

The Stage (*Rangomancho*)

An English translation of Rabindranath Tagore's article *Rangomancho*

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Abstract

The present English translation of Rabindranath Tagore's article RANGOMANCHO originally written in Bengali provides special attention to the importance of dialogues in framing the identity of the actors on stage. Further, the translation here talks about different methodologies of stage performances with particular reference to the role of an audience in making the performance successful. In the end, the translation provides a picturesque presentation of the role of JATRA in making the theatrical performance cost-effective and audience-centric simultaneously.

Keywords: Performance, Stage, *Jatra*, Actor, Verse

Translators' Note

Recently, we came across, Dr. Satyabrata Rout, a legendary figure in Modern Indian drama. He is not into acting but his theory of scenography has given him immense popularity among the Indian dramatists. A Professor in the Drama department of Hyderabad University, he was in Agartala on 14th June 2023 to attend a workshop organized by the National School of Drama. We took the opportunity to interact with him. While he was elaborating on his theory of Scenography, we had a feeling that the concept of scenography may have its roots in an article by Rabindranath Tagore entitled RANGOMANCHO (The Stage) originally written in Bengali. Surprisingly, Dr. Rout said he did not know Tagore's article. Thereafter we searched for the English translation of the article. However, we failed to find any translation of such an article. At this, we decided to go for a new venture to undertake the project of translating into English this composition so that a new perspective of research and performance can be opened up for the performers and the artists at the transnational levels.

A detailed description of the theatre is given by Bharata Muni in his classic THE NATYA SASTRA but one can hardly find any reference to the importance of visuals or setting in the text. However, the entire theory is presented in such a systematic way that there hardly seems to be any gap for this lacuna.

There is always a full-fledged glorification of Arts wherever she [arts] finds her exclusivity. However, as she has to adjust to a rival, she has to be self-effacing especially when her competitor tends to be dominant. For that reason, if one tries to have a tuned reading of the Ramayana from the first book i.e. ADIKANDA to the last or seventh trunk of the Ramayana i.e. UTTARKANDA at the same pitch, then that melody loses its distinctiveness and as a result fails to attract interest as a raga; moreover, it becomes wearisome throughout. A poetic composition of high quality has the vigour to create its ASSONANCE melody. Therefore, the addition of music to the reading appears extraneous and benumbing. This superior poetry snubs, as it were, these musical notes into a merely fatigued irritable sound. Again, the finest classical music can be a self-achiever; it may not need the assistance of Kalidasa or Milton to accomplish its loftiness. With petty words like TUM TANANA, classical music can create some of the finest tunes on earth. In that case, mingling words and pictures with songs may become a part of fine art and a consumer product that can be saleable in the market, but it will never find the majestic height expected in a classical music concert.

Nevertheless, a production on the stage enjoys less freedom than a recital. Thus, the accomplishment of a staged play is more or less subjected to external assistance and acting here appears as of paramount importance which needs to be acknowledged.

Unfortunately, people do not accept this. The way a vestal wife wants none other than her husband, a good piece of poetry anticipates a critic to enjoy its essence and beauty. It is often noticed that while reading a piece of literature we go on acting as well although not physically but conceptually. Similarly, any KAVYA [poetry] that fails to unravel its beauty through such conceptual acting does not beget fame for its composer.

Conversely, it can be said that the art of acting counts on other elements. Thus, acting eagerly waits for the text of the orphaned play to come and undoubtedly all its fame depends on the reputation of the text of the play.

An effeminate husband becomes an object of mockery in his locality. Likewise, if the text of a play is wholly bent on its performers only ignoring other factors, then it too becomes ludicrous. The text of the play should have an air that if it is not staged, then it is bad luck for the actors. It will not harm, in any way, the text of the play.

Therefore, acting is subjugated by KAVYA. But it does not mean by any means that it has to be subservient to all other aspects of fine art. Rather, to uphold its stature,

acting should stoop down only to that extent which is required for its growth. And if something more is added to it than that will only defame the art of acting.

It is needless to say, dialogues uttered in a play are the most significant part for an actor. The actor has to smile or giggle on the stage with whatever words or sentences provided by the dramatist. Moreover, he has to make the audience weep with his acting using the vocals of the poet. But what for is the picture? It hangs behind the actor. The actor has no role in its creation; it's but a painting only. For me, this reveals the incompetence and cowardliness of one's performance when the actor has to rely on that picture. In such circumstances, it often seems that the actor is begging the painter when he uses the painting to make his task easier by creating confusion among the audience. Further, do you [the actors] feel like that those who came to enjoy your performance have the slightest intellectual ability? Are they merely the childish extinct? Can't one rely on the audience's intellectual ability? If not, then tickets should not be sold to these spectators even if they pay double the price of the tickets. Theatre does not require any witness as in a courtroom to testify its capability. Why should the audience be cheated particularly when they have come to the theatre to get enjoyment out of a make-believe situation? These spectators don't go to the theatre keeping their imaginative faculty under lock and key at home. A part of the theatrical episode will be communicated by the artist and their art, while the other part will be understood by the audience themselves. Thus, a good rapport can be created between the artists and the spectators.

