

A Study on the Impact of Cyclone on Rural Theatre

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Abstract

Life goes on fighting with nature in coastal areas. Art and culture is blooming in the backdrop of economic uncertainty. The practice of theatre in the coastal districts has had a great impact on the lives of the people of that region. But everything comes to a standstill during the extreme conditions.

In May 2020, a severe cyclone Amphan hit Bengal. This super cyclone has falsified all the lands by carrying out violence. Theatrical groups in the Sundarbans and surrounding areas have suffered huge loss. It has affected North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Nadia and Kolkata. With utmost difficulty the playwrights are again constructing structures of their theatre halls that has been affected by the cyclone. Many could not. Most of the groups are leaving the place and looking for alternate livelihood.

The livelihood of the people in the marginal areas is so challenging that for many, where theater is now just a luxury.

Keywords: Theatre, Cyclone, Groups, Production, Life, Amphan, Crisis.

Introduction-Questions

Hurricane Amphan swept across the southern region of West Bengal as people are still struggling to cope up with the damage. The horrific picture of the loss of theatrical groups in the region gradually emerged when people lost their homes, crops, vegetables, livestock, birds and natural resources. Both life and theatre were in crisis.

Is that situation changed a bit? On May 20, a super cyclone hit Bengal. Then almost a year went by; people's lives are slowly returning to normal.

But how much the situation of the theatre groups have changed?

The details of how the affected theatre groups from North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Nadia and Kolkata districts are returning to theatre after the natural calamity and re-engaged themselves in social and cultural activities: Most of the troupes in the district suffered

more or less damage in the storm. Some directly and some indirectly. A case study was conducted in 12 of those groups.

Problem and Challenge

Nazat Bhabna : The theater group 'Nazat Bhabna' in the Nazat area of Basirhat sub-division, bordering North 24 Parganas district, was affected by the cyclone. The rehearsal room of the group, located on the banks of the Betani River, has been reduced to rubbles. The salt water from the river had flooded the area. The food grains (rice) that was stored in the rehearsal room of the theater group was flown away in the cyclone. The property of the theatre groups have been damaged. Through a gradual struggle, they have rebuilt the structure of the theater troupe. Relief and essential items have been delivered to a wide area of North 24 Parganas. They have got several theater groups from the district and Kolkata as collaborators. Every day, a team of about 20-25 people delivered relief to various islands in the Sundarbans. After the situation became somewhat normal, they engaged themselves in various constructive activities.

Sundarban Natya Utsav Committee : The group has been practicing theatre in marginal areas for a long time. Theatre work which they had been pursuing from childhood, came to a complete halt after this catastrophe. Their house had collapsed in the storm. The parents do not want the boys and girls of the house to practice the theatre that has affected their business and daily labour work. The children of migrant workers' families are no longer coming to the theatre today. Many have lost their jobs in the new normal life. They have left the theater in search of new jobs.

Gobardanga Kathaprasanga : The tin roof in their rehearsal room on the third floor was completely blown away. The six ceiling fans in the house were destroyed. After hearing the storm forecast, the playwrights had arranged for the lights and equipment of the play beforehand. That's why there was no huge damage to the theatre equipment. However, it took time to re-arrange the rehearsal room. The team suffered financial losses. Because, multiple shows were cancelled, then this storm greatly damages them. However, the team has resumed regular work since September. They are staging a production called Ravimala.

Jana Sangaskriti kendra, Badu : The Jana Sangaskriti kendra of Badu area of Madhyamgram in North 24 Parganas district was damaged in the cyclone. The cyclone has hit the Digambarpur open stage and space of the Patharpratima block in the rural area of South 24 Parganas of this organization in a terrible way. As a result, their crops, kachha houses of playwrights, covering the stage for theatre, etc. have all been destroyed. In the midst of a severe crisis, he has gradually settled down.

Kalinagar Oikyatan Natyadal : Most of the members of the theater group are associated with various works. Because, they don't do theatre all the time. The subsequent lockdown has had a profound effect on all of that work. This subsequent cyclone has taken everything away from them. Some of them worked in the hotels, but after the storm they lost that work too. Someone works to deliver newspaper. As a result of these lockdowns and natural disasters, they have suffered so much financially that there is no time for theatre. Even though there are so many problems in their lives, they have helped others as much as they can. The theater group of the island has shown the way to the various Kolkata groups who took flood relief items for the homeless. Their own rehearsal rooms were completely destroyed by the storm, which are yet to be repaired. Each time they finish a new production by Pujasin October, but this time it was as late as January.

Bauria People's Repetary Theater : The space that was being built for the Bauria People's Repetary theater in the Howrah region Was too affected by the storm, as one wall reportedly collapsed. The group is lagging behind financially.

