

## **CULTURAL RESILIENCE THROUGH THEATER: AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF DRAMATIC NARRATIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE POST-PARTITION ERA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this research, an attempt has been made to find out what has been the state of the art of theater, which can play an important role in national development, after the creation of Pakistan. Historically, it has been proven that there has been a strong tradition of theater in this region. Considering the weaknesses and gaps that emerged from the literature review on this topic, the research methodology was adopted. The qualitative method has been used for the research. In-depth interviews of experts and written history of the theater are used as tools for the study. Due to ideological confusion, migration of theatre performers settlement problems, the economic situation, and the capitalist system, the theater could not be stable as a media organization. A few groups were formed later, but they are not guaranteed for the future. If the state wants, everything is possible. This is an important finding on the contribution of East Pakistan in performing arts such as theatre, which was part of Pakistan until the separation as the Bangla Desh, Pakistani historical literature is completely silent.*

**Keywords:** Theater; culture; drama; partition.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article is a research effort to highlight the plight of theater in Pakistan. The research method adopted for carrying out this historical research is qualitative, whereby primary data is collected from interviews conducted by the researcher and secondary data from pre-existing books, research articles, and other sources has been taken. It is comprehensible from many studies and books that the tradition of theater in pre-partition seems to be very strong and theater is still being used as a strong medium in present-day India but in Pakistan, it is irreconcilable. Theater is still being used for effectual communication all over the world and theater is the foremost medium of communication in this world, which is still effective. Before 5000 BC, theater was being played in this region and it was the focus of religious worship. Besides, theater has been employed as a communication and remonstrance along with other civilizations of the world. The theatre has been used for different purposes since the Greek period. Since ancient times, the Indo-Pak region has been a great treasure and practice of this culture (Bilal, 2018). In ancient times, religious and cultural festivals were celebrated through performances i.e., summoning gods and influencing nature, as with rain dances and healing ceremonies (Cohen, 2017). Initially, the art of theatre was exercised to demonstrate the religious practices and teachings all over the world and in the sub-continent. "Recent studies of artifacts

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from the ice age have indicated that people may have already been performing rituals some 30000 years ago in ancient Egypt and the Near East" (Brockett,1991).

The research has great importance. Because theatre is deep-rooted in Pakistani culture it has a wonderful past it is an old tradition of the soil so theatre communication is very effective in the diverse culture of Pakistan to uniting the nation. Considering its importance, it is very important to study and understand the history of Pakistan so that the deficiencies in it can be removed and used in a better way. Theatre can play a vital role in rebuilding the nation and maintaining a peaceful environment it could be utilized for development and edutainment purposes. United Nations is using "Forum Theatre" and "Interactive Theatre" for many projects in Africa to raise public awareness. Ifeanyi (2009) suggests: "In Nigeria, ethnic conflicts have contributed to the social and political dislocation of the Nigerian society. It is in this regard the medium of theatre is being advocated as a tool in conflict resolution and management." In Nepal, street theatre played a vital role in boosting the democracy movement among the public. Moreover, India is using theatre as an effective tool for a successful Polio campaign. However, Nag (2013) states, "Folk media can play a vital role in communicating with the people, particularly, in rural areas, specifically for the modern messages. In India, folk forms have special significance as mass media". Theatre is being utilized in America and Europe in the education system for children. Theatre can be an effective mode of communication for the promotion of democracy and political awareness in Pakistan. Ali (2010) observes, "Theatre is a participatory learning medium that provides a space for creative collective learning and self-expression, helping youth to make sense of the social changes around them by visualizing issues and using their words and bodies in a clear way that everyone can understand and enjoy." The research tries to highlight the true picture of the theatre in Pakistan.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To explore the history of how theatre surfaced in Pakistan
- To discover the reason why theatre has not been patronized in Pakistan

