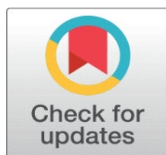
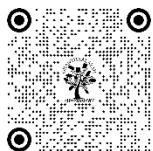


WHY THEATRE? PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIAN THEATRE ARTISTES IN THE CONTEXT OF NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA

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ABSTRACT

Nāṭyaśāstra is an Indian ancient Sanskrit text on dramaturgy written by *Āchārya Bhartmuni* in the 5th century. The story of the origin, development, and evolution of *Nāṭyaśāstra* is described in the very first chapter of the text. It also reveals the emergence of theatre practice. According to *Nāṭyaśāstra*, theatre serves the purpose of entertaining as well as educating its audiences. This paper aims to examine the contemporary theatre practice on the principle of *Nāṭyaśāstra* in this context. The objective of the present research paper is to study the motivation, inspiration, and purpose of contemporary theatre practitioners under the light of the purpose of theatre according to *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The present research is qualitative. The methodology employed for data collection is the interview of 46 theatre practitioners using semi-structured interviews. The data has been collected from prominent theatre festivals held in five different North Indian cities namely Delhi, Bhopal, Jaipur, Lucknow, and Patna. The analysis of the interviews is done using thematic analysis.

The findings of the research show that contemporary theatre practitioners have personal aspirations as well as social obligations to practising theatre. Contemporary theatre practitioners also believe that theatre is a medium of entertainment as well as sensitizing people which aligns with the principle of *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Keywords: Nāṭyaśāstra, Contemporary Theatre Practice, Theatre Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

[Dissanayake \(2003\)](#) writes that communication is “the lifeblood of society” and that no culture and society can survive in the absence of communication activities. Here it is very clear that culture plays an important role in determining communication behaviour and vice versa. Also, if we look at the history of communication, Indian art and culture cannot be separated. “Looking at the past in the context of Indian communication, its base in traditional India was language and behaviour (oral kinetic) and from this twin source flowed a wealth of theatre, dance,

and speech forms, both expository and lyrical. Ancient India communicated with power and subtlety which has lasted till today, as some will still say, still undiminished” Mary & Peeradina (1989). Dissanayake (2003) has proposed four areas which are extensively rich to explore the indigenous communication systems as classical texts, classical traditions as well as current cultural practices, rituals and performances, and day-to-day communication behaviour. The present research work draws inspiration from these areas where contemporary theatre practice is studied under the light of the ancient Sanskrit text *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Looking from the perspective of culture, Indian culture has evolved in three different phases which have affected the structure and system of traditions: first is the traditional past of Aryan civilisation, second comes from the colonial experience and the third is the post-independence era where the aspirations for new India were creating Reddi (1985). Observing all these points, it is the point in question that ancient texts like *Nāṭyaśāstra* remain relevant in contemporary times.

Nāṭyaśāstra has been studied considerably to explore the communication perspectives and lessons by many scholars including Chattopadhyay (2013), Bhattacharyya & Dasgupta (2013), Lohochoudhury & Bhattacharyya (2014), Adhikary (2014) and others. Yet this text has not been studied because theatre is the oldest form of group communication. While Aristotle’s model of communication has much to offer about persuasion in communication, the concepts of *Nāṭyaśāstra* by *Bharatmuni* offer the morals of communication where the process is not speaker-oriented, rather society-oriented. This also establishes the difference in the Western and Eastern perspectives of communication Adhikary (2008).

1.1. NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA AND ITS ORIGIN

The classical Indian text on dramaturgy *Nāṭyaśāstra* was written in the 5th century by *Āchārya Bhartmuni*. There is much debate on the dates of this text. However, most scholars relied on evidence such as the words and language used in the text, certain traditions in the text, references of *Nāṭyaśāstra* in texts written after it, and so on. Though the text is an ancient document Vatsyayan (2007) has seen “the text in the context of the flow of the *paramparā* rather than to locate it in a particular period and specific place” which is one strong basis of its reference in the present study. Another significant point here is that *Bhartmuni* suggests in the text that the treaty is based on the practice of theatre and further additions or changes should be considered if there is a change in theatre practice Shukla (2014).

