

## **Street Theater, Education and Civic Education in the Corona and Post-Corona Eras**

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### **Abstract**

The corona pandemic has led to fundamental changes to the world in all areas. Theater is not without its benefits. Education is also one of the things that has been influenced by Corona and the Covid 19 pandemic. The official institutions in charge of education can use the capacity of the theater, especially street theater, to prevent the stagnation of their educational activities. Those in charge of popular culture (folklore) can present their desired concepts in the field of citizenship education to the public, using the capacity of theater and street theater artists. Health and medical officials can also use the capacity of street theater to justify public opinion in areas where persuasion is needed to advance medical and health goals.

In this research, using library resources, available resources in the field of play, theater and street theater, the capacity of performing arts and street theater for formal, informal and citizenship education is emphasized and due to the vulnerability of different classes such as artists and theater actors, it is recommended to those in charge of managing the society to use the capacity of street theater actors for civic education and to facilitate the implementation of programs that are challenging in some areas.

**Keywords:** Theater, Street Theater, Education, Citizenship Education, Corona

### **Introduction**

The origin of the play is ambiguous and to explain its origins, before historians and other scholars and explorers in ancient human history can make a claim, they have speculated based on the available evidence. One of the most important origins of the play is ritual origin. For example, before hunting animals, special kind of ritual is performed by hunter in order to first capture the soul of prey and prepare himself for great work, or when a member of the society perishes in the battlefield, he could recreate it for others and express the narrative or tragic aspects of the incident and show it to others when he came back from the hunting ground. These are two main origins of the play.

As human life continued, the man who is intelligent creature in the universe, survived and the play was manifested in various ways. Theater flourished as an element of Greek life, especially in ancient Greece, and dealt with aspects of the interaction and confrontation of ancient gods and goddesses.

The first Iranian steps were taken to bring play and theater to Iran by translating cultural works by Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh. Although his action met with much opposition, but Mirza Fath Ali continued his work and his efforts are considered as the first valid steps in Iranian theater.

Today, street theater is one of the new methods that attracts the attention of famous European and American theater actors. Due to the easy access of general public and the street and market crowd to street theater, it could remove the special and general boundaries between the spectators and help a lot to keep the theater going. But the role of street theater and the

profound effects of this fine art on people's lives are still neglected.

With the outbreak of the corona pandemic, the state of the theater, especially street theater, under the influence of health protocols changed fundamentally and stopped completely at the beginning of the outbreak, but gradually, as the disease is controlled and the number of confirmed cases is declined, gradually indoor theaters are revived, but street theaters was still not allowed because health and safety professionals could not satisfy themselves to issue permits for mass gathering such as participation in watching sport matches and group activities and other similar events. This does not mean that these activities will go into a deep stagnation and stop completely, but the lack of a clear stance by medical and health professionals and the fear of re-emerging outbreak of Corona prevented them from ordering the cancellation of health protocols.

This study tries to point out the neglected aspects of the influence of street theater on citizenship education by referring to the artistic capacities of the performing arts and theater in conventional university education and other, and draws the attention of its audience from government to art authorities, artists and even commons to street theater and pointed out its influence as an effective element in citizenship education, especially beyond the corona pandemic era. Because the effectiveness of formal education faces many challenges in government institutions and departments in charge of education.

### **Research Method**

In this research, by reviewing library resources, history of theater and play in Iran and the world, as well as resources related to university and non-university education and research conducted in this field, has pointed out the importance of education through non-governmental and non-formal methods. It suggests ways to the custodians to exit or improve the status quo by paying

attention to new educational methods through non-formal citizenship education, especially sustainable education using the capacity of street theater.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Examining the texts and documents of the history of the theater and the play, it appears that the play was performed in outdoor and public places before it took its formal form and was performed in fixed and indoor places in the form of a theater. The first types of theatrical methods were satirical and humorous plays that artists presented their material in a direct and humorous manner or criticized it in a ridiculous and critical way. This theatrical style represents a special type of performance called street performance, which in specialized texts is referred to as street theater.

In this theatrical style, the three sides of a play, which includes the actor, a role that he play, and the person or persons who watch it as the audience are manifested in a process free from any restrictions. Actors play together, and dialogue or interaction are formed based on the story or improvisation, a kind of conflict occurs and ordinary people have a deep connection in a collective spirit with what they see and hear. The characters of the play may experience a slight change, but according to the number of spectators of the street theater, there are different and varied perceptions of the play because there are different perceptions for each audience.

What happens in theaters and plays is amazingly strange. The presence of the crowd, gathering and creating a collective spirit, as well as the enthusiasm to communicate and interact deeply with the performers, causes the distance between the play and the audience to close and the spectator to enter public performances (Amiri, 2021).

The spectator joins the performance when the conventional boundaries between the performer and the viewer of the play collapse. The spectators become actors

themselves by entering emotionally sensitive moments of the play, and it often happens that they guide the actors during the performance in a kind of improvisation, which is interpreted as a kind of spectator participation in the play (Banijamali & Amini, 2021).