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Khan (2014) narrates the history of Pashto theatre along with the world and subcontinent history of theatre. Theatre is a much more effective medium of communication as compared to mass media and new media. A different face of theatre has been defined in the research. Music and dance are very important part of theatre and it is a focused variable of the research. The theatre has so many types according to its functions, script, drama, objectives, and structure. Theatre has a very vital role in moderating the societies of Afghanistan and the North frontier area of Pakistan and has a very important role in promoting Pashtoon literature, like Rahman Baba's thought (poetry) and Khushal Khan Khatak's writings. The theatre was affected badly by the intervention of Russia in Afghanistan. Attan is a form of dance and it is a symbol of gallantry. It is the main subject of the study. All types of Attan have been explained in the research. Pashtun likes it very much and performs it gleefully. Music and dance theatre are an integral part of the Pashtun culture. Post-modern Pashto theatre also reflects the freedom, autonomy, and patriotism of Pashtuns. Overall, Pashto theatre reflects the bravery, peace, and nationalism of Pashtun. This research article provides information about Pashtun history and culture, but it lacks a systematic scientific method for gathering and verifying this information. Moreover, the prevailing media and culture study research methods are nowhere to be seen in it.

Hassan (2012) investigates the poor condition of theatre in Pakistan. It is concluded that the theatre has been neglected by the government as a medium and as an art in the research. Theatre is a discipline of fine art and the expression of this art has been investigated because it is a form of communication. Stage drama is very useful in promoting culture and art along with awareness and information but unfortunately, it has been used for the cheapest entertainment in Pakistan, which is why it has lost its value. There is no proper system to monitor the stage drama in Pakistan. The colonial act still exists to control theatre and concerning authorities are looking indifferent to the matter. 63% of respondents think the government is responsible for the situation and 29 % have the opinion that producers, directors, and artists are responsible for the degradation of Pakistani theatre. A quantitative method has been applied for this research. A survey method has been used to collect data. The social development theoretical frame has been applied to the

study. There are many suggestions for the betterment of commercial theatre in Pakistan, new laws should be formulated for art and culture, professionalism should be developed, and qualified and concerned people should be deployed for monitoring. The government should support the theatre. It is a quantitative study based on public opinion. Only one commercial theater in Rawalpindi has been taken as a case study. The scientific method of examining case studies is an entirely different method of research and public opinion based on the survey method regarding the decline of theater and drama is another type of research. Moreover, historical context has not been examined in this study. Therefore, the current research would help to address this research weakness and gap.

Bilal (2018) narrates the history of theatre in South Asia. Plato and Aristotle believed that drama is a reflection of reality. The word drama (dran) was originated in the 16th century. It means to do, to act, or to perform. The earliest civilization of human beings used to perform some religious rituals wearing masks, costumes, and makeup which can be called the beginning of theatre. The theatre was started in the 5th century BC in South Asia. It was based on Hindu mythology according to which theatre is a divine art. Therefore it is performed at a religious festival. Kalidas was a court poet and writer who wrote the Sanskrit drama *Shakuntala* in the early 5th century AD. Hundreds of dramas were written from the 1st century to the 10th century AD.

Sanskrit dramas are full of emotional sensations but mostly they have happy endings and sometimes even tragedy. Dance and Music are an essential part of South Asian dramas. Urdu theatre is a hundred years old in the region. It is not influenced by Sanskrit theatre. Urdu theatre became popular due to the degradation of Sanskrit theatre and was started in the Mughal period. Amanat Lukhnawi wrote *Indarsabha*, which was staged in Wajid Ali Shah court. Urdu drama as a form of art was ignored. The theatre has its local legacy like romantic lore. Many writers have translated English drama. Parsi theatre companies have adapted Urdu theatre due to its commercial aspects. These companies were performing most of the time in Lahore and Mumbai. Stage design and Text of theatre are influenced by European theatre. After independence, culture, and art, especially theatre have been neglected because of the political ideology of the nation. Lahore was a hub of cultural activities before independence so it continued after 1947. Folk theatre and storytelling are very popular entertainment. The tradition of the elite theatre was very confined to some elite.

