EFFECT OF PANDEMIC COVID-19 ON THEATRE ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at highlighting the constraints in Theatre Arts industry during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic which happens to be unprecedented due to the imposition of nationwide lockdown norms since 2020. Theatre arts is considered to be a form of performing arts where creativity develops through participatory approach and communication before live audiences. This study first analyses the importance of live theatre performance, capacity building with teamwork, its evolution through human history, and mass participation in the development discourse. It then incorporates the existing challenges with the fact of social distancing norms, financial crisis, physical health issues, other related mental health issues, and so on and so forth caused by the Pandemic. Theatre might not bring complete change but transformation can be expected in this global south nation. Hence with the help of thespians, dramatists, playwrights and directors (theatre practitioners) the present condition of this sector could be examined where the majority of theatrical workers, whose livelihood depends on this sector, are in an impoverished state due to unemployment and are expecting its revival soon. People had the fear of starvation and failure, more than the infectious Corona virus. The crisis caused the ultimate breakdown of the industry. Lockdown restrictions had a strong impact on psycho-social problems of theatre personnel. The study was conducted in the metropolitan city of Kolkata, West Bengal, and it helped to acquire insights into artistic engagements in Bengali Theatre. It consists of a qualitative method of research study. The interviews helped to attain an in-depth understanding of this topic and developed the mitigation strategy for one of the low prioritized sectors in contemporary society.

Key phrases: Theatre Arts Industry, Outbreak of COVID-19, Nationwide lockdown, Unemployment, Participatory approach, Financial crisis and Psycho-social problems

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world. This particular phenomenon has been considered unprecedented because of its broad impact on social, economic, political, health, education, and many other aspects in this contemporary era. To limit the movement of the entire migrant population, nationwide lockdown was imposed in March, 2020. It was implemented as a preventive measure against the transmission of the deadly coronavirus, after a marked increase in the number of confirmed positive cases and the rise in death toll across the nation. However, safety guidelines were not possibly followed by a majority of the population which indeed resulted in an increased transmission rate as well as high mortality rate in the nation within a year. Lack of precaution had caused the loss of economy, stress on mental health, increase in physical health problems, closure of many informal sectors, unavailability of resources and other related factors of crisis.

Theatre personnel

The fundamental base of theatre arts has always been teamwork. Even before the performers step into space, specialized personnel play a very crucial role from producing to presenting a specific play. A lot of effort is needed to make theatre performance effective and efficient in connecting with the audience. Most of the commercial theatre groups set-up the hierarchy of personnel, but it is not required

to assign a fixed role for performers or multi-taskers within a group where everyone's input matters in this creative field. However, professional theatre plays can be staged through proper division of labour or responsibilities as well as maintaining a sense of harmony.

A theatre group may seem predominantly, to be more confined with artistes themselves. But here if we look into the role of theatre personnel, they are divided into broad categories, adhering to definite duties. For example, the the initial pre-production team is responsible for conceptualizing the performance. They are also the chief agents for the development of the production and they make a group sustainable in the long run. In this category we can find, Producer, Director, Playwright, Designer, Composer, Choreographer, etc. After that, the production team, who are responsible for the fabrication of the production play a significant role in drawing the public's attention. It consists of Actors, Dancers, Musicians, Theatrical technicians, etc. In the end, the Theatre Staff are responsible for running the theatre group for long and they work for facilitating a single theatre. They are the Theatre manager, the Box office agent, Operators, Call boy, etc.

Significance of live performance

Since the development of civilization in human society, live performances had always been a predominant factor to develop its own culture and enrich the practice of various rituals. Likewise, before the emergence of technology live performance used to be the way of exchanging cultural aspects and creative ideas It also proved to be very influential as people tried to adapt through live experiences and evolved it in such a way that the existence of live performance is still there in contemporary society seeking encouragement to sustain it and take it forward.

Setting of theatre spaces

Theatre has evolved through time and it has various kinds of layouts where a production will be presented for audiences. Thus, through the responses, the concept of theatre experimentation came up to explain

what exactly it says.

Now, this experimentation is not confined only to the idea of a playwright or its sequence-wise presentation, etc. It is something beyond this. Before thinking of a play proper, the prior requisite is to think about the space where the play will be presented and accordingly the performers visualize their respective acts. Most of the theatre practitioners prefer to perform on a Proscenium stage set up, the Thrust stage, Black box, Theatre in the round, Platform stages, Open-air theatre, etc, across the city.