The story of the origin, development, and evolution of *Nāṭyaśāstra* is mentioned in the first chapter of the text. *Bhartmuni* informed the readers that the story begins with the five questions of *Ṛṣis* (sages) regarding the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The first question is the most crucial since it establishes the framework and makes it clear that theatre (*Nāṭyaveda*) came into existence for communication. In response to the first question, *Bharatmuni* shares the story of the origin of *Nāṭyaveda*. He explained that Indra – the king of the gods – reached Lord *Brahmā* with other gods and told the current scenario of the world to him. Indra informed Lord *Brahmā* that people have become dependent on sensual pleasure, leading to misconduct such as jealousy, rage, melancholy, and so on. This has led to the instability in the society. As the Vedas are not accessible to *Śūdras* and other sections of society, it is causing more problems and disturbance in society because the knowledge of the Veda is not received by everyone. Therefore, all the divine powers requested Lord *Brahmā* to create the fifth *Veda* as a vehicle for *manovinod* (entertainment/recreation) which would be both audio and visual and accessible for all *varṇa* (castes). The creator of the *Nāṭyaveda* Lord *Brahmā* remembered the contents of all four *Vedas* and

extracted the relevant elements to create the fifth *Veda* known as *Nāṭyaveda*. Hence *Nāṭyaveda* is composed of the components, i.e., *pāṭhya* (recitation) from *Rgveda*, *gīta* (songs) from *Sāmaveda*, *abhinaya* (art of representation and imitation) from *Yajurveda* and *rasa* (sentiments) from *Atharvaveda*. The other name of *Nāṭyaveda* is *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The above story demonstrates that *Nāṭyaveda* was produced when society wasn't steady and stable. The important aspect is that *Nāṭyaveda* or *Nāṭyaśāstra* has been created to impart the knowledge of *Veda* to every individual member of society. These lessons from the *Veda* would incline people to attain good behaviour in society. LohoChoudhury (2014) states that *Vedas* and *Puranas* have their own specific pattern in the texts that show the nature of communication in ancient India. This suggests that the idea of teaching the people about the *Vedas* involves teaching them about the events, customs and practices that are observed to make them aware of their surroundings. According to Tripathi (2013) the meaning of 'Veda' is knowledge. He also notes that the *Veda* are the source of the origin of Indian drama which also highlights the importance of theatre as a means of communication for entertainment and knowledge in ancient India.

The story further throws light on how entertainment plays a crucial role in the efficient dissemination of knowledge and information. In the context of communication, theatre is the medium which engages the eyes and ears of the spectator. Both these are the most active and attentive sensory organs which is an additional advantage for theatre communication. When Lord *Brahmā* delivered the *Nāṭyaveda* to *Indra* and other gods. He explains that it is such a work of art that consists of the combination of all the art forms in a unique way, incorporates all the information and knowledge and can satisfy a various section of society – regardless of caste, gender, class age and wealth. In this sense, the true essence of the *Nāṭyaveda* lies in its ability to sharpen individuals through different strategies and methods which would keep the observer connected with and will effectively serve the ultimate purpose of imparting knowledge.

2. BROAD OBJECTIVES

The contemporary theatre practice in India has evolved to a great extent. Still, reference to the theories of *Nāṭyaśāstra* is given repeatedly. This states the relevance of the text in contemporary times as well. The present study is focused on a single aspect of the text *Nāṭyaśāstra* which elaborates on the purpose of theatre. The broad objectives of the present research paper are:

- To study the motivation and inspiration of contemporary theatre artistes behind theatre practice
- To study the purpose of theatre practice from the perspective of contemporary theatre artistes
- To identify the similarities and dissimilarities with the concepts of *Nāṭyaśāstra*

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study has used the descriptive research design using a qualitative approach. The tool used for data collection of the study is semi-structured interviews. The sample of this study is 46 theatre artistes selected using a purposive sampling technique which includes 24 theatre directors and 22 theatre actors. These artistes were interviewed during reputed theatre festivals in five different

cities. The details of cities, theatre festivals and the dates are presented in [Table 1](#). The analysis of the interviews is done using the thematic analysis technique.

