

STORYTELLING THEATRE STYLE –AN EFFECTIVE AND POWERFUL WAY TO CONNECT WITH AUDIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Sounds and words have always fascinated the human race since the very beginning. Oral storytelling is an ancient and intimate tradition between the storytellers and their audience. Effective storytelling involves a deep understanding of human emotions, motivations, and psychology in order to truly move an audience. Stories have been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education and have been pioneer instruments of cultural preservation.

The word Theatre conjures up images of stage, lights, music and drama. It is a collaborative form of fine art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience. Storytelling is one of the simplest and perhaps most compelling forms of dramatic and imaginative activity. Storytelling Theatre style includes voice modulation, facial expressions, bodily gestures, mime, pace, repetition, rhythm, elaboration and exaggeration which connects the audience leaving a deep impact on them.

This paper discusses that in Storytelling Theatre style the narrator is usually integrated right into the story to play as a character live to the audience. The paper explores its usefulness in present era as an effective and powerful means to connect with audience. The paper is based on feedback of the audience, as there are several evidences confirming that memory of information automatically enhances when presented in narrative form. "A picture is worth a thousand words" and what better way to put the picture across to audience than storytelling. The paper covers the usefulness of storytelling theatre style as a powerful and an effective means to connect with audience and leave everlasting impact on their hearts and minds.

Keywords

Storytelling theatre style, Staging, Audience, Empowerment, Identity.

1. Background.

Let me share with you what happened when book 'A Life Apart' English translation of autobiography of a feminist writer Dr. Prabha Khaitan (Anya se Ananya) came in my hand ...It was so gripping that I glued to it and read it in one stretch. After series of long discussions with my friends followed by brainstorming sessions with my colleagues, artists and friends and concluded that the best way to take this character of Prabha Khaitan to people is via storytelling theatre style. The faith exhibited by friends and colleagues inspired me to stage this story to people. It was not only my desire to play that character but also to work on that in an innovative way with Theatre.

I worked with my team and Saara Creations patron Col Rajesh Bhukar and finally it was staged in 2014 at Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur under able guidance of veteran theatre Director Sartaj Narayan Mathur and well received by audience. This inspired me to work on some more Women centric stories to stage them to connect with people. These included - Renowned Writer Amrita Pritam (Bolti Khamoshi), Amrita Pritam. □□□□ □□□□, Urdu Poetess Sara Shagufta (Sara ek Afsana) Amrita Pritam. Life and Poetry of Sara Shagufta and Legendary Bollywood Actress Meena Kumari (Ajeeb Dastan Hai Ye), Vinod Mehta. The Classical Biography Meena Kumari. I found that the storytelling theatre style was not only an effective means to take the story to people but also brought in a positive shift in the participants including audience.

In all my Theatrical performances the stories were women centric which depicts their life sketch, circumstances, struggle, and conflicts and above all how they face their disappointments and bounced back in life. Behind these performances my purpose was to express stories of healing of these women characters who were popular in their fields and own ways. In all above said Theatrical Story telling performances my art practice was designed to successfully connect with audience to convey message of healing, transformation and empowerment.

2. Introduction

What is a Story? A story can be defined as "a narration of the events in the life of a person or the existence of a thing, or such events as a subject for narration" or "a series of events that are or might be narrated?" Stories come from the heart. People don't remember facts, they remember stories. It's easier for us to recall stories than facts.

Storytelling. Sounds and words have always fascinated the human race since the very beginning. Oral storytelling is an ancient and intimate tradition between the storyteller and their audience. It is a way of preserving the culture and beliefs of a tribe or community and passing them down to the next generation. It can take form through drawings, paintings, dance or even puppet shows. Storytelling is a popular concept that is used in many fields, such as media, education and entertainment etc.

Theatre. Drama is hands-on, experiential learning and engages mind, body, voice, and emotions to interpret and convey to others information and ideas.

Storytelling Theatre style. Theatrical story telling is a multi-sensory mode of performance that engages mind, body, senses, and emotions to create personal connections. Storytelling is one of the most important performing arts, which began to attract theatre practitioners and because the audience is the main target for the storytelling like in case of the performing arts. The success of the narrator in communicating with the audience is one of the biggest challenges that occur to the creator of storytelling performance.