Impact of lockdown norms

The decision to lockdown is basically a preventive measure against the outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19. On 24th March, 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide lockdown for 21 days initially, but that got extended for a couple of months. Till its 4th phase, everyone was under strict restrictions as cases of transmission of the deadly disease was rising and most of mainly the economic and social sectors were completely shut; the whole scenario resulted in a standstill, across the world.

Now, the performing arts industry like any other with informal workers, also suffered in this crisis and most of the people had to choose an alternative way to survive. Unemployment or no production had caused other related issues in a household. Most of the experienced practitioners shared in their interview that this lockdown mainly affected those youths who have the thirst to experiment with their creativity in the field of theatre arts. Similar were the responses of many youth participants. They experienced mental distress and had to sacrifice many plans and it was all quite challenging at that point. Apart from them, theatrical technicians or other theatre staff were tremendously affected due to the closure of all events and programmes across the city of Kolkata. Many of them moved to urban settlements for livelihood They had struggle hard to earn one meal a day and so this period of the pandemic was quite tough for them. We are aware of the phrase 'charity begins at home'. It became true for many theatre practitioners and many theatre groups who voluntarily

supported fundraising initiative within the theatre fraternity. Some groups also conducted paid online sessions, street shows for the crowd funding campaign, etc., where the whole amount was added to the donation fund. Likewise, many individuals tried really hard to cope with the situation no matter how much effort and hard work was required in a year.

In this context, if we discuss theatre performance which is based on teamwork and can rarely be performed solo, social distancing caused a serious hit to this sector. Being in isolation, rehearsal was possible only for some groups, especially the youth, via the digital mode, but then there was uncertainty about resuming their work and in itiatng a new production.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this situation, it was possible to access available literature through online sources and thus acquire knowledge about the topic of study. It was mandated to start with basics. After the collection of data, some of the general statements needed verification through other sources such as news reports, research works, journals, blogs, awareness campaigns, social media, etc. There was a gap in accessing a few sources that were dependent on their availability. In the reports, the interviewees seemed to be theatre group members, playwrights, directors, film actors and so on, who provided information about the suffering of theatrical technicians and other staff. The same thing happened in this process of research where the respondents could be identified with the help of mutual contacts but individuals who are striving for their survival could not be reached as no one could provide their contact details.

Background of theatre arts

If we talk about the existence of theatre arts that have so far evolved through human history and have significance in contemporary society, the concept of the first world of theatre is considered to be that of the Theatre of Dionysus which was built in the site of Acropolis in Athens. It is said that the first plays were performed at the beginning of 5th century BC but it is also said that during the 6th century BC, a Dionysus priest had introduced the concept of drama and added new elements to it. And that was the birth oftheatre arts.

According to Dionysians, their community had developed the structure of drama as we witness in the contemporary era. This form of drama or theatre has the combination of cultural activities such as dance, song, narration, acting, etc. They specially highlighted the stories related to Greek myths. Theatrical contests became a regular feature and then the drama came to classified into three different genres, i.e. comedy, tragedy, and satire.

Impact of the worldwide pandemic

An outbreak of pandemic is an epidemic that spreads throughout the world with no remedies to completely get over it. The least that can be done is to control the spread or transmission of the disease. The study of epidemics or pandemics helps us to understand politics, socio-economic structures, and personal relationships. Their outbreaks span across centuries and continents. From the earliest times to the present, it has affected human history in myriad ways: demographically, culturally, politically, financially, and biologically.

In the emergence of the pandemic or epidemics during the past years, we have witnessed SARS, Ebola, Flu, etc. which affected the whole world and resulted in millions of deaths across the globe. It has resulted in various forms of loss and other crisis. Inflation might hit the population anytime now and everyone is experiencing resource limitation. The global south countries are facing the worst and are still trying to cope with the restrictions and adopting further measures to control the transmission especially through vaccination in order to attain the base herd immunity to obstruct the disease and free the community. The shield through immunization is needed to overcome the pandemic but it does not guarantee its complete extinction (Hossain, 2020).