Table 1

Table 1 Cities, Events, and Dates of Data Collection			
S. N.	City	Theatre Festival	Dates
1	Delhi	Bharangam (Bharat Rang Mahotsav)	14-19 February, 2019
2	Bhopal	Iftekhah Natya Samaroh	22-27 April, 2019
3	Jaipur	Jairangam	22-29 November, 2019
4	Lucknow	Repertwahr	12-16 December, 2019
5	Patna	Patliputra Natya Samaroh	2-6 February, 2020

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Like any other art form, theatre also demands time and requires practice. Two aspects which are challenging yet interesting about theatre are that it is a live medium and it is a group art. Also, theatre as an art form as well as a communication medium has much social value. These points establish the relevance and purpose of theatre in society. The first chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself discusses about origin of theatre in society which also states the aim of a theatre performance. Concerning the theory of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, contemporary theatre artistes were asked about the objective of practising theatre. Interestingly, responses from contemporary theatre artistes align with the theory of *Nāṭyaśāstra* which states that theatre will play two important roles; one that it will provide entertainment to the general public, and two that it will consist of all the knowledge of the world, therefore leading to awareness. Both these roles assigned for theatre as a medium are inclined towards social welfare. Additionally, to this, the responses also opened up new dimensions about why practitioners are into theatre art as professionals. These responses are further divided into two categories fulfilling personal aspirations and social obligations of the artiste.

4.1. PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

4.1.1. INTEREST SINCE CHILDHOOD

It was interesting to find that most of the artistes have been inclined towards theatre since childhood. Some of them belong to the family of theatre practitioners. ([Solanki, A. personal communication, 2019, February 14](#)) says, "Magic has been my childhood fantasy and my fantasy gets fulfilled in theatre. The element of magic in theatre attracts me." Similarly, ([Jalali, F. personal communication, 2019, February 14](#)) expresses, "I feel like I have been doing it since I was a kid. It is sort of a natural evolution for me to do theatre, it's not anything against my grain." Theatre seems to be evolving with these artistes as it started as just a hobby and turned into their passion. In this context, ([Alam, Z. personal communication, 2020, February 3](#)) says, "I have been doing theatre since childhood. Earlier I did it only for enjoyment. Later, it gave me a vision to see things, to see theatre and literature. Theatre opens the mind to the world. You observe and understand the things around you."

4.1.2. ENJOYMENT AND SATISFACTION

Here again, when they talk about enjoyment in theatre, it is not mere enjoyment but something more satisfying. ([Solanki, A. personal communication, 2019, February 14](#)) expresses his emotions by calling theatre practice as important and

satisfying for him as breathing. As many artistes enjoy doing theatre, they have different reasons which satisfy them. (Singh, R. C. personal communication, 2019, February 21) feels satisfied as he gets the opportunity to present social reality while (Ganuwad, S. personal communication, 2019, February 25) is fascinated by the element of storytelling.

(Gandharva, M. personal communication, 2019, February 21) and (Bhutani, P. personal communication, 2019, February 24) as actors are always excited about the spontaneous response of the audience which helps in discovering the self, whereas (Talreja, H. personal communication, 2019, November 28), P. Malviya (personal communication, April 28, 2019) and (Ketkar, S. personal communication, 2020, November 2) like to portray a character and communicate with the audience.

4.1.3. SELF-WORTH AND IDENTITY

(Mishra, personal communication, 2019, February 17) and (Maisnam, J. personal communication, 2019, November 27) feel their self-worth and find their strong identity in theatre. In this context, (Mirza, S. A. personal communication, 2019, February 14) shares, “Honestly, I know myself because of theatre as theatre allows me to do self-analysis, self-criticism. I have a questioning mind since I’m into theatre, and I got more aware. Theatre has given meaning and depth to my life.” Theatre as a medium of art contributes highly to the lives of artistes on different levels.

4.1.4. GROWTH AS AN ARTISTE

(Raphel, N. personal communication, 2019, December 16), (Vyas, S. personal communication, 2019, December 13), (Kumar, V. personal communication, 2019, December 16) and (Bhavsar, J. personal communication, 2019, April 26) feel that they have grown personally and professionally as an artiste. (Palawat, A.S. personal communication, 2019, December 12) shares how his understanding has developed about self, life, and other things in the world too. V. Kumar expresses, “We all choose something to like and make the purpose of our life, I chose theatre. Theatre is what mesmerized me at a very young age and continues to do so. Nothing else challenged me, nothing else has given me a very important process. Also, theatre is the most democratic form of art-making. There is no law in theatre, it is very subjective to the artiste who is practising it. It allows that independence and inclusivity, and that’s why theatre is the most exclusive form for me at least.”

