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Performing Arts And Social Work – An Indian Context

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Abstract:

Art forms played a vital role from the very ancient time of Social awareness and development. Art forms are the major communication tool to reach the masses. Even today, the use of art forms are an interdisciplinary approach to the forms, objectives, and histories of creative social practice in modern performance and visual art is called Social Works. "Culture is an everyday way of life that we practice. This covers, among other things, customs related to food, attire, holidays, rites and ceremonies, language, demeanour, and art. A cultural expression is art. In contemporary India, art can be viewed as a creative means of protesting colonial rule and its horrors (1757–1947). There are various art forms like Therukoothu(Street theatre), villu pattu(Bow song), Mime, puppetry, playback theatre, theatre of oppression, folk arts like Paraiattam, Oyilattam, kazhial sattaikuchi attam, social awareness songs, documentary and short films etc., are forms are inevitable in social work. This conceptual study comprises of history of art forms in social development and social work, the role of art forms in social work, based on the intense reviews made the study also proposed a model on “ Mass Communication Tools in social work” – a curriculum based model developed to create a support model for social work education.

Key words: Performing arts and social work, Art forms, Communication tool, Mass Communication

Introduction:

Art and education is inevitable. There is an inclusion of arts in every programme in every institution. Art form increases the creativity among learners and educators. Art forms are an instrument of communication. It helps learners to develop various skills and involve in practice. When there are inclusive art forms in institutions; education becomes holistic and complete. Social work is a programme designed to develop students from

working with individual to community level. Performing arts is considered to be one of the major communication tools used in social work to communicate with the larger society and also it is considered to the therapeutic processes. This conceptual paper involves performing arts as significant tools for the major communication among the masses. An idea of include the tool as one of the components in social work education in Indian Context.

History of Indian culture and performing arts

Indian art forms comprises of theatre arts, dance forms, music and film. India's rich cultural legacy includes tribal performance arts as a fundamental component. They cover a broad range of artistic disciplines, such as theater, dance, and music, each having its own distinct aesthetic and cultural value. These manifestations, which show the tribes' close link with the natural world and the cosmos, are firmly anchored in their daily routines and spiritual belief¹. The performing arts offer more than just entertainment for tribal people. They serve as a channel for spiritual contact, a way to celebrate and strengthen social ties, and a way to preserve their history and traditions. Every performance is full with symbolism, frequently delivering messages of harmony, peace, and environmental respect. Among tribal performing arts, dance is arguably the most visually engaging element. It is a way to express happiness, a way to worship, and a way to commemorate important life events like marriage, the harvest, and the change of the seasons. The term "parai attam" describes a folk dance performed alongside the playing of the parai, a hollow drum constructed of a wooden frame with a cow's hide stretched across one side. One of the earliest percussion instruments in human history is thought to be the parai. Its origins can be traced back to the ancient Tamil society, when it served a variety of purposes such as calling forth the spirits of the dead during funeral processions, celebrating festivals and weddings, and broadcasting notices and cautions².

History of art forms in social development

India is a country with a rich cultural history. A vital part of our culture has always been music, dance, and theater, dating back to the dawn of civilization. These artistic endeavors were originally employed as a means of spreading religion and social changes, into which dance and music were included for commercial purposes.³

¹ *Indian Tribal Performing Arts*. IndiaNetzone.com. (n.d.). https://www.indianetzone.com/37/indian_tribal_performing_arts.htm

² Latagajanan, N. (2019, August 1). *How an ancient art form became a symbol of resistance*. The Caravan. <https://caravanmagazine.in/lede/ancient-art-form-became-symbol-resistance>

³ performing arts: Music, dance and drama(5.6 MB) - NIOS. (n.d.-a). <https://www.nios.ac.in/media/documents/SecICHCour/English/CH.12.pdf>

The global history of performing arts for ages, the performing arts have played a crucial role in shaping human history and civilization. It includes a broad variety of artistic disciplines, including theater, dance, music, and other live performance art forms. The performing arts have a long history, dating back to the times of ancient Greece and Egypt. Theatrical, dance, and music were employed by the ancient Egyptians to portray their religion. They thought that by pleasing the gods, these acts would bring good prosperity. The performing arts were an integral part of Greek festivals dedicated to their gods. Classical theatrical genres like comedy and tragedy were also invented by the ancient Greeks, and they continue to have an impact on theater today.⁴ The performing arts developed and expanded throughout Europe during the middle ages. The performing arts were heavily supported by the church, which also used them as a propaganda and religious education instrument. Ancient Greek theater saw resurgence during the Renaissance due to a resurgence of interest in classical art forms.

