

CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY THEATRE IN A DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This paper attempts at a discussion on how community theatre can be used to educate the people in a developing democracy like our own. It focuses specifically on the challenges/roles of community theatre as a tool for transformation and education of the communities they serve. It looks at the concept of community theatre in general and highlights the major roles it performs in the transformation and education of the people. It also suggests ways, or the future of community theatre in our developing democracy.

Introduction

Community theatre according to Nwamu in Akor, (2001) is not necessarily a theatre in a local community, but a theatre that has the main aims of achieving developmental objectives within a community. It is a popular and participatory theatre aimed at conscientizing people within a particular environment or community into consciousness and awareness to the extent that they take positive action towards the improvement of their lives. It is theatre that sensitizes the people into dramatizing their common problems and mobilizing them for action through the use of their own media and structure. Through it, the people are able to identify their problems and means of solving them.

In Ochai (2002), community theatre is a group performance for the people, by the people of the people. Viewed in this way, community theatre produces drama sketches on problems concerning them, themselves as actors and solving the problems themselves.

To Shirga (2001), community theatre is a means of upholding the tenets of our developing democracy, as the country is afflicted with a plethora of social ills such as bribery, corruption, nepotism, trafficking and money laundering.

The Nigerian youth too revels in such corrupt practices like examination malpractices, cultism, religious and students revolts etc.

The principle of conduct which should guide the private and public life of Nigerians are jettisoned in preference for high taste for sex, alcoholism, and mad craving for material wealth. Due to the emphasis placed on material wealth, Nigerians have espoused dishonesty as a way of life.

Many people while speaking on Nigerian social system have attributed the collapse of the moral values in the country to the capitalist system which has destroyed humane Nigerian values that laid emphasis on the survival of the community, rather than the individual.

Other critics of the system blame all forms of behaviour not in conformity with the standard behaviour of the Nigerian nation, on our corrupt, inept and dishonest leaders, whose major concern is wealth grabbing and ostentatious lives. Ugodoluwa and Bojimo (1998:1) for instance, emphasise the need for teachers, parents, leaders and all adult Nigerians to imbibe the virtues of honesty and disciplined taste for the emancipation of the country. Scholars like Adewole, (1978:7) propose the need for moral instruction to develop the child's morality by promoting patriotism. This can be done through community theatre education.

The principles enshrined in Adewole's proposal proscribe indoctrination and promotes autonomy, self-consciousness and self-criticism. Through this, the individual can achieve personal integrity, to enable him to be above pettiness, self-deception and the depletion of others. The hallmark of this principle is the inculcation of the spirit of fairness and selflessness in the individual in all his dealings with others due to the virtues of independent mindedness, truth, reason and altruism he has internalized. The community theatre is concerned with promoting national integrity, peace and harmony.

Challenges of Community Theatres

Community theatre is an effective strategy for concretization. It is invaluable for conscientizing the people in a community and bringing about lasting development and stability. Concretization is a means of letting the people know about their rights. Making them wake up to reality. It was this awareness campaign used by people like Ngugi wa thiongo in East Africa. His *Home Coming* (1972:11) centred on Kenya's colonial struggle for the emancipation of the people and their land. This demand later resulted in the independence of Kenya. This particular approach was viewed through community awareness to topple the

military from power in Nigeria.

Community theatre could also be used to achieve national unity, by creating the necessary awareness. Ngugi wa thiongo in *Bavadi* (1997) the function of the Journey in Ngugi wa thiongo's *Petals of Blood* is the re-establishment of communal spirits which has for long been forgotten. The communal spirit associated with pre-colonialism has been prostituted, using religion, education, language to divide the people.

Religion which has become a thorny issue in Nigeria, the unity of this nation depends upon how well and careful religion is handled, became instead of being an asset in the life of the people, has become a potential threat to the nation. There would be tolerance through the use of popular community theatre and inter-faith dialogue.

To Isah (2001), no nation can trifle with morality and hopes to progress and develop fully with human solace. To be stable, progressive and peaceful, all societies need a free work of shared'-beliefs and values, particularly interpersonal relationships in the society. This underscores the importance and relevance of morality that is a national fruit of religion.

