

# ***Crime against Women in India: Can Theatre for Development (TfD) be a Solution?***

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## ***Abstract***

*It is very common that theatre has been used for social progress and for the development of the society. Theatre for development (TfD) includes activists and grass-roots bodies, government and non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as socially-aware theatre groups or individuals. The groups working with women, children, Dalit<sup>1</sup> (Suman K Kasturi 2013:143-152), sex workers, and other marginalized populations – all qualify as practicing theatre for development. “Plurality” is the nature of India. It means people of various cultures, heritage, etc live across the length and breadth of this country. In India, the crime against women (in particular) has been increasing in leaps and bounds, year after year. There is an urgent need to curb the crime against women in contemporary India. “A society that is unable to respect, protect and nurture its women and children loses its moral moorings and runs adrift.” (Siddarth Chatterjee 2012:7). Due to the widespread and branched out cultures in India, apart from the involvement of the less educated and rural masses in most of the crimes against women in India, the medium of theatre could alone be very effective in addressing this significant problem. The aim of this paper is to emphasize the role of Theatre for Development in sensitizing the people of India to overcome the problem of increasing crime against women.*

**Key Words:** Theatre for Development (TfD), Satmass Media, Theatre in Education (TIE), Crime, Development Communication, Development Support Communication, India, Communication, Mass Media

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## **1. Introduction**

One of the major forms of human communication and expression is the arts. Individuals and groups apply them to explore, express and communicate ideas, feelings and experiences. The purpose of artistic works is to inform, teach, persuade and provoke a meaningful thought. They not only can reproduce and reinforce existing ideas and values, but also challenge them, or offer new ways of thinking and feeling. Also, they can confirm existing values and

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<sup>1</sup> The word Dalit has been originated from Sanskrit word ‘dal’, which means broken, ground-down, downtrodden, oppressed, persecuted, or exploited. The roots of the term Dalit can be traced back to the *Purusha Suktam of Rig Veda*

practices to bring about a change. As a result, the arts play an important role in shaping people's understanding of themselves as individuals and members of society, as well as their understanding of the world in which they live. Arts, if effectively utilized, can address the problems being faced by the society.

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a relatively recent phenomenon in the arts (Kees Epskamp 2006: 9-10). In Western Europe during the 1960s, its pre-history began as 'Popular Theatre', 'People's Theatre' or even 'Activist Theatre'. All these terms were in vogue till the time of before the end of the Cold War (1989). The application of performing arts was considered as a *weapon* used strongly and overtly to oppose both political and social oppression. The practitioners of these forerunner genres of TfD had a very pronounced Socialist or Marxist perspective. For that reason, in defining these terms associated with TfD, political or ideological references were involved, almost every time.

The other terms currently in vogue for TfD projects are - Theatre in Education (TIE) projects or Community Theatre projects. All these fields have common characteristics. Which of the three applies best to a particular project depends on definitions of the terms 'development', 'education' or 'community'. TfD is mostly used in the context of 'Development Support Communication' (DSC) and /or in the field of adult education and training, while Theatre in Education (TIE) basically refers to the use of theatre within a formal school or out of school context.

According to Jackson (Ibid) TIE began in Britain during the mid 1960s and spread rapidly as theatres sought to extend their outreach programs and developed a variety of ways of speaking to the countries they served. TIE refers to the use of theatre for explicit educational purposes, closely allied to the school curriculum and mostly in educational purposes: schools, colleges and youth clubs, or sometimes measures and historic sites.

From the other end, community theatre refers to theatre initiatives taken and further developed by the community itself - most often based on popular local forms of indigenous theatre or performing arts within the community. One common characteristic of all these types of theatres is – all of them are participatory in nature.

The use of the term 'Participatory Theatre' might best suit as a common term for all sorts of participatory forms of performing arts and applied drama, including TfD. Theatre in

Education, Community Theatre and Forum Theatre. All these forms have certain features in common. They are appended below: (Ibid)

- Performances or workshops aim at an exchange of ideas between actors/facilitators and the audience;
- The context of the performances indirectly related to the living environment of the targeted audience;
- The themes interwoven in the storylines of the performances are problem-oriented and of direct relevance to the community;
- The audience is motivated to interact in a direct manner during or after the performance with the actors/facilitators.

*Society and Theatre* is a trans-disciplinary cooperative project at the interface between society and the arts. It combines ethical and social aspects – as they are presented with the staging of plays in theatre.

As far as India is concerned, theatre has a great role to play in curbing the crime against women. The significance of theatre in this milieu is discussed at large in the subsequent paragraphs, starting with the working definitions considered for this paper.

