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LANGUAGE & ISSUES OF GROUP THEATRE IN ODISHA – RETROSPECT & PROSPECT

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Abstract: *The concept of Amateur Group Theatre/Group Theatre practice was started in Odisha in 1950. However, till date, the Groups struggle to hold high the banner of Group Theatre aloft in Odisha. Group Theatre', from its inception days in the World, was based on Left ideology to hoist revolutionary theatre. However, all the ground works yet to be prepared to sky the Theatre in to a sky of expectation. Here language or the communication by or somehow one such barrier. In this paper, we have created study and framework to overcome this.*

Key words: *Amateur Group Theatre, Odisha,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Theatre is the earliest art-practice of the folks. The language of theatrical expressions has been developed keeping pace with the progress of the civilization. Theatre has undergone many changes everywhere in the world - Concept after concepts has emerged in theatre. So also, in India as well as in case of Odisha. Group Theatre is a concept – a language for theatrical expressions. It must be having its origin and gradual development.

It is well known that Theatre culture in Odisha dates back to primitive times though the first evidence of stone stage of Ranigumpha was visible at Udayagiri, Bhubaneswar during the reign of King Kharavela in the 1st Century A.D. During the period of Classical Indian Drama/ Sanskrit Drama, Odia playwrights in Sanskrit contributed immensely to the Indian Theatre Culture. Towards the end of 18th Century, the high-brow Sanskrit culture underwent a declining phase. Odisha was the last State to be ravaged under British Rule in 1803. The British subjugation of Odisha had an adverse effect and the theatre tradition suffered a heavy blow. However, the first Odia play “Babaji” was written by Jagamohan Lala in 1877 which was staged at Radhakrishna Mancha, founded by him at Mahanga in the Cuttack district. Subsequently, many theatre houses were built by many patrons to spread modern Odia theatre culture in the State. Annapurna Theatre was formed in 1937, a year after the formation of separate State Odisha. In 1943, Annapurna Theatre could have a statewide commercial network having permanent repertoires at Puri (Annapurna–A group), Cuttack (Annapurna–B group) and Berhampur (Annapurna– C group). Subsequently, Orissa Theatre, Rupashree Theatre, Janata Rangamancha,

Kalashree Theatre and Ekamra Theatre joined the race. It was the Golden period of Odia theatre. The Commercial Theatre houses declined during the 1970s. The last commercial show was done by Annapurna on 28.11.1979.

The concept of Amateur Group Theatre/Group Theatre practice was started in Odisha in 1950. After the decline of the Professional/Commercial theatre houses, the Non-commercial Amateur Theatre Groups/Group Theatre productions have been representing the contemporary/mainstream theatre of Odisha. Till date, in spite of all the problems and limitation the Groups struggle to hold high the banner of Group Theatre aloft in Odisha. It is found that more than 150 Registered Theatre Groups/Amateur Theatre Groups are active covering the 30 districts of Odisha. They are united under the State level banner of “Odisha Natya Sangha” (ONS). They represent mainstream theatre in Odisha since the collapse of the Professional/Commercial Theatre houses in the 1970s. Indian society is pluralistic and its contemporary theatre, in the post-independence era is represented by thousands of such type of active Theatre Groups spread over in different States of the Country. They express unity in cultural diversity. Such type of theatre movement by Amateur Theatre Groups is categorized as “Group Theatre” (GT) in India. Hardly, any Professional Theatre Group is survived and prevalent in India.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/ RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Over the last three decades, there had been a long series of meetings, seminars, speeches and writings on the contemporary status as well as future prospects of “Group

Theatre” in Odisha. Practitioners, connoisseurs, aficionados of theatre as well as lay viewers had lamented the precarious condition of this ‘Group Theatre’ and had emphasized the need to revive its past glory. When they spoke of revival of the ‘past glory’, they meant a throwback to the times when Professional/Commercial Repertories like Annapurna Theatres, Janata Rangamancha, Rupashree Theatres, Kalashree Theatres, Odisha Theatres, Ekamra Theatres et al were at their peak: it was the period between the 1940’s and the 1970’s, which is earmarked in history as the ‘Golden period of Odia theatre’.

