dramatic forms of Indian Theatre. It takes on many other forms—traditional African storytelling and drumming, shadow puppets in Indonesia, Chinese opera, simple local children's theatres, and high-production Broadway musicals. In every form, across every culture, the theatre has the potential to create magical moments and memorable experiences.

There is an Old Native American Proverb, *'tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I will understand.'* This seems to be accurate, especially in the case of school

students. Gandhiji had seen King Harishchandra and Bhakt Prahlad's Drama in his childhood; since then, he had always remembered.

The second half of the 20th century had observed the apparition of many famous, alternative movements leading to the creation of social, cultural, political, community, fringe, and children's theatre companies. The necessity was to explore how theatre could be oriented to achieve educational and social goals. New forms were devised, and topics of current interest for particular communities and groups of people were introduced to produce performances adapted to the demands of a popular audience. Experiments with traditional dramatic conventions have narrowed the distance between actors and audience (in a literal and a metaphorical sense). Thus, the static conception of the acting space has been challenged. No longer restricted to a performance venue, the stage has become, in principle, infinitely adaptable.

A theatre text can be understood in layers of cultural meaning, such as historical periods, literary conventions, linguistic issues, characters, and central themes. In contrast, stage text can also be understood in its audio-spatial properties, such as how scenes are presented through the actions of the stage characters and objects on stage (Franks 1-21).

Theatre as an educational mode uses entertainment and humour to attract children's attention and highlights learning through the interplay between fictional and actual contexts. Education and theatre aim to attain an effective rapport between teacher/actor and students/audience. They give participants a shared experience that demands their cognitive and emotional involvement. Theatre has a great deal to do with pedagogy because it is an art" (Bolton 39-47). Educational theatre scholar Tony Jackson expounds on these ideas: Education can take place in various ways -not least through the art medium. In itself, any good theatre will be educational (Jackson 35).

The present paper explores the relationship between educational practice and theatrical art, namely TIE, DIE, and educational Drama in general:

Theatre in Education (TIE) refers to a particular kind of theatre practiced by professional drama companies or teams working on educational projects devised at schools. Its' most outstanding feature is that it involves much more than the presentation of a play, as it does of a whole programme of work. The performance is part of an educational project covering curricular or cross-curricular topics, including previous and further work at the school. Students' participation in the performance is prudently planned to provide an evocative learning experience according to specific educational aims. TIE encourages effective learning in schools and calls for carefully considering the audience's age and requirements to engage them and get the message across. In his introduction to *Learning through Theatre*, an invaluable study about the development of time and its practice around the world, Tony Jackson provides the following explanation about the nature of the TIE programme:

[It is] a coordinated and carefully structured pattern of activities, usually devised and researched by the company, around a topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and to the children's own lives, presented in the school by the company and involving the children directly in an experience of the situations and the problems that the topic throws up (Jackson 4).

TIE can provide experiential learning opportunities for influential students because theatre impacts the audience member's cognitive and emotional states. TIE believes that people learn from observing others, receiving feedback from others, and self-reflection and interaction between person and environment (Joronen et al.116-131). TIE suggests that children look at life as observers, making conscious moral decisions about the situations played out for them. It enables a 'cognitive space' whereby children can experiment with different choices and vicariously experience the delicate consequences of their and others' behaviours (Haner et al. 55).

A review of the literature on TIE reveals a wide variety of program characteristics, including puppets or actors; inclusion of follow-up classroom activities; the use of music; participatory techniques such as role-playing; and; research/theory-based performances.

Puppetry is an art that develops animation and morphing skills with suitable dramatized characters. It enhances the creativity of an artist. Each puppetry presentation through music and dialogues motivates the artists and entertains and educates the audience. Children grasp the message of the puppetry show very quickly. Today there is a need for a course in puppetry in schools. Karnataka Folklore University (Gotgody Havery) has come forward to introduce puppetry as a part of the school curriculum.