The performing arts saw tremendous transformation in tandem with the advancement of society and technology. The printing press made it possible to produce plays and musical works and distribute them to a larger audience. Cabarets, vaudeville performances, and circuses are examples of the new entertainment that the Industrial Revolution brought about.

The performing arts still play a significant role in our lives today by offering social criticism, cultural expression, and enjoyment. The variety and inventiveness of performing arts have only increased throughout time, encompassing everything from Broadway musicals to street shows. It is evidence of the enduring influence and force these artistic forms have had throughout history. Thus, as the performing arts continue to develop and influence our society, it ought to value and encourage them.

The role of Art forms in Social Work:

There are various institutions in India and abroad using performing arts in the curriculum of Social Work. As social work studies Ethnographic means of communities includes their culture, traditions, values, norms and their life style. Because the arts encourage participation and investigation into trauma or events that clients have not yet processed, they can be a contemplative and relational experience for them. Through a contemplative technique, the social worker and client can be open and attentive to the various perspectives and ideas that surface from the artwork the client is or has made. The creative process deepens the client's comprehension of their resources, expands their capacity to use them, and increases their wisdom. Additionally, it helps the client realize how much more multifaceted their lives may and should be. With the

⁴ nygms2. (2024, January 24). *The history of Performing arts: From ancient times to modern day. Performing Arts.*
<https://performingartsmusic.org/the-history-of-performing-arts-from-ancient-times-to-modern-day/>

aid of an artistic medium, social workers can engage with their clients and fully immerse themselves in their lives through this kind of therapeutic work, which is not about facts and history⁵.

Performing arts and Community Development:

The relationship between performing arts and community development is wider, from an awareness creation to freedom struggle movement. Performing arts were widely used and use today by various social and community scientists. Performing arts is one of the mass communication tools in community development. Especially in India, the performing arts are the major communication tools in various social movements. The Indian Freedom Movement relied heavily on theatre, which used its shows to spread nationalism among the general public. Dedicated to this aim, the Indian People's Theatre Association was founded in Mumbai in 1943. Among the most well-known plays produced by the IPTA were Veedhi Bhagavatam (about Hitler's downfall), Shahider Dak (about the Freedom Movement), Main Bhooka Hoon (about the Bengal Famine), and Nabanna⁶.

Social movements and performing arts in India:

Bengali versions of two Western plays were presented in Calcutta in 1795 by a Russian named Herasim Lebedeff, marking the first stage performance in a modern Indian language⁷. Indian cinema and theater were vital to the liberation movement. It was supported by numerous patriotic dramas and films in various Indian languages. During the colonial era, public theater evolved into a system of production and consumption that modeled national behavior and became a reflection of national character. The second part of the 18th century saw the emergence of theatre in India in Calcutta and Bombay. Elites ruled the theaters during the 1860s. They

⁵ *Social work and the arts. USC Suza Interactive theater is one example of a participatory arts program that works well for psychoeducation and addressing social issues (Fredland, 2010; Keller, Austin & McNeill, 2017). nne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. (n.d.-b). <https://dworakpeck.usc.edu/social-work-and-the-arts#:~:text=Enhancing%20the%20social%20worker's%20practice%20with%20the%20arts&text=The%20arts%20can%20be%20a,experiences%20they%20have%20not%20processed>.*

⁶ *Mahotsav, A. (n.d.). Indian People's Theatre Association. Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, Ministry of Culture, Government of India. <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-detail.htm?13200#:~:text=Theatre%20was%20an%20integral%20aspect,devoted%20to%20such%20a%20cause>.*

⁷ *Singh, D. (1970, January 1). Theatre and Freedom Movement in India. Shodhganga@INFLIBNET: Theatre and freedom movement in India. <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/83084>*

performed a variety of plays that tackled modern problems like polygamy, widow remarriage, and discrimination based on race and class, among many others⁸.

Performing arts and social work intervention:

Augusto Boal, a Brazilian drama theorist who popularized "Theater of the Oppressed," served as the inspiration for the development of interactive theater (Fredland, 2010). Boal created interactive theater approaches to portray societal issues or difficult interpersonal situations. He was inspired by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and engaged audiences in conversation to determine desired outcomes or remedies (Fredland, 2010). Active discussions about positive peer relationships among middle school students, suicide risk mediation, and other topics are addressed through the use of this interactive theater technique (Fredland, 2010; Keller, Austin & McNeill, 2017). Indeed, Let's Talk was an interactive theater intervention located in Montana that gave participants the opportunity to compose and perform creative plays on disclosure and suicidality. Following the performances, a licensed therapist led a discussion with the audience (Keller, Austin, & McNeill, 2017)⁹.

