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## Indian Theatre and Pedagogy: Requirement of a Good Teacher and Assessment Methods.

Hilda David

Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce,  
SenapatiBapat Road, Pune

### Abstract:

*Breezing through the Sunday newspaper I came across a headline which said "Why no one ever forgets a good teacher" and it went on to say further "perhaps that's because there aren't too many of them around." That struck a disturbing cord about our accountability towards parting good education to the students. It made me wonder if we have become a bunch who are happy in our comfort zone with a 6th pay carrot dangling in front of us and feel there is no need to part with innovative education? Are we just happy permitting our students with rote learning, summarizing texts and afraid to take that little effort to go beyond the syllabi and support universalization of education?*

### INTRODUCTION

There are certain strong reasons as to why teachers lack enthusiasm at the undergrad level when it comes to a theatre paper. Autonomous colleges have a way of spreading wings and developing an out of the box syllabus. Affiliated colleges have to bear with a framed syllabus therefore, some of the difficulties faced are

1. There are not many workshops which teach innovative methods of teaching drama in colleges.
2. Good experienced teachers have no role in syllabi framing. It is the inner courtiers who are continuously on the panel choosing text to ease teaching.
3. Un-interesting non challenging curriculum. Students would love to study 'Mid Summers Night Dream' or Macbeth unfortunately Shakespeare is totally dropped in some universities as the educators feel it is difficult for rural teachers to handle the playwright. Hence diluting the syllabi giving grief to good theatre class. Therefore, suggestions to frame parallel syllabi for rural and urban students would help Shakespeare not to stay away from the classrooms. Flexibility in the syllabi would enable students to choose from the choice given. Since this does not happen, compulsion of plays selected by the boards has to be taught. Multi-level groups in class at times makes it difficult for the teachers to teach.
1. Non-practical curriculum- with a strict time frame - out bound activities- visiting theatre space- watching plays- getting involved in directing home productions becomes a difficult task for enthusiastic teachers and on the other hand many teachers do not feel the need to step beyond the text. Here the loser obviously is the student.
2. No role in direct evaluation of students. It is controlled by the university hence to experiment with no exam pattern makes it difficult. Autonomy helps on this front.
3. Exam oriented teaching has a fixed time frame to complete the syllabus in a given time span. Due to this, innovative methods have their own deaths. Therefore, trying to encroach towards a holistic approach of teaching theatre does get defeated.

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4. Lack of audio visual aids in many of the colleges hampers teaching especially where today technology plays an important role. On the other hand many teachers are not techno savvy and are happy reading and summarizing the drama text.

The university kind of puts you in a ghetto where constraints make a progressive teacher to stand still. At such times an individualistic stand should be taken and this initiative goes leaping ahead. A teacher who takes that little effort to step ahead can bring interests of theatre to a bunch of students.

When you keep pouring old wine from a boring looking bottle into a wine glass for many years the taste of the wine tends to remain the same. If the same wine was poured from an attractive fashionable bottle with a fancy label the drinker will feel or imagine the taste to differ. Similarly when you take a play text and unleash it's? the nuances of the script will—blossom.

Teaching theatre in class can be made effective if the professor is willing to take a keen interest in it. Wearing blinkers and following the old rigorous method of reading the text, summarizing it, giving notes, question banks and believe in the rote method of mugging will kill the text and the interest of the students. A little shift in their monotonous method should not bring them under stress. If a teacher is not willing to change her/his attitude then to perceive any subject will be lost in a dark tunnel. Board chalk and text would make the class gloomy and ineffective, Students look forward to teachers who are enthusiastic and who have the ability to motivate the students to think differently and to go beyond the conventional level. Certain qualities should be there in a teacher which will not allow students to forget them.

A teacher should have good knowledge of the subject, should be communicative, intellectually stimulating, humble, social, and liberal minded. She/he should be imaginative, challenging and one who believes in the students, open to mistakes and clear about learning from his/her mistakes, these kinds of qualities in a teacher will be cherished by the students for a life time.

Since drama has always been a vehicle of communication and considered to be literature that walks and talks. There is great scope for it to come alive. We are born with action, noise and no words. As we grew up we have played the roles of pretending and imitating to be someone else— be it the person's walking style, be it his facial expression or his mood swings we all have enjoyed this role play and till date as adults we continue acting in various walks of life. We try not to associate drama with something that is passive and dull. It is a form which requires a burst of energy. For example— the slamming of the door in Ibsen's Doll's House resonates till date. The door was just an inanimate object but its action brought a revolution in the world around us.