People talked of Annapurna Theatre as ‘Professional Theatre’ as it used to perform plays commercially on a daily basis for which the audience bought tickets to view. All staff members were paid for their respective jobs. By implication, “Group Theatre”, which was performed occasionally without selling tickets, was branded unworthy of the ‘Professional’ tag. So, these were categorized as “Amateur Theatre Groups” doing “Amateur Group Theatre” depending on Govt. grants, private donations and corporate sponsorships. Of course, literally, the antonym of Professional is Amateur. But this is a superficial, derogatory remark which lacked conceptual clarity about Group Theatre. From the above-mentioned factual background, the following Research questions aroused in mind –

- (i) The question aroused in mind to clarify the conceptual difference between Professional/Commercial Theatre and Non-Professional/Non-Commercial/Amateur Group Theatre/Group Theatre?
- (ii) What about the origin of Group Theatre in the World theatre history?
- (iii) What about the inception of Group Theatre in India?
- (iv) What about the inception of Group Theatre in Odisha?
- (v) What about the Retrospect of Group Theatre in Odisha?
- (vi) What about the Future Prospects of Group Theatre in Odisha?

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

- (i) The above-mentioned problem area was significant both from the point of view of the history as well as academic need.
- (ii) Though Group Theatre practices had been continuing in Odisha since 1950, nevertheless no such academic research in depth was done earlier covering all the aspects of this theatre movement.
- (iii) There was not available a specific book completed in every respect being based on this subject. Whatever fragmentary articles were available they only provided incoherent information and inadequate knowledge.
- (iv) There was a contemporary need to find the answer to the problems. As this subject was included in the academic syllabus in Colleges and Universities, so it was high time to prepare a well-researched authentic document on this subject.

- (v) The outcome of this research work could remain as a valuable academic document and historical record for reference in future. Specifically, it could be helpful to the students, teachers, critics and practitioners of theatre. The findings could be a contribution to the concerned history of theatre.

4. DELIMITATION OF THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study was vast because it focused on the history of Group Theatre in Odisha since 1950 - its Retrospect and Prospect. There was a scope to go into deep details of the history – to study and evaluate the chronicle of Group Theatre productions of various groups both active and inactive. Keeping in view the time frame of the research project, the scope was delimited to find an overview of Group Theatre activities in Odisha since 1950.

5. PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to prove the following hypotheses true -

- (i) There might be a conceptual difference between the Professional/Commercial Theatre and Non-Professional/Non-Commercial/Amateur Group Theatre/Group Theatre?
- (ii) There might be the origin of Group Theatre in the World theatre history?
- (iii) There might be the inception of the trend of Group Theatre in India?
- (iv) There might be the inception of the trend of Group Theatre in Odisha?
- (v) There might be the Retrospect of Group Theatre in Odisha?
- (vi) There might be Future Prospects of Group Theatre in Odisha?

6. RESULT AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The required data were collected by applying proper methods. The analysis of the data was the followings. Contemporary theatre scenario in Odisha includes mainly the ‘Group Theatre’ activities. So, in order to understand the current status of ‘Group Theatre’ in Odisha, we need to have a cursory look into the retrospect of ‘Group Theatre’ since its inception in 1950.

7. THE CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION AND CLARIFICATION

The concept of “Group Theatre” is different from ‘Commercial Theatre’ and should not be confused with ‘Professional Theatre’. ‘Group Theatre’ is distinguished by its nature of work, ideology, philosophy, vision and mission. ‘Amateur Group Theatre’, and ‘Committed Group Theatre’, which are synonymous with one another. ‘Group Theatre’ is indeed ‘Professional Theatre’ where dramatists, directors, actors, designers, technicians and other staff are all committed professionals and seek perfection in their art. It’s a platform of committed theatre professionals who believe in experiments, quality and change. So, it is not quite the same

as 'Commercial Theatre' that exists merely for making profit out of its ticket earnings. In contrast, providing quality on a professional basis without an eye on profit is the goal for 'Group Theatre'. 'Group Theatre' represents the contemporary professional theatre standard of the society. It has a historic social responsibility. It gives greater emphasis on educating and enlightening its audience rather than catering to the tastes of the average viewer by providing wholesome but cheap entertainment. However, the "Group Theatre" movement in Odisha has not been the same as the 'Commercial Theatre' of Annapurna, Janata etc. It is not even the same as commercial Jatra/Opera, a form of folk theatre, which has followed the earlier pioneered path of Annapurna, Janata etc. and has emerged as the most successful 'Commercial Theatre' in Odisha during the last three/four decades. So, 'Group Theatre' is not 'Commercial Theatre'. The difference lies in the approach to do theatre: whether for commercial purpose or with social significance?