## **2. Working Definitions**

The Working definitions of Theatre for Development (TfD), Theatre in Education (TIE) and Development Communication (DC) considered for this paper are as follows:

*“Theatre for Development (TfD) means live performance, or theatre used as a development tool – as in international development. TfD encompasses in-person activities, with people before an audience: a spoken-word drama or comedy.”* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre\\_for\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_for_development))

According to Samuel Jotton:

*“Theatre in Education (TIE) is a new form of theatre that has cropped up in direct response to the needs of both theatre and schools and which has sought to exploit the*

*techniques and imaginative potency of theatre in the service of education.*” (Suman K Kasturi & P. Bobby Vardhan 2013:1-12)

The term “Development Communication” was first coined in 1971 by Nora C. Quebral. In her own words, Development Communication is defined as follows:

*“Development Communication is the art and science for human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential”* (Frank Esser & Thomas Hanitzsch 2012:65)

### **3. Discussion**

#### *3.1. Significance of Communication for Social Change*

According to a Rockefeller Foundation position paper, communication programs have very sophisticated propensity to fulfill three roles in development thinking and practice. (Kees Epskamp 2006: 109)

- To inform and persuade people to adopt certain behaviors and practice beneficial to them; for ex: to urge them to have fewer children and inform them how to do so;
- To enhance the image and profile of the work of organization involved in development with a view of boosting the credibility of their work, raising more funds and generally improving public perceptions;
- To enable community consultation over specific initiatives on a more targeted level within communities.

Access to communication and information is a prerequisite of ownership. Communication process owned by the people provides the community members with equal opportunities regarding participation in development of the society or otherwise.

It is possible to increase the participation in development, only if, communication systems start serving the needs of the vast majority in the rural and semi-urban rather than in the urban areas. Tfd is a good option to make this happen. It is the opinion of many observers and researchers that there is no guarantee that greater access to information will automatically lead to increased participation in development.

### 3.2. *The Nature of Theatre for Development*

Mostly, theatre is led by a team of experts who work with various types of extension workers or 'village level workers', assisting them 'to get their health, nutrition, and agricultural messages across to rural villages using entertainment and fun' (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/y5794e/Y5794E06.htm>). We might add to this list, campaigns to prevent crime against women too. Around the world, there are many ongoing projects of one type or another engaged in Theatre for Development.

Areas that come under this theatre vary from straight drama to songs that are employed in any way as media for communicating ideas related to various issues of development. So, broadly speaking, Theatre for Development (TfD) involves a wide range of resources. Following are a few elements of this theatre.

- *Songs*

More often than not, these are campaign songs composed and sung by teams of extension workers either alone or together with the people amongst whom they work. In some cases, the songs are recorded on tapes and distributed all over the country for playing through the radio or portable tape recorders during working sessions. Where the latter is the case the help of properly trained musicians is sought. The songs are sung in vernacular languages and usually their tunes are well known adaptations of popular music styles. The guiding principles in composing such songs are: simple catchy tune, clear message, simple words and lots of repetition.

- *Dance*

Dances employed in the theatre are those that already possess within themselves abundant mimetic potential, for what actually takes place here is what should properly be termed dance-drama. To the beat of musical instruments, dancers mime several scenes in which they depict whatever message they choose to show. In theatre for development, these messages fall within the total intentions of the project.

- *Puppetry*

This generally forms part of mobile information campaigns. The idea in such campaigns usually is to teach farmers and villagers in general, modern methods of agriculture and various other issues. Also, they are proven effective in educating the rural masses. In spite of its popularity amongst practitioners, puppetry is losing its grip on its adult audiences. The problems these shows try to tackle are usually a common phenomenon amongst the audience, so that no questions about the clarity of the message arise.

- *Drama*

This is the most extensively used art forms of the lot considered under Theatre for Development. The work in drama varies from plays performed for villagers by outside groups to plays created and performed by the villagers themselves. These dramas feature the adventure of a typical village farm family. In each story a situation is presented that a villager might encounter. Some of the dramas show ways that the problem might be solved, while others are left unresolved to encourage the audience to work out their own solutions. Each drama is in the vernacular languages of the people in which the project is presently being implemented.

### *3.3. The Process of Theatre for Development*

Theatre can be divided into two basic categories according to the way it is used (Ibid):

- Theatre in Development;
- Theatre for Development.

Theatre in Development is made up of three types:

- Scripted plays written by some specialists, containing information on a particular subject as understood by the writer and performed by a group of actors in the conventional theatre format;
- Unscripted plays co-created by a director and a group of actors, on a pre-selected topic and presented formally as conventional theatre; and

- Scripted plays on a chosen topic but later transformed by the actors before villagers and involving them in the refinement of the final play. This kind of theatre requires its audience to come to a special venue selected by the theatre group. It allows for very limited participation of the audience in the creation of the play and its performance.