Theatre and epidemics have always made an uneasy duet; the theatrical event which is physical, viral and communal at its root stands in an ambivalent relationship with what essentially both mirrors and cancels its working logic. From the years of

the Athenian plague, the Black Death outbreak, yellow fever, polio, and influenza epidemics to the more recent AIDS, Ebola, swine flu, bird flu, Zika, SARS, and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic and so on, theatre praxis has been both fueled and stalled by infectious disease outbreaks. The present analysis is an attempt to trace this age-old link, one that plots a sliding spectrum, running from dread and anxiety to fascination and influence. For theatre's survival and existence, this spread of the disease has been an ever-looming threat and it has also ambivalently served as a source of an intriguing notion where dramaturgy focus and impetus, as well as 'network of metaphors', address and describe the world stage's 'own mode of corporeal interaction (Ristani, 2020).

Battered condition of informal sector

Most of the individuals, including the report sources, blame the plan of lockdown as it will not save them from the virus but will kill the economy. The initiative was forwarded by the Prime Minister of India. Now we can assume, through the fact of the current status of our nation, how we are unable to get through this crisis.

There are a total 90% workforce who contribute to the informal economy in India. There are a lot of indices which needed proper consideration in various matters, while some of the target groups are visible within this sector and others also face uncertainty due to factors which curtail their identity.

Mitigation strategy for the constraints

There are several plans to cope with the situation, but the revival would be quite time taking. Theatre cannot be performed solo or by maintaining social distances. There are theatre practitioners who have undertaken experimental approaches to this art form. The spaces for performance can be changed but live performance should not be compromised in a way. But for the time being, considering the current phenomenon, the virtual mode can be accessed to promote culture and ideas and also to ignite the interest in this particular forte of performing arts.

Social work interventions during COVID-19 pandemic

Numerous frontline workers served the world while fighting against the spread of the deadly coronavirus. One of those notable warriors seemed to be Social Workers. This particular discipline Social Work is meant for harnessing a passion to help others and so social workers improve lives by connecting people with resources and providing social service. During the pandemic, it has been observed that due to the increase in risks, many professionals had to follow the norms of lockdown as they are the ones who a r e supposed to generate awareness on safety measures. And so they were providing counseling services via the virtual mode, to help clients, and also began fundraising initiatives from home to help the needy individuals. As the lockdown got extended, t h e social workers, being quarantined, could not limit their practice of providing social and welfare services.

Research gap based on review of literature:

This research study seeks to explore the crisis caused by the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic and also to focus on the context related to those individuals who suffered after the closure of the theatre industry. The world wide scenario seems to be at a stagnant state at this point. The closure of this particular sector has resulted in a sudden pause in artistic life. The notion of exchanging culture through live performance is proceeding towards extinction and the acts are now confined to digital screens.

METHODOLOGY

This research study aims to understand the impact of COVID'19 on theatre arts and the constraints faced in performing them in the metropolitan city of Kolkata, West Bengal. The concept of this research study was the intrigue caused by the present scenario. However, it intended to use the Qualitative approach of the research method to know the lived experience of the respondents and their valuable insights on this issue.
Area of study

The research study was conducted in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area which is an urban conglomeration of the city in Kolkata, West Bengal. This is considered to be the third most populous metropolitan area in India and it is often known as Greater Kolkata. The area is administered by Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) and it also covers the jurisdiction of four major Municipal Corporations along with 37 Municipalities. It comprises six major districts namely, Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Howrah,Nadia, Hooghly. The map of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area has been shown in Annexure-IV. According to the 2011 census data, the Demography of the total population of the Kolkata metropolitan area was 14,112,536. Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) report states the total area is 1,886.67 km², making the population density 7,480 per km². The informal sector is approximately 60% of the total workforce. In comparison to other metropolitan cities, it is much less expensive for start-ups and settlements. This particular geographical location has been chosen as per convenience because the student researcher belongs here and the area is quite well-known.

Rationale of study:

Theatre has a significant contribution to the performing arts industry for long. It has evolved through centuries and now contemporary theatre intends to be an experimental space without adhering to one specific field's practice. The Bengali Theatre endured through time and is considered to have played a pivotal role in several spheres as it has helped the actors to form a strong base so that they can pursue their passion of acting in a better platform. During pre-independence it has helped the movement in manifesting dislike of the British Raj. In leftist movements in Bengal, it is being used as a tool to create social awareness. Drama in election campaigning was considered to be quite effective till the late 90s. In short, theatre seeks opportunities to reach out to several communities where the masses can't afford to reach them out. This art form has unique characteristics within itself.