It was present in English dramas and adaptations. Some glimpses of theatre can be seen in 1960-70 back in Pakistan. The theatre could not progress due to cinema attraction in Pakistan. With hard restrictions and the dictatorship of Zia's regime, a new form of theatre came into being called parallel theatre, like "*Tehre e Niswan*" in Karachi and *Ajoka* in Lahore in the early 80s. Rafi peer theatre workshop started in 1970 to promote local art and also organized theatre festivals in the country. Media Libration Act 2002 has reinvigorated Pakistani theatre. This research is quite similar to the underlying ongoing research. Historical aspects have been investigated in this study from earlier research articles. A number of research papers have also been discussed and interviews of theater professionals have been conducted to observe Pakistani theater in its true form. This research has been evaluated as art and culture. The analysis has been done keeping in view the historical background. The current research for which this research is viewed is examining theater as an organization from a communicative perspective. Also, the researcher is focusing on the condition of theater post-independence. With regard to Pakistani theatre, this research will not only help in furthering the research work but will also play a significant role in filling the knowledge gap in the field of communication research.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The nature of the research is qualitative, for data collection, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews of playwrights, directors, and actors associated with Pakistani theatre, from which primary data was obtained. Interviews were conducted using the snowball sampling technique. In addition, pre-existing articles, interviews, and books (as secondary data) have been used. All the members who were interviewed were asked a direct research question on which they expressed their expert opinion.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Samia Mumtaz (Theatre and TV Actress)**

She has been connected with the performing arts since 1990. She has six years of theatre experience in Canada. She has been working with the Ajoka and the Sunggat theatre. She has also been working with Olomopolo Media Production since 2014. It is observed that the theatre is ignored due to its ideology. It was not liked, because it was considered that arts and culture are rooted in Hindustan. Pakistan needs new things altogether. So, the new state was very confused regarding the arts and culture policy. Theatre activity has been discouraged in Pakistan as compared to India, Bangladesh, and the other countries of the region. It is performed in every street and the Muhallas. Theatre just provides awareness to the public, but the establishment does not want public education and wisdom. There is a very low frequency of theatre performances and also there are very few groups of theatre in Pakistan. It is not enough; there should be more and more groups with their performances because it is needed a lot in Pakistan for development, but it is too hard to do the theatre voluntarily in the system of capitalism. Theatre is not a profession, it is a commitment, when it becomes a profession, it loses all its value, and objectives. There is no theatre and film industry in Pakistan. Some people are doing it on their behalf. It can be an industry with the involvement of the state, but it takes ages.

### **Shahid Nadeem (Ajoka Theatre, Writer, Director who also received Pride of Performance)**

Shahid Mehmood Nadeem, the executive director of Ajoka Theatre. You were also associated with Pakistan Television for a long time but had to leave due to ideological differences. Your theater plays were also telecasted like Nele Haat and Jum Jum Jeeve Juman Pura etc. Theatre is the oldest medium of communication. With the whole story of the history of the theater, when Pakistan came into being, the main issue was the ideology. Arts were a prohibited area for the artists in Pakistan, it was the ideology. Many artists migrated to India, and many came to Pakistan. The space of migrated people couldn't be filled. Besides this, the theatre was performed on and off after the partition. Most of the people who practiced theatre in Pakistan like in National Theatre Karachi, Safdar Mir in Lahore, and Peshawar Cultural Center were leftist. They all people were not local rooted they were inspired by the Russian socialist revolution and others. Theatre requires political, cultural, and state support for its development like in India. The theatre itself does not have enough finance for self-growth. Arts cannot excel without true democracy. Theatre is a very tough job; it is everytime new and it requires finance. Theatre is a very expensive medium. Only the excise and taxation officials do not breathe here. Rests of the problems are another case. The state and society are not supportive of the theatre culture. There is no big sponsor like multinational companies for this type of theatre. The English theatre and folk theatre have almost ended in Pakistan. A few new groups started working but are not granted for the future. Educational institutes can secure the future of theatre in Pakistan if they start theatre programs.