Katha Nattiyasangastha, Canning : The rehearsal house of the group was almost destroyed by this devastating storm. The tin roof in the house was completely blown away. Then, after spending the whole year planting plastic, roof was given again in January 2021. Although work on the new play has not started, the old two plays have been shown. Canning's theatre group works with child artists. After the storm, everyone in the theatre team has suffered more or less. So they could not do theatre work then. The director of the theatre group has been by their side in the difficult times of the people.

Taki Natyam : The socio-economic situation of the people in Lockdown took them to a place where theatre was closed. After that, Taki Natyam Natyadal of North 24 Parganas lost its way due to a severe cyclone. They had to spend some time in captivity. The lights of the play, the things on the set were submerged in water. There is extensive damage. Later, an attempt was made to handle it by placing it on the roof of a high house. But what was ruined was that the theater workers had water in their own houses, but they tried to reach the various islands of the Sundarbans with relief. Their help in the vast areas of Hingalganj has helped people a lot.

Amta Parichay, Howrah : Amta Parichay of Howrah district has been practicing theatre for a long time, this organization has built their own theater space 'Gurukul' through a long struggle. Gurukul was completely destroyed by the devastating cyclone. The crop has been damaged, various items of theatre including kitchen have been damaged. Amta Parichay has joined the fight to keep Gurukul alive.

Kakdwip Nona Theatre : Nona Theatre group of Kakdwip sub-division, was not affected by the storm. Their paved 2-storey rehearsal room was not damaged in that way. The theatre workers were a bit cautious about learning from the previous disaster Ayla. But they had a tin shed on top of their own launch, which was blown away by the storm. Later it was fixed. A number of members have lost their jobs due to the lockdown and cyclone. Everyone in the team was involved in solving their problems by helping each other.

Kathak Performing Repatyar, Howrah : Howrah's Kathak Performing Repatyar performing space 'Nanamukh Prantar' has been damaged by the storm. After a while, when the situation became normal, the theatre workers started working slowly again. Many pictures of the play, including the necessary important documents of the theater group, have gone under water. Several theatre equipments are damaged.

Thealight, Kolkata : The condition of Thealight, a theater group in Kolkata, is also deplorable. About 6 theatre production equipment was damaged. At the same time, many necessary documents of the theater troupe was also damaged.

Apart from these theatre groups, Chakdaha Natyajana of Nadia district, 'Alternative Living Theater's' own space 'Akhra' in Madhyamgram, Habra Nandanik in North 24 Parganas district, Basirhat 'Kingshook', 'Ekta Projojona' and a number of other theatre troupes have been damaged though they are not as extremely.

Analysis

It has been reported by several theatre troupes that they have to fight with nature for a long time and continue their theatre practice. However, it is believed that such problems can be tackled with proper infrastructural development. Even those who are not full-time theater workers are not able to spend time in the theater coping with this catastrophe. Full-time workers are not coming to the theater regularly in the hope of earning money. The economy of theatre needs to be strengthened to get them back in the team and prevent this defection. Amphan went through as a lesson. What could be the damage caused by a natural disaster, it will be useful to be more careful in any future disaster. From the first day of the catastrophe, a clear picture emerged of how to deal, and to rush to the aid of the people. Besides, the government should have provided special assistance to theater groups and groups involved in the practice of industrial culture. Or trying to reorganise the parties through a special project would have made up for some of this huge loss. However, each team is fighting and organising themselves.

Findings & Conclusion

As a result of this epidemic and its accompanying natural disasters, none of the theatrical troupes have strayed from their goal. In most cases it takes time, then again they have engaged themselves in their work. Gradually they are changing their rehearsal room. He is thinking of producing a new theatre in a different way. By changing the form, less theatre equipment, lights are being used and new theatres are being made. So that you can get ready for such a disaster in the coming days. The invitational performance in the long lockdown episode was off. For that reason, financially, almost all the teams were affected. Again, as a result of the disaster, various items of the play were lost from their rehearsal rooms, causing extensive damage. Since government support did not match, the theatre groups have lagged behind financially. Many are looking for an alternative economy. Apart from theatre, several theatre workers are searching for other professions. However, many Kushils in the marginalized areas do not get a chance to return

to the theatre. With the exception of Counting by hand of teams, almost all teams have increased the number of dropouts. Even if work starts, no one is able to work full time like before. The production is having an impact. However, several teams have found the alternative range by walking in the opposite direction again. They are doing new things and showing direction. Again, many are not able to stage their old theatre productions due to the departed theatre workers. The stage is lost from their lives in search of employment. In this way, just as every disaster takes away some life, it also changes the direction of life. Theatre is also sometimes dropped from their life.

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