8. THE ORIGIN OF 'GROUP THEATRE' IN THE WORLD THEATRE HISTORY

The concept of "Group Theatre" originated in New York, America: collective theatre from 1931 to 1941, started by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg that stressed ensemble acting and sought to present plays with social significance. These three former members of the 'Theatre Guild' wanted to establish a group of dedicated actors who would train according to the method, based on the teachings of Stanislavsky of the Mosco Art Theatre. The unifying goal of this theatre was the belief that a point of view was necessary for the actors, directors and designers of a show and that the actors should all train in their craft in the same way to realize this vision in true ensemble acting. Committed to social realism, the "Group Theatre" gained popularity with performance of the play "The House of Connelly" in 1931. But the Group couldn't continue further as it was banned in 1940 for producing Anti-Govt. plays and supporting Communism. However, the concept of "Group Theatre Movement" was soon spread throughout the World. In London, "Group Theatre" was a private play-producing society formed in 1933 with the object of performing non-commercial and experimental plays. "People's Theatre" of Romain Roland, "Political Theatre" of Erwin Piscator and "Epic Theatre" of Bertolt Brecht which incepted during the first half of the Twentieth Century and before the Second World War were also guided by Left Philosophy. The spirit of those theatre concepts was similar to that of 'Group Theatre'.

9. INCEPTION OF 'GROUP THEATRE' IN INDIA

'Group Theatre', from its inception days in the World, was based on Left ideology to hoist revolutionary theatre. The Progressive Writers Association' (Pragati Lekhaka Sangha) was formed in India at a conference held at Bangalore in 1940. 'The IPTA - Indian People's Theatre Association' (BharatiyaGananatya Sangha) was a branch of 'The Progressive Writers Association' (Pragati Lekhaka Sangha). In 1942, the earlier mentioned 'Progressive Writers Association' was reorganized in the name of 'Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Association' in West Bengal. Indian People's Theatres Association (IPTA) was a front of this Anti-Fascist Association. 'Group Theatre' movement was

started in India by IPTA on the eve of Independence. Beginning with a path breaking play '*Nabanna*' (1944) that dramatized the exploitation of peasants by land owners, IPTA followed up with '*Zabanbandi*' and dance theatres like 'Discovery of India' and 'India Immortal' with music by Ravi Shankar, Choreography by Shanti Bardhan. IPTA movement was followed in Bengal by the powerful trio: Shombhu Mitra, Ajitesh Banerjee and Utpal Dutta. They produced plays which were different from that of commercial theatre of Bengal. IPTA was a Cultural front guided by the Communist Party of India. So, the Govt. looked at it differently. Towards 1949, the rigid communistic principles of IPTA was not appreciated by sensitive, creative artists of the Group. Committed theatre person like Sombhu Mitra left IPTA and formed '*Bohuroopee*' group with the purpose of doing theatre freely as per his realization. The changing concept of 'Group Theatre' from IPTA to '*Bohuroopee*' was a very important and subtle difference. However, that '*Bahuroopee*' nature of 'Group Theatre' has been manifested in various forms in India.

10. INCEPTION OF GROUP THEATRE IN ODISHA

The first Proscenium arch type theatre was built in England in 1576. It was followed in 1860 at Kolkata, West Bengal, during the Colonial period in India. This European model of Proscenium arch type stage was introduced in Odisha in 1872 to present Hindi plays, Bengali plays and also English plays translated in to Odia. The first Odia play '*Babaji*' was staged in 1877, written by Jaganmohan Lala who was a Deputy of the Colonial Odisha. The play was inspired by the trend of European realism percolated through Kolkata to Odisha. Subsequently, the trend of modernity in Odia theatre vis-à-vis Proscenium theatre productions was spread rapidly in Odisha. Commercial Theatre repertories took the movement to a peak and ushered in the 'golden period' in the history of Odia theatre during the 1940s-1970s. 'Annapurna Theatre' was established in 1942 and in 1943 it could have a Statewide commercial network having permanent repertories at Puri (Annapurna-A), Cuttack (Annapurna-B) and Berhampur (Annapurna-C). Then Odisha Theatres, Janata Rangamancha and Ekamra Theatres etc. joined in the movement. However, these 'Commercial Theatre' houses attracted the audience as an industry of entertainment by producing popular plays as per the tastes and demands of the common mass. Every evening, commercial theatre houses staged plays and the spectators were ready to buy the tickets. Some of them were touring repertories moving into suburban towns, villages. For a variety of reasons, the commercial theatre repertories were declined during the Seventies, the two major ones being the inner conflicts and irresistible pull of cinema for the leading lights. Most of the artists migrated to the alluring medium. The last play by 'Annapurna theatre' was staged on 28.11.1979. The disintegration and total lockout of six commercial play houses marked a decadent phase in Odia theatre. Being inspired by the performances of commercial theatre repertories, many amateur theatre clubs/groups had already come into being in different corners of Odisha. But they were mostly imitating the superhit/ popular productions of the 'Commercial Theatre' houses.

