



Theatre is hope, Theatre is Freedom,

I would like to explain in brief why I have chosen to write about democracy, transformation and theatre. Art is a social metaphor because art is a human creation. Any creation is essentially the expression of an idea. *“Theatre is the first human invention and also the invention which paves the way for all other inventions and discoveries”*(*Rainbow of Desire, Augusto Boal, Routledge London, age 188*) was said by Augusto Boal. First of all human beings wanted to be the spectators of this wonderful nature. They wanted to get more information by being the spectators of the wonderful nature around them, as in theatre spectators like to receive information. To search for more information through spectatorship was the human need, even when humans were four footed. This need for information inspired human beings to be the spectators of nature and the art of making hands free came into being. The practice of that art made our hands free and labour was born as a consequence of this practice of art.

The search for information was an intellectual need from the beginning of civilisation. Human beings had information stored in their brain and they started acquiring new information from the wider vision which they obtained as a result of freeing their hands. The positive conflict between two sets of information produced knowledge that was necessary and responsible for the advancement of the human civilisation. Development was dialectical, a product of dynamic thought. Both the intellectual journey and the cultivation of applied art and fine arts like sculpting etc. was owned by people by and large. Unfortunately with the progress of modern society the intellectual need and the artistic need of a large section of people started being neglected. Society was divided along class lines and the artistic and intellectual world was eliticised. The eliticisation of art and intellect has dehumanised human society. Every human being is essentially intellectual. Vivekananda said—*“Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in Man”*(*the complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashram, Vol.8*) . The problem is that people are not aware of this perfection. Therefore we need art which can make visible this perfection which is normally invisible. That is precisely the reason why art was eliticised. The absence of cultivation of art will not help people to discover their talent. People will feel inferior and by making people inferior the social system can introduce a culture of silence. The political culture nowadays is to make blind followers, rational citizenship is not the demand of modern democracy as it is run by political parties which produce blind followers. Therefore to democratise politics we need theatre, we need art. Boal has said in his book called *Theatre of the Oppressed* *“I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that people*

themselves may utilise them, The theatre is a weapon and it is the people who should wield it." (Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal, Pluto press London, Page 122.)

Non-party activism (pressure groups) carried out by NGOs is also promoting the culture of blind following. For them of course the agenda is not to acquire state power. But fundamentally their actions turn out very often no different. Theatre there is seen as a support service to a political action, not politics in itself. Politics outside parties is also based on economism. Development activities do not consider the need for the kind of intellectual space poor people require, as if they only needed bread, clothes, and shelter.

It is dogma that prevents us from accepting the dynamic nature of thought, inhibits us from accepting positive conflict, makes us the prisoners of our ideology. Positive conflict can produce thoughts whereas negative conflict cannot. The art of argument is not to win against the other. Nobody actually wins as a result of an argument, only truth wins. We argue in order to discover the truth. This is what should be called positive conflict. There is a certain animalistic aspect in a dogmatic nature; it instigates violence. Thought is thoughtless when it does not allow conflict, thought becomes doctrine, something unchangeable and not the philosophy which is changeable. Making thought a doctrine is the kind of religiosity which can be found within the political culture of the political parties and can also be found in the modern development philosophy which looks at participation from the perspective of the developers rather than the developed. A violent political culture has surrounded us nowadays. Murders have a new name to justify them—that of political assassinations. The propagators of such a culture believe destruction to be a very important condition for creation. So destroy whatever is already constructed. This was precisely the problem with the Communists in India and this is true of Europe too. From late 60's to the beginning of 70's the movement for liberation destroyed a collective spirit that Europe had. Racism today is a big political issue in Europe. The search for liberation turned into individualism resulting in cynicism in the mind of the people. Economic independence is not freedom, in fact it can be the opposite to freedom. The growth of individualism is the result of an effort to achieve economic independence. Individualism produces fear and cynicism that keeps people away from freedom. Freedom is the product of a relationship. That is the reason why civil society evolved from human thought. Theatre is essentially a construction of relationship, a relationship between actors and spectators and between us and ourselves. Theatre creates freedom, theatre is freedom.

Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre:

The foundation of Theatre of the Oppressed is based on the true concept of democracy where human beings are seen from a respectable point of view. Boal has said—“ *Equally the human being is a rational creature, it knows things, it is capable of thinking, of understanding, and of making mistakes. Every human being is capable of thinking, of understanding, and of making mistakes*”(Rainbow of Desire, Augusto Boal, Routledge London). Boal did not say this as theory; he has learnt from the people as a democratic political practice. One very interesting dimension here is that theatre is seen as a method of introspection. The method makes the actors their own spectator. In the process a person experiences both the actor and the spectator in him. By being so an individual discovers his/ her potentials and also the dichotomy inside. An oppressed can very well be an oppressor. An oppressed agricultural worker sometimes acts as an oppressor in his family, sometimes he beats his wife, gets drunk, neglects the

children in the family etc. By being the spectator of his own actor sometimes an individual experiences the conflict between the human being and inhuman personality he has. Thus he can humanise himself, which is essentially a spiritual experience.