Similarly, S. Vyas who is a theatre actor and also works in ads and films, says, “Doing theatre is like doing Riyaz for me as an actor. So, theatre teaches you how to be secured as an actor and it gives you a chance to do your Riyaz as an actor with language, with words, with writers, with writing and so many things. So, I find theatre very inbounding.” When theatre directors and actors are talking about their growth as artiste, the interesting aspect that adds on here is the challenges that theatre brings along. It is a challenge to think beyond the boundaries, to satisfy self, to satisfy the audience, to create something exclusive and unique, and so on. In this context, N. Raphel feels that she doesn’t have to stick with one form because it allows the artiste to blend in more things and create something that they have imagined in their mind. Theatre gives her the flexibility to visualise differently and also challenges her thinking.

4.1.5. RICH EXPOSURE AND EXPERIENCES

In the interview conducted with the artistes, their aspiration for exposure and experience about life and the world through theatre is a significant theme. This theme emerged from the interviews conducted with the actors where they shared interesting insights. So, among many other reasons for which (Tiwari, I. personal communication, 2019, February 17) does theatre, the experience of becoming someone else and portraying it on stage makes her feel powerful. She says, “The kind of experience that theatre gives me, especially as an actor, is extraordinary. I feel very special and enriched which is usually not like real life. I like to explore the characters which are given to me. They come out of observation, imagination, realisation, and a mix of it sometimes. It opens a whole new world every time. I feel very much powerful, supernatural in a way while I do theatre.”

Another actor, (Jain, A. personal communication, 2020, February 10) shares a similar opinion and says, “On a personal note I have always been in love with the stage. It is basically about living a life which I can't live in one life, being able to play a character and live that on the stage. I want to experience the various emotions which probably are not possible to experience in one life even in the same routine. I could have never imagined playing or living like a village girl or living like a married Bengali housewife. So various things which I experience from various characters, that is the thrill that theatre gives.”

As many actors shared they grow on different levels in life because of theatre, every new play gives something. (Talreja, H. personal communication, 2019, November 28), an actor playing the lead role of Bhagat Singh in a play says, “Regarding Gagan Damama Bajyo, I would like to share that I didn't have an opinion of my own before I did this play. I got some thoughts and concepts of my own now.” Among this personal aspiration of doing theatre, one important reason for (Bisht, N. personal communication, 2019, December 14) is the energy that she shares with the audience during the performance. N. Bisht, who is also known for her roles in web series and films has great love for theatre because of the live audience. She says, “An actor's best medium is theatre. I have a strong feel for the instant reactions that we get from the audience. The energy that flows between the actors and the audience is very different. I love doing theatre. I learn so much here and gladly I got a teacher director like Faezeh, I feel great about it.”

4.1.6. INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION

Additionally, to this, the intellectual stimulation through theatre is a factor that also motivates artistes to pursue theatre. This intellectual stimulation is driven by the theatrical process from production to performance. Interaction of artistes among themselves, with organisers and other artistes of theatre festivals and conversation with the audience also leads to this knowledge extension according to (Mishra, A. personal communication, 2019, April 27).

4.1.7. WAY OF LIFE

The artistes interviewed here share that one significant objective of practising theatre on a personal note is also because it has become their way of life. When they entered into this art form, there were several reasons; it started as a hobby, they enjoyed doing theatre, they were fascinated to see others and started doing it, and

so on. What held them into theatre art is that theatre became their lifestyle. They do not see theatre as anything separate from living.

(Thakur, K. S. [personal communication, 2019, November 26](#)) as a director and an actor lives life in theatre on a very different level. He says, "Theatre is my way of life. It is a spiritual process for me. I have included Yoga in the training process of actors, and I am trying to develop the methods of training through Yoga. I don't have a lot of desires. Generally, because of their desires, people forget the major reason for pursuing something. I feel very much satisfied with the theatre. So, the people also who get connected with me, make theatre their way of living. So, primarily it is a spiritual process for me." (Ali, V. [personal communication, 2019, April 26](#)) shares that when he started doing theatre, he just enjoyed doing it but gradually it became his necessity in life. The theatre has given livelihood to W. Ali as he is in the production business parallel to practising theatre. He expresses that he didn't have a background in arts and couldn't have done better in life if he wasn't introduced to theatre.

