

Reimagining Theatre and Sustainable Pedagogy: An Analysis from Bhikhari Thakur's Folk Theatre

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Bhikhari Thakur's theatre and plays have been an anchor point for research across disciplinary fields. However, the discussion remains limited to examining his work from a literary or social science perspective. Scholars overlook his theatre as a pedagogy. By looking closely, we can observe that his theatre also contains elements that can lead to the development of theatrical pedagogy. By practicing theatre, artists can learn many things, such as the integration of acting, music, and dance; cross-gender acting; large gestures, expression, and movement; and improvisation. Such training can be imparted not only in formal theatre institutions but also in amateur and community theatre settings. This study aims to examine the pedagogical potential of Bhikhari Thakur's theatre in performance tradition as a tool for sustainable theatre training. This study used a qualitative research approach, including a literature review, performance analysis, and the author's participant observation as a tool for understanding the pedagogical component of Bhikhari Thakur's theatre. During my doctoral studies at the University of Hyderabad, I had the opportunity not only to participate as an audience member or a performer but also to direct the play 'Bidesia' for the first time. Until then, I had been learning the 'Bidesia' style merely by watching it or performing a role; this time, however, I not only played the role of the Sutradhar (narrator) but also directed the entire production. This gave me firsthand experience of using the 'Bidesiya' as a pedagogical method for teaching acting and stage performances. Ultimately, the study tried to establish that, much like art forms such as Koodiyattam, Kathakali, Thang-Ta, Tai-Chi, Kalaripayattu, and Chhau, Bikhari Thakur's theatre also has pedagogical potential for sustainable theatre training.

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