It is a type of narrative theatre in novice storytelling and theatre plays, showing live music, narration, and gestures taken from dance. In traditional puppetry, the plots are mainly derived from the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas (stories of gods and goddesses). Epic plays allow the puppeteers to cover an ancient wisdom pedagogic role as teaching the masses about gods and heroes and the many mythological implications of the stories. Puppetry fulfilled at least two functions' value in education and entertainment. In the last decades, government initiatives have also used puppetry as a medium for hygiene and family planning campaigns and its use in school education.

The clues for the origin of the art of puppetry can be traced back to the Prehistoric era when miniature dolls made of bones and small leather cut-outs were used for pseudo-magical purposes. Over time, this developed into an art with the objective of entertainment and propagation of morals and a communicating artistic experience in the context of religious and community ceremonies. The Vedas contain the rudiments of Drama, and several instances of hymns are in the form of dialogues. The art of puppetry might have started in India even before the Christian Era. The dramatic impulse, which is universal, may manifest itself in various forms of artistic expression.

Narratives in prose or poetry of religious, ceremonial, or social content were often supported by visuals like pictures, charts, paintings, puppets, icons, and anionic forms and by music played and enacted on different occasions ceremoniously. The art of puppetry is mentioned in several ancient texts of India. For example, the Mahabharata states, 'Another harnesses Hanuman gestures like a wooden doll strung on a thread. Inscriptions from the Sitabenga and Jogimara caves in Ramgarh Hills in South Bihar reveal the existence of a developed dramatic art in ancient India (Krishnaiah 1).

Puppet-performed theatre has demonstrated potential as an educational and clinical tool. Indian art comprises all art expression, as folk, classical, ethical, mythological, spiritual, reflections, and religious experiences of the highly evolved artists and sculptures. Puppets of different forms in almost all states of our country are used. This is a reflection of our ancient wisdom and spiritual and universal values. The experiential learning of this form is highlighted as pedagogy in school and teacher education. Puppetry has been the most essential traditional effective, and dynamic folk art form to communicate and entertain all age groups. It is not only an ancient art form in many countries but also a compelling medium of mass communication; it is a flexible folk-art form which not only a part of entertainment but also provides valuable information in public awareness for different issues, such as well as a sort of psychological therapies to treat psychological patients. Using puppetry in teaching allows children to express themselves in many different ways.

The actor-performed theatre is influential in developing a sense of realism among the children and is highly effective in enhancing the children's language skills. In the participatory theatres, children are made to participate in the theatrical performance. This medium teaches language skills, pitch, modulation, and appropriate body gestures through practical involvement. Since the theatre is activity-oriented, language teaching becomes far more effective in this medium. Children learn the

nuances of the language not by passively listening but through active participation.

TIE employing puppetry has been suggested as a valuable way of helpful approaching sensitive issues or having some stigma attached. A puppet theatre show portraying mental health disorders was presented to students to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigmatizing attitudes towards those individuals with mental health issues living in the community. Results of the study indicated that children who had watched the puppet show had significantly improved (Pitre 415-429).

Drama in Education (DIE) is applied to the practice of Drama in the classroom as both subject and method. It can be presented to deliver any aspect of the curriculum, often to explore cross-curricular aspects; in contrast to TIE, it relies upon the work of teachers, not actors. It is similar to learning by doing. It is essential for preparing students to live and work in an increasingly team-oriented world rather than a hierarchical one. The drama method also helps the students to develop tolerance and empathy.

The intermingling of Drama and Education has been since the time of Plato, who started his Academy. Plato assumed that informing a student just about the concept is not sufficient; a good teacher has to encourage the ability of critical thinking and the importance of value education in a student. Drama and theatre are both pivotal outlets for self-expression and using Drama as a teaching tool, students are physically, intellectually, emotionally, or socially involved in every way. Drama in education leads to holistic learning, accelerates personality development, and imparts students with crucial life skills, leadership, problem-solving skills, cooperation, and collaboration.