Statement of the problem:

Amidst the outbreak of the pandemic, the sector of performing industry was the worst hit by the crisis. The impact of COVID'19 battered many ensembles as well as theatrical technicians in Kolkata, West Bengal. However some of them are questing for alternative opportunities and possible support through monetary or kind, to fulfill their basic needs of survival and the desire to adapt to a better state of well-being. There is limited literature on this topic as it is quite a recent phenomenon that occurred in the contemporary context, but it is rare to find that theatre practitioners are in a worse economic condition than any other theatrical workers whose livelihood was dependent on the informal economy. Predominantly, the implication of the existing scenario has affected everyone's mental health and physical health. Thus, by considering all forms of theatre experimentation on different spaces and also on the existing notion of digital advancement, the sector of theatre arts is expected to revive soon through a participatory approach.

General objective
- To study the factors influencing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Theatre Arts industry.

Specific objectives:
- To understand the existing issues related to socio-economic and psycho-social aspects among the Theatre Practitioners and stakeholders of this particular sector.
- To investigate revival strategies amid unprecedented lockdown norms.

Research design

The exploratory research study was adopted as it is a recent phenomenon that occurred last year. The researcher explored to identify the existing problem in society related to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the major issues faced by the Theatrical Personnel during the imposition of lockdown to curb the pandemic situation. The most affected individuals are those whose livelihood depends on this artistic field and currently, they are experiencing a critical situation. All steps

were being followed in a structured way as no prior research was found soon after deciding the research study. The questionnaire consists of open-ended questions to make it more interactive while collecting the data. The researcher investigated all the possible information available concerning this topic and decided that the study of this particular domain of arts is effective, since the performances can bring a major change in society and to sustain it in the near future.

Research approach

In this qualitative approach of study, inductive reasoning is required to justify the existing phenomenon by transforming specific observation into generalized theory, i.e., to justify how the imposition of nationwide lockdown tremendously affected the livelihood of the people related to theatre arts (specific observation). Due to the lockdown, the informal sector experienced the worst (general conclusion). In the process of this research study, some of the basic assumptions or hypothesis were considered which need not be true, such as, the outbreak of pandemic is happening since medieval history and mostly the western culture got affected as notable tragic dramatists had written and portrayed the reality through plays. Due to the closure of cultural or artistic sector, the state's economy was largely affected and that resulted in the fall in GDP (Gross Domestic Product). The condition of unemployment caused more deaths than those caused by existing infectious viruses. After the announcement of lockdown the majority of theatrical workers opted for alternative livelihood which was considered to be essential service provider. It was also assumed that all the theatre groups with younger generation members were more active during the lockdown based on their knowledge of social media and other digital communication platforms. There is no such limit for performing arts and it will be revived soon. Students who are in other streams of the academic field do not seek paid professions in theatre arts. The majority of informal workers in theatre belong to rural parts of the state.

Sampling

The sample size consisting eleven respondents were selected out of the target group to fulfill the needs of this research. The respondents are Theatre Practitioners who belong to Kolkata Metropolitan Area, West Bengal. Within the process, a Non-Probability form of sampling was considered for the study, specifically Purposive Sampling. The researcher did not seek to sample the participants on a random basis as, before the study was conducted, the researcher had already set a goal on whom to approach at the preliminary stage. The researcher had a clear view of the criteria relevant to the inclusion and exclusion of the units of analysis. After that, to collect data from more participants, the researcher decided to use Snowball Sampling which is a form of purposive sampling in qualitative research.

Pretest of tool

This method was formulated after understanding and observing the available literature based on this research study. Initially, the researcher drafted basic questions in the open-ended form to identify only the crisis . The first experience in a conversation with a respondent which was indeed a trial had suggested the areas to be improved in the study and the requirement of more fact-based responses. Then the researcher corrected as well as added more questions in the semi-structured interview which would help in further findings and analysis. The two-way interactive session was implemented in data collection. Apart from the respondents, the reports and other sources of data incorporated the necessity of this research study.

Data collection

To collect a set of detailed information, an in-depth interview technique was used, where responses were based on Semi-structured open-ended questions. The source of collecting data was Primary source, which comprises using the tools of Direct Interview and Telephone Interview. Further, the recorded responses were used for transcription of the data. Likewise, the process was done with the utmost

cooperation of the respondents.