For (Saran, S. [personal communication, 2019, November 24](#)), who interviewed as an actor in this research work and who is also a playwright and director, there is no one answer to why she does theatre because there are multiple things that go along. She says, "Theatre gives the meaning to the current existence. For me, theatre is a medium to question, a medium to express, a space where people can come together as audiences and as actors and as teams and reflect on something. All forms of theatre are reflective performances. Theatre is not just one thing per se, it has a lot more activities like studying, researching, writing etc. Creating new venues for performance is also a part of theatre, so I love the idea of all these elements coming together and then of course you enjoy your performance and be eventually a part of it. So, the definition of theatre is broader. I enjoy the process and performances in the theatre."

4.1.8. WAY OF EXPRESSION

Theatre directors (Anant, S. [personal communication, 2020, February 2](#)) and (Arif, S. [personal communication, 2019, April 22](#)) say that their objective of doing theatre, driven by personal aspirations has merged with the social relevance of theatre. They share how theatre plays a significant role in their life as well as in society. Sharing his journey into theatre as a director, S. Anant says, "There is no definite answer. I was a painter and that came naturally to me. Theatre also happened very naturally to me. I love art and want to live in it. I realised that there is a certain kind of restlessness in me which helps me move ahead, which has led me to decide that I want to do art. I wanted to search for something in life through an art medium. So, my medium is my expression, my behaviour, my attitude. The theatre has everything that I am looking for in life, personal and professional. It completes me. Theatre satisfies my restlessness. I enjoy every process in theatre, be it sleeplessness, hunger or whatever it brings along. Theatre gives me the satisfaction of togetherness. It changes people, and it should. I feel that theatre becomes like a parent. It is magic. Theatre provides an opportunity to express myself. Theatre gives me the meaning of life. It has a connection (सरोकार) with people. So, there are several things which go together with practising theatre."

Similarly, S. Arif says, "I do theatre for myself. Everything that I am interested in comes under theatre. When I saw the theatre of Alkazi and Tanveer, I was mesmerized and felt like learning this art form. I don't have an agenda to do theatre. I don't want to change society but many things can be said through theatre. I feel a

commitment to the writer of the play and the audience. I don't have an ideology but have sympathy for the underdog. This is not a slogan but for the good of society."

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews done with theatre artistes on their objective of doing theatre is that they feel it is an excellent medium of expression as S. Anant also mentions above. Many theatre directors and actors said that another significant reason for them to practice theatre is that it gives them a huge and free space to express their ideas and emotions to others, along with which there is a sense of togetherness. In this context, (Yadav, G. S. personal communication, 2019, February 19) says, "I like reading literature and I could have remained a reader but there was a need for expression, to bring out what is going inside me. I feel like sharing what I have learnt. But there should be a meaningfulness in whatever I am doing. I believe in doing theatre which has a sense of life. Theatre should reflect life. I want to connect with the people through theatre, a sense of connectivity is important."

Talking about the need and significance of expression through theatre (Ketkar, S. personal communication, 2020, February 2) shares that when she used to dance, her ambition was on the expression of emotions of the song and the same happened when she came into theatre. Further, she says, "Theatre gives me the space to live the characters and express my thoughts through those characters. In theatre, expression is not restricted to acting, singing, dancing or any physical form. When I joined the theatre, I did backstage work. I made sure that I expressed in designing the costume and craft or doing the make-up. Even the slightest bell given to create a sound in the scene is an expression. In theatre, every minute detail is an expression and it is important. And in doing so, there is also a feeling and sense of togetherness. I have grown a lot since doing theatre. Theatre is a versatile art form, I can do everything, and practice every art form at the same time, this is also one of the reasons for doing theatre."

(Bhutani, P. personal communication, 2019, April 24) believes that through this expression, she can discover herself. She thinks that there are many hidden aspects of her as a human being which discloses through theatre. Theatre enables her to experience those emotions which one doesn't go through usually. For (Date, K. personal communication, 2019, November 25), the objective of doing theatre has changed from mere enjoyment to something bigger like stating his opinion. He says, "I always enjoy fiction and narratives and so, I love creating something out of nothing and making people believe in it. It excites me that people believe in what you want to say, it creates magic. Theatre started with the feeling of enjoyment, and creation. Now it is also about the power of expression and stature to comment on something. I can now have my political stand. Theatre allows me to say something."