Theatre for Development on the other hand could be said to be of two types:

- The one created out of researching in the community – but performed by the outside artists; and
- The one, which is explored and created with the community and performed jointly by the artists and members of the community. In both cases, the presentations take place in the community itself, and the venue does not necessarily need to have special requirements.

Very often, this theatre is a combination of music, drama, dance, masquerade and puppetry found within the community. It can be used both to investigate and probe specific issues as well as to stimulate discussion on issues of interest to the community, thus it can also be used to identify and discuss problem-solving approaches.

### *3.3. Paradoxes to Deal With*

The common hypotheses to the cause of crime which was held in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were - poverty, lack of education and population density. The same can still be used to explain crime in general as well as crime against women in India.

V. Veeraghavans study (1994) (Doel Mukerjee 2005, 8-9) on Delhi gave a general overview that crime is mainly concentrated in the colonies of middle and lower middle class. Most victims and offenders came from lower level of occupation or unskilled workers like mechanics, technicians, drivers, taxi and auto rickshaw drivers, and vendors. The study also indicates that higher the educational level of the women, the lesser were the chances of rape.

Rapid urbanization along with growth of population and lack of space and education has led to various social evils in India. Greed, feudal mind sets, economic benefit, a need to dominate along with overall degeneration of other social and moral values in society, has led to the

recent situation of crime against women in India. Overall development, i.e. rural as well as urban development should take place side by side. Else, the gap generated due to the differences in development at various geographic levels would lead to increased crime in the society. A notable point to mention here is – crime against women is not limited to a particular class of people.

Fig.1. gives us the clear image of the trend of major crime heads in India over the years 1953-2013. If we consider the rapes alone, since from the time the collection of information was started in 1971, there has been a huge growth of 1255.3% (<http://ncrb.gov.in/>) in crimes. This factor alone speaks the aggravated situation of crime against women in India.

**SNAPSHOTS (1953—2013)**

Trend of some major crime heads over the years 1953-2013

Total Cog. Crimes under IPC		Murder		Rape		Kidnapping & Abduction		Dacoity		Robbery		Burglary/House Breaking		Riots	
Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence	Year	Incidence
1953	6,01,964	1953	9,802	1971*	2,487	1953	5,261	1953	5,579	1953	8,407	1953	1,47,379	1953	20,529
2013	26,47,722	2013	33,201	2013	33,707	2013	65,461	2013	4,539	2013	31,927	2013	1,04,401	2013	72,126
% Change in 2013 over 1953		339.8		238.7		1255.3		-18.6		279.8		-29.2		251.3	

\* Bureau started collecting data on "Rape" since 1971 only.

Note: All percentages shown have been rounded off.

**Fig.1. Trends of some major crime heads over the years 1953-2013 (Source: <http://ncrb.gov.in/>)**

### ***3.4. Approach towards Safety of Women***

The statistical evidence gives us the impression that the crime against women in India has been increasing in leaps and bounds. There is a definite need to look into the safety of women. The following approaches may be adapted for the same.

- **To increase reporting of rape and assault cases:** In order to increase the reporting of such cases, we need to empower the women and children. They must be educated on their rights, apart from being encouraged to come forward to register the cases. There are many violent cases but due to stigma in the society very few are reported.
- **Law enforcement agencies:** Law enforcers should be well trained to react swiftly and with sensitivity towards the women and children cases.
- **Exemplary punishment:** Punishment awarded to every culprit need to be harsh, while campaigning for *zero- tolerance* of sex offenders. More number of fast track courts should be established.
- **Indian Police system:** Neither the Centre nor States have been proactive in improving the quality of Policing. Official records show that only 14 states (**Ajay Kumar Ranjan 2013: 1**) have either enacted the New Police Act or amended their existing laws to incorporate SC's suggestion.

