

THEATRE AND ART IN EDUCATION FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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Abbreviations

TO	Theatre of the Oppressed
SS	Sajhe Sapne
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ETP	Embodied Therapeutic Practices
TESF	Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures
IIHS	Indian Institute for Human Settlements
ToT	Training of Trainers
PI	Primary Investigator
SPT	Social Presencing Theatre

ABSTRACT

Theatre and Art in Education for Young Women with a Focus on Theatre of the Oppressed Techniques and Embodied Practices is a project that unfolded in the Nanahar village in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. The main objectives of this project were to spark critical thought and action amongst the participants of the programme, facilitate a process to reclaim one's agency, equip the participants with theatre facilitation skills, and to equip the organisation with a theatre and art in education curriculum. The project timeline was September 2021–October 2022.

A pilot workshop was initially conducted with 24 women enrolled in a skill development course, and consequently a longer 16-week workshop series was conducted for a group of 33 women. The methods used in this workshop series were a combination of Theatre of the Oppressed (Forum theatre) and Embodied Therapeutic Practices (Breath-work, Womb Medicine and nature-based art practices).

In the course of the workshop series, the group addressed an issue that they were facing with the host organisation related to food intake, and worked on personal stories related to the theme of sexual harassment. At the end of the workshop, the group did a public Forum performance of their plays before an audience of 300–350 persons at Taragarh Panchayat Bhavan,¹ inviting interventions and discussions from the audience on the theme in question. A series of videos were produced to disseminate the learnings and practices cultivated during the process.²

This report will take you through the processes of the project, and the insights from cultivating a ground up perspective, embodying climate action, and understanding the nuances of feminist action.

¹ The office of the local self-governance body.

² See Kalaa Dhari. (2022, November 17). 1. An introduction to theatre of the oppressed & embodied therapeutic practices [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/P91f7_bEb2k?list=PLGSuldDzXEniSSJP3RkD0AFW8PKJeTJIQ

INTRODUCTION

Context

Theatre and art in education for young women with a focus on Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and Embodied Therapeutic Practices was a project curated to enable and demonstrate a creative, playful, and safe space for a group of young women.

I, Arundathi, am the project's primary investigator (PI). I am a trained Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) facilitator and a psychotherapist with over 14 years of experience working with various women's groups across India.

This project took place in a village called Nanahar, in Palampur Tehsil in an organisation called Sajhe Sapne (SS) based there, a skill development organisation that works with young, rural women. They run a year-long residential course for cohorts of women with a focus on STEM education (for Math and Science Educators) and development and political studies (for persons who want to work in civil society organisations or NGOs).

In September 2021, I began to volunteer with SS and conduct theatre and art sessions for the first women's cohort. Given the enthusiastic response of the students, we decided to pursue a longer-term workshop series with students at SS.

Aims

The aim of the project was to enable creative, safe, and playful spaces where the group of young women being engaged could experience and learn political theatre with an objective to develop critical thinking capacities, enhance awareness of social-political realities, and one's agency in bringing about social transformation and change. The process would also facilitate the participants to reclaim a deep and resourceful sense of agency by experiencing and learning nature-based and body-conscious practices.

The objectives of the project were:

- To spark critical thought and action amongst the cohort of young women in Sajhe Sapne, Palampur;
- To facilitate processes that will create a space to reclaim a deep and resourceful sense of agency;
- To enable these women with skills of the Theatre of the Oppressed as they walk into their careers as development professionals and educators;
- To equip the organisation (with training and resources) to bring in Theatre of the Oppressed skills into their annual curriculum of skill development for rural women.

The project ran from September 2021 to October 2022.

Participants

The workshop series was conducted for two batches of students in the Sajhe Sapne skill development centre in Nanahar village, Palampur. The first batch underwent a pilot workshop series, and the second batch were participants of a 16-week-long workshop series that culminated in a public Forum performance.

The participants of both the pilot and the workshop series were young (18–25 years of age), mostly first-generation literate, rural women from marginalised socio-economic and political backgrounds from across the states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Concept

This project echoes a conceptual shift from the idea of education as a cognitive process to a versatile and robust understanding of quality education characterised by effect, body wisdom, critical thought, and action. Formal systems of education that focus on rote learning and scoring high marks, unfairly benefit persons of privilege in the caste, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality, and indigeneity matrix. The intention of using political theatre and indigenous practices of self and community care (such as breathwork, deliberate engagement with nature within and out, consciously connecting with the menstrual cycle as an embodiment of a cycle of nature, and so on) is to shift the focus from cognition-driven education processes to experiences of being led by the body's consciousness and intelligence, understanding the body as a "social being" and to deconstruct the oppressive impact that that might have.

Formal systems of education co-produce highly individualistic, stressful, and competitive cultures which have quite a detrimental impact on the emotional, psychological, and creative well-being of individuals, communities, and the environment. This project, in its potential, has challenged the values of competition and one-upmanship that formal education thrives on.

Scope of this Report

This report details the methodology, process, key insights, and learnings from the project. It will conclude with recommendations and suggestions to incorporate theatre and art in education and other spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This project adopted an interdisciplinary approach with a desire to co-produce a set of experiences and knowledge with the intention of developing a new set of processes for learning and teaching.

The two methods of work that were relied upon for this were:

- Theatre of the Oppressed practices
- Embodied Therapeutic Practices

Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a battery of theatre exercises and activities curated by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theatre activist. TO essentially challenges the premises of formal systems of education, describing it as a system of “banking” (Friere, 1970). Formal education is like depositing money in a bank, which can later be withdrawn only to spend on certain goods that are available within the system. The human being systematically imbibes knowledge from the formal systems of education which in the later years can be withdrawn to survive and thrive in a world that holds little (or no) value for critical and unique life experiences of the individuals and their community.

Costa (2012) maintains that individuals are fully and completely “educated” at any given point in their lives, through the lessons that life has offered to them until that moment. A continuation of education would essentially mean an unfolding and evolution of their life's lessons and insights into an experience that ensures the robust existence of their being. With this point of view, he slices through the hegemonic value placed on formal education. He goes on to say that each individual essentially has the intellectual ability to think about and act on the problems they are faced with. Any external agency that recommends that they have superior knowledge to articulate solutions for problems faced by a set of individuals or a community is stealthily contributing to the existing hegemonic order.

Through TO games and activities, a safe and energetic container is created in which real life situations portraying power inequality are enacted by participants. A robust scene portraying oppression is created through images, sound, movement, and dialogue. Internally the creation of this scene tends to empower the group to examine the nuances of oppression (as experienced by themselves) at close quarters. Rehearsal techniques are facilitated to collectively deepen the reflection of the scene of oppression and gradually reclaim the felt sense of agency. Ideally, the play is performed in public to encourage the audience to participate in the play by shifting gears from being spectators to “spect-actors”. This branch of TO, called Forum theatre, was focused on during the project.

Boal shares that TO creates a space to rehearse the change that we want to bring about in the real world. For instance, in Jana Sanskriti: Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, women survivors of domestic violence used spaces created with TO to enact scenes of violence they faced at home by asking fellow members to play the part of the perpetrator. The space was used to confront the fear they felt while under attack. This also gave the participants the opportunity to practice physical and emotional self-defence with the actors who assumed roles of perpetrators on stage.

TO is political in terms of understanding the various societal roles that a person enacts. What TO facilitates is a process of examining these roles and the societal stage on which it is enacted and to bring about change in the theatre of life that we witness and are a part of every day.

Embodied Therapeutic Practices

Despite being an extremely powerful tool for social change and transformation, TO could be seen as a method that may be over-achieving and emotionally exhausting for the participants. The importance of constructing a nurturing and resourceful workshop container to enable participants to process stressful and sometimes traumatic experiences that surface while collectively examining socio-political realities cannot be overstated.

It is with this objective, that I have coined the term Embodied Therapeutic Practices (ETP) to refer to a battery of practices drawn together from study and practice of Womb Medicine, Comprehensive Resource Model, and Shamanic Breathwork modalities.

ETP is based on the wisdom and knowledge of shamanic and indigenous cultures across the world. These practices have seldom been documented but have stood the test of time by being passed on from generation to generation, as well as across cultures to seekers and learners who have been interested in various modalities of healing and transformation (Menekam, 2017).

