CHAPTER II

WORK DONE TILL NOW
CHAPTER II

WORK DONE TILL NOW

Theatre in Education began in 1965 as a project undertaken by the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. A remarkable thing was that all the founder members were trained teachers. During the 1960’s, a gradual change was taking place in the realms of ideas and education. All over the world, conventions were undergoing radical changes and these changes were shaping up a revolution. This revolutionary change affected every subject of importance- including education and theatre. As a prelude to the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry was the meeting of the three veterans of theatre Anthony Richardson, the Chairman of Belgrade Theatre Trust, the Chairman of the Education Committee, the playwright David Turner and Gordon Vallins. A notification was published in The Coventry Evening Telegraph and huge amount of money was collected for Belgrade Theatre to the tune of 28000 Pounds. Brian Way, who had been pioneering children’s theatre for a long time brought out a book entitled Development through Drama. Gordon Vallins piloted what was to become the first TIE team which is in fact rooted in the schools in Coventry. Roemasry Birbeck who succeeded him began to develop further the resources of theatre and the skills of the teacher-actor. A play Who was to Blame?(1970) was devised to train children in problem solving, self exploration and decision making. Car Makers(1971) explored the chequered history of Coventry engineers and car makers. Poverty Knocks and Price of Coal were two other plays written and produced to train students in the same kind of psychological skills. The performers working with the education of children
gave themselves the name of an “Actor-Teacher”. The role and qualities of an actor teacher have in detail been enlisted by Mike Kay in his article “The Actor Teacher” which in fact is an interview of Romy Baskerville (Learning through Theatre, ed. Tony Jackson, Manchester: Manchester Univ. press, 1980).

We should however trace back the history of the TIE movement to 1930s when Bertolt Brecht wanting to teach theatre to school children was suspected by the powers that be. As a strong comment to such resistance he wrote:

Generally there is felt to be a very sharp distinction between learning and amusing oneself. The first may be useful but only the second is pleasant… Well, all that can be said is that the contrast between learning and amusing oneself is not laid down by the divine rule; it is not one that has always been and must continue to be. Theatre remains theatre, even when it is instructive theatre, and in so far as it is good theatre it will amuse. ("Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction", in Brecht on Theatre, ed. J. Willet, Methuen, 1974).

Education was no more what it used to be. The old methods that required learning to be limited to talking and listening were losing rationality. New educationists realized the importance of teaching through experience and direct contact and started making their way towards it- children were beginning to work in groups on projects. Introducing the practical aspect of learning in education opened new doors for the students, enriching their life culturally. In theatre too, things were changing. The limits were being pushed, in order to try new ideas and styles, looking at new topics for the content and exploring theatre outside of the theatres themselves.

The people who started TIE were influenced by this change in society. They were radical thinkers and were unsatisfied by the way things were. They wanted to bring a change in society, questioning everything and having a form of theatre that could do this. Social issues had to be addressed that were relevant and immediate for their audiences. The entertainment in theatre was not enough, and so they linked it with
The Belgrade Theatre project, *Pow Wow*, took a group of children and they formed a relationship with a cowboy. They then met an Indian who was kept in a cage as a prisoner. The children were given information about both characters and their opposing views in the situation. In the end, they had to decide whether to free the poisoned Indian or not. Their loyalties at this point were split between the two.

The project had successfully merged theatre and education together in a new way that had never been seen before. From this beginning, TIE companies had to create their own work. This was done either by the company members or by a playwright. But of course every idea was just as good as the last because it was something totally new and specific (Time, age, society and geography, for example). After Belgrade, many other TIE companies appeared in England: Bolton, Glasgow, Leeds, Nottingham. The companies offered a free service that funded the LEA, which meant that schools didn’t have to pay.

The TIE companies consisted of about 4-6 actors and took one class at a time. The actor also doubled up as a teacher. The program for TIE went as follows:

The performance did not stand alone, but was part of an educational package. There would be a preview and a discussion with the teachers. There would be pre-work in the classroom. The TIE company would often make more than one visit. Classroom work took in between the performances.

