

ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN ACTOR TRAINING: AN OVERVIEW

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Physical Education educates about knowledge, development and care of the body ranging from simple calisthenics to a course of study providing training/education in sports and physical fitness. Physical fitness is the primary requirement of an actor. It is the ability of the body to perform at optimal adeptness. Modern Russian acting theorist Konstantin Stanislavski in his acting theory "The Method Acting" mentions the significance of physical training under the elements of Relaxation of Muscles. *He believes that to cope with muscular tension an actor needs a trained and responsive body and control over his muscles. Even the slightest tension of muscles can paralyze an actor's creative state.*

Physical Education can play an important role in actor training because an actor is a performer who primarily works with body and voice. All over the world most of the acting school are consciously including swimming, yoga, horse riding, fencing, shooting, martial art in their acting curriculum. World famous actors Bruce Lee, Jet Li, Jackie Chan, Jean-Claude Van Damme's and many Hollywood actors are trained in martial arts and other sports. Along with a huge variety of characters sometimes an actor has to perform as a sportsperson in films and live theatre performances. Films like Robert De Niro's *The Raging Bull* (1980), Jean-Claude Van Damme's *Bloodsport* (1988), Leonardo De Caprio's *The Basketball Diaries* (1995), Rubin Carters *The Hurricane* (1995) and Will Smiths Ali (2001) can see in this context. When a director casts an actor for a sports-oriented role he instructs him to go for a rigorous training in that particular sport or skill. Indian actor Farhan Akhtar is casted in a film *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* as Milkha Singh and he is working very hard on his body to get into the shape of an athlete.

Acting theoreticians and actor trainers like Stanislavski, Grotowski, Barba, Meyerhold, Tadashi Suzuki and Zarrilli propounded the idea that an actor should be trained like a sportsman and martial artist. Polish actor Ryszard Cieślak states, *"An important thing to remember is that an actor must concentrate on...his whole body...Just as a musician has to exercise his fingers every day, so an actor has to exercise his body almost to the point of overcoming it, that is being in complete control of it."*

Actor can acquire the optimum fitness level through a regular workout. An actor's workout includes a warm-up, a conditioning bout and a cool down. So, physical education makes an entry in an actor's training through warm-up. Warming-up is a process of 5 to 15 minutes by which an actor's body is brought to a condition at which he can safely respond to the required action. It is a part of the acting curriculum and is always planned with academic and practice timetable. Warming-up generally consists of a few joint mobility exercises with jogging. It is also performed before rehearsal, run-throughs and a performance, even sometimes during the play rehearsals to refresh actors. Conditioning Bout is the main part of workout from 35 to 45 minutes in which an actor mainly works for muscular strength, muscle endurance, flexibility, concentration of attention, stamina, attunement of body and mind. For the accomplishment of these objectives many actors visit gym development on ultra-modern systems of body practice and opt exercises such as running on treadmill, biceps, bench press, military press, leg extension, rowing, abdominal curls, squats and some prefer brisk walk, running, hill-climbing and swimming etc. In the third part cooldown generally, an actor is instructed to lie down on the floor for 5 to 10 minutes.

In many traditional and modern acting schools and studios in East and West actors are specifically trained through Asian traditional disciplines like Hatha Yoga, Kalarippayattu and Tai Chi Quan (Kerala and Chinese martial arts) etc. These physical systems/disciplines are used by great theatre practitioners as psychophysiological technique. I can better explain my idea through the word of Phillip B. Zarilli post-modern acting theorist, *"I am not teaching kalarippayattu, taiquan or yoga as traditional disciplines in a specific Asian cultural contextthe goal of training is not to make all who train with me expert martial artists. I am training actors to act. These disciplines are a vehicle to this end and not necessarily an end in itself. I teach these disciplines side-by-side, key elements and principles in the process of training must be rendered immediately useful for the contemporary actor."* Yogic

Pranayama is also used as a voice and breath training technique. Bhramari Pranayama is specially used for the improvement of resonators. The chanting of “OM” for 10-15 minutes helps an actor in voice projection and modulation.

The martial arts are becoming very popular in acting training because they put things in a practical perspective. Vigorous martial arts make an actor extra perceptive. Theatre practitioner Eugenio Barba rightly states, *“Asian martial arts use concrete physiological processes to destroy the automatisms of daily life and to create another quality of energy in the body...All Asiatic martial arts show a decided body ready to leap and to act. This attitude...takes the form of extra daily technique of the position of an animal ready to attack or defend itself.”*

Bharata an ancient Indian acting theorist though has not mentioned specifically in his treatise N+myas+stra about the physical training of an actor but his listing and explanation of psychophysiological expressions, gestures, gaits and postures along with the division of body into three cetagoriesAnga, UpangaandPratyangas under the chapter AngikaAbhinaya proves that an actor has to go through a planned physical training to increase and stabilise his level of fitness. The usage of joints for specific postures indicates towards the application of Biomechanics in ancient Indian dance and acting training.

Russian theatre director VsevolodMeyerhold has established a Biomechanical Laboratory to explore Biomechanics as actor training system in 1992. He states, *“The basic law of Biomechanics is very simple: the whole body takes part in each of our movements. The rest is elaboration exercise, etudes.”*In Biomechanics body is treated as machine and actor as the machinist. According to Russian director Sergei Eisenstein, *“Biomechanics is the super structure of physical training. Physical training is the fundamental subject of physical education and Biomechanics is already a speciality. It includes all of the basic principles of physical training such as: correct relationship of the internal and external organs, audacity, lightness, flexibility.”* He further states, *“Of all the means of physical training, Biomechanics is the only one that teaches the actor the orientation of the body....helps the actor to share the orientation in time and space of those acting with him.”*

Conclusion

From above discussion, explanation and details it can be concluded that the physical education and its other disciplines play

a very important role in the actor training in various capacities. It can motivate the future research of both disciplines for inter-disciplinary research and practice.

References

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