In the Native American indigenous systems of knowledge, the word “medicine” holds a very different meaning in comparison with the modern pharmaceutical understanding of it. “Medicine” necessarily refers to a process of aligning oneself to their core, with the intention of the highest well-being of the self in harmony with community and nature (Sams et al., 1999). It is also understood that each individual has a unique medicine to offer to the community to enhance the sense of individual and collective well-being.

There is an innate wisdom through which indigenous communities nurture a symbiotic relationship between the self, community, and nature. Ironically, the need for Medicine in this modern world (that seems to churn out mental and physical illnesses by the second) and the pace at which indigenous communities and ecosystems are being destroyed are both high.

Through this project, the invitation for these young women has been to listen to their bodies and intuition in the context of self in relation with community and nature.

We are surrounded by ingenious cycles of nature. The earth's rotation allows us to witness the sun rise, peak, and set every day; the moon's shades of darkness and light during the course of the month; the seasons of summer, monsoons, autumn and winter each year; and life cycles that take us through birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old-age, and death. These cycles are embedded in every aspect of nature around us, and within.

For women, this cyclic nature manifests in the menstrual cycle. The phases of pre-ovulation, ovulation, pre-menstruation, and menstruation reflect the various phases of the sun, moon, seasons, and the human life cycle itself. To rely on the guidance of an innate natural cycle that is present within the body

is a pathway to reclaim one's lost (or depleting) relationship with nature. It is a reclamation of an innate femininity.

Nature walks and nature-based art installations, breath-work and meditation, working with sounds of the womb, artistic expressions through the non-dominant hand and methods to track the menstrual cycle are processes intrinsic to Embodied Therapeutic Practices.

Interdisciplinary Work and Co-production

Despite being grounded, community driven, and an extremely powerful pedagogy, TO practices (and community) could sometimes lean towards being highly achievement and male oriented. Working on issues of social justice also has the tendency to be draining like any other process embedded in the system. I have observed that in India, the main TO communities, and the TO Federation too, is anchored by the hetero-normative familial and/or male centric leadership. Women who practice TO are mostly solo practitioners without a community space to fall back on during times of need and inquiry.

The project aims for the scope of ETP to weave together with TO to embody the spirit of social justice and political theatre anchored in the spirit of well-being and harmony. Even though TO has its own therapeutic impact, there are situations in which locating the personal narrative in a socio-political reality could be severe and overwhelming for participants. In situations like this, the group requires a vessel in which these important and powerful emotions can be contained and processed, and breath, grounding, and resourcing practices are extremely useful tools.

The intention is to co-produce a new set of knowledge and experiences that bring together the powerful political tool of TO with ETP, so as to give birth to a culture of political education which is centred in values of democracy, plurality and agency, and grounded in nurturance, femininity, and well-being.

THE PROCESS UNFOLDS

The Beginning

I began to volunteer with the first cohort of SS to help them co-create a space for theatre and art in their programme. We planned a pilot workshop series to experiment with theatre and art in education for the first batch of participants at SS.

The pilot consisted of a group of 24 young women and ran for a total of 20 hours. Since the participants were at the end of their year-long skill development program at SS, care was taken to ensure that explorations were critical in nature without having to unearth deep socio-political narratives, due the lack of time.

By the end of the pilot workshop series, the participants shared positive reviews of the workshop. They found the session useful for their work and education. Most participants shared how this space helped them de-stress, have fun, and learn with fun. It helped them take their minds off work for some time during the day helping them feel rejuvenated and relaxed. The SS team also felt like the theatre and art sessions were faring well. They reported that a few participants who were restless and fidgety earlier seemed calmer and more focused in their work after having enrolled in the theatre and art sessions.³

On the basis of the feedback, I decided to offer a long-term workshop series for the second cohort of young women who would enrol for the program starting March 2022. The terms of agreement were:

- SS would provide for the space to conduct the workshops;
- The PI and SS would commit to a workshop series lasting 36–40 hours across 15 weeks on a periodic basis at a mutually convenient time;
- The SS team would undergo a TO and ETP facilitator's training with the objective of learning to weave in theatre and art in education for their future cohorts and curriculum;
- The financial resources required for the workshop series would be organised by the PI.

Ethics

Several processes in this project have been the consequence of my ideas and action being woven together with inputs from the TESF India–IHS team. Articulating ethics for the project was one such process.

Though slightly trying, the significance of creating spaces to reflect on the question of ethics while engaging with groups of women in processes that would lean into questions of oppression, vulnerability, and agency was very helpful.

Creating this space was also important because within the sector of social work, education, and social justice, it is common to feel a sense of superiority for doing work for the “betterment of society”. A reflective space to ask oneself and meet one’s practice with the question of ethics was helpful to stay

³ See Kalaa Dhari. (2022, March 13). (Pilot) workshops by Kalaa Dhari @ Sajhe Sapne, Kandbari, Palampur [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/WZ6JO7-j3Yk>

grounded. It helped set boundaries for the process, evaluate risks, and deliberate on the well-being and safety of the participants.

Deliberating on consent and the presentation of the work in a way that enables participants to make an informed decision to participate was a result of the ethics process followed for this project.

Workshop Series

After many discussions and negotiations with the organisation the longer workshop series was designed for the second cohort of women at Sajhe Sapne. The introductory workshop was conducted for a group of 35 women of the second cohort. Of these, 33 women signed up for the longer workshop series. The longer workshop series comprised of three components:

- The concept seeding workshop
- The main workshop series
- A public performance

Concept seeding workshop

The concept seeding workshop was held in the last week of March 2022. It was a 2-hour workshop with the following objectives:

- Sharing context of the partnership with SS and myself and the role of TESF India in these workshops
- Discussing and establishing norms for the workshop space
- Establishing workshop timings
- Presenting the consent document and process for participation in workshops and for interviews
- Taking consent for video documentation

The following workshop space norms were finalised:

- Maintain confidentiality.
- Take care of yourself.
- Take the initiative to step-up or step-back (you have the right to pass on a particular activity).
- Speak in the language that you are most comfortable in.
- Speak for yourself.
- Listen to understand.
- Agree to disagree with fellow participants.
- Give yourself and others unconditional respect.
- The group will be a closed one, with no external observers, non-participants, or one-time participants allowed.
- Reach out to facilitator in case of any need within the workshop space or outside of it.

The main workshop series

The main workshop series was conducted for a total of 40 hours from April to July 2022 with sessions held twice a week. We began with 33 participants, and the module was designed to weave together TO and ETP. 60 per cent of the module was designed with TO practices, and the other 40 per cent with ETP and nature-based art practices.

The workshop series could be understood and analysed in three phases:

- Seedling
- Blossom
- Metamorphosis

Seedling

In the seedling phase, the focus was on introducing the participants, warming up, and building rapport with each other. Apart from knowing each other's name, place of birth, education, and related information, the group was also getting to know one's own and each other's likes and dislikes, and joys and sorrows. This phase was seen as the beginning of something new, creating a fertile space for personal growth.

During this phase, it was essential to cultivate non-judgmental spaces. The aim was to create a space conducive to enabling participants to lose the shackles of oppression reclaim one's agency. On this journey, participants would also examine agents of oppression in oneself and one another, for the experience of being oppressed seldom exists without the experience of being an oppressor. The focus of the work being done was to be able to look at the parts of oneself that perpetrate oppression (with-in and with-out) in the eye, with the intention to humanise and hence reclaim the agency that is otherwise lost or suppressed. During the initial phases of the workshop series, it was important to understand and examine the dynamics of power without exercising judgment.