Follow-up work in the classroom after the theatre company had finished its involvement. The TIE companies work would often last a full term.

The children would be involved in all sorts of ways, either in a role or as themselves, and getting them to face up to important decisions in the performance. The children’s involvement was crucial in aiding the development of TIE.
This program continued to develop throughout the 1970's, but there were problems with the structure of some of the companies, with content, form, and whether writers are better than devising the performances and so on. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) formed the Cockpit TIE team to promote theatre among the younger generation of the learners.

A group called HM School's Inspectors surveyed the work of theatre companies in schools and published its report called *Actors in Schools*. In 1975, 'Standing Conference of Young People's Theatre' was formed to represent the interests of TIE to funding bodies to the national and international conferences by way of promoting debates and discussion. Detailed account of such developments has been in D. Bradby and J. McCormick's *People's Theatre* (Croom Helm, 1978).

The TIE movement by 1979 had grown promisingly. The 1979 edition of the *British Alternative Theatre Directory* lists twenty one TIE companies in Britain doing full-fledged TIE work. There are more than sixty touring children's theatre companies or companies doing puppet theatre for children which are partially engaged in TIE work.

In the early Thatcher years of the 1980's, funding for Theatre in Education was cut. The Tories believed that art should be value for money, and in theatre terms, TIE was too expensive. And so, many TIE companies vanished. Those that could survive were told to find sponsors, but even then schools were finding it hard to fit TIE into their new timetables, which meant that the companies were getting less work than before.

The 1980's saw another change to society. Politically, the government wasn't so keen on experimental theatre and pushed their views of 'value for money.' The education system was changing, which meant that funding was nonexistent and making TIE companies charge for their visits. (An average £250 for just one class). Drama was taken out from the National Curriculum and then put back in - but not as a core subject, serving the English syllabus and other subjects. Due to the league tables,
schools were concentrating on the ‘basics’ – literacy and numeracy. (More ‘simple’ than ‘basic’).

Theatre itself was changing too, with audience participation going out of fashion and the call for more artistic experience. It was felt that there was too much emphasis on education, not theatre. In the end, TIE companies could not decide the conditions for their work – the schools did. This meant a performance followed by a workshop was becoming more common, sometimes to more than one class at the same time putting too much pressure on the companies. The schools even began to censor the content and some still do up to today.

The end of the 1990’s is a world totally different to that of the 1960’s. Technology has stepped up, communication is growing even more and everything in the world can be seen in the newspapers, on the radio or on television. We have access to all of this and we can choose to ignore the problems and hope that they go away.

But there are some things that the children are more aware of than the rest of us: things that are happening in schools, on the playground, on the way home, in the local park. It could be bullying, drugs, gang fighting and so on.

These things are probably the equivalent to what’s happening in the world to a child. To us, it might not be as important as watching the tension between countries getting tighter or worrying about your income. Schools will look at issues, such as bullying and drugs with the children, but it is not enough. They can only explain and show them so much without going too far.

By now the TIE has developed three significant programs, namely, *It Fits*, *Poverty Knocks*, and *Marches*. *It Fits* is a program about Mathematics and problem solving for five-to-seven-year olds. In this program, two characters are used and are asked to play out their role in a big hall in a space of sixty minutes.
Poverty Knocks is a program in learning of history for ten-to-twelve year olds. It is based in the historical event of the riot of the Chartists in 1830. The students are divided into two groups, the factory workers and the handloom workers.

Marches is a program made to sensitize the students on the evil of racial prejudice. It is designed for fifteen-to-nineteen year olds. It is a full scale play performance. A semi participatory program Case of Craig and Bentley (Coventry TIE 1975) for young people aged fifteen-to-seventeen outlines the attempted illegal entry of a warehouse by Christopher Craig aged sixteen and rather backward nineteen-year-old Derek Bentley, leading to the shooting and subsequent death of a police officer. The case unfolds American legal sensibilities through the court trial of these two young boys.