The presence of the spectator in the street theater is necessary and its effect on the quality and components of the performance is undeniable. Since the corona outbreaks and the Covid 19 pandemic occurred, it has been largely affected on group activities and stopped them. Theaters were no exception, and theater halls were closed like other public places. The problem was so acute that even public transport was restricted, let alone allowing people to gather and cultivate their souls and learn individually and socially by watching theater and plays.

The corona outbreak has emerged as one of the most important social challenges and events of the present century, and more importantly, it has highlighted a sense of global weakness in the face of unknown biological crises. The need for a society free of pollution, healthy and clean and away from any biological hazards was institutionalized in the people (Feyzi et al., 2021).

The emergence and spread of corona imposed a special kind of life on the people of the world, which can be considered as the beginning of a new era in human life. Mankind was forced to manage and lead the lifestyle he had lived and accustomed to it for centuries, to temporarily abandon some of its components, and to change his habitat. Fear of the Corona virus led to home quarantine. It instilled a kind of health obsession in people, made the phenomenon of telecommuting mandatory, reconciled people with books and reading, forced education to fundamental changes, and influenced life in various cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions. (Shayanmanesh & Goli, 2020).

During the corona outbreak, various parts of human life were severely affected by the corona pandemic, and education was no exception. Formal government education was also influenced by Corona, and conventional teaching methods such as teacher and student relations, and school and high school teaching methods faced major challenges. Training in the workplace and practical training, workshops and laboratories needed to be reviewed and redefined to ensure that training was not disrupted. In developed countries, due to the existence of appropriate computer infrastructure and related systems, education could quickly adapt to the crisis caused by the Corona pandemic, but in countries that do not have appropriate infrastructure or have inefficient infrastructure, the issue is different.

Education at universities, especially during the corona pandemic, is influenced by a variety of factors. During the Corona pandemic, university courses and schools resumed virtually after a short break. Schools and universities were forced to develop and expand their technology infrastructure, and tried to rectify their shortcomings by implementing reform programs. But developing, reforming and improving technology infrastructure alone is not enough to succeed. A set of supportive policies along with the development of specific standards by experts and specialists could solve the problems facing the teaching of university courses (Mazlouminejad, 2020).

The quality of life of students has also changed greatly as a result of Corona conditions. They have been forced to study away from the real environment of classrooms, workshops and laboratories, so the use of artistic capacities could be effective in solving their problems in the Corona and post-Corona eras. One of the good solutions is using the capacity of theater therapy, because students can use

theater therapy to find a way to express emotions and prepare themselves to play the role of hidden inner motivations and to release emotional capacities (Samadi, 2018).

Art therapy and play therapy are effective methods in reducing mental disorders, and handicapped people, especially those who have less interaction with the society, can overcome their muteness by being in the performance environment of street theater both during and after the performance and share their experiences. It can be mentioned that theater therapy is effective on the muteness of physically handicapped couples (Salahi and Tabatabai, 2017).

The use of theater therapy is also effective in reducing the anxiety of the young. Theater therapy has been effective in reducing the anxiety of young people referring to the houses of culture of the Islamic Culture and Guidance Office of Shiraz and the tragic and emotional functions of the plays have been effective in the psychological discharge of young people (Ebrahimi and Nourian, 2016).

The effect of using artistic capacities is not limited to the young and adolescents, and many researches have shown that using artistic capacities can be a good way for students. Storytelling as one of the artistic capacities can affect the academic status of students and increase their academic grades. Students sometimes have to use their creative capacity when performing storytelling activities, which in turn leads to cultivating their creativity. It enhances their ability in composition and art courses. The use of theatrical capacities of storytelling and performing arts is effective for improving the educational status of students (Alavi Langeroudi and Rajaei, 2016).

With the advent of the Corona, the state of education changed. Virtual education was promoted in both universities and schools, and previous traditional methods became ineffective. Although the necessary capacities for virtual education were

lacking, education had no choice but to use these low capacities.

In addition to distance education such as that used in Payame Noor university courses, and virtual education which showed its importance especially during the Corona pandemic, a special type of education that is in the form of non-formal education can be implemented in any place and situation. However, in traditional teacher and student-centered education, the situation develops in such a way that there is neither the appropriate technology infrastructure nor the necessary and sufficient ground for their proper implementation, or it has major shortcomings, while informal education can compensate for the inefficiency of formal education.

The performing arts are a part of art that, due to its collective nature, has the potential to influence a large audience, but Corona has also influenced this part of art because of special conditions caused by health care and Corona pandemic. After a break of several years, although new strains of this disease threaten the world, but the number of confirmed cases is gradually declined and performing arts such as theater can be better used. Because of its outdoor space and reduction of the risk of spreading the Corona virus, street theater can be used for education. With the help of street theater actors and the help and support of institutions and artistic authorities, municipalities and theater houses, street plays can be performed on the subject of Corona and health care and other citizenship education. In this regard, street theater, which can be performed in all places and times, can be effective and useful. Streets, public places, public passages, metro and bus stations are places where a wide range of people, even the blind people, the physically handicapped can attend and it is possible for them to use street theater capacity for education.

