



## Theatrical Tormentory Timeline (3T)

### KEYWORDS

Redefining theatre, Tormentory line and Timeline (in the context of theatre)

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper is an attempt to understand and explore the definition of Theatre from the early days to – how theatre should be redefined in the present context. Time line and Tormentory line are parallel tracks to understand the journey from the early Bronze Age to the present age of being a Global Village. This study also attempts to give a glimpse of the upward spiral taken across history, in the social context of 'inner search of performances' – with the conceptual understanding of Theatrical Tormentory Timeline.*

### INTRODUCTION

Secondary catharsis is experienced by the audience during a theatrical performance. Audiences are drawn into purgation when a theatre performance or scene engulfs them into the magical world of imagination for a short period of time. They come out of this emotional and psychological spell when they are brought back into the awareness of the real world and its happenings by either - A person moving, a cell phone ringing, a cough etc

One of the earliest references to this is brought to us by Aristotle. While dealing with tragedy Aristotle says ".....through pity and fear effecting the proper *Katharsis* or purgation of these emotions." While catharsis is understood as purgation, purification, or clarification, one can safely assume that if an audience is going through secondary catharsis then the performers/actors should be going through primary catharsis.

These unspoken experiences/spirit of performances are influenced by different myths at different points of time. To get a holistic understanding of this we need to look at three aspects.

- The evolutionary definition of theatre
- Tormentory line between performers and audience
- Sociological factors of identified timelines

An understanding of these three aspects, its interrelations and impact will provide us an insight into the spirit which was dominant in society. In this search the ever-changing myths show us the continuous struggle of mankind - caught between three spirits. The Human spirit which seeks logic, the Evil spirit which destroys and the Holy Spirit which guides us to goodness and well-being of all.

### Defining and Redefining Theatre

In ancient Greece and Rome the theatre was understood as an outdoor structure for dramatic performances or spectacles.

While Aristotelian drama aimed at the effect of catharsis in the spectator, the freeing of emotions of fear and compassion Bertolt Brecht wanted a theatre that would stimulate and increased sense of political awareness in the mind of the spectator of his own situation in society.

The focus shifted from involvement to critical distance.

"We have actors but no art of acting," wrote Lessing of the theatre of his day in the Hamburg Dramaturgy.

The American Association of Community Theatre posts in its website the tasks and responsibilities of those who work in theatre under the broad category of Actors, Artistic Director, Chief Administrative Officer, Choreographer, Costume Designer, Director, House Manager, Lighting Designer, Marketing/Publicity, Music Director, Playwright, Production Manager, Set Designer, Sound Designer, Stage Manager, Technical Director apart from the Make-up artists and a whole set of assistants and associates. Each of these members will have their own definitions which will be right from their perspective.

In his foreword to Kees Espskamp's book *Theatre for Development* Tim Prentki – Professor of Theatre for Development – University of Wichester says "Theatre for Development (TiD) – where communities are enabled to address issues of self-development through participation in a theatre process..."

The Russian theatre director Stanislavski in his book *My Life in Art* says that a theatre studio is neither a ready-made theatre nor a school for beginners, but a laboratory for more or less mature actors.

Theatre practitioner Meyerhold says " The actor may get bored with perfecting his craft in order to perform in outdated plays: soon he will want not only to act but to compose for himself as well. Then at last we shall see the rebirth of the theatre of improvisation."

When asked to speak on theatre one of the stalwarts of modern Indian Theatre K V Subbanna in his Shri Ram Memorial Lectures says " I chose as my theme 'Theatre and Community' chiefly to suit my own convenience..... of free space and flexible borders..."

In simple terms Theatre can be defined as a building where plays, shows, etc., are performed on a stage. In modern era it also represents a building where movies are shown. In the ultra modern era the term Home theatre represents the experience of a movie theatre hall within the confines of one's home. It can also represent the emerging trend of theatre performances in 'found spaces'.

