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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PRACTICING THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED BY THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT BOYS ORPHANS HOME.

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Abstract

Theatre of the oppressed is hugely practicing in academics of India. Many universities are offering this versatile interactive theatre form to their theatre aspirants. The University of Hyderabad is a Central University located in Hyderabad which is in the southern part of India. Having more popularity in abroad, lack of contemporary practitioners, sometimes universities invite an expert in theatre of the oppressed to India to interact with their students. They will interact with students through workshops, then the mentors use to practice the particular form at the nearest practicable source. After getting primary knowledge about Theatre of the Oppressed the university students were practiced at nearest Orphan boys home named Snehghar. Practicing Theatre of the Oppressed in aware circumstances with amateur students and how Theatre of the Oppressed and its branches were applied with orphan children is the central idea of this paper.

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Introduction: -

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. - The rainbow of Desires by Augusto Boal.

Theatre of the oppressed is a kind of interactive theatre, it has unique way of style to engage the audience with many interactive theatre techniques which are derived by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, in many countries a lot of wide range of amateur theatre directors and practitioners are practicing the theatre of the oppressed techniques to address the oppressed communities. Augusto Boal has a good reputation in India. Jana Sanskriti is a well-known theatre hub for Theatre of the Oppressed.

Many universities which are offering theatre arts or performing arts are providing sustained knowledge about Theatre of the Oppressed to the students. The universities are producing many students to Theatre of the Oppressed, and they are practicing the core branches of theatre of the oppressed like Image theatre, Forum theatre, Newspaper theatre, Legislative theatre, and the Games. They use to practice theatre of the oppressed with different kinds of group of people at different kind of places. Games for actor and non-actor and Rainbow of the desires are everyday handbooks for many theatre students.

The University of Hyderabad is offering MA (Master of Arts) in Theatre Arts. In the core syllabus in MA, there is a paper about community theatre, for that paper sometimes university will provide guest faculties from local as well as abroad. After learning the particular course, the faculty use to conduct a practice work at the nearest source. 10

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days' workshop of theatre of the oppressed has to conclude with the practise session. So the university students are split into two groups, one group selected Boys Orphan home.

"Amanvedika Sneghar" Boys home Mehedipatnam is an Orphan school was selected to practice for university MA students. The students have planned the workshop for 2 days.

Most of the Children orphan homes are working under NGO's (Non-government organization), they associated with local schools to educate children. The first-day plan is about to find oppression issues of children, according to the results facilitators have to make a plan, to play theatre games, Image theatre, or Newspaper theatre practice with the children.

Second-day plan is to practice Legislative theatre, Playback Theatre and Forum theatre with the children

Methodology: -

Participant Observation method, Interactive method, Action research methodologies were used and Documentation of process was used for data collection.

Orphan Home and its conditions: -

Amanvedika Sneghar Boys home is located in Mehedipatnam, Hyderabad. 125 boy Orphans are taking shelter in the home. 50 to 60 children who are not having both father and mother.

50 children who are having only father or mother, few children were taken by police who are caught where they are used as child labor. Some children were taken to the home because of both father and mother who are not able to raise them in any way.

The local government is monitoring the home by NGO's (non-government organizations), the government provide shelter, food, and education. Sneghar (home for friendship) is located on the high school campus. Sarva Shikshana Abhiyan (Hindi: सर्व शिक्षा अभियान, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyān, English: Education for All Movement), or SSA, is an Indian Government programme aimed at the universalisation of elementary education "in a time bound manner", as mandated by the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 to 14 (estimated to be 205 million children in 2001) a fundamental right. The program was pioneered by former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

At the corner of the school ground, they constructed a hostel along with the kitchen for creating a permanent house and food facility, simultaneously co-operated with the high school to provide free education.

The orphan children have to study in their campus high school. The High school will provide education from 1st class to 10th. All age groups are allowed to live in the home, bachelor degree is the maximum affordable education and 1st class is the minimum providing education to the orphans. There is no caste separation to them, but they considered complete orphans as SC (schedule caste) who are didn't have anyone to take care of them, for their future benefits. Indian society follows reservation system to encourage the downtrodden people.

In the campus premises, they are very free to live but there is no free access to children to go out of the campus. Every day children go to school, attend their classes, the evening they play each other and they are very active in cultural events. After school they will come to orphan home. In that adolescent age they didn't have any other oppressions but when they saw the other regular children come to school from their homes along with their parents with caring and love, and at the lunch session mothers will come to school for feed the toddlers, in the evening the parent will wait at the main gate to receive their kids, these caring family bondage love, emotional situations make the orphans depress and fall them in to sorrow.