This issue becomes even more important when we know that street theater has a specific definition and it refers to the performance of a play in public places, public passages, public transportation stations, etc. (Shayan & Mowlanaei, 2015). Since the early days of 2020, when the Corona pandemic began, most businesses and industries have been affected by the Covid 19 pandemic especially in financial aspects. Financial aspects are the most basic needs for continuation of any art and industry, especially for those who work in the theater industry. Something that has not been experienced in the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918 and even in the 11<sup>th</sup> September terrorist attacks. However, the fundamental questions are whether the theater industry can be compensated for what it has done. However, the financial problems of this industry are still accepted and there is no way to solve this problem but to perform theater for the audience (Jasak, 2021).

In the agreement of the Canadian Independent Theater Actors' Equity Association, revised in October 2021, the conditions of the theater performance were agreed upon so that the theater would not be stopped during the Covid 19 pandemic era. This agreement determines the safety guidelines and health protocols for the Canadian Independent Theater to continue its activities (C.A.E.A, 2021).

Prior to the beginning of 2022, the Covid 19 pandemic was spreading rapidly worldwide with increasing mortality, but now with declining of the death rate and less dangerous strains of the disease, governments are reorganizing their economy state, and government policies are focused on not reopening theaters. In a study to determine whether the reopening of the halls is safe, a numerical estimate of the infection left by a patient in the theater hall was reviewed and analyzed with supply systems. In this study, the results show that, first, the probability of return air pollution

with filtration and fresh air operations decreases by 39.8% and 55.6%, respectively, compared to conditions when the return air is not filtered. Second, the probability of infection is respectively 84.9%, 92.3%, 37.3%, 74.0%, and 36.3%, 72.0% less for spectators who sit nine seats away from the infected person on the right defense relative to the audience sitting one seat away from the infected person. In addition, sitting in separate rows can reduce the maximum probability by 68.3% -7.4%. Third, the probability of infection reduced to 93.7% when the audience used masks with 75% efficiency. Fourth, the probability of infection can be controlled within a relatively safe range, even if the quantum emission rate is 30 or 50 quantum per hour, and even with two infected people in inappropriate seats. Thus, the halls can be safely reopened under filtering return air or all fresh air operations, and when spectators sit in separate seats and wear masks (Liang et al, 2021).

Therefore, it can be expected that by implementing of precise safety and health protocols and adopting creative methods, the possibility of performing artistic and theatrical activities during the corona pandemic will be increased. In this way, it is recommended that sometimes creative measures are taken to accommodate tourists during the corona pandemic by taking into account the precautionary aspects and using the capacity of special low-traffic times and the capacity of old tradition of traveling vendors to eliminate or reduce the risks of pandemics and to increase job dynamics (Pacurar, Albu, 2021).

Due to the major changes caused by the pandemic, many changes have taken place in all areas. Even cultural and artistic organizations should adapt themselves with these changes. Because what the consumers of artistic and cultural organizations want and what those organizations think their consumers want has changed. The needs of organizations themselves and what

organizations are able to provide have also changed {Matele, Gopalakrishnan, 2021}. The use of theatrical capacities for mere education and even for health purposes, such as education combined with examining a sample of the target community for security measures are cases in which cooperation of artists and doctors with each other in epidemic conditions can be useful for different uses. An example of this practice has been performed in India and it has been introduced as a model for other countries.

Street theaters are a popular traditional medium of communication and entertainment in India. So, street shows have been used to raise awareness about children's eye health in southern India. In a three-year field study, researchers selected topics and wrote a scripts based on them. These scripts were used in traditional street theater scenarios by adding traditional songs, humor, and traditional dialogue to the local dialect that provide ample space for improvisation during the actual play. With the three-year performance of these well-received street performances, the sample audience was interviewed about what they learned from the play, and most of them could reproduce key messages. Researchers have identified street shows as an effective and popular means for disseminating eye health messages in Indian society (Pehera, Yadavalli, 2021).

In this study, an attempt was made to consider the current situation of the Corona pandemic and its effect on certain sectors such as theater, street theater, and formal education and civic education based on available library resources and academic research texts. It emphasizes on high capacity of theater and street theater in the field of education. This study showed that these capacities have not been neglected despite the Corona pandemic, and developed countries have provided the necessary grounds for their economic dynamism.

It is suggested that by decrease of pandemic statistics in some countries, including Iran, while paying attention to this vulnerable class during Covid 19 pandemic, educational or health groups employ actors of the performing arts, theater and street theater and use their abilities to indirectly provided the necessary training for people in semi-privileged provinces which refuse to send their children to school, especially their daughters, or oppose vaccinating their infants.

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