Dalit Theatre:

Ambedkar pushed the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical issues pertaining to Dalits on society. He also introduced the general public to a rational and scientific religion, the Buddhist Dhamma, as well as the method of thinking, doing, and living that is approved by it. He provided guidance to the Dalit community and established the theoretical foundation for an uprising with phrases like "Educate, Organize, Struggle," "Wisdom, Character and Compassion," "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice," "Just make a slave aware of his slavery and would revolt himself," "Atta Deepo Bhavah" (Be your own lamp), and "Education is tigress' milk." The play Yugyatra by M.B. Chitnis, which is regarded as the founding work of Dalit Theatre, explains why Dr. Ambedkar left Hinduism. This drama was written by Chitnis with Ambedkar's approval and supervision. The focus of the drama is Ambedkar's life, legacy, and viewpoints. It stands for Ambedkar's thoughts and philosophy¹⁰.

⁸ Jaswantsingh. (2022, August 29). *Yojana magazine (August 2022): Role of Theatre & Cinema in India's Freedom Struggle*. adda247. <https://www.adda247.com/upsc-exam/role-of-theatre-cinema-in-indias-freedom-struggle/>

⁹ Forenza, B., & Eckhardt, B. (2020, October 23). *Using the Arts in Social Work Intervention*. SocialWorker.com. <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/practice/using-arts-social-work-intervention/>

¹⁰ Satish Pawade सतीश. (2017, August 15). *Dalit theatre and Ambedkar*. Forward Press. <https://www.forwardpress.in/2017/08/dalit-theatre-and-ambedkar/>

Theatre and activism:

Through its creative urge, art creates bridges for the resonance of our common truths and their expression. The motivation to defend these truths comes from politics. Both of them strive toward the same objectives and have similar origins. But in excess, politics becomes little more than opposition, strife, or a struggle for influence and dominance, and art becomes a means of achieving fame, amusement, and financial gain. The harmony that exists between politics and art is threatened by these excesses. Now more than ever, the effort of examining, comprehending, and enhancing this relationship is essential. We investigate this subject in this article by focusing on the connections between Indian theatre and anti-caste agitation. "The first turning point came in 1873 with the advent of Jyotirao Phule's Satyashodhak Jalsas, which added a reformist edge to the traditional form of street theatre, featuring poet-composer Shahirs," writes Yogesh Maitreya, founder of Panther's Paw Publication, in his chronicle of the history of Anti-Caste performances. The start of Ambedkar's anti-caste movement in 1927 marked the next turning point. Ambedkari jalsa and Shahiri took on a genuinely rebellious shape during this period, revealing a reality that had previously been hidden from society. A prominent character in Marathi theatre, Annabhau Sathe was a Lok-Shahir who began his career as a Marxist-Communist and was a part of IPTA and Lal Bawta Kalapathak (Red Flag Cultural Squad). However, he later converted to Ambedkariteism and gained notoriety as the father of Dalit literature.

Theatre of oppressed:

Creator of the "Theatre of the Oppressed," Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theater practitioner, once stated, "Theatre is a form of knowledge...and can also be a means of transforming society." Rather of waiting for our future, theater may assist us in creating it. Theater can be used to create and disseminate knowledge in many ways, such as reminding the oppressed of their constitutional rights. Strong examples include the work of organizations led by Dalit women, such as Vanangana in Bundelkhand, which produces street plays on legislation against domestic abuse, and the Irular Cultural Troupe in Tamil Nadu, which performs plays on the Bonded Labour Abolition Act in rural communities¹¹.

Various Performing arts bring into play in Southern part of India

Theatre, dance and music are the three basic forms in India widely using various instruments like parai (a drum made out animal skin) which was beaten alongside dance is called thappattam. Similarly, oyil (which is performed with the small piece of cloth on both hands with unique dance steps depicting the agriculture work) therukoothu or Street theatre is performed to portrays epics, dramas and so on. Puppet is one of the forms to

¹¹ *Theatre and resistance: An anti-caste perspective. Drama School Mumbai. (2022, January 31).*
<https://dramaschoolmumbai.in/theatre-and-resistance-an-anti-caste-perspective/>

narrate stories with various forms of puppets. Social awareness songs also written and sung for the various causes like environment protection, freedom struggles, anti dalit protest and peasant movements.

