

METAPHORICAL THINKING CENTRAL TO AN ARTS/PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION AND THE TRANSCENDING PROCESS IN INDIAN PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION

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Abstract

The process of metaphorical thinking is inherent in all learning but particularly in the Arts. Artists and poets engage in metaphorical thinking because they have to think in pictures rather than in words. Metaphorical thinking together with analogical thinking are creative thinking processes. Yet, Hindu Philosophy and philosophers like Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, etc. speak of a Transcending Process - from the Outer to the Inner man - which can be achieved equally through the Arts/Performing Arts. This paper draws a parallel between the process of metaphorical thinking central to works of art (Music, Dance, Drama, Painting, etc.) - which results into, what Aristotle calls as a "creative act"; and the process of transgression from the Outer to the Inner Dimension - stated as the purpose of the Arts/Performing Arts ('Natyā') according to the Natya Shastra.

Keywords: *Metaphorical Thinking, Indian Performing Arts, Inner Transgression, Hindu Philosophy, Arts/Performing Arts Education*

Many religions have used what they call, 'wisdom tales' – for e.g. the Japanese Zen stories, Middle Eastern Sufi tales, Indian Mythology, Greek Aesop fables, Bible tales/parables, Chinese Taoist parables and others. These wisdom tales are metaphorical sources which have been used as teaching tools to provoke metaphorical thinking.

Central to an Arts/Performing Arts education is metaphorical thinking. For a brief definition: The metaphor is a figure of speech – for e.g. 'Love is a fragile flower'. We know that love is not a flower but you can picture the feeling of love opening through the image of an opening flower. An analogy is for e.g. when the solar system in which planets orbit around the sun, is compared to the atomic structure of an atom where electrons rotate around a central nucleus. Stories in the form of a series of images or metaphors, analogies (i.e. a multilevel form of metaphor or an extended use of metaphor) are called allegories. Scientifically, metaphorical thinking is thinking in images. To simplify, in analogical & metaphorical thinking, your thoughts leave the left part of the brain to make analogical associations in the creative right part of the brain. In other words, your thoughts leave the left logical hemisphere of the brain to capture meaning through pictures and emotions in the right part of the brain – this brain process is called abstract thinking, an analytical ability which goes beyond seeing images. These brain processes happen in the right brain area associated to manipulation of visual forms which is a creative act – as opposed to duplication of visual forms in the left brain area which is memorization, repetition. Aristotle calls this stretching or this extension of our imagination/ our thoughts from the left to the right part of the brain as an interpretative effort. According to Aristotle, this is a creative act which requires intuitive perception. Metaphors therefore position information graphically in your brain so that you structure and organize it. With metaphorical thinking, you shift your frame of reference to make new connections and this results in creations/innovations – which, using the words of Aristotle, metaphors "bring new truths in view" (Driscoll, 2012). Because metaphorical/analogical thinking is central to works of art, an Arts/Performing arts education uses "arts strategies as pedagogical tools" (Ewing, 2010) to stretch our interpretative effort / the imagination, through analogies & metaphors. This stretching of our interpretative effort towards the creative act - through intuitive perception - according to Aristotle, cannot be learnt from others because it is what primarily discovers, it is the underlying condition of all learning.

The use of metaphorical/analogical thinking is evident in Hindu Philosophy or Hinduism through its mythological/allegorical stories, images of gods, goddesses & symbolic rituals - in order to explain universal philosophical Truths, concepts and values – which are also transmitted and vehicled through the medium of the Arts & Performing Arts (e.g. Dance, Music, Painting, Drama, Poetry, etc).

The main objective of using the Arts/Performing Arts was to give more visual/ aural impact to the philosophical/symbolical concepts i.e. to make them more appealing to the eyes, the ears – 'a feast for the mind'. A very good example is the Indian Classical Dance where we dance stories of Hindu mythology which are

in fact, allegorical stories containing high philosophical Universal Truths of the Vedas. The ‘Tarangam’ - Plate (& pot) Dance of the Kuchipudi classical dance [see opposite photo], for instance, illustrates philosophically the 3 phases of spirituality or spiritual development as explained in the Bhagavad Gita: i) ‘Bhakti Yoga’ – the dancer standing on the brim of a plate remains above the floor - where the floor represents the ‘material world’. This symbolizes the detachment of man’s senses from the material world. ii) ‘Jnana Yoga’ – then, the dancer’s concentration flowing upward to balance a pot on the head symbolizes man’s constant mental concentration directed upwards i.e. towards Divinity. iii) ‘Karma Yoga’ – at the end of the dance, the dancer waves the arms with lamps in her hands - these, together with the light above the pot, on the head of the dancer, symbolize that: once man has detached himself from the material world and kept his constant focus upward towards Divinity, only then can he receive Enlightenment (represented by the light above the head of the dancer) and only then, can he radiate Light around him (represented by the waving of the lights in the dancer’s hands).



For Music, Mahatma Gandhi says (Bhatia, 1992): “We shall consider music in a narrow sense to mean the ability to sing and play an instrument very well carrying a tune and marking the correct beats of time – but – in its wider sense, that is to say that true music is created only when life is attuned to a single tune and a single beat. Music is born only where the strings of the heart are not out of tune. R. Tagore says (Bhatia, 1992): “It is the duty of every human being to master at least to some extent not only the language of the intellect, but also the language of the personality which is the language of the arts.”

From the above brief analysis, Indian Performing Arts education therefore constitutes in itself a vehicle or a medium for “Going Beyond”. “Going Beyond” will therefore consist of immersing the human mind into the very essence of Indian Performing Arts which takes us to the CORE DEPTH of the philosophical & symbolical world of Hindu philosophy - in other words, imprinting the human mind with a Sense of Meaning. “Going Beyond” to the Ultimate Inner Depth of the Arts equals instilling i.e. infusing a spirit for Transcending. Transgressing, Transcending from the Outer Beauty to the Inner Beauty : - thro Music, from the Outer Sound to the Inner Sound - thro Dance, from the Outer Form to the Inner Form - - thro Drama, from the Outer Being to the Inner Being

The ancient Hindu sacred text of the Science of Dramaturgy, the Natya Shastra states the purpose of the Arts/Performing Arts in Verses 108 – 109: “This teaches duty to those who go against duty, love to those who are eager for its fulfilment, and it chastises those who are ill-bred or unruly, promotes self-restraint in those who are disciplined, gives courage to cowards, energy to heroic persons, enlightens men of poor intellect and gives wisdom to the learned.

The evolution of Indian Performing Arts Education in this 21st century can only but meet back the mystical, educational purpose of the Arts/Performing Arts as per Hindu Philosophy, unless it aims at a continuing Transcending process of “Going Beyond” i.e. Transgressing from the outer to the inner man. This could be achieved only if the Arts/Performing Arts become an integral component of education for the holistic development of man. The metaphorical thinking process is rather a rational and scientific analysis, whereas the transcending process from the outer to the inner world of man seems to be more of a subtle spiritual

realization - therefore mystical. But what relates both processes is the Intuitive Sight or Perception as an end-result of what the Arts/Performing Arts can consequently lead man into.

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