Theatre is used as a “central stimulus for a deeper and richer learning process” (Tony Jackson, p ix). Several terms are used for the variety of TIE experiments. Young People’s Theatre (a broad term used to cover all kinds of theatre including TIE); Children’s Theatre (Professional theatre meant for children studying in schools); Youth Theatre ((non-professional theatre practices by young artistes).

It is also interesting to know that several terms have been coined for the professionals of TIE. The first is “Theatre education or how theatre works”. The term is used for the process of establishing links between the theatre performers and the schools and the clubs. It refers to the process of telling the audience in schools what theatre is and how it works and how it creates theatre audience for tomorrow.

The second term is “Examination plays workshops or play days”. The term refers to presenting a set of plays to the students along with an academic commentary on the theme, plot and characters of the plays presented. “Educational Dramas or Dramas in Education” (DIE) is yet another term used for the dramas taught in schools with a theatrical bias involving the preparation of a play for public presentation.

It is now concerned more with the exploration of themes and problems through role
plays and improvisation, with a stress upon developing the child's imagination, self awareness and expressiveness. Another term is “Simulation games” meaning an activity in which the children explore real life situations, solve problems, and make decisions in roles.

A comprehensive and authentic account of DIE can be found in J. Allen’s *Drama in Schools* (Heinemann, 1979), Mc Grover Robinson and Tate’s *Learning Through Drama* (Heinemann, 1979 and John O’Toole’s *Theatre in Education* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1976).

In India Ravindra Nath Tagore is considered to be the first modern Indian educationist who underlined the significance of art in learning process. To him art was not just an amusement but an essential ingredient in the provisions of learning. Learning without art and aesthetics was unthinkable for Tagore.

He provided for music, dance, theatre and painting as essential parts of curricula at every stage of formal education. Still on date Vishwa Bharti University founded by Tagore has the richest educational packages in art and aesthetics. Tagore defined three essential elements of education: 1. Mother tongue, not only as the medium of instruction but also as the major means of mutual communication between people. 2. Nature of which we are an inseparable part. 3. Creative activities.

With tongue in cheek expression Tagore seems to be advocating the need of theatre in education: The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but which brings our lives in harmony with all existence. And it is this education that is being systematically neglected in the school system. From the very beginning, information is forced into the minds of the children so that they are alienated from Nature. Instead of accepting the Earth as its home, humankind sets itself in competition with it and makes schemes to exploit it as if it were its servant. (Devi Prasad, *Education for Living Creatively and Peacefully*, p80)

What he called creative activities, Mahatma Gandhi defined as ‘meaningful manual work’. Gandhi’s concept of Buniyadi Talim, the basic education, was derived
essentially from Tagore’s method; the basic difference lied in utilization of the 
faculty earned. Tagore’s view was more elitist; he looked upon art as a means to take 
human consciousness to greater heights, while Gandhi associated the manual work 
with one’s livelihood and source of knowledge.(Devi Prasad, Education for Living 
Creatively and Peacefully, 89-90)

J. Krishnamurthy was the next to accept theatre and arts as essential input of 
education. In his Rishi Valley chain of schools, theatre is an essential part and very 
recently other courses are being taught in theatrical style. Heavy investments are 
being made to make the science teaching easy and understandable. For the purpose 
the teachers of such subjects are trained in essential HRD courses. In order to make 
better understanding of literary and scientific subjects, the Rishi Valley Rural 
Education Centre uses the traditional shadow play style of Andhra Pradesh. Both the 
children and parents perform themselves and enjoy such 
performance.(“Contextualizing the Curriculum”, contemporary education dialogue, 
4:1:2006, 25-51)

The TIE Co. of the National School of Drama Delhi was the first to start practice 
based researches in the field. The Co. has been rechristened as Sanskaar Rang Toli ( 
A group training students in good manners).