Data analysis

In the process of data analysis, initially, the transcription of all collected data was done and were recorded through voice notes. After that, translation was done from the Bengali language to the English language for common understanding. Hence, all the responses were recorded with the consent of each participant who appeared for direct personal interview as well as telephonic interview.

Ethical considerations

All possible ethical problems were considered while designing the research to get the required data. First, the respondents were identified and were approached with utmost dignity. Before conducting the interview, a written consent had been circulated to each respondent in order to seek their voluntary participation in this process of research study and to maintain transparency while acquiring their personal information (Annexure-III). Meanwhile, an adequate level of confidentiality had been ensured and by which the anonymity of individuals who shared their experiences during the period of crisis was maintained. The interviews were conducted as per the availability of the participants. Usually, they used to suggest a feasible time for having a comprehensive conversation. Thus, their decision was respected and everything was done systematically.

Limitations

The only limitation that was being faced by the student researcher while conducting this research study which is a part of the curriculum was less scope of exposure through the virtual mode and the responses of different participants tended to be similar in a way. Due to the unprecedented situation since last year, everyone is experiencing restrictions and other related constraints. Therefore the student researcher was kept on hold and it is the main reason for collecting this much information within crunch time. Most of the individuals were dealing with various challenges; despite that, it is finally done, considering everyone's convenience

and valuable input in this study.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the relevance of the available data, the researcher tried to focus on specific variables. On this basis, a theory that had been adopted in this research study is *'Theory of Cost Disease'*. This theory was introduced by William Jack Baumol and William Gordon Bowen in the 1960s and both of them are American economists. The theory explains the rise of salaries in jobs that have experienced no or low increase of labour productivity, in response to rising salaries in other jobs that have experienced higher labour productivity growth. The original study was conducted for the performing arts sector, which believes in the quality of the production than the quantity of it. For instance, the majority of the artistes have diverted their interest to consider it as their profession. In cultural industries, the uncertainty about the quality of a product plays a crucial role and the consumer does not know how good the product is until he/she has consumed it and the producer directly confronts this typical uncertainty in thes industry. It is often used to describe consequences of the lack of growth in productivity in some of the economic sectors that are labour intensive and rely heavily on human proximity as well as public services. It has also been observed that the total factor of productivity is not available to the performing arts sector. It resulted in the increase in the price of performing arts which was offset by an increase in the investment in entertainment by consumers with their standard of living. There were two major thoughts, the first one is concerned with the existence of productivity growth in some areas of production i.e. the same theatre performance can be shown to an even larger audience by improving the space or design of the theatre, by introducing more technical assets, use of digital modes, etc., but that might contradict the relevance of cost disease theory. The second one is concerned with the allocation of subsidies in this theatre industry that should relate to general public interest and distribution of income, i.e. if theatrical practitioners can reduce the cost to the relatively well-off part of the society then

that section of the community can be over-represented as the audiences of subsidized theatre performances and it can also help to promote non-elite artistes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data have been analyzed thematically to interpret the findings through distinct themes out of eleven responses. The procedure was undertaken from having the consent of recording the data to transcription of the recorded responses and working on manual coding by marking the relevant codes from the text where respondents shared their experience in an interview. Then the codes were identified and combined in a group to get themes and sub-themes. At the end all the related findings were mentioned in detail for justifying the relevance of the context in this research paper.

Conceptualizing theatre arts

The concept of theatre can easily be understood through available articles, books, research works, discussions, etc., but this theme has been selected for the purpose of looking at the concept through the lens of the respondents' perception. Well, to get involved in a certain field the idea must be clear before pursuing it. What many of the respondents did was explore the concept or existence of theatre arts in our contemporary society. They have shared their views in their own respective ways where they tried to convey their thoughts and experiences in this field.

Theatre Arts has evolved through an experimental approach in the past decades, where theatre is denoted as a prerequisite notion of not just acting but something beyond this, as an expression of emotion, creating connection through live performance, the realization of a being, and so on. Here, the acting is considered to be the tip of an iceberg and the performance should be in a way where it can lead to liberation. By exploring the skills within, an individual can help to realize the existing capabilities and that can build confidence.

According to respondent 1, his concept of theatre has changed after getting into this field. He says,

By the word theatre, I only understood

acting. And I thought that theatre is all about acting and nothing else. But today, if we really see what theatre is, then acting is just the tip of the iceberg. It has much more to it. And I feel that theatre and performance can lead to liberation. So I started exploring it more and more and I suddenly realized I was good at it for some reason, which was never expected. And this is how my journey continued and to date, I have been searching for myself through my theatre.