### **Jamal Shah (Actor, Director, Writer and Painter)**

Mr. Shah was born in Quetta and got his education from there. He is the founder of Karvan Theatre. He has worked a lot in Baluchistan, and now he is living in Islamabad. Here he has developed the Hunar Kada Institute for art. The institute also organizes theatre workshops and gives training. He has also been associated with Baluchistan University and the Pakistan National Council of Arts. It has performed "Punja Shakunja" repeatedly for nine days in Pakistan National Arts (PNCA) in Islamabad recently. It is a black comedy; it is the political history of Pakistan. The largest theatre festival, CEPAC cultural activities was organized under the supervision of Jamal Shah when he was in PNCA. The ideology of Pakistan is totally against the arts despite this region having a very rich culture of arts since prehistory. Every language in Pakistan has its own culture, all are neglected, so what about the theatre? Art is the identity of a human being, art tells people about their surroundings. Art is the basic necessity of human beings but here it is considered a luxury of life. Dance and theatre is the weakest part of arts in Pakistan. Art is considered entertainment but it is the source of change, it is a method of social change. That is why the theatre has not been developed in Pakistan. Few efforts are seen here at the individual level, like indigenous and folk theatre, but could not be converted into the institutional structure. It is observed that another tide of the theatre in Zia's regime, in Pakistan. It was so strong, like serious political theatre and a commercial theatre in Pakistan. Art can uplift the economy; it can bring change through theatre education. The arts council

should be run by artists, the government should only facilitate them. It is not the work of bureaucracy. These groups are very few and have nothing to do because they do not have finances, their efforts are being appreciated.

**Fiza Hassan (CEO of Theatre Wale, Teacher, Writer, Director, and Performer)**

Fiza has been working as a teacher in Islamabad for the last twenty years. She has been working with the theatre since 2005. She said that she is a teacher because the classroom is also a theatre room which is why she is a teacher. Theatre is very costly for the common man, so it should be subsidized so that people can connect with it. Theatre is public art. It should be enhanced and enlarged. Huge activities are required for the Pakistani public and it is too low in Pakistan. Huge finance is required to strengthen the theatre in Pakistan and it can only be through the government with the collaboration of the corporate sector. The narrative of the government was quite different as compared to the theatre art after the partition. Theatre is the naked truth and was also stigmatized in Pakistan.

Saleem Bukhari describes the situation of theatre in Pakistan after partition. There was everything settled in India. The political institution, economic condition, and organizational structure were in the working position. Pakistan was a baby in 1947. Everything was new. There were too many problems like the rehabilitation of migrated people from India to Pakistan. The economy was very poor, the constitution was not ready, the organizational structure was not proper, and the Kashmir war. It was very hard to think about stage play and theatre in such conditions. The theatre was already ruined in War World II. Agha Hashir's theatre was destroyed but despite all these matters, there were small scattered groups of theatres in Pakistan. They had continued their struggle and work. It was Government College which presented the first theatre play in (1950-51). It was based on a translation of Shakespeare's "Mid Summer Night Dream". Another play was played in Government College by Naeem Tahir. It was "Government Inspector". It was also an adaptation. Khwaja Moin-Ud-din started working in Karachi at the same time. "Zawal-e-Hyderabad" was played in Karachi under the supervision of Maulvi Abdul Haq (Baba-e-Urdu). It was an individual-level effort. The University of Peshawar played a very important role in rehabilitating the theatre plays in the early years. Theatre grabbed greater attention in 1950. A German lady Sigirdkahle established the Clifton Players Club. It presented many dramas in Karachi in a struggling period. Khwaja Moin joined this club after some time. Art Council Lahore was formed in late 1948. It was the first cultural organization in Pakistan. Fazal Kamal, Aslam Azhar, Mohsin Sherazi, Freed Ahmad, and Zia Mohiyy-Ud-Din were very prominent theatre players in 1955. "Bakheel" a theatre play was played by an actor and directed by Naeem Tahir in 1956, at Government College. "Mujrim Kon" a theatre play was also presented by Naeem Tahir in 1956. It was based on socio-political criticism. It is said, it was the first professional theatre play. It regained its production cost by 100 rupees per ticket.