Theatre during this phase included several de-mechanisation games, i.e., activities that deliberately challenge linear thinking and cognitive patterns such as Columbian Hypnosis,⁴ a signature Theatre of the Oppressed exercise, trust games,⁵ and an introduction to Image Theatre.⁶

⁴ Columbian Hypnosis: One actor holds her palm forward, fingers upright, anything between 20 and 40 centimeters away from the face of another, who is then as if hypnotized and must keep his face constantly the same distance from the hand of the hypnotizer, hairline level with her fingertips, chin more or less level with the base of her palm. The hypnotizer starts a series of movements with her hand, up and down, right & left, backwards and forwards, her hand vertical in relation to the ground, then horizontal, diagonal, etc. - the partner must contort his body in every way possible to maintain the same distance between face and hand, so that face and hand remain parallel. If necessary, the hypnotic hand can be swapped; for instance, to force the hypnotized to go between the legs of the hypnotizer. The hand must never do movements too rapid to be followed, nor must it ever come to a complete halt. The hypnotizer must force her partner into all kinds of ridiculous, grotesque, uncomfortable positions. Her partner will thus put in motion a series of muscle structures which are never, or only rarely, activated. He will use certain 'forgotten' muscles in his body. After a few minutes, the two actors change, the follower and the leader. After some more time, both can extend a hypnotizing right hand, becoming leaders and followers at one and the same time" (Boal, 2002).

⁵ See Kalaa Dhari. (2022). 3. 'How-to' trust fall [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOJIZe4qt5k>

⁶ First method: The facilitator asks five or more volunteers to express the chosen theme(s) in a visual form. Each works without seeing what the others are doing, so as not to be influenced by them. One after another they come into the middle of the playing space and use only their bodies to express the theme they have been given. Without talking, they position their bodies in a still pose, to express their opinion or idea or experience of the theme, as it strikes them there and then; having made their image, they need offer no explanation or justification – in itself, it says everything that needs saying, for the moment. When all the volunteers have been into the space and shown their individual images, the facilitator asks if anyone in the audience can suggest an image different to those shown. The response is almost always affirmative. One by one, anyone who wants to, comes into the middle and shows their own image of the subject being treated – whatever image occurs to them. When they have all been in the middle, the Joker moved on to the dynamisation of these images. Second method: When dealing with small groups, the facilitator can suggest that the participants form a circle and, at a given signal, all simultaneously depict with their bodies their version of the subject. Then as a second state, still holding their poses, they look round at what everyone else is doing. The images made by each participant must be static images, even if they presuppose movement; the actor can show a static image of something captured in mid-movement. Similarly every image must be isolated, though it may presuppose the presence of other people or objects or whatever" (Boal, 2002).

Some of the Embodied Therapeutic Practices in this phase were learning coherence breaths⁷, earth breaths⁸, connecting and breathing with the womb, and nature-based practices such as conscious walks in nature and nature-based art installations. This phase concluded as the group united on an issue that they were facing.

Blossom

The theatre and the art sessions were scheduled twice a week, one at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday mornings and the other at 5:00 p.m. on Thursday evenings. Over time, I noticed that participants were so tired during evening sessions that they were unable to do much creative work. While the first few sessions were addressed by connecting with breath, nature, and other meditative practices, it eventually became apparent that the issue was something else.

During an Image Theatre exercise to showcase what one was feeling at that moment, all participants expressed being hungry, tired, and sad. The group discussion that followed led to finding out that the lack of a healthy diet in the SS hostels was the reason. The participants said that apart from taking turns to cook their own meals, they had one meal at 7:00 a.m. every morning, another at 1:00 p.m., and dinner was served as late as 10:00 p.m. Not eating between lunch and dinner left them exhausted by evening. Despite having brought it up several times with the SS team, the issue hadn't been resolved.

The problem united all the participants of the group who collectively decided to address the issue. The group decided to undertake three tasks in this regard. One, they assigned me the task of speaking with the founder of the organisation regarding the matter, two, they decided to work on an Image Theatre performance and invite members of the Sajhe Sapne team for a discussion, and three, they decided to work on a snack menu and calculate the expenses and means by which they could be met in case the organisation stated funds as a limiting factor.

I then spoke with the founder of the organisation who immediately acknowledged the issue and assured redressal. During the following theatre session, members of the SS team were invited to an Image Theatre performance that highlighted the issue. A discussion followed that helped identify gaps in communication as the key reason for it to have persisted for so many months. A plan was immediately set in motion, to introduce two snacks to the daily schedule. A menu was discussed and acted upon.

By the fifth week of the workshop series, the group had not only cultivated a fertile space for their learning and growth, but also solved an organisational issue affecting their daily lives. The group grew confident and their trust in one another deepened.

The theatre exercises conducted during this phase were Moulding and Sculpting, an activity that brings to

⁷ The coherence breath (Elliot, 2005) is a balanced breathing pattern of 5 breaths per minute. This breathing pattern has been found to optimise Heart Rate Variability, i.e., the variability in between each heartbeat. The more variability you have between your heart beats the healthier the system. Sit or lie down as comfortably as you can, close your mouth and breathe through the nose. (1) Breathe in for 6 seconds. Breathe close to full capacity but not totally. (2) Breathe out for 6 seconds. Breathe close to empty but not fully. (3) Continue for at least 5 minutes.

⁸ Intuitively ask your body which side of your body (right or left) is willing to breathe in from the earth today. Take the first response that you get. Next, breathe in as if you are breathing from the core of the earth, through the various layers of volcanoes, underground water, caves, crystal, the metals, and the various layers of the soil. Breathe in the rich energy of the earth through the sole of your feet all the way up your ankle, your calf muscles, knee, thigh, hip joint, and breathe the energy into your womb space or the base of your spine. Hold the breath there for up to 5 seconds, experience the interaction of the earth's energy with that of your womb/spine, and slowly let the breath spiral down and out from the other side of your body, your hip joint, knee, calf muscles, ankle, all the way through the sole of your foot, the energy spiralling back to the centre of the earth. Repeat this process 3–5 times. (Schwarz, 2016).

focus “respectful touch” and affect-based work through movement and sound, and Blind Games, games in which the group steps deeper into narratives stored in the unconscious mind and storytelling through multiple scenes of Image Theatre, movement, and sound.

While navigating through the Moulding and Sculpting activity, there was a discussion around disrespectful touch, which was initially referred to as “bad touch” by many in the group. Having just addressed an issue they faced in daily life with collective effort, they felt confident and optimistic about bringing into focus the issue of disrespectful touch or sexual harassment in their group process. The group brought forward 33 stories of sexual harassment to work with.

Over the next few weeks, the module and group process steered a transition from individual stories to collective narratives; from one scene showcasing a scene of sexual harassment to six scenes narrating a story on sexual harassment; from expressions to emotions; from stillness to movement; and from silence to sound. All these transitions were textured by lived experiences and the embodied effect of the narratives of sexual harassment faced by each participant.

Simultaneously there were sessions on educating oneself about the womb, parts of the womb centre, energising the womb centre, and listening more deeply to the womb. During this phase of the workshop process, 33 stories were woven into various nuances and elements culminating in 2 stories that represented the voices of all 33 participants. All of this was done with a focus on movement, affect, and sound without dialogue or discussion. The focus was on working at the level of lived experiences, showing up authentically, and collectively expanding the window of tolerance and vulnerability. It was a magical time as the participants wove their lived experiences from individual stories to collective narratives to be presented and shared with a public audience.

Metamorphosis

This phase is characterised by the transformation of the group process from being focused “within” to spreading wings and taking the plays that were prepared to the outside world. During this phase, the focus was on dialogue, rehearsal, and the Forum performance. A variety of dialogue was the last element that was introduced in the play, with the awareness that words are often limiting while expressing the depth of emotion or energy of an experience. Like every other element, dialogue of the play was scripted by the participants themselves.

Rainbow of Desire, in which the various nuances of a pair of characters in conflict are represented by several actors; *Spotlight*, in which one of the characters in the play is chosen and asked several questions about the character; *Think!* in which a scene is paused and every actor is asked to think out loud, while in character; *Slow Motion*, in which the scene is performed extremely slowly and with deliberation; *Exaggeration*, in which the play is performed by amplifying emotions; and *Fast-forward*, when the play is performed at a quickened pace, were some of the rehearsal techniques used to strengthen the scenes, dialogue, and presentation of the plays.

This phase also marked the end of the group as a container of processes and a transition to take the work they had done so far into the realm of the “outer world”.