The trend of 'Group Theatre' started in Odisha in 1950 with United Artists Club at Cuttack being initiated by the

legendary dramatist Manoranjan Das. The other veteran artists who joined hands with him were NitaiPalit, GobindaTej, Brajanath Das, Gloria Rout, Nora Rout and others. Manoranjan Das was associated with commercial theatre houses and was writing plays for commercial success. By the time, the trend of New Wave theatre/Experimental theatre/Intellectual theatre/Theatre of the Absurd had already emerged in the World drama scenario during the 1950s. When Commercial theatre repertoires did not accept his experimental plays, he formed United Artists Club to stage his play 'Aagami'. Though it was the first and last production of that Group, nevertheless, it was the first 'Group theatre' initiative in Odisha. Then he formed 'Srujani' at Bhubaneswar in 1964 to stage his play 'Sagar Manthan' taking veterans like Ananta Mohapatra, GobindaTej, Sukhalata Mohanty, UrbashiTripathy, Kunjalata Nanda and others. 'Srujani' has remained as the milestone in 'Group Theatre' history of Odisha though it was active for a shorter period from 1964 to 1972. Thanks to 'Srujani', the 'Group Theatre' movement in the State came into its own and was subsequently picked up by many other groups in different corners of the State. Groups were mushroomed in the State after the decline of the 'Commercial Theatre' in the 1970s.

11. IMPORTANT THEATRE GROUPS OF ODISHA

Starting from United Artists Club of 1950 to the present day, many amateur theatre groups have contributed to the "Group Theatre" movement in Odisha. Presently, more than 150 amateur theatre groups are active in different corners of the State. Out of them, more than 20 groups are based at Bhubaneswar. Many groups are led by the qualified professionals who are alumni of either the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi or Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya/Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar. In spite of all the problems and limitations, these groups have been striving to hold the banner of 'Group Theatre' aloft in Odisha. The important groups of the State are ShatabdiraKalakar led by Dharendra Nath Mallick; Mukti Theatre by Surya Mohanty; Manan Theatre by ManojPattanayak; Uttar Purusa by Gourishyam Mahapatra; Panchama Veda by Haren Sahoo; Natya Chetana by Subodh Pattanayak; AJIT by Ajit Narayan Das; EbamAame by Sachi Das; Anwesana by Narayan Pati; Interface by Dr. Gouranga Rout; SabujaNatyasanstha by Simanta Mohanty; AameSruti by Lala Biren Roy; UttkalRangamancha Trust by Ananta Mahapatra; BijayaEkaUchhwas by Dr. Bijaya Mishra; NabinBarnali Theatre by NabinParida; HawaHawaNatyasansad by Gopal Dey; Divine Club by BiplabSatpathy; Spandan by Kailas Nayak; Mirror Theatre by Subas Pradhan; Parampara by Prasanna Mishra; International Theatre by Mihir Meher; Nupur by Kumaramani Nayak; Yugechha by Dhira Basa; CANMAS by Sriman Mishra; Arohana by Shaileswar Nanda; Mahumachhi by Alok Bose; Pratidhwani by Sharat Das; Sampark by Bhaskar Mahapatra; Rangamancha by Kailash Panigrahi; AameNatua by Gangadhar Jena; Prayas by Prafulla Sethi; SwostiJhankar by RajibPani; Kalinga Kala Parisada by Radheshyam Mohanty; Swara by Dr. Panchanan Mishra; Ka Kha Ga by Brajendra Nayak; Sree Cultural Association by Satya Ranjan Behera; Loo by Kesaranjan Pradhan;

AbarnigundaNatyasansada by AsokBahidar; Kalahandi Kalakar Sangha by Prabodh Rath; Kalaparisada by Dilliswar Maharana; Srashta by Hemendra Mahapatra; Tulasi Cultural Association by Sarada Prasanna Das; Rangashala by Bikram Sahoo; PanchaPatmaliNatya Mahotsav by Ashok Kar; Ganjam Kala Parisada by K.C.Singh; GanjamZilla Mancha KalakarSammilani by Ramesh Maharana; Nabajiban by Pradip Bhola; Jagarana Art International by Sujit Mishra etc.

