

ABSTRACT

Title: Theatre and the Popular: a Study of the Bhramyamaan Theatre in Assam

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The Dissertation highlights the popular parameters of Bhramyamaan theatre through some of the Western theories of popular culture and popular theatre. The role of the artists and producers is important in the process of production. But it is essential to study the process of reception in order to understand the popular parameters. The objective of this research is to explore various dimensions of popularity including concepts of production and reception of popular culture and to assess the process of construction of Bhramyamaan theatre as a popular art form. In this process, the role of audience is highlighted which has been neglected so far by the theatre critics.

The thesis counters the practice of projecting “subjective responses of the critics” and underlines the “potential diversity of collective and individual response”. In Bhramyamaan theatre, the reviewers constantly condemn the theatre for lack of quality plays but also recognize the wide reception it enjoys, although they project this as a result of attracting audiences, with inferior taste. This happens due to overwhelming response from the audience in commercially successful and popular Bhramyamaan plays. So, there should be no “ideological exclusion” and “assertions about audience response” and one should do away with “tendencies to generalize about audiences and to judge them

without evidence". It is also to be taken into account that individuals can take different viewing positions.

The socio-political and historical paradigm shifts influence the 'horizon of expectations' of the audience/spectators. A diachronic approach has to be adopted while analyzing the reception of Bhramyamaan theatre. However, a synchronic analysis of reception, too, is essential as it is evident that there are multiple interpretive communities existing at the same historical point. There is, essentially, a problem of grouping audiences in the same interpretive community across time. The problem lies in the fact that there are no uniform/definite principles that combine audiences into one community across time. There are similarities that may bring them into one category. But the boundary fluctuates. This happens because the audiences as individuals are not bound to stick to their positions. They may change their "subject positions" at will. It is only through an analysis of the actual responses of the theatre-goers that one can create, or rather imagine the communities. Therefore, while discussing the "horizon of expectations" of the "interpretive communities" one actually looks at these "imagined communities" which constantly change diachronically and synchronically.

The study reveals that there are abstract lines that differentiate one "taste public" or "interpretive community" from another. While discussing the sociology of responses, it is found that one's educational background, profession and shared experience are essential elements that influence the audiences. The consciousness or lack of belonging to a certain community in a society is reflected in one's response to Bhramyamaan theatre.