Social Work and Performing Arts:

The social nature of man is defined by an abundance of experiences and occurrences. Our environment, technology, audio-visual media, colors, music, and daily events all have an ongoing impact on our mental health. We unwind with a variety of entertainment during a busy day. These kinds of amusement are within the arts category. The performing arts have a great deal of potential for application as a successful social work method. Professionals in social work now need to be multidimensional in both their educational and practical endeavors. As a profession that is always changing, social work demands the adaptation of fresh, cutting-edge methods and approaches to help people with problems that are impeding their ability to participate in society, both current and emerging. A way of life for some, a form of pleasure for others, and a source of enjoyment for everyone is the performing arts. To comprehend the entire image, a thorough examination of several dimensions is necessary. The value of using dance, music, poetry, theater, role playing, and film in social work. The importance of performing arts in social work practice and in promoting improved social functioning in people, groups, and communities and for their betterment¹²

“Tools of Mass communication in Social Work”:

Social work is comprises of theory, practical, field visits, camps, exposure visits, social reality walks and social experiential labs. Along with leadership, communication, personality development, problem solving, decision making, organizing, documenting, public speaking, students also train on various art skills. Based on the reviews it is understood that social work and social change is possible only with the cultural and art forms as we work with the people. People reside in any part of the community have connections with their cultural arts forms they well related with. Art forms are inevitable in social work, thus the model of Social work tools was developed out of the steering reviews. The Tools of Mass Communication in social work comprised of importance and functions of performing art forms in developing communities and social change.

Performing arts is of theatre, dance and Music. Every social work student trainee has to undergo the massive workshops on theatre, dance and music as part of their prospectus. As the communication patterns of social work starts from the micro to macro level it is important to create a model for the communication outline through arts forms especially through performing arts.

¹² Srivastava, V., & Guin, S. (n.d.). *Performing arts and social work: Initiating creative amalgamations*. *Global Journal of Enterprise Information System*. <https://www.gjeis.com/index.php/GJEIS/article/view/631>

At the micro and mezzo level: social work course includes counseling, case study, therapeutic interventions and guidance. Children, elderly, women, victims, destitute.

Performing art forms that can be used: Movement therapy, music therapy, dance therapy, playback theatre, puppetry, mime and medical clowning

At the Macro level: To deal with communities and mass crowds. Additional to the mass media and social media. Direct communication with the masses is done only through social work communication tool that is performing arts. This can be used to create positive social change through awareness creation, mobilization, organizing, and empower the communities. Street theatre is one of the most mass communication tool used for awareness creation along with music and traditional dance forms. Puppetry is widely used to create awareness among children and convey social information. Playback theatre which is used mezzo and macro level to understand the trauma and the conditions of the communities through community expressions.

The model encompasses the curriculum framework in social work education with applied mass communication tools in social work as one of the specializations or courses in application of the performing arts in community development and empowerment; therapeutic interventions; multidimensional levels of assessing the needs and challenges among children, women, youth, elderly and adults through expressive art forms. As India is known for its multicultural systems, performing arts is one of the needed and significant aspects of social work education.

Model of Mass Communication Tools in Social Work (MCTS)

<p>Applied communication Tools in Social work curriculum- comprises of Performing arts as one of the courses. in India there is an existing system of training performing arts to social work students as beyond the curriculum as Theatre for Transformation and through Social Skill labs and for the purpose of community awareness programme. This tool helps the students to work with Micro to Macro level communities. Helps to create public support and social action</p>	<p>MCTS will be utilized as one of the mass communication tools in social work curriculum in order to work with rural, urban and tribal communities. communication is the major aspects in any programme, and its very essential for social work students to adopt a mass communication tool which helps them to communicate with the larger masses in a better way for the betterment of community as well the self growth of every students who pursue social work.</p>	<p>Performing arts comprise of theatre(theatre are of various forms arts, traditional dance forms, social music forms, which helps students and communities in Multifaceted dimensions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self development 2. develops creativity of the students 3. therapeutic in nature 4. develop various skills of students 5. helps students to understand various perspectives of community issues and challenges. 6. develop students leadership and ability to communicate with any community.
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Chart: Mass Communication Tools in Social Work (MCTS). The syllabus or curriculum involves both theory and practice.

Conclusion:

In India most of the higher educational institutions train and teach performing arts in social work curriculum as theatre for transformation, social skill labs, and theatre workshops which increases student's communication skills, creativity, to understand the problems in a better way to finding its solutions on multiple ways. Social work academics always provide the positive social change and performing arts is one of the major tools of communication with the larger communities irrespective of their literacy levels, culture, social patterns, and languages. Performing arts plays a vital role in communicating and transforming knowledge from the micro level to the macro level.

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