

Theatre Acting: Navigating New Challenges in the Modern Era in Indian Context

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Abstract:

Theatre acting in India has undergone significant transformations in recent decades due to technological advancements, shifting audience expectations, and evolving societal norms. This article explores the multifaceted challenges faced by actors in contemporary Indian theatre. By examining scholarly literature and interviews with industry professionals, it delves into modern acting techniques, mental health considerations, and the need for versatility. The findings highlight the resilience and adaptability of actors, showcasing their ability to navigate the complexities of the modern era while maintaining the core essence of their craft.

Keywords: Theatre, Acting, Mental Health, Versatility, Technology Participation.

Introduction

Theatre, as an art form, has long reflected the socio-cultural zeitgeist, embodying changes in societal values, political movements, and artistic innovations. In India, this art form is deeply rooted in a tradition that spans from classical performances like *Kathakali* and *Yakshagana* to experimental and contemporary productions. However, modern actors face unprecedented challenges brought about by digital transformation, evolving audience behaviors, and heightened competition from alternative entertainment mediums. This article

examines these challenges in detail, exploring strategies to help actors adapt and thrive within India's ever-changing theatrical landscape.

The Changing Audience Landscape

Theatre audiences today engage with entertainment across a spectrum of platforms, from live performances to on-demand streaming services. This shift has significantly altered audience expectations, requiring actors to adapt their performance styles. The immediacy of digital media, characterized by short attention spans and a demand for visually appealing content, has added to the

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complexity of sustaining engagement during live performances. Moreover, smartphones and social media distractions have become constant competitors for the audience's attention.

To address these challenges, theatre practitioners are adopting innovative strategies. Interactive performances, which directly involve the audience, have proven effective in maintaining focus. Similarly, productions incorporating technologies such as augmented reality enhance the theatrical experience, blending traditional storytelling with modern tools. Shorter play formats and segmented productions also cater to audiences with limited time, ensuring accessibility while preserving artistic quality.

Technological Distractions

The digital age has introduced a new dimension of challenges for live theatre. Smartphones, social media, and streaming services offer constant distractions, often drawing audiences away from the immersive experience of live performances. Actors must compete with these distractions while maintaining their focus and delivering compelling portrayals.

One approach to counteract these distractions is immersive theatre, where audiences actively participate in the performance, breaking the traditional boundaries between actors and spectators. Interactive storytelling techniques, as seen in productions by Rangashankara in Bangalore and Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai,

keep audiences engaged and invested. Additionally, training actors to use digital tools creatively, blending live and virtual mediums, can help sustain theatre's relevance in a technology-driven world.

Mental Health and Emotional Resilience

The emotional demands of theatre acting often take a toll on actors' mental health. The transient nature of theatre contracts, combined with the pressures of delivering consistent, impactful performances, leads to stress, anxiety, and sometimes burnout. Immersive roles that require actors to deeply embody characters can amplify these challenges.

To address these issues, actors are adopting coping mechanisms such as mindfulness, therapy, and physical exercise. Peer support groups within theatre communities provide a safe space for sharing experiences and seeking advice. Organizations like the National School of Drama (NSD) are increasingly emphasizing mental health awareness, conducting workshops on stress management, and offering resources to help actors maintain emotional equilibrium. The growing openness among prominent Indian actors to discuss mental health has further encouraged the destigmatization of these challenges in the theatre community.

Versatility in an Interdisciplinary World

The intersection of theatre with other art forms, including film, dance, music, and visual arts, demands versatility from

modern actors. To remain competitive, actors are expanding their skill sets, blending traditional acting techniques with elements of other disciplines. For instance, contemporary productions often integrate traditional Indian art forms such as *Bharatanatyam* and *Koodiyattam* with modern storytelling techniques, enriching performances with a fusion of styles.

Training institutions like NSD and workshops across India now incorporate interdisciplinary approaches in their curricula. These programs include voice modulation, dance, martial arts, and digital media training, ensuring actors are equipped for both stage and screen. Collaborative workshops with international artists and institutions bring fresh perspectives, helping Indian actors refine their craft and embrace global practices.

The Digital Dilemma

The rise of the attention economy has deeply influenced how audiences engage with theatre. The ubiquity of smartphones and constant online connectivity often detracts from the immersive nature of live performances. Actors must now adapt to capture and hold the attention of audiences distracted by digital alternatives.

This shift has highlighted the differences between acting for stage and screen. While stage acting relies on exaggerated expressions to convey emotions across a physical distance, screen acting demands precision and

subtlety due to the intimate nature of close-up shots. Understanding and mastering these nuances are vital for actors to navigate the demands of both mediums.

Emotional Well-Being in Cultural Context

Mental health remains a sensitive topic in India, making it essential for the theatre community to lead efforts in promoting emotional well-being. Peer support groups within theatre troupes foster open communication, while mental health workshops provide actors with tools to manage stress effectively. The cultural stigma surrounding mental health is gradually diminishing, with initiatives aimed at educating actors about the importance of self-care and seeking help when needed.

Balancing Tradition and Innovation

Theatre in India remains a delicate balance between preserving its rich classical roots and embracing contemporary innovations. Classical techniques rooted in the *Natyashastra* provide a foundation for actors, while modern approaches encourage experimentation and risk-taking. Productions that blend immersive theatre with site-specific performances push the boundaries of traditional storytelling, offering audiences fresh and engaging experiences.

Conclusion

Indian theatre actors today face a dynamic and multifaceted landscape,

characterized by technological advancements, evolving audience behaviors, and increasing mental health awareness. By embracing innovation, prioritizing emotional well-being, and honing interdisciplinary skills, actors are redefining their craft for the modern era. Their resilience and adaptability not only sustain theatre's relevance but also ensure its continued ability to inspire and captivate audiences across generations.

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