The actor also here makes theatre. The group I belong to is called Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed. Here we script plays instead of playing the script. While scripting plays actors become spectators of their own reality. They identify Oppressors, Oppressed, passive oppressors, etc. Also the play-making process includes the scope to understand the ideology of the oppressor and the same applies to the oppressed character. So in the workshop the actors – who should come from the oppressed community - script the intellectual power which resides in them. Scripting plays become scripting power. This is how the process of democratising politics starts. The individual analyzes society from his own perspective, as well as that of others. Such is the collective effort of scripting a play.

In Forum Theatre an event of oppression or torture is enacted. Here facts are the only material for drama. Fiction has no role to play in such theatre. Actors on stage enact an event where the distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed is clearly marked. Boal projects a concrete situation in order to motivate the audience to find out ways of ending this oppression. There is no place for passive spectators in Boal's theatre. Here spectator becomes 'spectactor'.

Forum Theatre is a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience, against spect-actors, is invited to suggest and enact solution. The problem is always the symptom of an oppression, and generally involves visible oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed. In its purest form, both actors and spect-actors will be people who are victims of the oppression under consideration; that is why they are able to offer alternative solutions, because they themselves are personally acquainted with the oppression. After one showing of the scene, which is known as 'the model' (it can be a full-length play), it is shown again slightly speeded up, and follows exactly the same course until a member of the audience shouts 'Stop!', takes the place of the protagonist and tries to defeat the oppressors.

The game is a forum of contest between spect-actors trying to bring the play to a different end (in which the cycle of oppression is broken) and actors ostensibly making very possible effort to bring it to its original end (in which the oppressed is beaten and the oppressors are triumphant). The proceedings are presided over by a figure called the 'joker', whose function is to ensure the smooth running of the game and teach the audience the rules; however, like all the participants in Forum Theatre, the joker can be replaced if the spect-actors do not think he or she is doing a fair job, and virtually any of the 'rules' of the game can be changed if the audience wants. Many different solutions are enacted in the course of a single forum – the result is a pooling of knowledge, tactics and experience, and at the same time what Boal calls a 'rehearsal for reality'.(Games for Actors and Non Actors, Augusto Boal, Translators Note P.xxi)

In India, Jana Sanskriti is the only exponent of **Forum Theatre** in which members of the theatre team select, construct, and narrate a social problem from their daily life. With artistic direction this play is taken to an audience who must now find a solution to the problem. Passive spectators then become engaged spect-actors. Spect-actors come on stage to enact the solutions they have thought of, debating with trained activists on the feasibility of the solutions suggested. Thus individuals publicly engage in tackling a problem that has thus far provoked the most profound cultural silence and acceptance. This exercise gradually suggests the possibilities for liberation from that oppression in real life. Over the years

we have seen that the experience of 'spect-acting' has motivated people to be active outside theatre as well.

Politics is not about dividing one into two. It is the opposite: it is to bring two into one where every one is present with his/her own dignity and differences if there are any. In Forum Theatre we find an argumentative space is created. Diversified opinions play with each other, the stage gets extended. The debate here unifies people, actors and spectators come together, learn together, feel together, rationalise the situation shown in the play together. They construct a relationship based on a respectful attitude to each other. This is how theatre here democratises politics.

I have mentioned earlier that information we receive from elsewhere and information we get from spectators often conflicts and produces a thesis which is a basis for change. A Forum play appears to the spectators as a piece of information which conflicts with the information stored as an experience in the mind of the actors and spectators. Here actors and spectators are engaged in a collective action which also leads to an introspective action. While acting collectively they deal with a local form of an oppression, which is the manifestation of a much more macro level of oppression. For example a scene of domestic violence involves a couple or a family. But after a certain time it often takes actors and spectators to a rational journey where they understand patriarchy. The journey here starts from dealing with an experience and continues toward making theories, it moves from effect to the cause of an oppression. In this intellectual journey actors and spectators experience the intellectual growth to what I can call internal transformation. This internal transformation inspire actors and spectators to become active citizens in real life. Acting continues outside the stage in the form of action where people are not blind followers of any political force, they become rational social engineers, they act to transform the oppressive reality, an external transformation. Boal described his theatre as rehearsal of revolution, but in a true sense his theatre is an act of total transformation, which includes revolution both internal and external.

Participation; the very word is being used narrowly nowadays. To see people as implementers is the objective there, but "*Theatre as Politics*" can create an opportunity for people to become policy makers. Let's be optimistic about it and let's try to understand the scope of theatre beyond performing art.

Conclusion: Theatre is a space for introspection and collective action. A space where politics in the form of a collective action is complemented by spirituality if the form of introspection. Theatre is all about the construction of relationship, therefore audience here demands respect from the artists. Unfortunately very often artists think themselves either stars or intellectually superior to the spectators. A respectful attitude towards spectators is created through the connection between our head and heart. A theoretical belief is not enough, a positive emotion is also required. Politics comes from the head and spirituality comes from the heart. They need to be connected. The lack of this connection is the reason some kinds of theatre are losing their audience. Theatre with the kind attitude of actors I have described creates a truly democratic space. A space which allows debate and argument, makes us social critic and at the same time optimistic. Theatre creates hope, theatre is hope.