These and other definitions given over the centuries miss a very critical factor. They don't capture the entire spirit of theatre. They fail to capture the rehearsal and preparation process where the theatre team spends most of the time. Psychologists like Moreno have used it to understand and explore human behavior. Rehearsal spaces are the untapped laboratories of human behavior. No theatre definitions capture this dimension. Psychologists and Sociologists have started using it and are applying it across fields – right from organizations, to educational tools, sports etc. Theatre practitioners lacked the scientific thinking to provide a clear definition which also resulted in the failure to capture the after effects of a theatre performance. Blinded by ego, emotions and intellectual aspects of performance – most practitioners also missed the accountability and responsibility aspect which the theatre had to take.

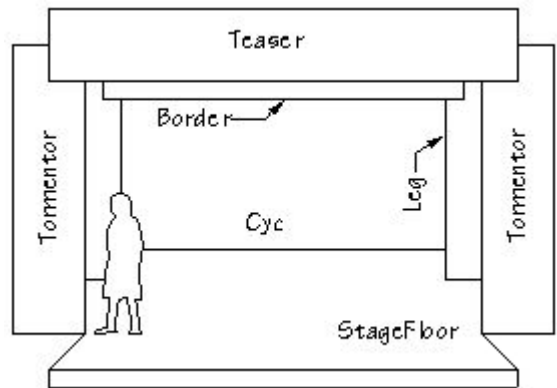
In the context of the above understanding the new definition has to be inclusive and accountable. Inclusive of all the people involved and accountable for the preparatory, performance and after effects of theatre – with responsible accountability. The people involved with the theatre both as active and passive participants cannot be just entertainers and commentator. They have to respond and participate in the refining process of society to make meaningful contributions. The new definition should be - ***"Theatre is a refining process of societal activities using identified tools through experiential methodology where participants take individual and collective accountability from its initial process to its final impact."***

The question is - Are people involved in the theatre ready to adopt this ultra-modern definition or would they still want to be in their euphoric cocoon of unscientific self-glorification to fulfill temporary needs?

### Understanding Tormentory Line

When the journey of theatre was to move from ritual to spiritual there was an inclusive sense of participation by all members of society. Folk forms involved the whole community. Be it the harvest festival or going to war – the community was involved in the ritual, practice and participation. With the emergence of stylization, specialization and compartmentalization - action and reaction were isolated in the theatre. Actors engaged in the action while the audiences engaged in the reaction. Physical structures were also erected to reinforced this emerging myth of how, when and where theatre has to take place. A facilitator standing near a board to teach is different from a facilitator sitting in a circle to enable a journey. The physical compositions and structures in the theatre followed the spirit of knowledge and skill centric instead of community participation.

*"The 3000 seat Teatro Farnese, the first permanent proscenium theatre, was built into the Great Hall of the Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma, Italy in 1618. The theatre was primarily used for official state functions (such as a Royal wedding) for over 100 years before being abandoned. The palazzo was almost completely destroyed by Allied bombs during World War II (1944). It was rebuilt, following original drawings in the 1950s and reopened in 1962. The Proscenium Arch (or "picture frame") separate the acting area (stage) from the audience area (house or auditorium). The tormentor and teaser establish the size (width and height) of the set on a proscenium stage.*



*The tormentors are narrow curtains hung behind the act curtain. They are used to establish the width of the setting and mask (hide) the off-stage space."*

From this historical background we draw the reference of *Tormentory line* which came into "official" existence when the audience and actors were separated by this invisible line. Proscenium Arch, Invisible Fourth Wall are some of the other terms which further isolated the actors and the audience members. The actors and audience were made to believe in the sanctity of this 'border line' to provide an authentic experience of myth on one side and the real world of the other. Both worlds co-existing in the same place at the same time. Catharsis was the invisible link between the people on both sides of the tormentory line. Primary catharsis experienced by the performers and secondary catharsis experienced by the audience. In Modern theatre, Bertolt Brecht's – 'Alienation' principles and Augusto Boal's – 'Spect-actors' principles are two well-known attempts to cross the tormentory line. These and similar attempts helps one understand the existence, challenges and opportunities of working with the idea of tormentory line.

The invisible tormentory line was in existence from the beginning and continues to exist – changing its form according to the emergence of society and its myths. In the continuous search of evolution, man attempts to extend the tormentory line from himself, to the stage, audience, community, nature, materials and supernatural forces.