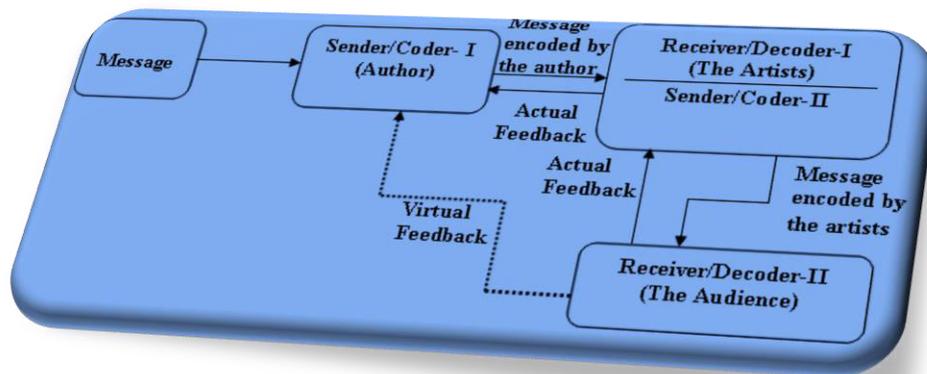
### 3.5. Role of Tfd in Addressing Crime against Women in India

As Liverman *et al*, the eminent geoscientists observed:

*Effective communication may require different approaches depending upon the educational background of the audience being addressed. The audience can be broadly classified as scientists, government administrators and the general public. The communication process is complicated further by the difficulty that geoscientists can have in identifying the appropriate communication pathways to use if their endeavors to be successful. It raises questions of exactly who they should talk with, and whether one organization can open better communication opportunities than other (Liverman et al 2008, 179-184).*

Often, theatre is misinterpreted purely as a source of entertainment. However, theatre can be so much more than just sequined costumes and pretty songs; in fact, it is often the perfect vehicle to provide education about current social issues and to inspire social and political change.

In general, the communication process involves only sender and one or more receivers. But unlike in conventional model of communication, a theatre communications involves two or more stages of senders (Suman K Kasturi & P. Bobby Vardhan 2013:1-12). The message intended to be passed to the audience involves coding and decoding at minimum two levels. So, sender-I i.e. the author of theatre theme should keep in mind the comprehending levels of both the artists as well as the audiences. Fig.2 gives the detailed flow of information in a typical theatre communication.



**Fig 2. A Typical Communication Model of Theater**  
**(Source: Personal Files of author Dr. Suman K. Kasturi)**

In our opinion, Theatre in Education (TIE), which is a form of Theatre for Development (TfD), in conjunction with the above mentioned model, would bring out the desired results. In 1965, for the first time in Belgrade theatre, TIE began to all aims and purposes (Ibid). Surely, this method of fusion would bring out the new concept of *actor-teachers* specifically because they seek to combine the qualities, skills and objectives of both actors and teachers, simultaneously.

In order to address the severe problem of crime against women in India, the concept of *epic theatre* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic\\_theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_theatre)) developed by Bertolt Brecht and his partner Erwin Piscator might be used effectively along with TfD (in its most effective form of TIE). The main objective of epic theatre is to ensure that the audiences are not forgetting that they are seeing a theatrical presentation, and are therefore forced to reexamine reality. It is achieved using such techniques as very minimal scenery, harsh lighting, and actors speaking directly to the audience. These performances were meant to be seen as representations of

reality but not as being real. The intent of this representation was to inspire critical reflection, rather than to encourage to audience to emotionally identify with the characters and actions of the play.

Even though the process of Theatre for Development varies according to its purpose the following stages can be adopted in most cases: research, reporting back, creating the story, sketching the story, rehearsing the play, performing the play and after performance. (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/y5794e/Y5794E06.htm>)

- *Research*

Like any other development process, the process of Theatre for Development also starts with research. This is *informal* research – it is not set up. The research involves living in and with the community in order to know and learn about the *life* of the people there in. This involves participating in their happiness, sorrows, celebrations as well as their work. In this way, one is able to imbibe in the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the community. Although this research is informed, some communication and public relation tools could be used to sharpen pictures of the community.

Material and information learnt or gathered during such research provides:

- Stuff for the play that will be created;
- The way the play will be performed;
- The venue which the community actually would choose for performance; and
- Issues that the community feels most strongly about (in present case, it is the crime against women).

When a *theatre* team goes into a community, it should become a part of that community. That is why it is important to dress appropriately – in a manner that is in line with the communities. The team must ensure that they are not over-dressed or outrageous in their appearance. It is also advisable to work in pairs when going around the village rather than in one large group. In this way, the community members being observed and studied do not become overwhelmed.

- *Reporting*

After experiencing the first hand information about the problems being faced by the community, the team must come back together to report on what they have learnt of the community. Such reports highlight issues closest to the hearts of members of the community; cultural life of the community; stories of happenings/events and anecdotes or jokes common in the community. Information gathered should include the community's perception of whatever is the subject of concern (say for example, in our case it is the crime against women). Such materials provide good stuff for dramatization.