As Rob Graham once said

“Theatre has been with the human race virtually since it stood upright. Although in this century it has had to move from centre stage to make room for radio, film and television, it has not gone to the wings to sulk”

Therefore a teacher should have the ability to bring magic to the words given in the text and get totally immersed in it with her students. Theatre studies have always had a tough innings on a college campus. Many colleges would be happy forming a film club— has film festivals and discussions than invest in a drama club. To produce live plays on campus one has to have the time, energy, patience and money. Large funding for this activity does not exist and one has to delve on supporters and sponsorship. One cannot put it aside as a 'fuzz subject' as time memorial theatre has brought forth a technique of bodily movement—vocal action and intangible concentration which has been conventionally ignored. If used in a right manner it helps students in reading comprehension and vocabulary. Role play has been used by psychoanalysts for youngsters who are suffering from inner struggle. A theatre teacher has all the scope to examine and explore her/his method of teaching. Active teachers know intuitively how to use performance skills to gain and hold students interests. They must find ways of bringing forth the dramatic techniques into classroom— be it through —voice modulation, or exaggerated body movements. An example would be of Shaw's Pygmalion where we see the demonstration of powerful elocution— screen My fair Lady which will help students to improve their speech and social being—this exercise would be beneficial to both urban and rural students. The excuse should not be time limitation for this activity as it can be done after college or on a Sunday the difference is the little extra effort taken by the teacher will automatically get her the support of the students. An educator need not transform a student into Hamlet or Nora but can bring interest into classroom.

Role play should not be the obvious. A good role play is something that he or she is not—make the male do the actress's role—enabling him to understand how difficult it must have been for the Shakespearean actor or for that matter Balgandharva himself. Give the tallest boy/girl the role of the dwarf see how he/she is able to perform so much within us can be tapped. Have them do something different. This brings



excitement and ideas into the class. These kinds of small acts could be psychological and physical.

Most scripts are very wordy- filled with dialogues. Use the physical being by using no dialogue- try converting texts to different regions for role play. This will help in coming up with new text totally- .Performance should be made a seed for a new play.

Scripts in hand should have an excellent library enabling them to read the best and watch DVD's of live performances. This will enable them a choice of their favorite playwright instead of the teacher enforcing her influence on them. In fact along with the syllabus text the educator should give students other scripts for reading at home and teach them to locate good plays.

Another interesting factor which a teacher could do is text to performance- has her/his drama students enact the play which they are studying. Whilst doing this the teacher has to diversify by taking them to an auditorium showing them how the backstage - lights- sound- makeup-greenroom function, all this should be incorporated without losing sight of the text.

Cross Cultural references should be made in class this will break the lingual barrier—and make them understand how universality has come in. We are aware that western cultures comprise eastern martial arts like Tai Chi or Aikido in their programs. The West has observed that Asian performances are more body related than mind focused. An educator should throw light as to how acting is not just a western concept or brainchild. Japanese and Indians have had a good amount of discourse on acting and theatre productions. An example could be given on the Natyashastra where dance music and drama is interwoven.

Theatre is a three-dimensional and three way event, actor or actors communicating, not simply with you, the spectator, but each and every member and group in the audience. All interact with each other. An outbound activity can be conducted where students are given questionnaires to study - Who goes to the theater? What is the reason for them going there? How do they assess their visit? What are the approaches that are functional before, during or after a performance? Questions can be on profession, age, gender as well as tastes and preferences for particular genres or works. This will help them to find out the socio-economic make up of spectators. This exercise can be part of classroom theatre studies on a small scale and have discussion on - "In theatre, the audience regulates the performance"(Bertolt Brecht).

Exploring theatre Space can be an outbound research exercise. Where a study can be conducted to find out how theatres and their unique architecture have been forgotten. This will enable students and their teacher to walk in their towns and cities exploring the change by having conversation with folks young and old. This kind of a Heritage walk will serve two purposes to know your town and the spaces used by theatres for their performances be it open air performances, basements, café-theatre, home theatres, apron or thrust stage or away from the normal proscenium stage etc. A play like Waiting for Godot was performed in a church or Satyadev Dubey's production of Andha Yug, in which, a blind-folded Gandhari crept up a steep ladder onto an overhanging tank, her hair grandly wafting in the crosswinds. Galileo staged in a basement meant to be a godown. Amol Palekar's production of Badal Sircar Juloos was another play done away from the proscenium stage. The trouble shooters for such performances will engage and interest students to explore other spaces as well. Also they will be able to understand the great divide between the performer and the audience in the proscenium stage and note that theatre space is regarded as a highly flexible unit for example the Royal National Theatre in London has three diverse stages to house different kinds of performance texts: a large apron stage (the Olivier), a smaller proscenium theatre (the Lyttelton) and a small multi-functional 'black box' (the Cottesloe). The use of applied theatre can be discussed like community theatre, theatre for development, theatre in education, drama therapy etc. Also the impact of theatre and media could be showcased to the students

Information should be given as to how the drawing room is the archetypal space of western realistic drama; it was approved by Indian dramatist working in the realistic mode as the setting for their play. From Ibsen to Albee, the drawing room has represented all that is treasured to the western bourgeoisie. In traditional Indian house, caste and social status determine which parts of a house can be used. This also has undergone a change.

Dorab R Mehta, a producer of plays in the fifties reminisces

"From the bug-infested stuffy old theatre, we now have air-conditioned luxury. While amenities for the theatre-goers have increased, stages have become smaller, limiting the scope of grandeur in the stage props. Formerly, a dramatist had a large canvas. One misses the glamour and spectacle of the older drama. For instance, I was astonished to find a huge steamer rolling in on the Baliwala theatre stage in a play of mine."

I feel an educator of theatre should keep the students updated about new developments in theatre. In a traditional method of teaching it will take time to break the stagnant code but nevertheless it could be tried and tested.

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Indian Streams Research Journal  
258/34, Raviwar Peth Solapur-413005, Maharashtra  
Contact: 9595359435  
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