For instance, King Dushyant is having a loving interaction with Shakuntala and her companions are hiding behind a tree trunk. This is a very important scene in ABHIGYAN SHAKUNTALAM and for the audiences as well to understand the romantic rhythm of the play. In such a case the conversation must be emotive. The spectator hardly needs the presence of a tree trunk on stage to get this scenic effect. They must have this much creative imagination to enjoy the play without seeing a trunk in reality. It is challenging to replicate authentically the attitude or the voice of-Shakuntalaa or Anasuya and Priyamvada as in reality but when one witnesses the rendering of these characters on stage; one may have an emotional attachment to the visuals; or else, it will be a grave distrust towards the audience if replications of two trees, a house, or a river are added on stage as these are not at all difficult to conceive.

That's why I like our indigenous JATRA [theatre]. There is no such distance between the actors and the audience here. On the contrary, there is mutual trust and warmth between the two, which gives the JATRA smooth sailing. The RASA of the JATRA, which is primary, is spread by the actors on stage through their skilful acting all around the audience like a fountain, which the spectators receive jubilantly. For example, When Malini [a character] is wasting her time in vainly searching for flowers in her garden, there is no need to bring on stage big flowerless trees to prove it; rather the whole of the garden, it seems, is felt by the audience in the performance of Malini. If it doesn't

happen, Malini, the actress is utterly abortive. In that case, for what reason the audience will come and wait in the JATRA like a wooden puppet?

One may opine that if Kalidasa had given attention to the stage and setting of ABHIGYAN SHAKUNTALAM, he would have dropped the scene of the chariot running after the doe. But, since he was a great poet and so the chariot may stop but not his pen. My observation is why one should persecute something vital than the other which is relatively trivial. The dais is already set within the contemplative mind; there is hardly any lack of space on this stage. There the magician cum poet recreates the scenes one after another. The dramatist's objective is to attain that stage and scene. The poet's creativity can hardly be affected by any simulated stage or scene.

Therefore when Dushyanta and his chariot driver stand in the same place and share the speed of the chariot through their dialogue and their performance, the audience can easily appreciate that the stage is small but not the imaginative faculty of the poet. So, for the sake of KAVYA, the spectators are gladly ready to exonerate the shortcomings of the stage. They add their passion and creativity to take this small stage to a magnificent height. Conversely, if KAVYA had to be truncated for the sake of the stage, then there would be hardly anyone in the audience to endure the unfortunate wooden structures of the stage.

One may find that there is hardly any reference to external locations in the play ABHIGYAN SHAKUNTALAM, which means deep down, the play itself has created a setting of its own. Thus, in the process of referring to the hermitage of KARNA or MARICH and giving a detailed description of his realm of clouds on the way to heaven, the poet has not given any thought to any external setting. It has become a perfect play by itself. Both in character portrayal and in disposition, the dramaturge depends on the poetic abilities.

In one of my articles, I argued that Europeans are never satisfied merely with ideas. For them, the creative faculty should be concretized by objects from hard-core realism to allure the childish minds of the spectators. One can rarely find that they are satisfied with the lifesaving VISHALYAKARANI faculty of poetry. They also want the physical existence of the whole of GANDHAMADAN Mountain.

It's Kaliyug now and to bring GANDHAMADAN Mountain down to the stage requires technological assistance, which is often highly expensive. The Europeans spent so much on these stage props that many grave famines can be resolved in India with the money spent on those props.

In the Orient, all the activities including games and sports, or any entertainment of the sort are simple and easily available. One might have witnessed that we often finish our feast in a banana leaf; similarly, we can also relish the real pleasure of such a feast. In other words, we can easily invite the whole world into our hut without any SHILLY

SHALLY. In the case of an expensive and complex arrangement, the real pleasure of such a feast would have been lost.

The theatre we are performing obsessed with English stagecraft is getting overburdened with so many props and costumes. It is difficult to move it from its present settings and to uplift it to the highest rank is also impossible. The owl of Goddess *Laxmi* has already overshadowed the lotus of Goddess *Saraswati*; the impact of consumerism has grown deeper and broader than the aesthetics wings. What I mean to state is that the wealth of the rich will outshine the talent of the poet and the creative artist in such a situation. If the audience is not interested in accepting the childishness of the English stage and if the actor has faith in his ability to perform even on *Kavya*, then it will be good for a kind-hearted true Indian aesthetician and artist to sweep away all the compost of the English props and open the stage by re-establishing its past own glory. Imitating a garden on stage or presenting a woman character with a woman are the concepts developed by the English stage, which one must dissolve. The time has arrived to decry it fervently.

Therefore, it can be said that the complexity is an outcome of inability. If reality enters art like a glass worm, it sucks all the passion from art like a cockroach. Thus, when the hunger for emotion in art is played out, we find a gradual increase in the use of costly props on stage. Moreover, it is the amassed accessories that overshadow what is primary in performance.

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