Theatre is considered to be a live performance where its essence could be felt through the sound of applause and appreciation at the end; thus it is an irreplaceable art form. The online platform has taken over live performance in this generation as viewers are shifting to their convenient option but it is for the time being and most of the performers are hoping to revive theatre soon, where encouragement is expected from the live audience and the vibe will be maintained throughout the show. The viewers are the ones who make better artistes by their valuable response.

Theatre is often seen as a source of motivation, where the stage and the spotlight can boost one's confidence to be resilient. It is considered to be the world of philosophy where performers can explore through their interests and realize their desire for future endeavours and help in moulding personality traits. Bengali Theatre has its own significance like any other existing theatre forms. Thespians are trying their best to sustain their cultural identity and language by reaching out to the larger audience. Transmission of this particular art form can generate positive change in society which can result representing a community for the heritage of their existing culture.

Theoretical knowledge as well as practical experience is necessary to acquire the basics; this does not limit the skills of an individual. They are capable of anticipating beyond stardom, they need to establish certain plots which have a resemblance with reality. The journey from being amateur to enhancing their skills and knowledge can lead to stardom but that too for a short time. Creation of new concepts and turning out to be better can lead to self-satisfaction to some extent. Opportunities might be limited but

that cannot obstruct one's determination, as others will be guided accordingly.

One of the respondents also shared a view about drama in relation to divinity. A few of the artistes can create a realistic scene through their determined performance, and the act of pretending cannot be justified as a remarkable one. Acting is something that can be learned by observation, practical experiences, interactions, so on and so forth. New compositions with different forms and experiments can help terminate the presentation of monotonous plays.

As respondent 9 has shared his view,

In many other cases, our theatre plays are considered to be monotonous as it is repetitive by nature, but we try to create new compositions as well, likewise, we are paving the way… See if your acting is true, even though you stand in a place and stare at someone with true intention then you'll see the spectator can connect and watch your performance, it is very crucial in theatre arts. Now probably many actors stare in a dramatic way that happens to be pretending only.

Usually, the names of theatre forms have been given according to the space used by thespians to perform their play. Open theatre is known as Mukto Natya in Bengali, the concept is quite interesting where an imaginary platform can be visualized. But in a true sense, there is no such boundary can be created, unlike Stage theatre which is known as Mancha Natya in Bengali. In this industry the thespians prefers to call it proscenium set up. The open theatre is something which has relevance with constant interaction with nature and its surroundings and it is said to be conceptualized for the rural areas where the thespians are free to perform in available set up with the minimum expense. After that, it is often compared with the concept of Street Play which is completely different. Street plays are performed on urban streets and mostly the idea is related to awareness generation. Then we can see there the periphery of audiences where the direct response can be expected; the majority of youth artistes or amateurs prefer this form to convey their concerns.

Respondent 10 says in her interview that,

Prodigiously, this open theatre has also a proper set, or the artistes perform in an imaginary platform, if we can say, but there is no such boundary in the space or we haven't tried to mark its limit; that is why we don't consider it stage theatre. Open theatre has constant interaction with nature and other resources and is considered to be a unique form. There is a difference, i.e. open theatre is basically conceptualized for the rural environment, as artistes are free to create a set out of resources where, a tree can be depicted as a temple or other resources can be included in the play. But the street plays which we see in urban streets are quite different as they needs props or periphery of the audience to interact with and convey the exact message in the given time. There the norms of a few restrictions might come up in urban areas than rural space. Mostly, this open theatre in a rural area must be performed during daylight after considering the constraints of rural living.

Then we get too familiar with the terms Intimate Theatre and Third theatre. These two concepts are synonymous in the way the performers build a relationship with audiences, for the time being. It is so, because throughout the performance the constant interaction and conversation is being done to maintain the interest of an audience, in an effort to engage them throughout the show. Direct responses can help in improvisation and public opinion is considered to be the key element. To be a good performer the convivial nature is mandated to reach out to the masses, build certain connection, etc.

Respondent 3 had concluded in short,

You know, theatre means live performance; what you can get, what kind of taste you can get throughout the live performance you won't get it from an online performance; you won't get that because it is fully recorded.

