

Physical Theatre

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Abstract:

An art is basically abstract in nature. It's an abstract form of human emotions or say creativity. In order to give it concrete or physical existence we try to transform its abstract nature in physically existing world. For that purpose we use human body when it comes to physical theatre. The almighty element which is present everywhere in universe, is then composed and constructed in the form of art and a kind of spiritual satisfaction or emotion and is then emerged in all the hearts watching and performing any art .So does it happens in the context of physical theatre. Human body is used as a tool or an instrument to translate abstract human emotions in worldly symbols which has been accepted and practiced since long.

Keywords: Physical theatre, symbols, language, emotions, execution...etc.

Introduction

The concept of physical theatre includes art of storytelling which is executed through physical movements or gestures. Here emotions are conveyed to the audience using human body as a tool. Right from natyashastra where nritta and nritya both the terms are explained by Bharatmuni. Both nritta and nritya can be considered as a form of physical theatre. Even all the classical dance forms in India can be considered as a part of physical theater. Bharatmuni's concept of Angik abhinaya also reveals the boundaries of physical theatre. Ang, Upang and Pratyang are the body parts which are included by Bharatmuni to express certain emotions. Thus in India we have a deep rooted tradition of physical theatre. Concept of theatre has elements like text that is script, a character, his emotions and motif of that particular text. So in physical theatre which has a branch of classical dance, includes all the elements, where classical dance has a proper script –of which most are from traditional treatise like Ramayana and Mahabharata-character, and finally much important a motif. In modern physical theatre concept we can consider mime as a part of physical theatre. It requires flexibility of body, control over muscles and self-awareness. Flexibility and control over muscles are the basic criteria or a basic requirement of a physical theatre. It can be achieved by practicing daily exercises, but the third most important factor which really makes physical theatre a spectaculars one is self-awareness. This self-awareness can be gained by practicing yoga which itself includes meditation that provides certain calm and cool status of mind. The calmness of mind helps body to maintain its focus and projection in the performance. In eastern theatre, after watching Japanese Noh theatre Artaud was also fascinated by its physical nature and power of communication with the audience. Even in western theatre Stanislavski also gave importance to the physical execution of emotions

after his concept of emotional memory, which again comes to Indian treatise Natyashastra by Bharatmuni who had included technical use of different body parts to express emotions. Kuttiyattam is also a fantastic example of physical theatre.

Physical theatre is abstract in nature. It keeps human body at the Centre. It reveals the dramatic potential hidden in the body movement. It involves not only gesture but posture, gait, pace, rhythmic movement of the body, energy and grace. Also it includes the use and shape of the body and position in the theatrical space. All these technical elements of physical theatre are based on concentration, focus and maintaining the line of body. Dance and physical theatre are related to each other but has a significant difference where it focuses more on narrative or script and character and the movements or actions included in the performance; whereas dance focuses more on movements with pace, gait than character.

There are certain styles of physical theatre like mime, puppetry and stomp (with external objects) and circus and comedy. In any kind of physical theatre it focuses more on narrative or script and character and the movements or actions included in the performance. In any kind of physical theatre the main element of it is body movement through which emotions are expressed and thoughts are communicated. Thus language is a collection of symbols and each symbol is associated with certain meaning. This meaning is related to the emotions. These symbols are suggestive. All these symbols and suggestive gestures are practiced since for years in our human society. As a child we learn language means we learn to remember and relate the symbols with their prescribed meanings and thus we communicate our thoughts and emotions with another human being who has been brought up in the same background of learned behavior about language and communicating symbols.

By Elly A.Konijn (*Acting Emotions*)

“Privileging inner life over outer form, psychoanalysis over textual analysis, infantile self-absorption over mature observation of human nature and society, the Method has at its hollow core the essentially conundrum supposition that an actor can form an empathetic, affective transference with a set of glyphs on paper called a character.”