### Exploring Theatrical Timeline through Sociological factors

One cannot understand the spirit of the times unless one maps a time line. Knowing the past, understand the present and exploring the waves of change can give one some knowledge. One's humility to absorb the vastness and uniqueness of the 'time-dimension' can bring wisdom to enable new progressive insights to the field. While attempting to explore the time dimension the question is – where do we start and where do we stop - for something as unexplainable as "time and spirit" which are in constant movement. While the dimension of time could be codified into seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, ages, eras etc. Spirit and its ways cannot be captured within the dimensions of human capability.

In the context of this study the theatrical timeline has been classified into 13 sections.

1) Egyptian Theatre – Which evolved as a ritual during the Bronze age and paved the way for Greek Theatre to evolve.

2) Greek Theatre – Where concepts of Classical Theatre emerged with the basic rule of three unities - time, space and incident. Performances were as part of festivals for communities.

3) Roman Theatre – Architectural structures like Amphitheatre came into existence. Expressionism and newer forms of entertainment like Gladiator sports emerged. Sanskrit Theatre – Evolved during the same time in the east with concepts of Rasas, Bhavas and science of drama with classical plays.

4) Medieval Theatre – Morality Plays and human understands of what is good and bad in relation to the supernatural forces were attempted. A period where the man is trying to understand God from a human perspective.

5) Vernacular Plays – Performance moving out of a religious centric approach to a societal approach through languages, tableaux, masks etc

6) Italian theatre – Renaissance - Avoided supernatural powers, while reality was stressed and Roman plays were revived and the emergence of Proscenium Theatre.

7) English middle ages - Neo Classical era - 3 elements of classical theatre were removed, but themes were retained and Shakespeare creates an impact followed by the Globe Theatre concept of professionalism.

8) Spanish, France and British theatre – Moved from religious to secular themes. Middle class started dominating British theatre along with the creation of a National Theatre identity in France.

9) English theatre – Restoration/ Puritan period - Modern era – Actors were called rogues by law leading to non-verbal communication and evolution of pantomime.

10) Italy, France, German and China – French revolution leading to the rise of the common man as hero and moving away from romanticism and development of realism. Journalism and Photography opening up as new avenues of mass expression.

11) Theatre during World War - Alienation, Poor theatre, Absurd theatre, Constructivism, Method acting and related concepts emerged with key contributions from Stanislavsky and Brecht.

12) Neo-Modern Movement – Interactive models, Third Theatre, Spect-actor and moving from skill based to knowledge based approach was seen. The movement was from emotional actor to thinking actor

13) Ultra-Modern Movement – Theatre-in-Education, Feeder for visual and virtual mediums. Emergence of Corporate theatre and customization through Applied Theatre. Links were formed to encompass psychological testing, behavioural mapping, Multiple Intelligences

### Theatrical Tormentory Timeline

Understanding these three concepts of Theatre, Tormentory line and Theatrical Time line from a sociological perspective gives us an insight. An insight on to how the spirit has moved across the ages tormenting mankind with its invisible movement. A tormentory movement which is cyclic in nature, like a road weaving up a mountain. Mankind reaches the same point time and again. A period of ex-

ploration followed by suppression/division and ending in destruction. This movement reaches the next plateau but continues its normal spiritual journey of exploration, suppression/division and ending in destruction - paving way for the same cycle to be repeated at a new level.

In the first cycle the agricultural era moved into a religious era and ended in an era of dominance of those who claimed to know God and those who had lost belief. In the next cyclic turn it moved from innovation to industrialization and ended in destructive world wars. In this third cycle of upward movement it started of as a period of man exploring into outer spaces and psychological depths, leading to territorial, economic and intellectual dominance. Wars are for virtual spaces and virtual experiences based on ideology while attempting to cling on to relationships with families and fellow human beings - with the help of any available and acceptable supernatural forces.

Customization and individual/selective uniqueness are becoming the norms of the emerging era. Mass movement and big brands and larger than life personalities will have greater existential challenges until mass hypnotic effect takes over through the emerging medias through sensationalism and blinded belief systems.

Amidst all this there will be individuals and movements who will capture their own true spirit and continue to give hope and growth as shining examples on this tormentory theatrical timeline of life. These few individuals have been in existence in every era and will continue to be the torch bearers of truth. One should have the courage to stand up to this call and be one of them. To take up a journey to follow the invisible holy spirit which is whispering to every listening heart.

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