Therefore, this study aims to view the most important techniques to create a well-made story, on the level of performance. Before going into the storytelling techniques at performance level, we will differentiate between storytelling and imitation and characterization. In order to create and achieve an effectively communicated story, one must capture audience minds by maintaining a good rhythm, a good opening and a clear ending.

Importance of Storytelling. Remember the good old stories narrated by our grandparents? From Vikram-Betaal to Akbar-Birbal, stories about kings, queens as well as animals and ghosts, the ones that we read have lived with us over the years but those narrated by our grandparents have not only been etched in our memories but also passed on to other younger siblings. So, why is storytelling of importance to us? The storytelling:-

Introduces new words and enriches our vocabulary.

Enhances our listening skills.

Connects and keeps oneself connected with ones cultural roots.

Fosters imaginations and creativity of mind.

High emotional impact. Stories, novels and poems clearly have the power to move people emotionally, to inspire them, to amuse them, to uplift them and sometimes to anger them. The process of storytelling is a highly complex human interaction, a powerful form of expression that has a high emotional, motivational and social impact. When a story is 'told', as opposed to read off the page or witnessed in a dramatic portrayal, it enters the interpersonal and interactive sphere and this may heighten its emotional impact.

Storytelling in today's time. The best communicators today are the ones who engage with their audience on a personal level, inviting them to hear their story and ensuring it lives up to the expectations. Drama provides a rich experience that engages body, emotions, and senses in dynamic learning. Storytellers can now be found working in schools, libraries, arts centres, and in the increasing number of festivals held worldwide that celebrate the storytelling revival. Storytelling has been the subject of multidisciplinary study through the disciplines of theatre and folklore. Performance storytelling is extending its reach out of the storytelling festival and club events into mainstream arts programming and theatre spaces. Michael Harvey, *Staging the Story*. <https://www.michaelharvey.org/staging-the-story>.

How storytelling connects with the hearts of audience. Given this crazy amount of activity going on every minute, of every day, the real question is how your content will grab the attention of your target audience. If you really want to attract people, you need to tell a genuine and interesting story. Stories are a great medium to express your views, impress people, and make a human connection with them. We, humans, are social creatures and we are attracted to stories. Everyone has a story and everyone loves a great story.

Objective of the Paper. The objective of this paper is to bring out the power of Theatrical Storytelling to create spaces to encourage conversations on above entangled personalities and to see as to how effectively these storytelling theatre style performances impacted minds and hearts of audiences.

*Talaq Talaq Talaq – Teen Talaq ghanjhar ki mout hai
Lahu thukti aourat dhat nahi Chudio ki chor nahi
Maidan mera Hounsala hai Angara meri kwahish.....*

Lafzo ki kaynat chor rahi hoo aie aourat, Mere lafzo ko sone na dena.....

Excerpts from play (Sara ek Afsana). These lines capture the sadness of having to leave one's home and implies a desire to feel accepted where she is now. Reading it, I imagine this poem spoken out loud in character - its pained and reverberating call, echoing for everyone in the audience to acknowledge how we are more alike than different. Performing it in front of a huge fully attentive audience and a pin drop silence continuing even after the show was over conveyed it all that the aim to connect with audience is more than achieved.

This fits with Denzin's directive that "as researchers we need to find new ways of connecting persons and their personal troubles with social justice methodologies" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. ix).

This paper is written from the point of view of an active Performer and her experiences with people while conducting shows among people from all across the social fabric.

The paper attempts to address the challenges of grasping the emotional connectivity and use of Theatrical storytelling to invoke the emotions amongst the audience and bring out the value addition of Theatre to Storytelling. The paper also explores the possibility of utilising it to our current repertoire of methods for understanding the 'messiness' of present day World.

Review of Literature

For most of human history storytelling has been a major form of entertainment, education and a means of passing on values, often conveying folk wisdom about how to survive or succeed or behave correctly. However, relatively little has been written about the impact of 'live storytelling'. Our conceptualisation of 'live' or oral storytelling is of a triadic interaction between a 'teller', the 'story' being told and the 'audience', whether it be one listener or many (Killick & Wilson, 1999). We will consider each in turn, particularly in relation to formal storytelling.