The strongest feature of physical theatre is its ability to translate the written script into bodily movements and conveyor transfer these emotions to the audience. Now all these are on the same level of understanding who have same sheared concept about symbols and its correlated emotion. Human body uses its sense organs to understand his or her surroundings. Sense organ collect the data and send this data to the brain where all the data, collected from all the five sense organs viz: eyes, ears, skin, tongue and nose and store it in the brain. All this type of data is rearranged and it is then logically compartmented. Repetitive occurrence of the incidences or things helps brain to relate and associate collected data with symbols and its learned meanings. Communication is also a learned behavior that is why in each country different symbols are used to express different motions. Also symbols are used in respect of certain context. They can be totally different from their assumed and practical meanings while used in different context. That is why physical theatre is much more expressive and communicative than any other theatre form. Symbols includes –image, sounds, gestures, colors, living and nonliving things etc... Symbols

cannot be used as communication medium unless and until it has been associated or related to a certain practiced or learned meanings. A performance in a physical theatre can achieve its peak only when actor and audience share the same kind of communicating data. Symbols can be formed and can be used to strengthen physical theatre.

In Natyashastra Bharatmuni has also formulated a structure where he includes all the human body parts and the emotions associated with their use. This formulation is very scientific and technically perfect. He has categorized human body in three basic classes viz: Ang, Upang and Pratyang. He has also classified all the emotions in Rasa and Bhava. According to him emotions are generated from rasas. These rasas are mainly eight in types and each and every rasa is associated with certain emotion. The body parts ang includes-head, hands, breast, hips, waist and legs. All these main parts are divided in sub parts .That are upang and pratyang. Upang includes forehead, eyebrows eyeballs, cheeks and nose. These are upang or sub parts of ang – head. Now ang-hand has upang like palm, fingers, and wrist and index finger, middle finger, ring finger, little finger and thumb also and whole hand.

Gestural vocabulary of a theatre which is nothing but physical, all these actions are designed that is, choreographed by a director or an actor himself. Language is a kind of learned behavior where all of us have a shared concepts about certain symbols. But for an artist all these symbols are more than that are, to a common man. He has the ability to collect, store and logically rearrange and relate all the symbols and signs in different contexts and also has the ability to explore there meanings beyond our general understandings. To develop this artistic sense one has to train his mind and body in such a way that, it will help him to perform the particular character. In order to educate himself about physical theatre he needs to focus on a particular character, he needs to develop concentration, also he has to develop his memory to remember all the different symbols and signs those will help him to execute all the emotions of that character on the stage in a physically executable manner. One good performer of a physical theatre always has his own library of learned symbols and signs and their associated meanings. He uses different combinations of all the signs which are the part of his learned and shared behavior along with his audience. The performance in a physical theatre becomes spectacular only when the audience who are watching it, can relate their own learned and shared concepts about execution of emotions and meanings behind them.

By Marié-Heleen Coetzee & Marth Munro University of Pretoria

“The centrality of the body in theatre and performance is well documented. In recent years perceptions of the body in performance have shifted to include a notion of the body as Performance. This special edition on Physical Theatre(s) in South Africa focuses on the body and its relationship to drama/theatre/performance, to self-exploration, and to the socio-political, cultural-historical and symbolic contexts and contours that enrapture, or are enraptured by, the performing body”

Thus a performance in a physical theatre is well documented, although it is scripted one, for an artist it is a self-exploration in social, political, cultural and historical symbolic contexts. Hence explores drama and performance itself. This self-exploration of physical movements

collectively helps to challenge the dominance of a theatre which is more literary and verbal in their presentation. Physical theatre then tries to find its origin in our contemporary sense to those concepts, beliefs and ideologies, which expects to reverse word over body in the context of its dualism and hierarchy. Thus physical theatre is composed of forms, beliefs and disbeliefs. All these belief and disbeliefs, ideologies are the representatives of a certain culture, so the transformations in the physical theatre performances are the byproducts of the inevitable changes in the growing culture. "Grotowski would work with his actors' bodies and awareness rather than have them approach acting from a place of recreating emotions psychologically as in method-acting. He told stories through ritual actions and metaphors on stage rather than literal representations. After rejecting the "theatre of production", as he called the market theatre world, he spent years exploring the ritualistic origins of theatre and the simplicity, and ultimately spirituality of the performative act. For him, theatre didn't need anything more than two people, one to perform and one to watch."-by Julia Metzger Traber.

Now a days the boundaries between dance and theater are not much distinct as they had been in last decades. Assumptions about the communicative power of written text or script that is literary has been overshadowed by the storytelling power of body movements. Grotowski has also emphasized on expression through actor's body over creating emotions psychologically in a theatrical space .He relied on movements and ritual actions than the narrative. Thus he tried to explore the spirituality of the performative art .According to him only two people that is performer or actor and a one person to watch as an audience is enough to create theatrical experience.

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