As the importance of live performance and its essence has already been discussed here, the OTT platform is something that has recorded clips where several retakes cannot justify its sense of perfection over live act. Virtual mode is having its own set of benefits but the choice should be based on an

individual's convenience. Theatre connects the masses through one to one approach and live performance gives meaning to exchange the views.

Introspection:

This topic will discuss the respondent's insight that they hold within and have shared through conversation and this sub-topic itself defines the ideology they might have through their experiences. There are lots of theatre practitioners who seek peace out of this art form and they happen to be inspired by short phrases which shed light on their life. Hence, they follow it as ideological concepts such as, 'maan er kono mane nei' (an individual's worth or reputation has no literal meaning); 'acting is doing'; 'Krodha vabati sammoha, Sammoha smriti vibhramaha, Smriti bhramsat buddhi nasho, Buddhi nasha pranashyati' (a person should always choose to be in a calm minded state to have control over portents). This inspired Gita Shloka teaches us about anger management of an individual and so on.

Significance of diverse communities in theatre:

Through the interview, the research student came across the fact of participatory approach in this particular sector. Theatre can reach its height through everyone's interest, as the participation can increase the sustainable approach in a way. The experimentation in theatre arts has also been done through involving communities irrespective of their gender identity, age group, caste, class, region and so on. It is also said that if people from marginal communities or residents of distant areas cannot reach out, then through developmental perspectives the performers must go to them for the promotion of art and culture, also to set an idea of empowerment where theatre can be used as awareness weapon in the near future. Evidence can be found in various journals or articles, but through this research study, many respondents shared opinions about the inclusion of various groups and the merits of their participation.

In this contemporary society, the disparity of caste and class has been a predominant factor. Respondent 1 shared his thought,

It always happened that for the most part of my life CASTE has been a predominant factor because I come from a very lower caste. So, just like, the society always pointing fingers at it, I always wanted to fit into something, and unconsciously, the class struggle is embedded in our being. Theatre is a medium where I can express myself and vent out things.

Likewise, it has been mentioned in the study of 'theatre for the oppressed'. Generally, in society we are unconsciously stuck in and always try to take up the role of oppressors in the process of being oppressed. Everyone plays a role until their death. Theatre can give a platform or we can say, it is a medium where the thespians or any other individuals can vent out their emotions, in a way. The biased outlook or any kind of division among creativity does not allow development and sustainability in society.

Challenges during the unprecedented crisis

The impact on an individual's life can be better explained by themselves only. Through an in-depth interview, all the required information was recorded and also verified through available sources. They shared their experiences and other related concerns based on their knowledge and incidents which they have witnessed so far.

According to respondent 2,

As an individual, living in that situation was very difficult, because everything changed. We were all home-bound. Things like food material and everything were not available because the shops were closed. We were very anxious about how we would survive if the basic needs are not met? Then we were also concerned about the medical facility, how would we be availing that facility in this kind of a situation. So it was a very, very challenging time for us as normal human beings. If you look at the cultural aspect, we deal with a medium that actually demands a lot of human proximity. You need people to come together as this is a community thing where we want people to come and share the same space. So what happened? The entire

system collapsed; the cultural system which demanded this kind of presence of human beings in a small space, or in a confined space, totally collapsed. So everything was stopped. It continued months after months, and then what happened slowly, you know, frustration, depression, all these things started to seep in.

Since the time lockdown was imposed on this nation, it has affected all sectors. Mostly, the respondents suffered from anxiety, mental stress, mood swings, and all being at home also was not suitable for physical health. The next thing was the crisis in livelihood In the culture of theatre it is obvious to have human proximity, but in this unprecedented situation, thespians had to maintain social distancing and avoid rehearsing at their respective spaces. The fear of this deadly disease has cornered the interest of theatre performance for the time being. In spite of that, many practitioners tried to perform solo over virtual mode but in that way the theatre performance was not possible because it requires a team to work together. Maybe most of the thespians need to learn about digital handling and advanced technological stuff to resume their work during this difficult time. Sitting back and hoping for revival will not work as the extension of lockdown has become common, but these days it can be seen as an opportunity to learn something new. Artistes are the ones who used to have practical experience on this, saying 'there is no age limit for learning something new and we should acquire knowledge throughout our existence.'