The Forum Performance

Forum theatre is one of the branches of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In a Forum performance, a play is created around a social problem statement, without stating, implying, or recommending a solution. This play is performed before an audience with the assumption that the audience are intellectual beings who can relate to the social problem being presented to them by virtue of being part of, and contributing to, collective consciousness, and think about and act on solutions to the problem.

By design, Forum theatre challenges the hegemony of a certain group of people claiming intellectual superiority and the skill and ability to analyse a social problem and put forward a solution. Instead, what Forum theatre does is exercise a conscious destruction of the fourth wall of a theatre performance by actively engaging with the audience and inviting them to transition from being a spectator to a “spect-actor” by intervening in a problem and contributing to finding its solution. Forum theatre is an invitation to act, to rehearse for change in real life, to weave solidarity together.

The group of participants had prepared two plays on sexual harassment, both real life experiences from within the group. One was a story about a couple of young women being harassed on the train. The other was about a young woman being harassed at a wedding party.

The initial plan was for these plays to be performed in a government school or college in or around Palampur, the site of the project. However, due to school and college holidays, that didn't happen. The public performance was then arranged in collaboration with Parvatiya Mahila Adhikar Manch, an NGO that has been working on violence against women for over 10 years in and around Palampur.

The performance was arranged in the Panchayat Bhavan of Taragarh Panchayat and hosted an audience of around 300 men and women. The two plays were performed before the audience who were then invited to vote to choose one of the plays to be performed again and interacted with. Most of the audience chose the play in which two young women are traveling by train and are harassed by a group of men.

The audience was asked to watch the play again with the awareness that at any given point during the play, anyone from the audience could say “Stop!”, step over to the stage, take the place of a character with less power, get involved in the play, and attempt to change the narrative.

The entire performance and discussion lasted about 2.5 hours. Interventions included people coming on stage to replace either the young women who were being harassed or those who were harassing them.

Each audience member who wanted to intervene was welcomed on stage. She or he took the position of the character they wanted to replace and engaged with the other actors. The actors had rehearsed to improvise and held their ground and characters as people stepped in with their own scripts, ideas, and dialogue. After each intervention, the facilitator spoke with the audience member.

The facilitator anchored the Forum performance to discuss the intervention, the thoughts, intention, and action of their effort. Each audience member was applauded for their effort, irrespective of what the intervention was.

One of the objectives of a Forum performance is to have a non-judgmental and encouraging intervention space so that the audience can take the risk to transform from being a spectator (a person who is watching a problem) to a "spect-actor" (a person who gets on their feet to intervene and change the problem story).

Apart from creating the space to address their own stories of oppression and powerlessness, these young women had risen to the occasion creating a forum amongst 300 (largely) women and men and inviting them to rehearse for change in real life on issues that affected each one of them.

Following the performance and interventions, the audience began to share their own experiences of harassment in their daily lives. They had dialogues with some of the older men in the audience who claimed that the responsibility of the woman's safety was hers alone, or that sexual harassment happened only in big cities, and not so much in small villages and towns like Baijnath and Palampur from where the audience came.

There was also a discussion on patriarchy and structural gender discrimination which was explicitly stated to mean that one isn't stereotyping men as perpetrators and women as victims, but acknowledging human beings as agents of patriarchy, and how the patriarchal system establishes pillars and roots in the society we have created and live in.

Overall, the performance was one to behold, a spectacular demonstration of the journeys that this group of young women had been through over the past several weeks. The Forum performance was followed by a closing circle of breath-work and reflection which marked the end of the workshop series with this group of incredible young women.

Shifting Relationships: The Primary Investigator, Sajhe Sapne and Community

Apart from conducting the workshop series for the cohort, one of the objectives of my partnership with SS was to handhold them as they anchored theatre and art in their curriculum. Facilitating a Training of Trainers for the team members of SS was part of this process.

Initially, the reason SS wanted theatre and art in education was to enhance the emotional intelligence of their students and work on their resilience and overall personality development. Over time, they were curious about the socio-political transformational aspect of TO and how the awareness of one's self and relationship to society can be explored using TO methods. Given that they are an organisation that works with women, the element of Embodied Therapeutic Practices, self-care, and well-being appealed to them too.

While the organisation was on board with the methods and work at a cognitive level, practically there were matters that needed to be ironed out for aligned action. First, there were negotiations to shift the understanding of this work to a part of the curriculum as opposed to extra-curricular work. They suggested that the TO and ETP sessions be conducted between 5:00–7:00 p.m., a time slot otherwise allocated to extra-curricular activities.

It took a few weeks to negotiate with them for one slot a week before lunch, because nature-based activities are better done in sunlight, and that the other could be scheduled in the evening.

I was then offered the opportunity to incorporate the TO and ETP sessions in a session in their curriculum which they called "Self and Society", possibly to balance out the timetable or time-allocation. In this session, one of their faculty members organised lecture sessions and small exercises on values and beliefs with a focus on the self as social beings. It turned out to be more like a socio-moral science class, with a focus on values, introspection, and learning. Though the TO and ETP work would perhaps begin this way, it seemed that the scope of these modalities were way broader than the objectives and deliverables of the Self and Society sessions. I urged the team of SS to allot separate hours for TO and ETP work where the participants could have the opportunity to lean into the experience of embodying one's authentic self and become members of society grounded in that experience.

Finally, it was agreed upon that separate hours would be allotted for the TO and ETP sessions and that SS and I would use this opportunity to understand each other's work and step into a deeper collaboration in future, if desired.

One of the requirements of the workshop was for it to be a closed and contained space. This meant that there were no observers or one-time participants who could step into the workshop series, including the members of the team.

During the first few weeks of the workshop series, it was humbling that the SS team were respectful about the norm of the workshop being conducted in a closed group. I felt trusted and responsible for this action.

However, over time this distance seemed more disassociated than respectful, for there was little or no effort to engage with and integrate the work that was being done in these sessions with the curriculum. It seemed as though the emotional labour of engaging with the cohort had been outsourced to me, with little or no effort from the organisation to so much as check in with what was happening.

A few weeks into the workshop series, when the food issue surfaced, though slightly defensive, the team committed to addressing this issue and they did. However, by then, at the village community level this issue had slightly tipped off scale too.

The village in which the SS team works and I live is a small place which is also a hub for human rights work and some NGOs. Given that there were a few women from the village who were part of the cohort of participants, the news of these young women being under-fed travelled like wildfire. I was then approached by a few human rights activists in the community to boycott SS and discussions about filing a case of harassment against the organisation began to brew. At this point I found that there had been a few others in the village who had tried to bring SS's attention to the food issue as well as other pressing concerns, but the organisation had paid no heed to them.

Given the momentum and breadth of the issue, I approached the founder of SS and told her the need to invite the village folk and engage them in conversation to clear things out. I was told that the team didn't

have the time for this then. I volunteered to organise this meeting myself, but that offer wasn't taken into consideration either. I was in an odd situation where I was defending SS amongst the social network in the village trying to bridge the gap between the village community and them but was being told by SS that they were not "interested".

In the next couple of weeks, I was informed by the founder of SS that they were no longer interested in conducting the Training of Trainers (ToT) for their team due to "internal reasons". Despite following up, the organisation gave no reason for this sudden change of plans. Later I was told that it was because of an unexpected number of resignations from the team that the original plan for a ToT was cancelled.

Unexpected Outcomes

Although it was a heart-breaking turn of events, I double confirmed SS's position on the ToT with the founder and the team and then began to reroute the resources ear-marked for the ToT. The idea was to reach out to other groups and communities who might want to pursue exploring TO and ETP in their spaces and work.

After the public performance with Parvatiya Mahila Adhikar Manch, the organisation expressed an interest in doing a three-day introductory workshop for a group of women in their federation.

During this time, I got in touch with the teachers in Shaheed School, Raipur as well as community-based practitioners in Bhawanipatna, and Living Farms in Muniguda. While the teachers at Shaheed School were principally in alignment with the need for such work in their school and community, due to logistics and other details, the plan did not materialise. However, a two-day introductory workshop was conducted for educators and community-based health workers in Bhawanipatna and Muniguda in association with DAPTA and Living Farms. The experience was rewarding and promising in terms of seeding ideas for longer term collaborations.