Similarly, (Raha, S. personal communication, 2019, February 19) shared how and why theatre became his profession. He says, "Later in my life I also found that theatre is a medium of expression where I could express myself better. I am comfortable expressing myself in this medium. Therefore, I made it my profession. Lately, it becomes your habit to express and after that, it also becomes your responsibility. You can and must express your thoughts and position." Like Solanki, A. personal communication, 2019, February 14), he also believes that once he started expressing himself in an art form like theatre, he gradually realised that it is now a responsibility to keep expressing. This is because the art that they are practising reflects social reality and has meaningfulness. A. Solanki says, "Being able to practice arts is a privilege and further a responsibility."

Theatre enables self-expression which is many times not possible in real life. It provides an opportunity for the expression of those emotions which one may not do

usually. “Not just about ideas but it also allows me to behave and react in a way that I cannot do in my life, the emotional expressions. I can sing if I feel like it, I can dance if I feel like it, I can cry if I feel like it. To me theatre is closer than a family” says (Ali, W. personal communication, 2019, April 26). Similarly, (Beesetty, S. personal communication, 2020, February 10) shares that as a shy person, he couldn’t express himself, but theatre empowers him to share and express himself. (Kumar, V. personal communication, 2019, December 16) believes that theatre is a democratic art, so (Sajida, personal communication, 2019, November 30) feels that she can express herself completely in theatre and nobody would judge her based on caste, religion, or gender.

Beyond the boundaries of expressing personal emotions, the theatre also allows artistes as sensitive people to voice for others. Sharing his opinion, (Mishra, S. K. personal communication, 2019, February 16) says, “It gives me freedom and opportunity to express myself in different ways. I feel strongly for society, and sometimes we are not able to do something for society. But definitely, art has an impact. I think I can express my views about it in theatre. I can tell others about the problems in society that I see, and feel should be corrected. It is the best medium for expression for me.” While some look forward to speaking their mind and heart, (Talreja, H. personal communication, 2019, November 28) likes to become a medium as an actor to speak for the writer and director of the play. He says, “Mostly I am interested in expressing the thoughts and ideas of others in my way. I like to give voice to what others want to say and relate with the writer. I also look for my thoughts on what the writer wants to say. I like this craft more.”

4.2. SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

4.2.1. THEATRE AND EDUCATION

Further discussing the objectives of practising theatre, artistes shared the importance of theatre as a social activity, and hence their responsibility as artistes. They consider it their privilege, obligation, and choice to be practising theatre for the social roles it plays. Directors (Khan, H. personal communication, 2020, February 4), (Thakur, K. S. personal communication, 2019, November 26) and (Anant, S. personal communication, 2020, February 2) consider theatre as a very strong medium for education. These directors are known personalities who are working in the area of theatre for education. K. S. Thakur shares that he and his theatre group are primarily working for and with the children in Kullu (Himachal Pradesh). They aim to promote theatre in the lives of people and help them gain the benefits that theatre practice offers in the enhancement of life values.

H. Khan calls theatre as the primitive and most important medium of expression and education which is essentially helpful in the development of physical, psychological, emotional, and moral values in a human being. He also believes that theatre is a strong medium for communication. In this context, he says, “Theatre allows communicating and connecting with people. Acting has been used to teach children in earlier times. I believe it is very significant as it is the oldest form of communication in human civilisation.”

4.2.2. IMPORTANT MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Similarly, (Jha, P. personal communication, 2019, February 17) also believes that theatre is a great medium to talk about social issues which no other media can do as efficiently. The elegant part about theatre is that it enables communication where both entertainment and message blend effortlessly. Theatre as a medium has

this quality which (Alam, Z. personal communication, 2020, February 3) expresses in his interview. (Talreja, H. personal communication, 2019, November 28) as an actor thinks that he is the bridge between the writer and the audience. He considers himself a person who has the responsibility to communicate with the audience about what the writer has to say. In this process of rehearsing to communicate in the best way possible, he further says, “Theatre brings a change in me and that happens with every play.”

Sharing his journey from a student to a theatre director and his desire to communicate with the audience, (Ankur, D. R. personal communication, 2019, February 15) says, “As I was a student of literature, wanted to do teaching and liked doing theatre, so it became my profession, my art, my medium. As I always inclined to literature, I wanted to communicate literature through theatre. This is because, in every theatre performance, we pick up a novel, story, or autobiography. So, theatre is not possible without literature. I wanted to give due credit to the literature. Therefore, I focused on this concept and called it ‘Kahaniyon Ka Rangmanch’.”