- *Creating the story*

Material gathered during research should give a *clear* picture of what the position of the *issue* of concern is like in the village or any other place of consideration. It should include stories of individuals, families or sections of the community showing concrete testimonies of how they relate to the issues. For instance, instead of saying the people of such and such village do not report the cases of a rape although they are aware of it, you should actually have a real person who has not reported the matter and who has had concrete reasons for not reporting to the police authorities. This takes you beyond awareness to actual experience of not reporting to the concerned bodies and its consequences.

From such personal testimonies or experiences and individuals, characters for the story and the story itself may be drawn and developed. Instead of speaking in 'general terms and about issues', an individual or specific people are made to live and demonstrate the experience of living with the issues being looked at.

The story so created is obviously fiction. But, it is built on actual lived experiences, that the community for whom (later with whom) the drama is being developed will recognize and sometimes even identify with it, depending on how well the dramatization is done.

- *Sketching the play*

Having created a story from findings gathered in the field, the next step is sketching the play. The goal here is not to create a play script, but an outline of the play scene by scene. A scene being stages in the story just created. If we can compare the story to a journey

between place X and place Y, there are points that must be gone through to make up this journey. From place X, we might have to stop over at X<sub>1</sub>, to have a break for snacks.

While at X<sub>1</sub>, the driver might have quarreled with the attendant at the Restaurant in the parking area. We then moved to point X<sub>2</sub> where we stopped again -this time to visit the rest rooms. The next story may be our destination Y.

The above mentioned as an example of the whole story, we can say that points (X) (X<sub>1</sub>) (X<sub>2</sub>) and Y could be our scenes. In *building* the plot, we shall select purposely events that happened at these points and leave out those that happened on the vehicle in between them. Sketching the play is very similar to this process. We deliberately select or create points that highlight important aspects of the issue the story is meant to tell (in our case, it is again the crime against women).

- *Rehearsals*

Using actual stories of happenings gathered during the research, characters could be identified and re-lived before everybody in the team. Here, the whole team agrees on whether those *acting* out these happenings as put together into scenes of the sketch are being truthful. They can also select those individuals who seem best suited for what scenes. This is preparation of the play that is referred to as the rehearsal. The process of rehearsal uses other material gathered during the research. These are the songs, dances or rituals that people do in the village. During the research, the team will learn how people relate to each other, how they behave. From such observations, individuals selected to play particular roles might build their characters.

The idea here is – when the people of the village come to see the play, they should recognize themselves (as a village) in the play. Rehearsals therefore aim at achieving this, quite apart from dramatizing and developing the story created earlier on.

- *Actual Performance*

Once the play has been rehearsed and the team is satisfied that it is ready for presentation, they must choose a venue that is accessible to the people in the village. The period of

research should reveal which places are used for public celebration in the village. The period should also reveal which time of the day is the best for holding the performance.

Efforts to involve the village community in presenting or even participating in dances from the village should be made. The idea here is to make it the people's own occasion than that of the team.

During the performance, the acting should deliberately offer opportunities for the audience to answer questions or even comment on what is happening in the play. These comments can be repeated and passed on to other members of the audience around issues being depicted in the play. The actors should always take the story back from this dialogue and move it towards the end.

- *Feedback from Performance*

The team should get back together to go through experiences of the performance, to examine their own performance and the comments that the people were making as the play was unfolding. This discussion should reveal material for further action either theatrically or on issues under discussion.

Sometimes, the people want further discussion on issues in the play – such an opportunity should be provided to them. There might also be need for follow-up action. This has to be taken care of, and whenever possible fulfilled, by the subject specialist.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Theatre for Development (TfD) as a form of communication is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition. In recent times, this form has been used to propagate social and political messages and to create awareness amongst the masses regarding critical issues.

Very often it can be seen that theatre has been used for social progress and for bringing various changes in the society. Theatre for development includes activist and grass-roots bodies, government and non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as socially-aware theatre groups or individuals. The groups working with Dalits, women, children, sex workers, and other marginalized populations, all qualify as practicing theatre for development.

Many studies carried out have tried their best to bring complex but important issues of the crime against women in India into limelight. A record growth of 1255.3% in alone rapes has been experienced in a span of 42 years i.e. between 1971 and 2013, in India. An important revelation of many studies is – most of the crimes are attributed to the middle and low middle class families in India. Also, they are attributed mainly to the rural areas. Theatre has been proven as an effective medium among the rural masses, even in this era of Satmass Media (Suman K Kasturi 2013, 183) (a word coined by Dr. Suman Kumar Kasturi to indicate the mass media that work in conjunction satellite communications). Consequently, clubbing together the participatory concept of Theatre for Development with the reality of increased crime against women in India, while considering the fact that more than 70% of Indian masses live in rural areas, the desired results could be achieved with theatre.

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