**Why Theatre in Education ?**

The National School of Drama established its Theatre-in-Education Company in 
October 1989 with the belief that it could provide a unique and valuable service for 
the children and teachers of Delhi schools in their pursuit of knowledge and 
development.

Barry John, in an introduction to the first brochure of the TIE Company gave a sort 
of his manifesto of his mission and vision about theatre in education concept. He 
said, the brochure was not the space to argue the point that Theatre and the Arts in
general take a very low priority in the curricula of most schools. Sufficient it was to say, he said, that what and how children learn were reflections of a society’s values and aspirations.

He declared that we happened to be in an age of science and technology, of commerce and industrial development. It is hardly surprising, then, that our schools resemble factories and office complexes, and that they make of education a profitable business. Nor is it surprising, he continues, that we see the role of the child as a uniformed, obedient little machine on a 10+2 years long assembly-line, being fitted with pre-packaged inputs of science, Math, Language, etc. and programmed to compete to memorize to pass exams. Or else to fail and be rejected.

He rued over the predicament that the children were made to be mini-replicas of adults in their own little rat-race; a rat-race that determines the direction and quality of the rest of their lives.

He questioned the basic lack of human and democratic rights in this system, its injustice and its denial of childhood. But he saw no choice for the students. He posed a question: “What can theatre contribute to education in such a context?”

Barry John goes on to explain that theatre, a major art form in most cultures of the world, has, since recorded history began, been a vehicle of personal community education. It has a central role in oral literary forms, in the recording of society’s history (whether actual or mythological), in religious and secular celebrations and rituals. He comes to an essential conclusion that man’s fascination for transformation or role playing for witnessing and being affected by theatrical representations of life and mind, is seemingly universal and eternal.

Barry John avers that as we find the instincts of theatrical mimesis in the infancy civilization, so do we find a passion for it in the infancy of each individual. To infuse life and character into a doll, to dress up and role-play Rama and Sita, he believes, are theatrical devices we have all instinctively used in our life, coming to
terms with life during childhood. In other words, he announces, It is nature’s in-built method of learning; a meaningful and pleasurable way of dealing with life, its joys and its sorrows.

Developing his thesis further he comments that these natural methods of artistic expression and education have, in our era of specialization, been divorced from each other. In Theatre-in-Education they are reunited and provide a powerful and effective learning medium for all categories of children, whether infant or senior, academically bright or illiterate.

In his opinion the plays that TIE Company perform were not ends in themselves, but a stimulus to further enquiry, research, project work, alternative artistic expression and writing, and so on; whether organized as follow-up work by the company itself, or by the teachers, or by both working in cooperation. But the advantage of a TIE Company he felt was to provide professional standards and expertise that the average school would otherwise find difficult to raise.

The TIE Company, he elaborated, placed the children and their developmental needs at the heart of its work. Cutting across the school’s divisions of children and subjects, his concern was focused on the children and their awareness and understanding of themselves and the world around them.

For Barry John theatre meant engaging children physically, mentally, emotionally and even spiritually at times. It is integrated and experiential education aiming at the development of lively, imaginative, sensitive and socially adjusted individuals who can enrich their own and other lives, responding to life’s challenges in humane and constructive ways.

Like other theatre theorists, Barry John also sees theatre as a good team work that fosters the skills of being able to listen to another’s point of view, of give and take, of being able to accept criticism and to give it.
It is a way of working out and dealing with suppressed mental and emotional problems. It encourages ‘divergent thinking’ as opposed to the ‘convergent thinking’ that most other subjects foster. It improves the children’s means of communication in verbal and non-verbal languages so that they become more expressive in their own persons and as actors.

What other subject on the curriculum is concerned with what the children think and feel, dream about and long for? What other subject places the children syllabus?

Theatre is fun, he thinks, so far as the children are concerned, and its importance in education rises, as it is, with the increasing problem of motivating children (and teachers) in positive ways. It has great potential to assist in the formidable task of reforming and revitalizing the syllabi, the curricula and the teaching methodologies that prevail in schools; to liberate the children and the teachers from desk bound, book bound routines into something more exciting, creative and relevant to their needs.