Way forward:

Last year has been difficult for the performing industry; everyone who is related to theatre faced a humongous crisis due to the closure of halls and other spaces in the city as well as due to the norms of social distancing and quarantining. After that, during the period of unlocking, many groups pleaded for the resumption of theatre performances. By the end of the year private auditoriums planned to resume, taking into consideration all safety measures including to allow limited audiences. because many of the staff were in a financial crunch. Likewise

government halls also opened for the performing arts industry in February this year. Now the concern is that halls and spaces were available during post-lockdown but Is it the only way of reviving theatre performance in Kolkata?

In this theme, all the respondents including theatre practitioners, directors, playwrights and amateur artistes had set their vision to move on in the field they are currently pursuing and also for post lockdown they already had revival strategies to be accomplished within a fixed time.

DISCUSSION

To curb the spread of COVID-19 across the nation the sudden lockdown was imposed last year by the government. Most of the sectors suffered due to sudden closure and the works paused for a while. It resulted in a sharp fall across the nationwide economy; it affected the population of the informal sector to a large extent. The researcher analyzed the condition of Theatrical personnel by reviewing literature and interviewing participants of this research study.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic the population had to cooperate with the decision of the government and follow the order of home quarantine; thus, most of the workers in the theatre industry were affected by the loss of jobs. This unemployment had raised many complications in society. Theatre practitioners compulsively came down on the streets either urging people for help or to generate awareness about their concerns. This crisis situation seemed to be life-threatening for most of them as they found it hard to afford their basic needs. The situation for one year had become worse than the great depression; it caused a financial crisis which is why people were unable to purchase essential commodities and also pay their rental costs in the urban settlements. The standard well-being had dropped resulting in psycho-social issues among the people. Often they were suffering from depression, anxiety, frustration, and so on. To deal with such a situation some of the theatre workers shifted to alternative livelihood where they took up jobs as informal workers or self-employed workers. There is no evidence found other than in these two categories and

they are providing essential services to the people residing in Kolkata Metropolitan Area.

According to the responses, the workers who used to engage off-stage are now working as vegetable sellers, fruit sellers, fish sellers, rapido riders, masks and sanitizer sellers, factory workers, manual workers, etc. The fear of hunger could not surpass the fear of transmission of coronavirus. Also, this issue triggered the rise in the number of suicidal attempts and suicides in this theatre industry. The forms of theatre have been changed, it is being politicized to draw the attention of the majority by making them aware of the power of people's rule and the authoritative structure of society. Acting can often lead to activism, just that there needs to be a realization of freedom of expression. The involvement of the masses and unity can promote this artistic sector. The sense of equality and equity in this industry can deal with emerging issues in the future. As theatre practitioners seek better opportunities than considering this particular art form of their passion, they often perform to satisfy their needs and it acts as human motivation. Most of them do not introduce theatre sector as their mainstream profession and that has become the reason why it is denoted as one of the non-essential jobs in this contemporary society. Also more than 90% of theatre groups in the city are not registered under the concerned authority for development. It impacts negative connotation in the creative invention or artistic life.

The concept of a pandemic is not new as it has occurred in the past decades and over centuries, but coping mechanism has changed according to the availability of resources and possible strength. It may require up-gradation of preventive measures being taken during such period and proper awareness of the whole mass. There were responses as well as other sources based on initiatives taken to help the affected workers, i.e. most of the theatre groups initiated fundraising drive with utmost transparency, the government implemented one time grant to the theatre groups during the lockdown, artistes were engaged on social media platforms to exchange their cultural aspects and so on. Even after it resumes, the revival will take time as the number of audience might drop and the workers will be limited due to limited budget. Still, it is possible to continue the work through experimentation on various spaces and accessing limited resources. It has been decided to reach out to the masses who cannot afford to witness a live performance. The belief says theatre arts cannot bring transformational development but it can contribute towards change in the society and it can empower the communities by enabling them to express themselves.

CONCLUSION

This research study is intended to shed light on the life of individuals who are associated with theatre arts so that their experiences are made known to the population for better analysis of the facts mentioned in this paper. The respondents belong to an amateur group as well as a professional group but the struggles do not differ much, in a way, as this pandemic has been distressful for all. According to the interview, it could be analyzed that most of the respondents initially got into this field for their outstanding interest in theatre arts. Now, we can see most of the practitioners considering theatre as a passion than a profession (full-time job or income source). While analyzing the data, it was evident that theatre needs a collective approach to bring transformation in society. It might not change the whole society at a time but it can create social reform with the inclusion of mass participation to bring change in human society.

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