Few Sundays some of the orphaned family members who are having only mother, father or caretaker are used to come to the home to visit their kids and bring some homemade food and serve their children it makes other children sad and they remember those lost family members, some of the children become orphans because of their family member died in crime incidents these children are sometimes unmanageable, poverty, family issues, these are all situations are an example of an indirect oppression on the Orphan. The caretakers or organizers of the Orphan home

did not allow the kids to go outside of the school premises, because of the security reasons, it makes children feel like they were arrested. These are the few situations make some children feel alone, calm, inactive, angrier beings etc., these are all also an oppression but the dimension and impact are different when compare with Augusto Boal described oppression.

In this particular case, the oppressor is not a particular person to find out, those are the situations that did not have to resolve oppression nor give a solution to the oppressor, sometimes it does not come under the circumstances of the theatre of the oppressed. But whatever it may be it is a psychological oppression, so where the oppression and oppressed appears the theatre of the oppressed should make an impression on it. So this particular observation is deals how the theatre of the oppressed and its techniques work on some indirect oppressions.

Theatre of the Oppressed workshop at university: -

The University of Hyderabad has conducted the Theatre of the Oppressed workshop in the part of the master degree program for MA (Master of Arts) Theatre arts students. The actual paper for that semester is theatre activism so the head of the department elected Theatre of the oppressed is a much better optional course for the students.

Ola Johnson is a research scholar from Sweden. He was the workshop operator for the Theatre of the Oppressed course. The University of Hyderabad is invited him to take a class on the particular topic, most of the students are very new to the theatre of the oppressed. I am Mr Kiran Kumar Sangala a research fellow at the same university (University of Hyderabad) as well as the same department (Department of Theatre Arts), I have been supervising by Prof. Satyabratha Rout. I have much more interest to do my PhD in the area of Theatre of the Oppressed, but I am at the initial stage to decide my research topic when Ola Johnson had come to give his class, so my supervisor gave permission to join the MA students as an observer.

The class had been carried through by one week. 1st day he has given an introduction class about the theatre of the oppressed followed with few games. Image theatre, Newspaper theatre, Playback theatre, Legislative theatre, Invisible theatre, and Forum theatre were covered, Joker and his jobs spect-actor transformation, audience behaviors in the forum were covered in all session. At the end of the class, workshop instructor has to do a practice session with the class. He selected two different areas for practice the theatre of the oppressed techniques in different circumstances. He divided the class into 2 groups and sent them to two different areas in Hyderabad by the choice of the class. One group decided to go to local school which is in the University campus and associated with the university, and the second group is selected an orphan home which is attached to a high school in Mehadiptnam 9 km far from the University.

Theatre of the oppressed is presenting its unique quality in many ways to explore the characteristic behaviours of societal oppression and simultaneously providing a democratic solution to counter that oppression.

Day 1 with Children: -

We permitted into the school premises by taking school principal permission and orphan home caretaker permission, and we have been allotted time from evening 3 to 6. The practitioner is 5 in number, and I'm in the position to observe the total process of the workshop along with them.

Ola Johnson is a European guy, that means he is a foreigner because the children are very interested to interact with him, he is also played a trick to engage them with us, the actual plan is we have to take an interactive class with them for understanding both parties but when we entered the school few children are playing football actually we don't know whether they are orphan children or normal school children, later we understand these children are orphans, but Ola observed that they don't want to join in our theatre activity to leave their game, so Ola was joined immediately with the children to play football without asking anybody the children surprised and accepted him as a team mate, later we also joined with them and we split into two teams and we played around half an hour. That game makes our university students very comfortable to interact with children and that session concenter as the warm-up class.

As a theatre of the oppressed practitioner, we need to understand the circumstances and aware about the area where do we want to work, and we have to make a good relation with the participants and we need to establish a friendly and convenient location for exploring our ideas with them.

Ola Johnson divided the practitioners into two groups as well as Orphan home children also divided into 2 groups each group of children were led by each group of university students. 30 students were covered in each group. At the initial stage, students were operated few games with children from the book of "Games for actors and non-actors" written by Augusto Boal, some walking patterns and related exercise, Integration games, circle games, etc.

Image Theatre:-

The meaning of an Image is the image itself. Image is a language.

- Augusto Boal- Games for actor and non-actor.