Much after the resources for the SS ToT were re-allocated and used, I was approached by the SS team to design and conduct a ToT for them. I shared with them the resources that would be required to facilitate the workshop and the team is yet to respond.

Kalaa Dhari

The silver linings of heartbreaks have often been that they are windows to new opportunities. In July 2021, I founded Kalaa Dhari, an organisation that does work around Womb Centred practice, Comprehensive Resource Model based trauma healing and therapy, and Theatre of the Oppressed workshops.

While the TESF project supported me in my experiment with and understanding of the scope of weaving together political, transformational theatre and Embodied Therapeutic Practices, it also made me realise the dire need for more such spaces for collective growth and transformation. The project also gave me the impetus to commit to this process of personal and social transformation by building an institutional space where these processes can be hosted.

Kalaa Dhari as an organisation is now committed to bringing together processes of political theatre and Embodied Therapeutic Practices across diverse communities in India. Kalaa Dhari translates to “She who holds art” and is an organisation based on principles of democracy, nurturance, co-operation, intuition, love, and harmony.

The primary work of Kalaa Dhari will be co-creating safe and playful spaces of transformation through workshop intensives. While leaning into methodologies of Theatre of the Oppressed, Womb Medicine, the Comprehensive Resource Model, breath-work, and nature-based art and movement activities, the focus of the work will be reclaiming a sense of agency, and a reconnection with the sense of self that might have been lost or misplaced due to personal and socio-political enmeshment.

This work is done from a space of feeling resourced and grounded, with the intention of creating rippling change from within to without and facilitating deep socio-political transformations for the individual, group, and community.

Kalaa Dhari's short and mid-term plans include the launch of a two-year-long fellowship for practitioners of theatre, art, and Embodied Therapeutic Practices, from various marginalised and vulnerable communities across India characterised by periodic workshop intensives facilitated by some of the best international practitioners in the field. The idea is to cultivate a network of practitioners across the country and learn the best practices to enhance transformative processes across various communities.

Since August 2022, I have mobilised a Board of Directors for Kalaa Dhari, made an outreach community mobilisation plan, established contact with renowned TO and ETP practitioners from across the globe and created proposals and budgets to raise funds for the work.

Board of directors

The Board of Directors of Kalaa Dhari currently consists of four women. One of the directors is currently engaged with Muskaan in Bhopal in the capacity of an English teacher. She has an M.A. in education from Azim Premji University, is a singer and artist, and has experience working with various indigenous communities across India. The second is a Dalit feminist from Tamil Nadu, who is an alternative media journalist, a freelance translator, and has worked closely with various student unions, trade unions, and women farmer collectives across Tamil Nadu. The third director is an environmental activist and researcher based out of Goa with over 14 years of experience in the human rights sector. Currently, she works with the Centre for Policy and Research on certain projects. I am the fourth board member.

So far, the Board of Directors have had three online workshops and two board meetings. The focus of the workshops has been on “forming” the Board as a group of people coming together to anchor Kalaa Dhari. The first workshop created space for introductions and questions. The second workshop created a space to understand Kalaa Dhari’s vision, mission, and way ahead. The third workshop was to brainstorm the roles and responsibilities of a director of Kalaa Dhari. The two meetings have been quarterly meetings of the board to check in with the progress of the work as planned.

I designed the workshops by using online Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) techniques as well as online TO activities. Soon, Kalaa Dhari will be registered under the Section 8 Company Act.

Community mobilisation

Kalaa Dhari’s plan is to design an 18-month programme for a group of 26–30 community-based practitioners across India. The idea is to liaison with collectives, movements, institutions, or organisations to bring together this group of practitioners. The board is in the process of finalising participants for the programme. During the next few months, I will be actively doing out-reach work and conducting workshops with the purpose of mobilising this group of people.

Mobilising facilitators

During these 18 months, the group of 30 will undergo 6 workshop intensives (a workshop every 3 months) that will equip them with facilitator skills through experiential learning.

Some of the facilitators who are shortlisted to be invited for the 18-month program are:

- Hector Aristizabal from Reconectando, Columbia, who does political theatre and reconnection (with nature) work. Hector is a senior and highly experienced TO facilitator, who over the years has curated several nature-based healing and rejuvenation practices that complement his political theatre work.
- Barbara Santos, from Kuringa Brazil/Germany, who has curated a unique and interdisciplinary body of work called Feminist Theatre of the Oppressed
- Hannah Kendaru from The Forest Garden, Indonesia who works with a focus on de-colonising wellness through breath-work practices.

The aim is to bring in facilitators from the global majority, so as to seed efforts towards international solidarity with a decolonial approach. The effort is to create spaces in which community practitioners from some of the most vulnerable communities across the country can access quality education in political theatre and ETP from some of the best practitioners across the world. It is rooted in the intention to centre well-being and creative action amongst marginal and vulnerable communities.

FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Learning Theatre of the Oppressed and Embodied Therapeutic Practices

Across the board, TO facilitator workshops are 100 per cent experiential, as are Embodied Therapeutic Practices. These methodologies are based on one's own life and lived experiences becoming textbooks to learn from.

During the workshop series, apart from regularly sharing the intention that the sessions are aimed at supporting the participants to evolve as facilitators, there were regular debriefs about the exercises and activities conducted, so that the participants could ask questions that would help them as facilitators later.

Both methodologies are an invitation to embody one's authentic self and to decide from that agency if one wants to pursue this skill or area of work. The effort is to enable an integrated experience of the self and honour the decision taken from that space.

In a way, though intended, there is no expectation of the participants becoming facilitators by the end of the workshop. The intent instead is to have an aspiration to create the possibility of reclaiming oneself through these processes to enhance critical thinking, embodied action, and informed decision making.

The Ground Up Perspective and the Naked Truth

Through the workshop process, the participants as well as I developed the ability to connect to some of the most oppressed and vulnerable parts of the self, listen to these parts within, and view the world from the perspective of these reclaimed parts of self. This brought in a huge shift in perspectives and realities.

My initial understanding was that SS was a team of motivated young women who did inspiring work by engaging with first generation literate women across different parts of rural India. By the end of the workshop series, SS came across as a group of urban, English-literate, university educated women who were setting up spaces governed by their entitled sensibilities, making decisions about eating habits, living arrangements, and other details for 35 women from a significantly less privileged background than the team itself.

In pre-assigned groups, the young women (the students) were also expected to wake up at 5:00 a.m. each morning, cook breakfast, and pack lunch for themselves and their classmates. During lunch, while the team members of SS sat inside the mess and ate hot meals cooked by the campus chef, the cohort sat outside eating food that had turned cold from their tiffin boxes..

The SS stated that the reason for such arrangements was cost as well as the need for the students to learn household skills, which, according to the team, were important for women who were earning to possess.

The team was making decisions about the food and living conditions of these young women without applying any of the rules in their own lives. The contradiction of the founder of SS being an anchor of an Instagram page "Women at Leisure" also came into focus. This online page showcased pictures

of various women relaxing and being joyful with snippets about the importance of self-care, self-love, and leisure for women when in her organisation (SS), the cohort of young women were far from feeling nourished, being well, or having time for leisure.

The group of participants also began to raise questions about funding, financial accountability, and a sudden change in fee repayment policies that the organisation was putting in place. Though not planned to specifics, creating spaces to listen to the oppressed or shackled parts of the self at a personal and collective level, creates an awareness of the limiting nature of structures and systems that one is part of with the potential to shake things up.

Through processes of political theatre and radical self-care, what seem like suppressed voices transform into perspectives grounded in resilience, critical thought, and agency. It is an embodiment of social change, a true gift to oneself and the world that we live in. It is remembering our true power, becoming able to witness things the way they are and acting from that space of clarity and wisdom.

The real question is do we risk such “education”? An education that breathes through, moves through and dismantles structural discrimination and hierarchy? An education that wouldn't reproduce populations that are led by fear and continue to pay obeisance to agents of discrimination within and without? Do we dare to sign up for an education that paves the path for a world that is equitable and just? But really, what is education if it isn't about learning how to lead fulfilling lives brimming with love and harmony?

