



DRAMA THERAPY: AN OVERALL DISCOURSE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.240206004>

Abstract

Drama therapy is one of the most popular therapies in the world today. Psychodrama (another name for Drama Therapy) not only cures a person's (patient's) mental illness but also increases his/her life span and helps in over-development. This article discusses the history, importance, and different types of drama therapy (techniques) of drama therapy. It is an essay-type descriptive research article. Drama Therapy has been in practice since ancient times, but its acceptance has not yet become that way. Not particularly popular in India. However, it is expected that its popularity will increase in the future and it will be recognized by all. Drama therapy includes role-play, mime, improvisation, puppetry etc. This article reflects the possibilities of Drama Therapy in our daily life.

Keywords: *Drama therapy, Psychodrama, Overall Development, Role-play, Mime, Improvisation, Puppetry*

Introduction

Stage, lights, makeup, especially 'performance' come up again and again when we talk about drama. But is it just that? No, not just that. There is great relevance behind it. Which can be manifested or blossomed as the material of survival of a person throughout his life. When discussing drama therapy, it is very important to first understand its literal meaning. Drama therapy is the use of theatre techniques to facilitate personal growth and promote mental health. Drama therapy is used in a wide variety of settings, including hospitals, schools, mental health centres, prisons, and businesses. Drama therapy, as a modality of creative arts therapies, exists in many forms and can apply to individuals, couples, families, and various groups (Wikipedia contributors, 2022). Drama therapy is a form of psychotherapy. It involves using drama and theatre techniques to help people resolve conflicts and problems. It may also allow individuals to develop self-awareness, express emotions, and improve relationships (Sherrell, 2022). Drama therapy is closely related to the current drama process. The main themes of the drama are 'self-study', 'self-realization', 'to be somebody', 'role-playing', 'dramatization', 'self-presentation' etc. All these issues are linked with psychological orientation to create 'psychodrama'. Jacob. L. Moreno developed this concept of psychodrama and from there the current concept of "Theatre as a Therapeutic Intervention" (Wikipedia contributors, 2022) is coming into vogue.

The North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA) defines drama therapy as - The intentional use of theatre techniques to achieve symptom relief, emotional growth, and mind-body integration (Lear, 2020). Drama therapy can be expressed more simply and profoundly - it is conducted through the interaction of Theatre, Drama, Psychology, Psychotherapy, Anthropology, Creative Process, etc. In this case, the client has more role than the therapist as it is an action-based therapy process. Drama therapy is inextricably linked to ongoing living. Which helps to make our everyday life more beautiful. The concept of this therapy is very beautiful, simple and in many cases, it has a profound impact on life. Drama therapy forces a person to think differently about his/her life. Kathrin Rudlin has said in this context - Drama therapy combines drama and psychology methods to offer new ways to express what you are thinking or feeling in order to cope more effectively with behavioural and emotional problems (Drama Therapy May be a Creative Option for You, 2021). Drama and psychology work on human behaviour. Psychology works on the human mind, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and drama helps to form a character by analysing those thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Which is displayed in front of the audience. Many dramas or literature related to dramas are made in view of this human behaviour.

History of Drama Therapy

There is no written evidence of when exactly drama therapy started. But drama has been around since ancient times. In Athens, Greece, drama was practiced and performed through masks and physical activity. However, the term "Drama Therapy" is mentioned in Aristotle's book "The Poetics". The function of tragedy is to induce catharsisⁱⁱ – a release of deep feelings (specifically pity and fear) to purge the senses and the souls of the spectators (Aristotle, trans. 1954). Aristotle placed great importance on 'catharsis', and psychologist Sigmund Freud applied this concept to many of his "Psychotherapeutic Models of Freudian Psychoanalysis". Where the client's emotions can be expressed and calmed through therapy.

Later, in the 1970s, drama therapy was implemented in many hospitals as a psychotherapeutic healing process and was the first time in any psychological treatment that patients or clients were asked to create a play. Its later modification or integrated upgradation is the improvisation and process drama method. The focus of drama therapy is on helping individuals grow and heal by taking on and practicing new roles (Anonymous). From the 18th century, the practice of drama therapy began throughout Europe. But that does not mean that only mental hospitals this drama therapy was applied but drama is considered a suitable form of entertainment (for emotional satisfaction), and patients begin to explore drama as their own solution to their problems (Psychosisⁱⁱⁱ). Over several years of observation, it is clear that psychological processes are important in any psychiatric treatment. Throughout the years, it evolved and a focus on theatre as therapy became more defined in the 20th Century (Maynard, 2022). In the 20th century, 'therapeutic theatre' (Maynard, 2022) became widespread and popularized. Some famous directors and playwrights who believed in this therapeutic theatre. Russian theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski, who emphasized spontaneous performance and improvisation. German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht's method of breaking down the walls of the audience and taking the audience into the play, etc. emphasizes the dramatic therapeutic approach.