The joker or facilitator asks more than 5 among the group to express the selected concept in a visual form. Without talking and without observing others to influence others, one after one has to come into the middle of the acting space or playing space to express the theme by positioning their bodies in a still pose to convey the idea or opinion of the given concept is a central idea of Image theatre.

The facilitators (joker) unable to give the pre-assumed concept to the children to create an image, they indirectly imposed non-oppressed themes to do the image theatre with the orphan children. In the image theatre, if you want to make a Forum with that particular image, that created image has to be shown the resemblance of the oppression. In the orphan home nobody will not do any practice to take back the children into their previous memories, why because nobody will make any attempt to create a situation to rethink about their past situation and family, that will lead them to disturb, homesick, and loneliness, so in the school premises either Orphan home organizers did not make any disturbance to the children. So practitioners are also very much aware of such things by the organizers.

The total plan was changed according to the orphan home circumstances. Every theme of image theatre was a happy memory of the children. So here the facilitators (joker) are practiced the Image theatre with happy and enjoyable concepts.

Image theatre is based on the multiple mirrors of the gaze of others. A number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what has evoked them, what is their imaginations throw up around that image, these multiple reflections will reveal to the person who made the image its hidden aspect. -Augusto Boal, Games for actor and non-actor.

The practitioners (facilitators) make children in a circle, they played memory games, coordination games. In the image theatre practice all images or poses they are intended to present very happy and joyful gestures. In Image theatre they came to the center by joker's instructions created some images according to their imagination that gives a metaphorical meaning but there is no oppression on that images. In total image theatre process children are very enjoyed, the facilitators who are practicing theatre of the oppressed didn't address or impose any kind of inputs to raise orphan children problems or oppression.

The university students want to practice all major branches of the theatre of the oppressed but the limitations and possibilities have changed the plan of action. Theatre of the oppressed is not a static form or pre-planned work its always change according to the situations, facilitators have to observe and understand the situations

Second day with children: -

The university students are not able to practice Forum theatre, Newspaper theatre, Invisible theatre. The second day Ola Johnson was accompanied by another group, so the group who is working with orphan school children were unable to monitor by the subject expert.



Photographs 1: - A still from Image Theatre



Photograph 2: - A still from Playback Theatre



Photograph 3:- A still from Playback Theatre.

Playback Theatre: -

In the original Playback Theatre dramaturgy, the intention was to recreate events, experiences, and lived situations told as stories by spectators - then to immediately translate them into scenes on the stage set up for that purpose, acted out in an abbreviated form and, so-to-speak, "played back" (hence "Playback").

Playback theatre with the children, they divided the children into 4 groups and instructed them to come with a personal story of their own life incidents, they gave 10 minutes to all groups. After 10 minutes the children come up with very interesting stories, interestingly most of the stories are addressed with the family members when they have been with their beloved families.

The stories were enacted into performance. Four stories came to the performance.

One of the performance is about a father and a son story, a father's small gift to an achieved son. A father was offered a gift to his son if the son succeeds in his exams. The boy has cleared the particular exam so the father was surprised the son with a beautiful bicycle. It is a 12 years' boy story has enacted in the playback theatre.

Most of the stories addressed to their family-related stories. Remembering their family members, and related memories, and enacting the real stories children felt very excited, they are very attentive to participate in the Playback theatre. They are very happy and enthusiast to establish all characters into their own show. Instead of all other branches of theatre of the oppressed playback theatre is the more effective theatre to deal with this particular kind of situations.

Conclusion: -

Theatre of the Oppressed is not a technique to address about oppressional situations and socio-political change every time, in certain, parameters Theatre of the Oppressed unable to apply the techniques to resolve the overviewed oppression, but sometimes it should be work as relief and reconciliation object. Learning Theatre of the oppressed by workshops in short period, practicing in a different circumstances and limited period of time are justified thing in theatre practice. As a facilitator, they must adopt the theatre of the oppressed techniques according to the situations, locality, time, and space. The facilitator needs to understand the atmosphere and find the suitable techniques to resolve the oppression or he has to offer the Theatre of the oppressed as a playful object. So whatever theatre of the oppressed should be adaptable and flexible to address the issues of oppressed and oppressors by own way of style.

Note:-

1. Joker (facilitator): The joker is the facilitator of the theatre of the Oppressed experience. In rehearsals and workshops, the joker guides actor thorough games and exercises to investigate shared experiences of oppression.
2. Spect- actor: Theatre of the oppressed spect-actor refers to the dual role of those involved in the process as both spectator and actor.

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