In light of choosing to do a narrative literature review (as opposed to a systematic review, I chose to organize my discussion around common themes rather than the more standard review questions. It also permits me to approach with an open mind about what the outcomes (positive or negative), challenges, and ethical considerations might entail. The themes that I surveyed were empowerment, resilience, identity, confidence and improved self-esteem, wellness, community, inclusion, social change, and academic and social-emotional improvement.

The art of storytelling.

Successful leaders and public speakers throughout history have understood and harnessed the power of good storytelling. No matter the topic or the audience, telling a story instantly engages your listeners and elevates your message to an art form.

Dale Carnegie. The art of storytelling. The major strength of storytelling lies in connecting with audience and was effectively exploited during the performance by the artist.

“Your purpose is to make your audience see what you saw, hear what you heard, feel what you felt. Relevant detail, couched in concrete, colourful language, is the best way to recreate the incident as it happened and to picture it for the audience.” Dale Carnegie in Maria, Pellicano, The art of Powerful communication, aligning your mindset, message and voice. This exactly is the purpose of storytelling theatre style and was adopted in the execution of five shows by the artist.

Why I tell stories. One reason for telling stories is to create bridges, so in telling stories I try to create a bridge with you. Now I propose to you that storytelling is an act of heroism, that when you actually reach out and tell a story to someone, you're creating an empathic bridge. Anne Bogart. Address on 13 May 2015 at Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Empowerment and Identity. Here I will discuss the themes of empowerment and identity. I found the meaning of empowerment in the field of social work. This seemed justified since it is sometimes used in social work settings such as drama therapy, in schools, and in prisons. A surprising gap was the lack of theory to support the various claims that Theatrical story telling can help and empower women. While it is a psychological not a social or educational theory, Empowerment Theory, originally conceived by Julian Rappaport in 1977 and further developed by Marc A. Zimmerman, explains empowerment as “both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 121).

3. Essential elements for staging the story

Humans are narrative animals. Stories are such an essential part of meaning-making that we usually do not pay attention to how we choose to tell the story or on what grounds these choices are made. How to use language, articulate and reflect on experience is a major topic of interest in the dynamic field of practice as research in the arts. As we have demonstrated with the example, it offers the practitioner-researcher multiple perspectives. Michael Harvey, Staging the Story available at <https://www.michaelharvey.org/staging-the-story>

The three key elements that make up a story for effective communication are Character, Drama and Resolution.

1. First element, **Character**. Every good story has a compelling character and the whole story is crafted around this character. The Character is a connection between performer and target audience and must be keeping in mind audience's needs and problems so that they can relate to the Character easily.
2. Second element, **Drama**. Set a drama which fits performer's prospect, problems, needs, or audience journey. If it doesn't fit, how will they connect? For a better idea, one needs to spend some time understanding audience journey and their problems.
3. The third element is **Resolution**. Where there's drama or conflict, your audience will naturally want some sort of resolution at the end of story and this is one main aspect that an audience carries after the show is over.

4. Key features of storytelling performance

There follows a list of features which appear to me to be core to the contemporary storytelling revival and which storytelling in theatrical spaces attempts to maintain and develop.

1. A strong repertoire base.
2. Intimacy, engagement, directs address and mutuality of gaze.
3. An understanding of the story's context and its literal, creative and metaphorical landscape.

For a storytelling performance eye contact with the audience is vital and there needs to be sufficient house lighting to see them clearly. In a theatrical space the lighting rig has a markedly different effect than in tented or multi-functional venues. If lighting can be created to acknowledge the same space phenomenon of storytelling there is no reason why it cannot be used to sensitively underline mood and dynamic in the performance. Lighting deserves to be properly designed and storytellers need to be aware of how sloppy lighting can work directly against the connection they are trying to achieve. The Adverse Camber is a leading production company of Derbyshire that makes new performance work with storytellers and musicians at the top of their field, tapping into a global 'well' of source material that speaks to us today. (www.adversecamber.org).