The study of Kaaland-Wells showed that "teachers who had taken a college drama course were more likely than the others to feel that it should be a part of all teacher training, and they were more likely to view it as effective" (Wagner 12). All of the arts can be effective learning tools; Drama is compelling. "Drama is powerful because its unique

equilibrium of thought and feeling make learning exciting, challenging, relevant to real-life concerns, and enjoyable" (Wagner & Heathcote 9).

Teaching through the theatre method has proven successful wherever applied so far. It supports educational institutions to educate young people and inspire positive change. The benefits of this method are:

- It involves children and young people in their learning, excites them, and they become more aware. With the power of the live theatre and the highly skilled actors presenting it. It helps them to reflect on their behaviour and embrace critical messages.
- Performing in a play develops a constant focus of mind, body, and voice, which also helps in life and school subjects.
- Young people can use theatre as a learning tool to add purpose and value to their creativity. It lets them find their unique ways to learn the answers for themselves. Working in this process improves self-esteem, motivation, and achievement.
- Acting in a role for different situations, periods, and cultures promotes compassion and develop a tolerance for others' feelings and viewpoints.
- Theatre activities decrease stress by releasing mental, physical, and emotional tension.
- Movement in Drama improves body balance, flexibility, coordination, and control.
- It combines the new ideas and abilities of its participants. This cooperative learning includes discussing, rehearsing, sharing, negotiating, and performing.

After independence, the government established different education commissions (Mudaliar Commission 1952, Kothari commission 1968, National Education Policy 1986) to address the educational challenges. It recommended

comprehensive policies to improve the educational system of India.

In 2015 the government of India adopted the Agenda for Sustainable Development and, according to its Goal-4, introduced the global educational policy known as '*National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.*' This new education policy seeks to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Such a condescending goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning so that all the critical targets and objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved.

Indeed, with the quickly changing employment landscape and global ecosystem, it is becoming increasingly critical that children not only learn but, more importantly, learn how to learn. Education thus must move towards less content and learning about how to think critically and solve problems, be creative and multidisciplinary, and innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields. Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, and enjoyable. The curriculum must include essential arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics, to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners; and make education more well-rounded, sound, and fulfilling to the learner. Education must build character and enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring while at the same time preparing them for gainful, fulfilling employment. The gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is required must be bridged through significant reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system, from early childhood care and education through higher education (NEP 3).

New NEP is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address our country's many growing developmental imperatives. The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge

and thought has been a guiding light for this policy. The education system aims to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, and sound ethical moorings and values. It aims to produce engaged, productive and contributing citizens to build an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as our Constitution. This policy envisages that the extant 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18.

Rule 1.2 of the NEP 2020 explains that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) ideally consist of flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning. It comprises languages, alphabets, numbers, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, counting, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, *Drama* and *puppetry*, music and movement (NEP 7).

Rule 4.21 of the NEP 2020 provides that teaching all languages will be enhanced through innovative and experiential methods such as films, *theatre*, storytelling, poetry, and music - and by drawing connections with relevant subjects and real-life experiences. Thus, the teaching of languages will also be based on experiential-learning pedagogy (NEP 15).

## CONCLUSION

The attention span in students, especially children, is short. Getting them to remember and concentrate on subjects is even more challenging in the present world, powered by technology. Innovative techniques find no limit in the educational fraternity, where academia always looks to introduce something more effective in teaching. It has been realized that the emotional involvement of the students is essential for them to comprehend things

to a deeper level. The theatre is not a new topic in teaching, but it is an integral and compulsory subject of instruction. The introduction of Theatre in Education is a novel approach to physically and emotionally involving children in education on issues related to society, health, and well-being. Theatre as text is a medium of schooling that employs entertainment to attract the child's attention and evoke enthusiasm in their minds to listen attentively and identify correctly the educational messages being portrayed. Theatre as the text makes the children realize that they are essentially natural beings with the abilities to think creatively, technically and socially. It provides a better platform, which could be called a workable, practical and exemplary model that helps the student and learners to analyze and assimilate the nature of the social world in which they form a part of it.

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