The drama was translated by Izhar Kazmi and directed by Naeem Tahir for the Art Council. The duration of the drama was 90 minutes and it continued 14 nights consecutively. It was also played in Karachi under the supervision of Khwaja Moin-Ud-Din. Three more dramas were produced and directed by Naeem, which were; Aadaab Araz (1958), Soe Kahan (1959), and Aap Ki Tareef (1960). The Bureau of National Reconstruction presented "Aur Shabnam Rotthi Rahi", Aasia Khan played the Punjabi Play "Pag" played in an open-air theatre in Lahore. "Babra Sahib" was performed by Agha Babur in Rawalpindi. "Hans Ki Chal" by Nazir Zaigham, Aap Ki Tareef, and "Kanjoos" by Naeem, was converted into the repertoire. These plays had a major role in the development of theatre in Pakistan during the second decade of Pakistan (1963-1970). Naseer-Ud-Din played many dramas in Cotton Mills in Lyallpur (Faisalabad) during the same period. Bano Qudsia wrote her first script for theatre "Ik Tery Aane Se Pehle" and got 2000 rupees for it. She wrote five more plays for theatre which were "Adhi Bat", "Manzil Manzil", "Khawaboon Kay Musafir" and "Sitamgar Tere Liae". Intazar Hussain wrote "Darad Ki Dawa Kia Hae". Theatre drama writing became a profession and many other names came into the field like Anwar Sajjad, Sufi Nisar, Rashid Umer Thanvi, Attiqullah Sheikh, Begum Imtiaz Ali Taj, Salim Chishti, Asghar Butt and Sajjad Haidar. Theatre got some impetus when local administration in major cities started sponsoring plays. The most active among them were Sialkot, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Faisalabad, Multan, Sahiwal, Rahim Yar Khan, Hyderabad, and Jaccobabad. Some prominent actors of the theatre of the time were Qavi Khan, Masood Akhtar, Ali Ejaz, Athar Shah Khan, Kamal Ahmad Rizvi, Nazir Begum, and Attiya Sharaf

### **Moneer Raj**

Moneer Raj narrates the history of theatre post-partition, in 1947, after partition, Karachi became the capital of Pakistan. Many actors, directors, and writers migrated from India and settled in Karachi. In 1948, Khuwaja Moin-Ud-Din and Ali Ahmad reorganized the theatre in Karachi. Ali Ahmad developed people's theatre and Moin worked for the Karachi Art Council. Khuwaja Moin presented "Lal Qalah Se Laloo Khet", "Mirza Ghalib Bander Road Par" and Taleem-e-Balghan whereas Ali Ahmad staged Wadi-e-Kashmir. Now the prominent name is Zia Mohiyy-Ud-Din in Karachi. He presented "Sea Gul" at the Karachi Art Council and it is very much appreciated. The Sea Gull was the translation of Chekhov's.

Bhatti (2016) narrates the history of theatre in Lahore according to him Rafi Peer theatre was established in 1974. It is a private theatre company but it is said, it is a non-governmental and nonprofit organization. The workshop presented many plays like "Culture and Exercise" (1974), "Raz-o-Niaz" (1975), "Khareed-o-Farokht" (1981), "Gumnam Dairy" (1995), "Ye Janta Agar" (2002/2009). There are long lists of Dramas that were staged by Rafi Peer. Most of the scripts were written by Rafi Peer Jee and performed again after his death. These plays were presented throughout the country and also out of Pakistan. Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop is the biggest theatre company in Pakistan. In 1971, Ajoka Theatre was formed by Shahid Nadeem but it started its work in 1983 practically. Ajoka theatre staged plays in both languages i.e. Urdu and Punjabi. Ajoka's first play was "Jaloos" which was written by Badal Sarkar. It is not a commercial organization. The plays Chack Chakra (1985) and Mangalpur Ka Insan (1988) were an adaptation of Brecht. The Plays "Chullah" (1989), "Teesri Dastak" (1991), "Dekh Tamasha" (1992) "Jum Jum Jive Jaman Pura" (1995), "Kala Mendha Bhaes" (1996), "Adhori" (2002), "Dukh Darya" (2006), "Burqavaganza" (2008), "Dara" (2009) all were written by Shahid Nadeem and directed by Madeeha Ghour. America Chalo was presented in 2011. All these plays are based on social and political issues. Ajoka organized Many theatre festivals, like the First Pak-Bharat Festival (2004) under the title of "Zanani", the second festival "PunjPani" (2005), Third and fourth "Punj Pani" (2006-2007). Musafat and peace festivals were organized in 2009 and 2010.