Elaborating on the dynamics of theatre as a communication medium, (Raphel, N. personal communication, 2019, December 16) elaborates on vivid aspects of communication and theatre. She says, “I think when you do theatre, there are different ways of communication through which I say something. Sometimes you understand it immediately when I say something, and then you must pause and ponder on that. Sometimes you may not be understood in the first viewing. But I think if you are a genuine appreciator of art, then I think you will come back to watch it again. So, I think in that sense, it's okay to just knock. We didn't communicate rules.”

4.2.3. SENSITIZING PEOPLE

Another significant role of theatre, which is the primary reason for the evolution of theatre according to *Nāṭyaśāstra* as well as for contemporary theatre artistes, is the power of theatre to sensitize people. Some of the artistes of course practice theatre for self-development, satisfaction, and growth, but almost half of them also feel a responsibility towards society. Here, theatre enables them to work in this area in the most non-violent, cooperative, entertaining, and creative way. One reason is that theatre has a deeper social connection and therefore can bring change to not only artistes but also the audience, as (Mirza, S. A. personal communication, 2019, February 14) shares. Discussing the sense of responsibility as a theatre artiste, (Anant, S. personal communication, 2020, February 2) says, “Theatre is a medium that is like responsibility towards self, towards people and towards the medium itself. This is my medium to do something for the society, for the world.” Similarly, (Mishra, A. personal communication, 2019, February 17) also says, “Theatre has a deep relation with society, for that matter, every art form is deeply associated with society and that gives me a sense of responsibility. The social relevance of theatre also matters as a theatre practitioner.”

4.2.4. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

When asked why they practice theatre, (Singh, J. personal communication, 2020 February 6) shares, “Theatre is a natural process for me as one eats food. I do theatre for the generations to come. Like the importance of a teacher or a farmer in society, theatre is equally important. Theatre allows us to share literature in an easy and essential way, especially in the age of modern education. I am doing theatre for

modern social welfare.” It is true that like literature, theatre is also a reflection of society. Therefore, it is a responsible task to portray the reality of society according to (Singh, R. C. personal communication, 2019, December 21).

The theatre has undoubtedly played a significant role in society. Contemporary theatre practitioners also believe and state the role played by theatre and that it must play in today’s times. Regarding this role of theatre and its artistes, (Solanki, A. personal communication, 2019, February 14) says, “I believe doing art, doing theatre is a privilege. Many times, the theatre has awakened, and sensitised the people and society and therefore it is a very responsible task to practice theatre. So, it is not merely for enjoyment. I am also sensitive towards underprivileged people and theatre allows me to talk about that. I feel myself responsible towards people, society, and the text that I pick up.”

5. CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary theatre practitioners have various sources of motivation to practice theatre which includes both personal as well as social factors. The above discussion on the data concludes that theatre artistes have personal aspirations while practising theatre. They also feel a sense of responsibility as theatre professionals because theatre is a social activity affecting its stakeholders. Both these aspects of motivation are also interconnected where there is no visible difference between the effect of personal aspirations and social responsibility.

While theatre artistes have personal reasons to practice theatre, it is to note under the study that such details are not discussed in the text. However, in the concluding chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra* – which is chapter 36 – *Bharatmuni* has clearly stated that whatever is discussed in the text is his observation as of the time in practice, and if there is anything else which is in theatre practice must be added into practice in coming times. Based on the data gathered and discussed using thematic analysis, the themes drawn from it are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