The tradition of drama/theatre in India dates back to ancient times. Koodiyattam (Kerala), Yakshagana (Karnataka), Saang/Swang (Haryana), Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh), Jatra (West Bengal), Chhau (Odisha/Bihar/Jharkhand), Tamasha (Maharashtra) and Ramlilas all over North India, these are the different forms of drama, from different parts of India since ancient times. Even though drama has been practiced since ancient times, but drama is not considered as therapy or as process of therapeutic medication. John Casson in his journal "Drama Therapy in India (1993)" describes how drama emerged as therapy in India.

Drama therapy meanwhile had already begun to develop in India. Anaheeta Nariman from Bombay became the first qualified drama therapist in India. Poonam Natarajan subsequently led her staff and 150 children in a major drama project entitled, 'From Passivity to Empowerment'. Also in Madras, a psychiatrist, Dr Rudhran began in 1986 to experiment by involving clients suffering from chronic schizophrenia in drama sessions. Meanwhile, in North India, Pramila Balasundaram established SAMADHAN in 1981 to work with disabled children and the community. In 1987 SAMADHAN started a programme called A.R.T.S. (an abbreviation for Art, Recreation, Theatre, and Song). In 1992 she opened the first centre for drama therapy in India and continues to nurture the development of drama therapy (Casson, 1993, pp. 17-21).

Thus Casson's (1993) writings suggest that, slowly, people in India began to accept drama as a therapeutic process today, and today both its demand and prevalence are increasing.

Major Characteristics of Drama Therapy

Therapy brings permanent benefits only when the truth about the past is made accessible and remains accessible for the rest of our lives (Miller, 1997, pp. 13). Through the definition of drama therapy, its history, and several works related to drama therapy we get a general idea about what is drama therapy and its effects in different fields. Now comes the question, what are the characteristics that make this therapy or therapeutic process equally popular and important in all fields, all types, and all ages. Some of the features are discussed below –

- **Self-sufficiency**

Drama therapy is a self-contained process. That is, while receiving this therapy, the patient has to complete all the tasks by himself. Which helps to make a patient independent.

- **Circulating processes of interaction**

Drama is all about interaction, and one of the most important methods of drama therapy is enactment. So, when one person interacts with another person, the interaction naturally occurs. Interaction plays a very important role in this therapeutic process and a patient is can know himself/herself more and more through the process of interaction.

- **Exploring the power of imagination**

One of the strengths of drama therapy is to stimulate the imagination. That is when a patient enacts a scene by himself/herself, he/she creates a picture of that scene in his/her imagination. Keeping his/her image in mind, he/she visualized the rest.

- Confidence to take on something new

Most people are afraid to accept something new or rather can't muster the courage to accept something new. Drama therapy teaches acceptance of new things. When a patient is asked to present a new scenario, the patient develops confidence that he/she can do it.

- The joy and satisfaction of becoming someone else

We live with only one character in our ordinary life. But in drama, an actor can live in many roles and become many characters and derive pleasure and self-satisfaction from it. Drama therapy transmits that joy and satisfaction to patients. The life of a character should be an unbroken line of events and emotions, but a play only gives us a few moments on that line - we must create the rest to portray a convincing life. (Stanislavski, 2013b).

- Reinventing yourself

Another important feature of drama therapy is that this process helps a person to rediscover himself. When one or more patients try to present a new drama by themselves (self-actively) in new situations, with new people, then that person becomes aware of his/her weaknesses and strengths. A person can realize how powerful he/she is.

Different Types of Drama Therapy (Technics of Drama Therapy)

In Figure 1 we can see the different types or techniques of drama therapy. A brief description of which is relevant to our article.

- Drama Games

Drama games refer to many different types of games. Which helps in creating some drama.

- Improv

Improvisation is an important technique in drama therapy. Where a subject has to be completed through immediate solution.