Ajoka started youth festivals in 1998. This tradition lasted till 2012. The theatre festival was introduced by Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop in 1990 in Pakistan. Rafi Peer Workshop organized many International festivals (1992-2008) until 2008. After the Millennium this international festival converted into World Performing Arts Festivals. Bhatti (2016) also describes the history of children's theatre in Pakistan. There was two little theatre or children's theatre in Pakistan; one was in Rawalpindi and the other was in Lahore. Ali Ahmad established a children's theatre in Lahore. Sufi Tabassum Academy, Rafi Peer workshop, Naya Theatre, Samina Ahmad production, Alhamra Art Council, and American Council worked for children's theatre in Pakistan after Ali Ahmad. Children's Little Theatre was formed by Aziz Asri. The theatre performed its first play "Naya School" in 1969. This theatre group has been providing its services for a long period to children. It performed three drams for the children, affected by the Oujhri camp incident in Rawalpindi. Ajoka Children Theatre (ACT) performed its first play for children "Kali Ghatta" (1994), and then "Band Gali" (2000), "Khwab Sache Ho Sakte Haen" (2012). ACT has organized some theatre workshops for children. Many other theatre groups and organizations have been working in Pakistan to date like Punjab Lok Raahs (1986), Sungat (2000), Tehreek-e-Niswan (1979), Dastak (1982), Murk Theatre, Interactive Resource Center Lahore (IRC, 2000). These groups and organizations are very political. These are playing a very vital role in the proliferation of theatre groups and for social change in Pakistan.

It is observed there are so many big and small groups of theatre in Pakistan but not documented anywhere in arts councils, as a registered company. Mundarawala mentioned in her research that IRC formed 80 theatre groups in 88 districts of Pakistan (Mundrawala, 2009). Lok Raahs and Sungat also organized workshops and training programs in far furlong areas of Pakistan like Ajoka Theatre, Tehreek-e-Niswan, and Rafi Peer. There are many new theatre groups formed because of these training programs. It is needed to patronize and document these groups.

## DISCUSSION & RESULTS

In opening the topic, research methods, importance, and objectives were highlighted in the introduction part. In the backgrounder of this study, the theater is examined in which historical evidence from prehistory to the time before the partition has been brought to the fore.

The background of the study makes it clear that theater has had a very strong tradition and culture in the region. Moreover, this tradition and culture emerged with, if not older than, the oldest civilizations in the rest of the world.

The literature review not only shows the seriousness of the research on this topic in Pakistan but also creates justification for the current research. It also clarifies the similarities and differences among the studies. Keeping this literature review in mind, the research question for this study has been constructed and the selection of the topic has been finalized. And for this research, the scientific research method has been tying up.

The method of in-depth interviews of experts and written historical studies on existing Pakistani theater were used to clarify the research question of the study. The results were guided by the methodology of the research.

The unanimous opinion of the interviewing experts is that when Pakistan came into being this medium was spoiled due to lack of focus and unfavorable situation at that time. The state is still baffled as to whether art and culture are ideologically right or wrong. A few years later there were some attempts to use theater on an individual level, but they were not enough. In the capitalistic system, it is very difficult to do the theater voluntarily. It requires a lot of capital and there is no special sponsor for this work. If the state has the will, this work is not difficult, the theater can develop and play an important role in the development of the country and raising public awareness, but this is not what the establishment wants.

The various eras of theatrical performances documented after the creation of Pakistan have been comprehensively but succinctly summarized in this study. Bangladesh was a center for art and culture before its separation from Pakistan. There are references to cultural and literary activities before the creation of Pakistan, but unfortunately, these historical facts have disappeared somewhere after Pakistan. This historical heritage of Pakistan and its strong theater tradition needs to be explored.

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