12. ON THE EVE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Juncture period and boosting light: It was a juncture period in Odisha from the 1970s to the end of this Century when 'Commercial Theatre' declined to end; 'Group Theatre' struggled hard to thrive; Onslaught of films and electronics media threatened to overwhelm culture andJatra/Opera strategically emerged to achieve peak commercial success. But 'Group Theatre' practitioners, all over India, were boosted with creative enthusiasm when the "Scheme of assistance to young theatre workers" was implemented by the Kendra Sangeet Natak Academy, Government of India, New Delhi during 1984-94. It was also a boosting light for 'Group Theatre' in Odisha.

Significant strokes at the National level theatre canvas: As discussed earlier, the "Scheme of assistance to young theatre workers" was implemented by the Kendra Sangeet Natak Academy, Government of India, New Delhi during 1984-94. The broad objective of the Scheme was to support the endeavors of young theatre workers engaged in the production of new, exciting works which promised to enhance the frontiers of theatre, both in terms of production values and thematic content. The purpose of the project was to bring out experimental productions reflecting the creative blending of indigenous Folk / Traditional forms with modern theatre techniques and in the process creating new idioms of theatrical expressions. The scheme was inspired by the concept of "Theatre of Roofs / Encounter with Traditions" practiced by the avant-garde directors like Habib Tanvir, K. N. Pannikker, B.V. Karanth, Ratan Thyam, H. Kahneyalal, Girish Kannad et al since the 1960s seeking true Indian theatre. The productions of Odisha, under the scheme, which got selected from the East Zone Theatre Festival to the National Theatre Festival were 'Muktipatha' of Anwesana by Narayan Pati (1985-86) and 'JhimitiKhela' of Mukti by Satyabrata Rout (1988-89). The other productions which participated in the East Zone Theatre Festivals under the scheme were 'AtiAachambita Katha' of Manan by ManojPattanayak (1984-85); 'Avatar' of ShatabdiraKalakar by Dharendra Nath Mallick (1986-87); 'Gotie Bula KukuraraAtmabruttanta' of SoukhinKalakar Sangha by Hari Mishra (1987-88); 'AsangataNatak' of ShatabdiraKalakar by Dharendra Nath Mallick (1989-90); 'AamariBhagaban' of Manan by ManojPattanayak (1990-91); 'RuddhaDwara' of ShatabdiraKalakar by Dharendra Nath Mallick (1991-92); 'Kaatha' of Natya Chetana by Subodh Pattanayak (1992-93) and 'Parleen' of AameSruti by Lala Biren Roy (1993-94). The spirit of the project of Kendra Sangeet NatakAkademi has been inspiring many directors till date. Dr. Gouranga Chandra Rout of 'Interface' experimented on the novel concept of 'Developing Contemporary Tribal Theatre in Odisha' for his Ph.D. in Music (Drama) under Utkal

University, Bhubaneswar during 2000-07. The Santhali play '*ChalakTuyu*' (Clever Jackal) was staged at Adivasi Ground, Bhubaneswar during the Annual Tribal Fair which drew attention at the National level news in 2002. Besides, he successfully experimented at Kohima, Nagaland (2002) and Agartala, Tripura (2006) to popularize the concept of 'Developing Contemporary Tribal Theatre in India'.

Formation of the Odisha Natya Sangha (ONS): Indian society is pluralistic and its contemporary theatre is represented by thousands of 'Group Theatre' groups active spread in all the States of the country. The problems and questions all these groups struggle with are almost identical in nature, some of the major ones being financial support and patronization. Because the groups depend on Government grants, public donations, corporate sponsorships. Ticketed show is yet to be accepted by the audience. The similar kind of struggle of Groups in different districts of Odisha to hold high the banner of 'Group Theatre' has united them under the State level Association named "Odisha Natya Sangha (ONS)", registered in 1988. Now, more than 150 Theatre Groups are united and active under this State level banner of ONS.