- Role Play Method

You have to act according to the other character by becoming another character. What he does, what he eats, where he goes, how he behaves etc. In this, the person (patient) gets the freedom to become someone else.

- Socio-drama

A Socio-drama is a dramatic play in which several individuals act out assigned roles to study and remedy problems in group or collective relationships (Wikipedia contributors, 2023).

- Psychodrama

Psychodrama is a structured technique of drama therapy. In psychodrama, a person (patient) presents his/her life story or his/her life problems to other therapy participants through dramatization.

- Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is an aesthetic method created by Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal that stimulates critical observation and representation of reality, envisioning the production of consciousness and concrete actions (*Theatre of the Oppressed – ImaginAction.org*, n.d.).

- Masks

The use of masks in drama therapy keeps the person (patient) independent and secure. Through the mask, the person (patient) can express his/her thoughts easily. And the person (patient) becomes aware of his/her position about reality.

- Puppets

Puppets are sometimes made as conscious self-representations or representations of others, but more often, puppets emerge that embody unconscious dynamics or parts of self that are not as easily or openly expressed (Bernier, 2005, pp.125).



Importance of Drama Therapy

From the overall discussion, it is clear that drama therapy is one of the most important therapies in the therapeutic process. It is not just a therapy, through this a patient finds him/herself, explores him/herself, can become aware of his/her existence.

Drama therapy provides a safe space for individuals to explore and process any difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences that they are going through, without relying on verbal communication. It has been found as an effective aid treatment for people suffering from conditions such as; Anxiety, Depression, Schizophrenia, Eating Disorders, Bipolar, Borderline Personality Disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (How Drama Therapy Can Assist With Mental Health Recovery, 2020).

The patient tries to be someone else through various theatrical activities such as role-play, mask-making, mime, and puppetry. His/her thoughts become like someone else's thoughts. So he/she can explore new behaviours, postures, which make him/her aware of his/her behaviours, and postures. Drama therapy helps to give context to those new behaviours, and postures. Humans are socially organized organisms. People want to live together. Drama therapy emphasizes group therapy sessions. Through this, the practice of working together, collaboratively among patients is created. Gradually they master social skills and communication skills. Not only this, but drama therapy also plays an important role in overcoming various shyness, inertia, fear of the heart, and moving towards the future life. Be it talking about the plight of sexually abused children in Delhi^{iv}, or making their lives more beautiful and accessible to blind women in Kolkata through drama^v. Drama therapy plays an important role in all fields. Drama therapy is therapy in the primary sense, primary conditions, but above all, drama therapy works for the overall grooming of a person. Apart from this, drama therapy also plays an important role in severe mental disorders like Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, Dementia, etc.

Conclusion

Drama therapy uses various techniques to relieve mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, addiction, etc., where a patient suffering from mental disorders can easily use various types of drama therapy techniques (dramatic projection, role-play, role improvisation, miming, puppetry, and mask-making) can express their thoughts, and share their thoughts. Drama therapy is of utmost importance for an affected person (psychologically or socially affected) to turn around in life and live with their head held high. This type of therapy is the only therapy where the patient does something for his/her pleasure through self-activity and tries to think like another character by going out of his character. Which informs him/her about the importance of seeing and understanding things differently. But its circulation has not yet started in our country. But its need for circulation is unlikely. Our country is slowly moving towards modernity. So it is to be hoped, very soon the practice of drama therapy will be started in our country.

Acknowledgement: No

Authors Contribution: Ratul Nandi: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No funding.

Declarations/Consent for Publication: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

Notes:

ⁱ Psychodrama is an activity-based/action-based method, where the client spontaneously tries to judge themselves through various types of dramatic postures, dramatic movements, self-presentation, etc., and engage in efforts to improve their lives (Wikipedia contributors, 2022).

ⁱⁱ The word catharsis is a Greek word. Which means - it is a way to express one's deepest feelings. Let's say it is through a play or creative activity.

ⁱⁱⁱ Psychosis is an abnormal condition of the mind that results in difficulties determining what is real and what is not real (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022).

^{iv} The theatre troop of Bangalore performed a 45-minute Play, called - "Positivity Shameless" in Delhi, to express the fear, grief, and pain about sexual harassment (Times of India 2017).

^v In Kolkata, Subhashis Gangopadhyay has started a theatre group for blind women. Which is called Anyadesh (Another Country) (The Hindu, 2019).

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