Embodied Climate Action

In the course of the project, the unique relationship between Embodied Therapeutic Practices and Climate Action made itself shown.

The unimaginable scale of environmental destruction, fragmented relationships between human beings and the earth, the undeniable threat of climate change that hangs like a sword above our necks demonstrates all too well the dissociation of human beings from nature. “Nature” seems to have become another category of experience that we must sometimes delve into, or “connect” to, to feel rejuvenated, as opposed to being nature ourselves.

It's no breaking news that climate change is a fierce threat to our planet. Could this be a result of human beings being disconnected with the experience of being nature ourselves? A fragmented relationship with our own bodies and with the earth?

40 per cent of the workshop series was designed around practices that would help the participants connect with their body's consciousness, breath, and various elements of the earth. Each segment of the week had time allotted for breath-work, meditative practices, nature-based art practices, and womb-centred work. Though the aspiration was plenty, I noticed the immense difficulty that a significant number of participants had doing these activities. The first few times the group was guided to simply connect with and observe their breath, some felt anxious, unable to close their eyes and sit with themselves and others, and some felt unsafe.

Similarly, while connecting with the womb, or with the earth, several participants felt lost and disturbed, highlighting the fractured relationships with bodies and the nature within and out.

Over time, with consistent practice, the group was able to lean into the experience and benefits of breath-work and other therapeutic practices so much so that by the end of the workshop series, a few participants confessed that they would sometimes pretend to feel tired so that I would guide them through relaxing meditative practices. This is a crucial observation about access to self-care, especially if one has to pretend to be tired to access it instead of just asking for it.

When the group became a container that witnessed the telling of 33 stories of sexual harassment, guided womb-centred practices were immensely resourceful in creating a grounded and centred space for transformation. Though the participants were young explorers of this arena of work, their work in connecting with their wombs energetically helped me hold ground without getting overwhelmed or anxious.

Embodied Therapeutic Practices lay claim to reconnecting with the nature within and has the potential to help us remember ourselves as nature. The potential to compassionately embody our nature within has the potential to create a ripple of change in the way we relate to Nature without.

Feminist Action

TO and ETP practices have been proven to create spaces in which the silenced, unheard, and oppressed parts of oneself and the collective can be breathed into. Ground is held for these parts to make sound, move, breathe, reclaim and integrate as valuable, prior disassociated parts of the self. It takes a significant amount of emotional labour, love, nurturance, patience and integrity to do this work. These qualities are characteristic of the “feminine” and have traditionally been attributed to women to perform their roles as caregivers.

In the industrial, patriarchal, and consumerist world that we live in, these are qualities that are unaccounted for, labour unpaid and most often taken for granted.

Even at Sajhe Sapne, at the end of the year, I became acutely aware of the extent to which my labour was being taken for granted. Apart from not budgeting for this work, the team's increasing disassociation from the sessions seemed like they were “outsourcing” the task of maintaining the emotional health of their students. The constant excuse of “being busy” or “unavailable” for important conversations, or the expectation that I would be available to provide these services to the organisation whenever they might need them, free of cost, were evidence of my work being taken for granted.

These patterns of behaviour were indicative of the extent to which Sajhe Sapne as an organisation is embedded in patriarchal and consumerist values. It was an insight that women-centric work doesn't necessarily mean feminist work.

The growing awareness that SS was “grooming” young women from across rural India for the industry, while TO and ETP work was invested in enabling these women to create their own worlds by embodying their agency also helped in seeing things for the way they are, facing the truth, and healing.

Whether it is an organisation that continues to set masculine or patriarchal milestones to measure women's “success” and call it empowerment, or men on trains and at weddings who feel entitled to access a woman's body, the question is what next? Though anger, hurt, rage, and disillusionment are all experiences that accompany these realisations, where does the churning end? How does the pattern break? Would confronting violence with violence end the pattern? Would boycotting SS in the middle of the workshop series have served my purpose?

It is in these questions that the understanding of feminist action emerges. The ability to co-create spaces where things can be seen for what they are, to develop the skill of calling a spade a spade, for the person embodying the oppressor to be witnessed with the same humanity as the person embodying the oppressed, and for there to be an opportunity to move beyond the label of being an “oppressor” or the “oppressed” is the foundation of feminist action. The possibility of compassionate inquiry with the conviction that we are much more than the roles we play and sometimes get attached to, is crucial to feminist action. To value compassion, nurturance, co-operation, love, harmony, healthy boundaries, a connection to our innate humanness, and the value of the labour that goes into embodying these qualities in the current socio-cultural and political context is key.

Last, but certainly not the least, the ability to connect with and celebrate the earth and non-human forms of life with curiosity, humility, and love are the roots of feminist action.

CONCLUSION

It has been over 15 years since I began engaging with participatory theatre methods for social change. Sincere thanks to TESF, for this has been the first time that I have been able to afford to deliberate on the process and the impact of these methods in such detail. The importance of weaving these processes with narratives and the value of its dissemination is not lost on me.

Often, community-based work is a process that is caught in a race with itself. As soon as one item is checked, the other is ready to begin with an urgency that is valid and meaningful.

Creating space to rest, integrate, celebrate oneself and communities, and sometimes lick one's own wounds is something that's easily forgotten or bypassed in the face of the innumerable opportunities and necessities of social change.

Gabrielle Roth says, “In many indigenous societies, if a person went to a healer or a medicine person feeling depressed, dispirited, and disheartened, they would be asked one of these four questions: When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop getting enchanted by stories? When

did you stop being comforted by the sweet territory of silence?". There is relevance in understanding that the Medicine is within us, in our movement, our songs, our dances, and our laughter.

Creating spaces for play, rest, rejuvenation, and self-care is a political act. It is a demonstration of radical love for ourselves, our communities, the earth, and all her beings.

Embodied or body-based practices are the simplest way of connecting with nature. This research project has revealed that the scope of engaging with social change processes expands magnificently while operating from a space of grounded resourcefulness. Weaving together political theatre and Embodied Therapeutic Practices have an alchemical effect. Maybe you can sense some elements of it in this report, but the experience of it is truly felt in the bones.

There is a pressing need to create more spaces in which these processes can breathe, make their potential felt, and reverberate in the hearts and at the cellular level of social workers, educators and community level practitioners. These processes are capable of evoking transformation at a structural level, and shifting power dynamics and paving new paths and ways of being.

Though it is essential to support more projects and work of this nature, what is also required is to create space for connection and play in one's day-to-day personal and professional life. Day long academic meetings, for instance, could be punctuated with body movement exercises or play activities. Dance or play breaks at workplaces, inventive and playful ways to connect with family, friends, and community are all tiny but powerful ways in which we can deepen our expansive ability to love and create joyous change.

This project has not only had a direct and significant impact on at least 58 beautiful women (24 from cohort 1, 33 from cohort 2, and the PI), but has also rippled change across several dimensions and realms of these beings.⁹ This project leaves behind a strong legacy through the short-term plans articulated by Kalaa Dhari committed to creating more spaces to decentralise well-being and political transformation and co-creating networks. I am truly grateful.

⁹ The project has produced a video playlist to reach out to teacher, educator, activist, and social worker networks to encourage the viewer to experiment with theatre, art, and well-being practices in their own communities. See Kalaa Dhari. (2022). *Theatre of the oppressed & embodied therapeutic practices*. YouTube. <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGSuldDzXEniSSJP3RkD0AFW8PKjeTJIQ>

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APPENDIX A

Transcripts of interviews with some of the workshop participants.

Lily Sneha

Hi, my name is Lily Sneha and I am from Jharkhand. I am pursuing a web development course from Sajhe Sapne and along with this, I have enrolled for theatre classes as well. I have learned so many things from theatre class. Theatre is very relieving for me. We are in classes all day and are studying because of which our minds get completely tired, and theatre sessions relieve us of this tiredness. We have a lot of fun in theatre class. This is very helpful and I feel theatre class very enjoyable. I don't even feel a class is going on. I feel like we are playing, and through games we are taught many things, and I like to play games.

While doing some activities, we also discuss about social problems that hold us back, or things we otherwise have not been able to talk about. We learn how to solve these problems in theatre class. I learned how to make images in theatre class and I like it very much.

