

Limits of Theatre Communication

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(Published in Facts & News, No 16, NCPA, Theatre Development Centre, Mumbai, February 1990)

Peter Brook was recently in Bombay to conduct workshops, 'theatre days' as he prefers to call them. Screenings of Brook's filmic adaptation (of the dramatized) *Mahabharat* preceded the theatre days. The two efforts could creditably be described as attempts to transcend the boundaries imposed/created by culture, especially in theatre communication. While the filmic re-adaptation was a creative endeavour, the theatre days were devoted, to capsule demonstration of Brook's methods in theatre training related to the specific areas of acting, direction, play-scripting and music. He was assisted by his colleagues to lead discussions, demonstrate methods and to interact with the Indian participants.

The 'beyond culture' movements are popularly dubbed as acts of internationalizing. To induct participants from various countries is too obvious a way of internationalizing! Such internationalizing though repeatedly attempted, becomes grossly symbolic of the intention to go beyond cultural boundaries or limitations, the restraining powers of which are resented by all those convinced of the essential oneness of the humanity. Many workers in the fields of arts, science, religion, sports etc. have however felt the need to convey the message more meaningfully and they have sought to go beyond the act of assembling a multinational group. Peter Brook is one of them. His internationalism is deeply coloured by a philosophical conviction that universality in theatre-communication is both desirable and real.

For all practical purposes he may be taken to represent the Western viewpoint which deplores the importance attached to the rational, unambiguous, culture-rooted, system-bound and the style-oriented in theatre understood as a composite art. Is the assumption aesthetically inevitable and universally as well as uniformly valid? In other words the extent to which the "dramatique" i.e. the fundamental theatric impulse can transcend the confines of culture is a position to be examined and not assumed. A discussion of the issue can hardly be opened on the level of the genres, styles and schools etc. unless the premises are clearly stated.

All communication is a resultant process in which expression (of the initiator) and perception (of the receiver) build a relationship of mutual dependence and sharing.

Theatric communication being a kind of communication needs be considered in a larger framework. It has four primary components and they form a parallelogram of forces creating a charged (and not an empty!) space. Mainly two modalities and two mediums are in action. The two sensibilities, aural and visual, constitute the modalities while the verbal and non-verbal are the mediums.

Aural or the auditory sensibility means that which is heard. (At one point of time the term audio conveyed the same meaning. However, of late, the term audio has been appropriated to mean the mechanism designed to reproduce recorded sound). The Indian equivalent to convey the import of the term aural was originally shabda. It was traditionally defined to be that property of the akasha which is experienced by the ear. It is interesting to note that shabda also has undergone a considerable narrowing of import and now means 'word' i.e. the minimal and meaningful linguistic unit. Aural/shabda would therefore accommodate verbal as well as non-verbal messages, the latter variety obviously referring to music.

The other sensibility, namely the visual, would also include verbal and the non-verbal. While the linguistic content of the former is obvious, the latter in reality suggests phenomena such as colour, texture, shape etc. It is important to recognize that in its wider application the non-verbal indicates a channel of communication aptly described as multi-sensory. The Indian tradition talks of five senses while the contemporary perception- studies would add eight more to the tally. An ambitiously detailed discussion would have to compare and contrast inputs of messages received through different senses and judge their respective contributions to the final theatric communication.

What is important to note is that the four constituents of the parallelogram do not display a uniform accessibility. For example the verbalized-visual necessitates an acquired skill to decipher the highly structured linguistic signals of the particular culture involved while the verbalized-aural, i.e. the spoken word, proves to be a little more accessible. On the other hand the communicative efficacy of the multi-sensory mode would depend on the extent a culture allows symbolization. For example the aural in the non-verbal (ranging from unadorned acoustic signals to the highly processed musical manifestations) does not signify or mean equally in all cultures. This is because the musical symbolism differs from culture to culture. An acquaintance with the user-culture and acquisition of particular skills therefore figure as preconditions for a successful communication. The other sensibilities such as tactile, olfactory, gustatory et al hardly enter the fray or at least are too indirect in their contribution. On this background it is easy to deduce that universal elements in theatre communication

would mainly operate in the non-verbal and non-referent in both aural and the visual. This throws up the question: what kind of experience can be assumed to be expressible through these? In brief the answer would be the non-classifiable and the ambiguous.

It is clear that the human mind could not have explored better agencies than myth and music to communicate the non-classifiable and the ambiguous. Art-communication in particular has relied heavily on myth and music to overcome/exploit the barriers/channels existing on account of the cultural diversity. This is the reason why significance and not meaning, an amorphous range of imagery rather than one-to-one relationships of the carriers of meaning, simultaneity and paradox instead of chronology and causality have been pressed into service to transmit the value-experience to receivers, compelling them inevitably to move on planes of abstraction and contemplation. Naturally the maximum cross-cultural communication takes place in this rarified atmosphere where presentations are severed from factuality and attention is turned away from the mundane. The question is: how?

To state briefly the two m's achieve their goal in three steps. Firstly they operate a cultural sieve keeping back the particular. Secondly they provide a bridge to bring over the abstract remainder. Finally music and myth enable the receivers to reach parallel structures in their respective cultures.

For the receiver the gain can be both quantitative and qualitative. Usually a thorough outsider tends to include more details and hence items of information are greater in number in his presentation. The qualitative benefit accrues to the receiver because he begins to appreciate his own cultural structures better on account of the creative juxtaposition of two major expressions with different origins. In other words if and when a Peter Brook creates an *Iliad* he helps the Indians to appreciate (their own) *Iliad* at the level of concrete reality and *Mahabharat* on the planes of disturbing ambiguities and evocative abstractions. Under the circumstances those permeated with the *Iliad*-culture will need authentic details to reach the universals. Today Brook's *Mahabharat* helps them appreciate their own *Iliad* because they reach it through *Mahabharat*. The Indians however are denied the base of authentic details and are yet faced with the task of reaching the skies of the abstracted universals! Clearly a case of an unrealized equation!