To drive his point home he says that he is reminded of a Chinese proverb that perhaps best answers the question: Why Theatre in Education? Thus goes the proverb:

I hear : I forget
I see : I remember
I do : I understand

That should become the motto of TIE (Barry John was the Director of TIE Co. NSD from 1989 to 1992)
An Educationist’s Experiments

Asha Singh, then Reader in Lady Irvin College of Delhi University who had intensive research experience in child development and specialized training in performing arts (classical dance) was also engaged in the venture of introducing theatre in education.

Thus when she was asked to join in a consultative capacity in May 1990 having the task of “Assessment of the Summer Workshop” of the National School of Drama’s TIE Company it seemed like an opportunity for an organic personal professional growth to her.

She was to maintain files in respect of each participant of the workshop and to analyze the rate of psychological growth in them. Her findings were that the children slowly unfolded their personality to the propensity of theatre. In a brochure published for the theatre workshop of 1990, she reminisces that during the six weeks of workshop, she savored watching the children experience, the magic of spontaneity, the joy of creating and the sharing bounce of sentiments rooted in social emotional security. In her opinion the TIE Co. had the good fortune of being navigated by thinking adults who were tuned into the needs of children. In fact the actor-teachers in her observations had displayed as much spontaneity and unassuming approach in working with children as the participating children themselves. She discovered that there existed a diffused power relation between the group leaders and participants which was evident in the very labels that TIE used the term “Group leader” instead of “Director” for the main trainers of the Sunday Club (earlier known as Saturday Club) productions as well as summer theatre workshops. Commenting on the intimate relationship among the trainers and the participants, she said that the children freely interacted with the adults calling them as “didi” and “bhaiya” which is a typical way of addressing adults within an Indian culture setting.

She found that innovative and creative ways to sustain children’s interest and identity
had been not only the hallmark of the TIE ideology but a practice.

Any exhibition of children’s work had on display the work of all the children and not only a select few or teacher’s favorites. She praised it as a skill in bulletin board organization.

She claimed that her association with TIE Co. had taught her many enriching ways of theatre world that could offer immense insights for enriching human relations in the classroom. She concluded that through her doctoral research work she was presenting persuasively a self reflective methodology for teacher education, using the medium of theatre, thus building an understanding both of children and childhood along with knowing her own adult tacit assumptions.

“...the dream of bringing about a change in education can, materialize only after a prolonged struggled along the line in which Gandhi, Tagore, Gijubhai had moved. The educational theory propounded by all three of them emphasizes child’s need for an atmosphere of independence and self-reliance.

Gijubhai gave this Idea an institutional basis by establishing his Bal Mandir in 1920, and in his writings he identified the different facets of the Idea. Divasvapna is the imaginary story of a teacher who rejects the orthodox culture of education. He remains enthusiastic towards children and continues to experiment while consciously neglecting the traditions of teaching from prescribed text-books”.

(Krishna Kumar, Divasvapna by Gijubhai Badheka, pg. viii).
End Notes

1 Bertolt Brecht: introduced epic theatre and theory of alienation.

2 ILEA: a platform for youngsters to enhance their theatre skills.

3 Vishwa Bharti University: established by Tagore to widen the art and esthetics.

4 Buniyadi Talim: established by Gandhi the basic education in Pathshalas and Madarsa.

5 Sanskaar Rang Toli: the other name of Theatre-in-Education company of NSD.

6 Theatrical devices: theatre tools used as catalyst in teaching and learning.

7 Divergent thinking: it is a conventional methodology of education (thru convex lens).

8 Convergent thinking: it is a modern methodology (thru concave lens).

9 Assessment of the Summer Workshop: evaluation of social and drama skills of child.

10 Group leader: a guide, a facilitator and friend of children.

11 Independence and self-reliance: freedom to know own self in various levels.