Originality/value. Significant value may be gained by others seeking to understand how best to use stories and storytelling to heal and empower. The paper shows how the use of oral methods combined with other media can be used to support a number of different objectives and yield a wide variety of benefits. (Eg...Bolti Khamoshi - Screen Digital Multimedia).

Characterization. This should not appear as a foreign element to the story especially as characterization and practical experience has proven the accepted percentage of characterization in dialogue scenes inside the narrative story should not exceed 25%.

Dramatic Structure. Because the story mostly includes one dramatic theme, the structure is often a traditional construction, including a beginning, middle and end. The performance must be characterized concisely, because excessive elaboration would affect the story rhythm. Conflict "The conflict is either internal or external with the community or with other people as their interests' conflict with the hero's interests", therefore, conflict increases audience anticipation. (Rhythm The rhythm –in relation to story text –is one of the essential pillars that lead to creating a good story. Good rhythm is achieved by reaching image and sound diversity in relation to the story, which can be achieved by demonstrating diversity when representing the story characters and describing (Lesley Bown & Ann Gawthorpe, 2007,)

We tell stories because they matter; regardless of the style, genre, theme or formal complexity of the material chosen by them, she has found that by always treating the source as a story, not as a text, the landscape of choices gently alters. Emma Rice, director of the British theatre company Kneehigh. Frances Babbage. Adaptation and Storytelling in the Theatre.

Storytellers all have had to build on the past, on tradition, on stories handed down over the ages. They have had to translate from different tongues to facilitate understanding and create meaning. But what distinguishes the great writers and storytellers is that they write and tell with a conscious effort to grab hold of tradition as if it were a piece of clay and to mould it and remould it to see what they can make out of it for the present. . Zipes, Jack (2002). *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*.

Theatrical storytelling is one of the arts that stick directly to the concept of intimacy. It is a very private situation assembled by the story teller and the audience craving to hear it. Therefore, the story should be important to this audience. It should discuss a relevant problem, be in their own language, and touch the audience's values containing the feelings and emotions that interact with the audience's conscience and passion.

Design. As the story begins, it should raise audience attention, and push them into a rising conflict with gradual movements in which the action is equal to the reaction, and which complicates events and excites the audience to follow. The conclusion of the story is one of the main areas which give the story a qualifying certificate as either a good or bad. (Yakout, G.M. (2015). A good ending is decisive and conclusive with a clear interpretation. Doubt should not be left with the audience, because multiple ending possibilities confuse the audience. A fully resolved ending is achieved by choosing a clear and powerful combination of words to help the performer orate the conclusion decisively. This is what finally remains in the mind of audience and reverberates for long in his memory.

Audience relationship, gaze, participation. During the performance the audience's gaze is firmly fixed on the storyteller while the teller makes ample use of direct eye-contact with the audience directing the performance straight out towards them. A vital component of the gaze in a storytelling performance is that it is mutual. The audience are looking at a real person and that person is looking back at them and when real people really look at each other for any period of time a sense of togetherness and intimacy will naturally develop and it is within that mutuality of gaze that the story happens. Participation is a natural part of the performance and varies according to the material. The audience members are able to put themselves in the action of the story "the listener is the hero of the story" (Yashinsky 2005 p.28) which can, in turn, affect their role in the real world as "protagonists and not extras in the scenery of the world.

Methodology

The present study is based on five theatrical storytelling which were staged in a premier performing art centre of Rajasthan Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur during 2014 to 2018 by the research scholar. This study is based on Qualitative research tool of interviews through questionnaire of almost all the audience as theatre lover respondents who were witness to these shows. In most cases more than 60 % audience responded to the feedback interviews and the analysis of the same was done with the help of graphs and tables.

Qualitative methods were used to obtain information on the nature, purpose and use of stories in Theatrical storytelling. Discussion and semi-structured and unstructured interviews took place over an extended period during warm up meetings, rehearsals and interactions with the Theatre Art Lovers. Observation as a data collection method was included to add depth and variety to the data collected and also allowed for the identification of artefacts and documents as data sources. Press coverage and reviews both pre and post performances were also analysed.