During one theatre class, Arundathi didi said "Make an image according to how you are feeling today". Through the images, it seemed that all the girls were tired. Someone was holding her stomach, someone was holding her head, some were sleeping. The problem was visible to everyone through the images.

The problem was with our food and schedule. Through images, everyone was trying to show this problem. We get food only three times a day. Firstly, breakfast is at 8:00 a.m., lunch is at 1:00 p.m. There is a huge gap between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. After that we eat directly at 10 o'clock at night, so there are 10 hours between 1 o'clock and 10 o'clock. In the gap of 10 hours, we didn't get anything to eat. Our theatre class is at 5:00 p.m. And there are many activities between 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. like classes, sports, and so on. If there is such a big gap, we are bound to feel hungry and we wouldn't have any energy at 5:00 in the evening. All our energy would be spent in studying. How much energy will you get from just having one meal anyway? So, some of us used to have stomach-ache, some would feel weak and tired, and this was because we were hungry.

We solved this problem in our theatre class. We shared this with Arundathi didi that we should get snacks in between our meal. She discussed it with Surbhi didi, we had a big meeting with Surbhi Didi and discussed that we should have a snacks time and healthy snacks, so that our energy remains intact and we can do all the classes, like sports and theatre. The problem is now resolved. And I am very thankful to Arundathi didi that she listened to our problems and she discussed this with Surbhi didi. Now we get snacks every day. Thank you so much.

During our session later, my story was selected by the group to work upon. Firstly, the story that was chosen was very serious for me. Earlier, I hadn't thought of its seriousness. Earlier, I would keep quiet and not reach and brush it aside as a small problem but in theatre class I realised that this is indeed quite a big problem. I used to feel very bad on experiencing such things and I used to understand that something wrong happened to me, but I could not think what could be the solution for what happened. But in theatre class, I realised that this is quite a big problem.

Deep inside, whenever I used to remember that situation, I used to feel very bad. Inside I used to curse myself that why I could not take any action in that situation, then when my story was selected, the story was repeated again and presented in front of the people. The inner restlessness, anger, cursing myself, came out and I could show it to the people. I am feeling thankful for choosing my story. I was able to show people that yes it does happen.

I want to tell people that situation I faced, it can happen with anyone. The incident I faced is a common one. Any boy can hold anyone's hand, can do anything, and also the person who harassed me was someone I knew. Perhaps, I wasn't able to do anything because of this. I want to tell people that I was confused at that time about whether what he did was wrong or not? But within, I had a feeling that what had happened was bad and I couldn't do anything at that time. I want to tell people that whether that person is known or unknown, nobody has the right to misbehave with you. If you are feeling harassed, then whatever happened was wrong. We should never blame ourselves, the way I did. Instead, we should take action: do something...react, scold him, whatever you think is right, you can do that. I want to tell people that no one should do anything wrong with anyone. So, one thing is when something wrong is happening with you and feeling wrong from inside then you can react because it's your right, and nobody has the right to do anything wrong with anyone.

When we were preparing for the public performance, initially, we were excited to perform! The date was finalised and we had been practicing for months! But somewhere there was hesitation and fear within me, because had practiced in a closed room for months and never in front of an audience. Then suddenly we had to perform in front of several people, which was quite new. So I was nervous. But when we performed and got the responses from the audience it felt really good. Their response was really positive. Felt really good. And as they chose one act out of two, and through their interventions, they gave power to the powerless people, changed their roles and it meant a lot that the audience were active. I felt really very good. Thank you for listening to my story.

Shital

Hi, my name is Shital and I am from Himachal Pradesh. Here at Sajhe Sapne I am pursuing the web development course. I have also enrolled in theatre class. We have a lot of fun in theatre class. We usually don't pay attention to body, our mind and what we think but in theatre class we get to know about those things. In theatre class, we focus on ourselves, as in, what are we carrying in our minds. What is going on in our minds, how we can do our work and so on. Through the day we are working and experiencing so much pressure, but when we are in theatre class, we have a lot of fun and we come to know what's going on in our hearts. We are able to do this because we meditate. We get to learn a lot from theatre through activities and we have a lot of fun by playing games with each other. It's a lot of fun.

Initially, I did not know what a theatre was. When I heard about theatre class, I used to think maybe there will be rehearsals, dramas and so on, but as we continued, we got to learn about many things. So in the beginning we used to play games, then make frames of images and observe the image-frames from different angles. This was a learning for me – to observe the same thing or story from different angles. Further into the sessions, we learnt about respectful and disrespectful touch. Since childhood I have been hearing about good touch and bad touch but I didn't know how to talk about or express these things. So,

when we were told in theatre class that we could talk about these things, all of us did. Really, all the girls in our class had been harassed at some point in their lives. Everyone shared their experience. We did this without speaking, nothing was said, but created images and image frames and shared our stories with each other.

This is what happens to us girls. We go through things and we are unable to share it with anyone. But it was a great feeling for us in the theatre class that we were able to express ourselves, and we can share this with one another. So this thing was very good. Many times it happens that we cannot tell our experiences through words, but we express through theatre. One of the things we learned in theatre is that we can talk about what is wrong. We can convey our message to the people. So this thing worked very well for me. And I really liked being associated with the theatre. In this class, we forget all our tension. I would look forward to doing something without speaking because through the day we would keep talking through our classes and during this session we were able to be and feel calm and communicate through emotions and expression. Going forward, we will perform out plays in public to talk to more people about such experiences and to also create space for others to express themselves. Theatre class worked very well for me.

Meenakshi

My name is Meenakshi and I am from Uttar Pradesh. I am pursuing a math educator course from Sajhe Sapne. In theatre class, I mainly learnt about how you can share stories of your life using theatre.

When I heard that we were going to perform our plays in public, I was so excited. I felt like maybe will actually listen to our stories. We usually don't share stories of our lives with everyone, but here we were going to! I was feeling very good about it!

I was also scared...I didn't know how people would respond to our performance. But was also excited by the thought that I will share whatever has happened in my life. So, I was feeling good and a bit afraid.

After our performance, few people raised questions and certain others from the audience addressed these questions too. It felt really very good. I felt like something was happening in my real life simultaneously too.

When I was in college and school, I never worked in a group, I used to dance alone. This was the first time that I worked with a group and we supported one another. It felt great.

I want to learn more about theatre. During our closing circle, I told didi to teach us more because we wanted to learn more. Until now, we have been able to only do a few things related to real life...so I want to keep doing that and will do so in the future too.

Sangam

My name is Sangam I am from Araria, Bihar. I am pursuing Rural Development and Management course in SS, in Himachal Pradesh.

I enjoy meditating in theatre class. By meditating, we feel peaceful and rested. Along with this, I have learned also learnt about menstruation in more detail. Earlier I knew that during periods we bleed, but in theatre class, during one session we also learnt about the anatomical details of the reproductive system.

My story was selected by everyone in theatre class to prepare for a public performance. The story is about me being molested when I was traveling in a public train. I think my story was chosen because it is a common story that has been experienced by many girls.

Through my story I want to talk to people about sexual harassment. While traveling in public transport, men are often seen being inappropriate with girls. I chose my story so that I can share my story to the world. And let people know that this is not happening only with me, it is happening with many people. At the time of the incident, I was silent; but you people do not have to remain silent anymore. Action has to be taken; voices have to be raised against it.

Rita

My name is Rita and I am from Bihar. Currently I am pursuing a 9-month Rural Development course from SS. Along with this, I have also enrolled in theatre classes. Arundathi didi comes to take theatre session. All day, we are in classrooms, studying and doing assignments. I mean, the whole thing seems really heavy, and there is no fun happening at all. But when Arundathi Didi comes to take theatre sessions, it is a lot of fun. She facilitates games in such a way that the mind becomes fresh, and we have a lot of fun doing it. Lots of fun. One day didi was talking about respectful and disrespectful touch. We already knew this but through the game didi helped us express ourselves and talk openly about these matters. I am afraid to talk to my parents or anyone else, I am afraid that my mother will restrict me from leaving the home if I tell her these things. But Didi showed us how we can tell our story through games and other activities. So we loved it.