13. IN THE BEGINNING DECADES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

'Natyadhara' - a unique programme:

Veteran Ananta Mahapatra of UtkalRangamancha Trust initiated the ticketed regular show of plays at Bhanja Kala Mandap, Bhubaneswar in 1999 in collaboration with the Government. It, gradually, pulled viewers but stopped in 2005. The ONS became geared up when Dharendra Nath Mallick and AvinnaRoutray were elected as the president and the Secretary respectively in 2009. "Natyadhara" – a unique programme was launched in 2012 by the Department of Tourism & Culture, Government of Odisha in association with Odisha Sangeet Natak Academy (OSNA) and ONS for monthly free show of 'Group Theatre' productions at Rabindra Mandap and Bhanja Kala Mandap in the capital city Bhubaneswar. Dharendra Nath Mallick became the Secretary of OSNA in 2014 who was the president of ONS. After his shift to the OSNA, legendary AsimBasu became elected as the President of ONS and same AvinnaRoutray as the Secretary. This combination of leadership of OSNA and ONS accelerated the 'Natyadhara'. In 2016, ManojPattanayak and Lala Biren Roy were elected as the President and Secretary of ONS respectively.

'Natyadhara' continues in spite of conflicts, difficulties. Groups of Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri (coming within 200kms.) are performing at Bhanja Kala Mandap on 1st, 2nd and 3rd day and Groups of other districts (beyond 200kms.) are performing at Rabindra Mandap on 2nd Sunday of every month as per the schedule decided for the year. In a year 4x12= 48 Groups are getting the chance to perform their plays. The Department of Culture provides the Groups with a minimum financial support as well as the auditoriums (taking the minimum charges towards development fees). No doubt, the continuation of "Natyadhara" since 2012 has boosted the

'Group Theatre' practitioners in Odisha. Many new Groups have been formed being led by young directors. Now, the audience is not forgetting to witness the 'Natyadhara' productions. The increasing pull of audience has encouraged the 'Group Theatre' practitioners immensely to continue their activities. But for how many days this type of free show can run? Is it not hampering to bring out qualitative theatre productions? Who knows what will happen to the Govt. policy in future? However, 'Natyadhara' is a unique programme which is not found in any other State of the country.

Many new actors, directors, dramatists and designers have emerged from 'Group Theatre' platform. Women Directors have emerged from 'Group Theatre' platform. New and Young directors have emerged from 'Group Theatre' platform. International Theatre Festivals, National Theatre Festivals and State Level Theatre Festivals are organized in Odisha.

14. THE ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF GROUP THEATRE IN ODISHA

The problems and issues all these Groups struggle with, all over India, are almost identical in nature. Financial problem has been a major challenge to Groups since their inception. It is a platform built up on the sacrifice of the committed artists for a social cause. The Groups struggle to meet the cost of production by collecting donations, through release of advertisements in their Souvenirs and availing some Govt. grants/Corporate sponsorships. Financial difficulties limit the quality of production and development of the Groups. Nevertheless, there is future prospect of Group Theatre in Odisha for the following reasons.

- (1) Both the State and Central governments have opened up various avenues to support and patronize the Group Theatre Movement. The Groups should take advantage of the Schemes.
- (2) Corporate houses have already started supporting the effort by releasing advertisement in the Souvenirs of the Groups. It would be of great help to the Groups if corporate funding sources can be generated by the Govt. motivating them to earmark a chunk of their budget allocated against peripheral development which will be utilized for Cultural Development vis-à-vis Group Theatre.
- (3) But all these supports are secondary which have no guarantee. The primary is the audience support. Audience and Theatre are both supplementary and complementary to one another. So, both should realize it convincingly to let the show go on.

During 1980-90, the Groups in Bhubaneswar tried to push-sell tickets well in advance of the show as well as opened ticket counter at Rabindra Mandap, but the result was not encouraging. Gradually, the system was done away with considering the declining number of audiences. However, the formation of Odisha Natya Sangha in 1988 has given a fresh lease of life to Group Theatre in Odisha. The Natyadhara Programme, a monthly regular show of productions as well as the Theatre Festivals organized by various Groups have gradually attracted and pulled the audience back to the auditoriums. The attitude of the

audience, who have become habituated since long to witness plays without paying for any ticket/donation, must undergo a change. They must be made to contribute financially to help the Groups meet their cost of productions. In 2013, some Groups introduced a system: placing donation box near the entrance door of Rabindra Mandap to appeal to the audience politely without any compulsion for contribution. The response showed that it might bring about a change in the attitude of the audience to honor the sacrifice of the artists. But this strategy was not strictly followed by all the Groups. So, the result was not satisfactory. Even now, very few audiences are responding to this process generously. Some Groups stick to their principles and are not allowing any viewer to witness the production without any ticket. If this principle is followed by all the Groups, the audience might change their habitual mindset. But it is not that easier the process. It will take time because change comes in the process, not instantly.