According to Ekwueme (1991:220) creative arts is fundamentally to promote, preserve, perpetuate and transmit our cultural values and heritage. It provides, information in developing a sense of cultural and social responsibilities, and encouraging active participation in communal activities. To her, it increases awareness, interest and sensitivity towards our culture, which has been bastardized by the introduction of Western culture.

Through community theatre cultism that has taken over our society, especially the institutions of higher learning, can be stopped or minimized, this is by creating an enabling environment for interpersonal dialogue. To lorshal (2001) cultism is retrogressive and catastrophic in nature and structure. This is based on the fact that their antecedents are characterized by vandalism aggression and bloodshed.

Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society that even the farmer in the village, views even, other persons as suspects. This has brought about a lot of suffering to the masses of the nation. Official corruption is so which that it was reported in Newswatch (2002) that most of the state governors declared that they are broke financially. This has resulted in their inability to pay civil servants for months. While the poor are suffering, the rich are getting super rich. This can be minimized or stopped through the use of proper community theatre education.

Through the use of community theatre education, the people are now become aware of the dangers of contacting AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

How community theatre can be used:- Community theatre mobilizes the people by involving them in programmes of the society of uses the four principle of research problems, Identification, play making, discussion and follow-up to solve problems of the community (Alachi, 1992).

In research, the theatre workers are expected to go into the communities designated for the programme for the exercise. They involve themselves with the people in interactions of the community with the aim of acquiring necessary information about their problems. The workers should do more listening than speaking, so that they will get a better picture of the community's problems.

The major point about problem identification is that theatre workers are required to come together, share their various experiences. These experiences, views and informations collected are gathered and they try to come to a consensus about a particular need of the community. They then visit different members of the community once more to determine which of their problems is the most pressing.

When they have determined the most pressing problems in the society, they embark on the play creating process. This involves dramatizing the particular problem identified with the aim of finding solutions to it. The theatre workers are required to use the villagers to act the play. This will make the drama interesting, since the villagers who will take part, are familiar with the norms, proverbs etc of the community.

The next stage is the discussion stage, entails the coming together of the people of the community with a selection of the few who will perform the problems in form of drama, solution should be highlighted to the problems with the theatre workers giving a helping hand.

In the follow-up stage, the villagers head the execution of the actual project to solve the identified problem. It should be known that in carrying out the projects, the villagers lead, while the theatre workers and government officials are only helpers. The villagers at this point feel satisfied because they are involved in the execution of the project and see it as their contribution to the transformation, improvement in their

lives.

It can be seen that community theatre has the main function of mobilizing people through drama, by helping them to identify problem areas, making discussions for themselves, and solving such problems using their local structures. It is in this regard that this paper suggests the community theatre's five states process to community involvement as propounded by Fesster and quoted by Nuamu in Akor (2001), as the best method of realizing any of the objectives of the government's social, cultural and economic programmes at improving the lot of the people.

Awareness Level- Programmes are announced and made aware to the people through their community leaders. In this way, they don't think it is another idea from the government.

Interest State- Propaganda and campaign can then be used to sensitize them to get them to want to know more about the programmes. The theatre workers and key community workers are used.

Evaluation State- Selected communities are used as demonstration centres, testing grounds and open discussion centres to enable the grassroots to digest the programmes and its objectives mentally.

Practical State- The villagers are helped to put the programme into practice on a small scale.

Many villagers are encouraged to participate since they will help to disseminate the success of the experiment. - Adoption Stage- This is the stage where the community accept the programmes

as theirs and

decide to adopt it as part of their culture and improvement in their social condition (Hagher, 1990).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to state and federal government to recognition of the role of community theatre in eradicating social ills in our developing democracy.

Community based project should involve members of community in their execution.

There should be well-trained and prepared theatre workers who should take up the task of using their apparatus for the job at hand.

There should be proper funding for providing the necessary logistics and materials. This is to enable the workers reach the target community for their programmes.

The theatre workers involved should be committed and be ready to participate actively.

There should be constant follow-up, as lack of it will make the people forget and fall back making the project a waste.

There should be proper orientation and briefing on the purpose, goals, process and expectations of community theatre workers to be achieved to ensure its effective implementations.

Conclusion

The paper has carefully looked at the challenge of community theatre, methods of implementation and recommendation concludes that community theatre is a major promoting force in solving our social problems.

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