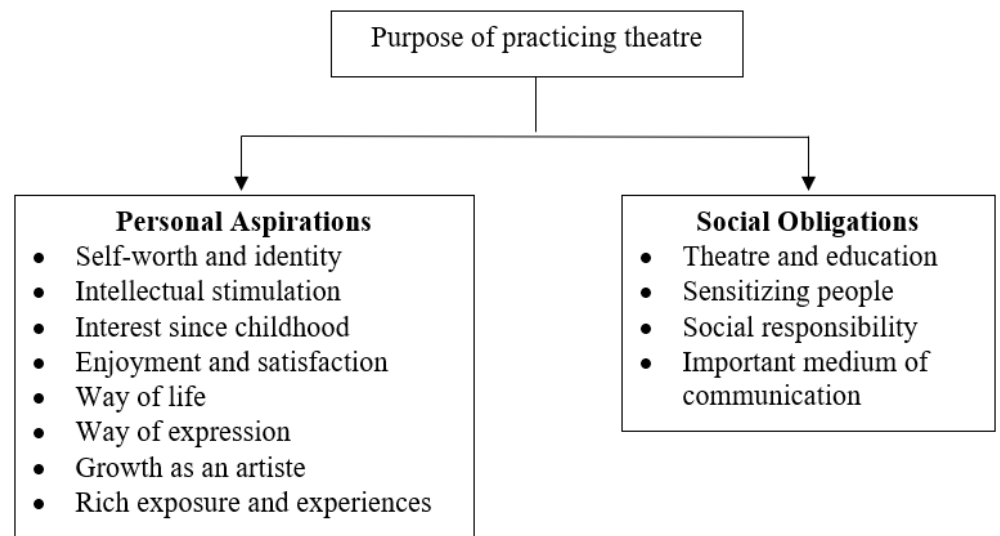


Figure 1 Themes of Theatre Artistes’ Objective Behind Theatre Practice

Theatre gives knowledge not only about the world but also about the self. As the Indian knowledge system constantly encourages seeking the matters of within, the process of intrapersonal communication is essential which is visible to theatre

practitioners. As an individual, theatre practitioners find satisfaction as artistes. It also allows them to get exposed to life experiences through the stories and characters of the play which enhances their experience and leads to intellectual stimulation.

Theatre is also a medium of expression for many artistes. Contemporary theatre artistes find themselves more comfortable in expressing their thoughts and opinions through a medium like theatre. They think it enables the sharing of ideas, emotions, and energy. This leads to the feeling of togetherness defined as *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* in *Nāṭyaśāstra* Ghosh (1950). The pleasure that theatre gives to the performers is the pleasure of shared emotions. This concept is also looked upon as a significant theory for communication which calls the communicators *Sahridayas* Adhikary (2010). Ubersfeld et al. (1982) elaborates that “Theatrical pleasure is not a solitary pleasure, but is reflected on and reverberates through others; it spreads like a train of gunpowder or suddenly congeals.” After years of practice, theatre has become a way of life for most of the theatre practitioners now.

While discussing the social role of artistes, theatre practitioners feel themselves responsible towards society. Theatre has a significant role to play in education. This reflection on education points out the insufficiency of formal education to provide overall development of humans including the psychological as well as skill development. Theatre had a significant role to play since its inception. Patnaik (2008) write on the role of traditional theatre that played a significant role in shaping society and the effecting on the behaviour of people. Theatre artistes like (Thakur, K.S. personal communication, 2019, November 26), (Khan, H. personal communication, 2020, February 4) and (Singh, J. personal communication, 2020, February 6) have discussed that this insufficiency of the education system is their motivation to the specific kind of theatre they are practising.

Theatre is a medium which gives not only information or education to its audience but is more experiential. Thus, the effect of entertainment on the audience gets stronger. The idea of entertainment-education is not new, either in terms of theory or research. The theory of *Nāṭyaśāstra* emphasises the role of theatre in providing both entertainment and education. Modern communication theorists also forecasted decades back that entertainment education has great significance in society. Singhal & Rogers (2002) asserts, “In the future, we believe entertainment-education will also go beyond the boundaries of its mainstay messages—reproductive health, family planning, and HIV prevention—to include other pressing social issues such as peace, conflict mediation, race relations, and reconstruction.”

Theatre practitioners do not see themselves as individuals doing theatre for their own sake, but they also feel a moral responsibility towards society. They believe that theatre has the power to influence people and thus this power should be used to sensitise people. In the history of Indian theatre, several examples establish the role of theatre in sensitising people which includes the work of theatre groups like IPTA Tanvir (1974) and JANAM Ghosh (2012).

Finally, it can be concluded that the theory of *Nāṭyaśāstra* perfectly aligns with the contemporary theatre practice when it comes to the social role of theatre. They think theatre is still a relevant medium of communication and entertainment, they are also motivated to be responsible towards society. Theatre as a communication medium serves the purpose of self-actualisation and growth for the artistes, it also serves as a medium to sensitize and educate common people, just as the principles of *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

6. LIMITATIONS

The present research is qualitative in nature and therefore the data gathered through the interviews is the opinion of the selected artistes. Also, the data was collected during the data collection period of the research work which was the pre-covid era, so the data doesn't reflect of the issues and challenges of and after the pandemic. Thus, the results cannot be generalised, as it also not the purpose of qualitative research.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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