Feedback. As part of feedback at the end of performance a set of questionnaire is presented to the audience to gauge the effectiveness of storyteller connecting with audience. The sample Questionnaire:-

SN	Feebbacj Questions	Very Good/Yes (in %)	Good/A Bit/May Be (in %)	Okay/No (in %)
1	How did you find the story presented today as a theatrical drama?			
2	Did the content and execution move you emotionally?			
3	Are you made to think more deeply about the Character in some way?			
4	Do you find the work and performance memorable?			
5	Are any morals put forward such that they enlighten the audience?			
6	Would you like to recommend to others and witness such performance acts again?			

Further feedback should begin with 'if it were my story', (keeping in mind that it is not your story). This is relevant to my argument because, in phrasing feedback this way in the story circle, it forces participants to reflect on their own subject positioning in the storytelling process. Personal reflection through storytelling Theatre is one of the themes that I find running through much of the interview data we have analysed thus far, and I believe that it is useful for developing insight into the importance of reflection for understanding embodied and emotions.

Findings

The audience clings on every word, sound and gesture of the story teller on stage. Each sense that is engaged provides an opportunity to remember the information and the experience. Memory can be triggered from what the audience saw, heard or how they stimulated during the performance. Each sensory input provides another opportunity to learn and retain the information.

This research paper has demonstrated that the emotional involvement in Theatrical storytelling promotes an in-depth understanding of the subject and improved retention of the information.

The research paper identified an innovative approach being used to combine a number of approaches to empower through the use of stories and storytelling, in particular representation of the stories. The audience senses this enthusiasm and identifies with the story events, raising eagerness to know what happens next which enabled achieving the 'audience captivation' objectives.

The five storytelling theatre style shows exhibited by the performer clearly revealed the following:

1. The audience was thoroughly embedded into the show and pin drop silence exhibited in the hall during the show clearly revealed that show achieved its desired results.

2. The post show comments, critics, media coverage and feedback from audience (where more than 60% people responded and of which 90% positively affirmed for the questions asked about the methodology and show) confirmed the success of storytelling theatre style methodology as a powerful and effective means to connect with audience.

3. The increasing popularity of subsequent shows which were oversubscribed and the JKK Jaipur auditorium as fully subscribed. The number of queries for conducting more shows showed a rising trend.

4. The post show interaction clearly revealed that the storytelling theatre style has immensely impacted the audience and the connect was visible.

Summary of Audience feedback at the end of five performances at JKK

Name of Show & Year	Very Good/ Yes (in %)	Good/A Bit/ May Be (in %)	Okay/No (in %)
A Life Apart (2014)	67.9	21.1	11
Anya se Ananya (2015)	72.5	18.3	9.2
Saara ek Afsana (2016)	76.7	16.7	6.6
Boli Khamoshi (2017)	81.7	13	5.3
Ajeeb Dastan (2018)	90	8.2	1.8
TotalAverage	77.76	15.46	6.78

Suggestions

Some of the recommendations for making storytelling more effective means to connect with audience are:-

1. Need to enhance storytelling awareness through the expansion of studies and research and to pave way to public access to a more glowing story.

2. The expansion of training workshops to contribute to the training of a greater number of youth actors in the art of storytelling, and to form volunteer groups of artists go to small villages and cities collecting traditional stories from the local residents in order to preserve them.

3. Organizing a group of theatrical storytelling festivals to include storytellers from different countries to achieve an artistic and cultural connection and an introduction to the customs and traditions of different nations and to encourage dialogue between civilizations.

5. Conclusion.

This paper has focused on just a few of these elements but I feel these to be the most relevant to help us 'continue to improvise both the custom and content of the art form, reinventing storytelling as a new artistic form.' (Yashinsky 2005 p.6).

In this paper we have reflected on educational, academic and artistic challenges when practiced as performer. We have argued that narrative inquiry and storytelling are a useful methodological approach in arts practice as research.

The combination supports the dynamic and multimodal lens advocated by Nelson (2013). We have presented and discussed these theatrical examples investigating aspects of conflicts, tensions, introspective questions and complex narrative construction. These examples represent the multi-layered and complex emerging research area of practice as research in the arts. We can claim that the Theatrical story telling has a potent role to play in the future recognised at all levels.

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