- (4) Now, the challenge for the Groups is to meet the expectations of audience with quality productions so that they are urged from within to buy tickets / donation receipts. The time has come for the Groups to refresh, revitalize their creativity and commitment through Intensive Theatre Training Workshops, conducted by experts, in order to present soul-stirring productions with contemporary sensibility. Of course, it will take time to change the taste of the hoi polloi. Continuous and persistent effort of Groups might turn them into Professional Theatre Repertories, self-sufficient as well as a paying platform for every member.
- (5) The Professional / Commercial Jatra has already followed the strategic path of Annapurna Theatre, Rupashree Theatres, Janata Rangamancha etc. to reach the hoi polloi successfully. Their camps have reached rural / tribal village fields as well as fields of the urban and sub-urban areas. More than 200 Jatra Parties are performing every night in different corners of the State. Jatra Stars are now high-paid and more popular than the Film Stars. Of course, Group Theatre is not Jatra, Nevertheless, it should reach the common mass. Otherwise, how can it be self-sufficient with dazzling presence? Time has come to think of a sustained effort for grand success.
- (6) The support of both Print and Electronic News Media has increased immensely during the last decade. Doordarshan, Private TV Channels have also picked up many successful plays. Then the question arises, Is Group Theatre moving confusingly with lack of vision?
- (7) Group Theatre has been a grooming ground for all segments kinds of artists since theatre is an integrated art form. This is the mother platform giving birth to many great artists. Equally, Group Theatre in Odisha should be associated with Academics to strengthen the movement more.
- (8) Further, it must focus on Children and Young adults. They can be transformed into a well-informed, knowledgeable audience as well as practitioners of tomorrow. This way, the art of theatre can play a challenging and formational role in our lives and ultimately fulfill its social role of being a creative participant in Nation building.
- (9) Looking at the growing trends and status quo of Group Theatre in Odisha, it is easy to say that its status is very poor when compared to National standards. It is also not difficult to see and prescribe what it needs to reach National and International standards. It must continuously refresh and update itself and be very clear in its philosophy, vision and mission taking into view the era of Globalization, Consumerism and Post-Modernism.
- (10) The basic human values are more vital for development of the Humanity. Creative art field is in no way beyond it. Intolerance has become a global problem now. This mental disease creates rebellious attitude instead of accommodating temperament. If it is at all destructive, all should try to be devoid of it. Social duty does not simply mean the daily routine works of a person at home, office or club etc., rather, it means the doing of a person what others/society expects from him everywhere. Positivity and co-operation are development. The Group Theatre practitioners should try to be devoid of intra-group and inter-group intolerance for peaceful co-existence. This is very easy to say, but difficult to practice since it needs spiritual practice / sadhana for self-realization. Truth, Non-violence and spiritual perseverance are the basic needs for creative development. Every creation of Nature / God is unique. Every being is unique in his / her place to perform duty.
- (11) Theatre in India and by extension, in Odisha has passed through many crises and transitions: Around the 10th Century when the Classical Sanskrit Drama tradition came to an end; In the 18th-19th Century when the British Raj struck roots with their own stage performances; In the 1930's when talky films arrived on the scene and finally in the 1980s-90s when the onslaught of television, video, computer, internet and other technologies threatened to overwhelm the established Culture. The threat is by no means over, if anything, it was only grown bigger. But the truth is theatre has survived the combined onslaught and there is no reason to believe that things will be any different in the future. Theatre is a living, ever-changing and constantly evolving artistic medium of expression which is as old as the civilization and has always been a part of our lives and culture. Theatre was, Theatre is and Theatre will be.
- (12) Hopefully, good time is around the corner. The viewers shall be seen queuing up to donate and obtain receipt well in advance to witness Group Theatre productions. Devoted, full-time theatre workers shall be remunerated with dignity. There, possibly would be auditoriums in every district facilitating regular shows. Some Groups might go for mobile-camp-performance in rural/tribal village fields as well as fields of the urban and sub-urban areas entertaining the hoi polloi. But the move should be with a vision for future to respond to the contemporary 21st Century Theatre. Let the show go on

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