Rashi

My name is Rashi and I am from Himachal Pradesh. I am currently pursuing a web development course at SS. We are excited to attend theatre session because theatre class does not feel like a class to us. It gives our body a lot of relief and helps us get some rest. It helps us meet ourselves and reflect. The sessions were very good and I enjoyed it a lot.

Manpreet Kaur

Hi, my name is Manpreet Kaur, I am from Punjab and I am pursuing a 9-month maths educator course here at SS. I used to love drama very much. So when I heard of theatre classes here, I participated in it. Didi got us to do new activities and got us to play different games. We became aware of our thoughts and feelings through these activities. We learned how to create different scenes, and then create a play using these scenes. And when we played games, we felt like we were back in our childhood! When we meditated, we got an opportunity to share with one another how we are really feeling. We would begin

meditation by closing our eyes and exhaling; initially we would focus on our breath and then gradually we would move inwards, which helped us relax from within. This made us feel very good from within. I loved doing theatre classes.

Kavita

My name is Kavita and I am from Himachal Pradesh. I am currently pursuing a web development course from SS. I enjoyed theatre classes with Arundathi didi. We work so much throughout the day, take on so much burden. So in our theatre sessions I began to understand how important it is for our body to feel relaxed. In this session, we do various activities for our mind and body to relax. In theatre class, we are currently working on women's issues. I used to think in theatre class, we will only do fun activities. But along with that fun, we also dealt with serious matters like harassment. Many women remain suppressed and cannot speak about what has happened to us. But by expressing it, we rise above that experience and encourage each other to express our feeling by rising further. We were able to talk about what happened with us in front of people so that they too stand up for their rights and raise their voice against violence.

Bhawna

Hello, my name is Bhawna Vaishnav and I am from Rajasthan. Here in SS, I am pursuing a web development course. I have also enrolled for theatre classes here.

At the end of our sessions, a public performance was organised. I had never performed in front of so many people before. We were performing stories on sexual harassment; it was a mix of all our stories. When we were about to leave from campus, I was panicking about how we could perform. I was wondering where and how and what not. I was nervous. However, once we started the performance, I realised that everyone liked our performance. It felt very good that people supported our cause. We had a lot of fun even after the performance.

Aarti

Didi told us that we were going to perform our play in public. We chose a story to do with sexual harassment. We prepared for it and did many rehearsals. Didi helped us with rehearsals. It felt strange to be performing in public, for the first time. Didi said, it will be fine, don't worry. We said okay didi. So when it was time for the performance, we went there. Before going there, there was a little fear in my mind about who the audience would be, what kind of questions would they ask us. When we reached the venue, there were only a few women. It felt strange because didi had told us that there would be many people. But then slowly, many people started coming in and the place became crowded. We performed a play twice and people came to intervene. It felt good because people responded to our plays well. It went well. It was nothing like what we were thinking.

Soumya

When I started theatre class, I knew a little bit about what theatre is, but did not deeply. I didn't participate in theatre class in school, but here, I did. So when we started, I started feeling very good. In theatre, we are taught how to go deep within ourselves. I like these things very much. I began to understand that theatre gives us a different glimpse of how things are. The things which we are not able to speak, we can share through expressions. So when we started theatre class, we made only still images and scenes. In

this, we did not speak, but used our bodies to make images to show how we were feeling. Those images spoke a lot. Through those images we used to tell our story to each other. People look at the same frame from so many angles. We also did art during theatre class. We also learned about good touch and bad touch, what is good touch and what is bad touch. Good touch means something which is done in our comfort zone and bad touch means which we do not feel comfortable and which happens to us but we cannot tell anyone that someone has touched us. We keep our feelings inside ourselves. This happens a lot with most girls. That she keeps her feelings inside herself and cannot tell anyone. If anyone touches her inappropriately, she does not say that this happened to me. In theatre class, we did a session where we didn't have to say anything, we just had to frame things and we had to use facial expressions to tell what happened to us.

Chandni

Hello my name is Chandni. I am from district Araria of Bihar. I am pursuing a 9-month Rural Development and Management course from SS. I learnt a lot from theatre class. Like how we can make plays instantaneously, without having to think much. I have learnt how to make plays now and I am really happy with that.

We learnt a lot in theatre class; like didi teaches us how to prepare a drama or play. So someone tells me to imagine the story and play it. By playing with the image, we can communicate what we are thinking and feeling. First you have to work on the image and then a story will emerge by itself.

Being in classes all day is tiring. Doing theatre helps us feel relaxed, especially because we play games and do activities during theatre class. It makes us feel so good! Our bodies feel relaxed.

During one theatre class, everyone was really emotional and tired. We would have classes all day, and not eat proper food. Because we didn't know how to cook and were expected to cook our own food. Secondly, we would have lunch at 1:00 p.m. and remain hungry until 9:00 p.m....on sometimes, until 11:00 p.m. because it used to take us time to cook. So, during theatre class, when didi asked us to make images of how we were feeling, everyone showed that they were very tired, headache, sleepy and so on. It all came out. When didi asked us why is this was happening, we told her about how hungry we were. Then didi asked us how would it be if we get snacks around 3 o'clock? We said it would be great. After that there were many discussions on this. After that, we did a drama, role play on this through image work and shared it with the SS staff. Then after that there was a discussion in the group, then we also started getting snacks at 3 o'clock. Then we started feeling very good inside us. Then we began to do theatre classes with all our heart and also study well.

Arushi

My name is Arushi, and I am from district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. Currently I am pursuing a one-year Rural Development Course. Theatre classes are going very well. We did an activity in which we connected with our wombs and learnt more about menstruation. When didi did this session with us, I came to know that a lot of things happen inside our body. Didi made a diagram and showed it to us, there were many parts in our reproductive system. In an activity, didi asked us to place our hands on our wombs. There was a strange sensitivity in it.

We are talking about good touch and bad touch in theatre class nowadays. I like it very much because we are learning through theatre about good touch and bad touch and how we feel. When didi says how are you feeling today, express in just one word, that one word comes from my heart. Otherwise, I usually say, "I am feeling good", but when I have express in just one word and I think deeply about it. I love that activity.

So when I came to know that I will have to go public for the performance, I was more excited, less nervous because I love doing it. I was happy because I like to do this. So when I came to know that I have to go, rehearsals started, as the days were nearing, I was feeling so happy that I am going for a public performance. When we were going for a public performance, many girls were nervous, I was not nervous at all, I was thinking that when we are going, we will come back having done something. When we reached and saw the public, I was happy somewhere. On the other hand, I was also a little concerned. What if I got scared and couldn't speak on stage? But when we arrived there, we performed, and at that time we performed very well. Then I saw the reaction of the people, when people started speaking, the efforts we have put in for the performance, people are also responding to that.

I love doing theatre. My favourite thing was happening, so I was very happy. Somewhere there was a feeling of sadness that the opportunity that was given has now come to an end. I will not be able to continue this further for the time being. I will learn in future, but what I am learning now, will end. And the biggest thing was that through drama we can talk about social issues with people. When we were performing there, there were a lot of people who had a lot of energy, who stood up and spoke and added to the performance. If we would have only spoken about those issues so much, then that thing would not have happened. But we took it to the people through theatre, so the issue reached the people more easily and people got more involved in it. Through drama we can talk about social issues. I got to learn how we can convey our message to the people. I love doing this and will continue to do it in future.

Akanksha Patel

My name is Akanksha Patel, I am from district Raibareilly of Uttar Pradesh. I am currently pursuing a development management course from SS, Himachal Pradesh. I really enjoy doing theatre classes because it gives us a break from all the assignments and the tiredness. When I am in theatre class, I feel a strange relief. I love theatre classes. What I enjoy is that whenever didi teaches us a new topic, she teaches it through an activity. So we understand it well and don't get bored.

We are dealing with stories of sexual harassment in theatre class right now. In the play, I am a boy who is harassing a girl. I play the role in a way that a boy would harass a girl in real life. When we were going to perform our play in public, I felt some fear. I was wondering about how the audience would be, how would I be able to express my character in front of people and all these things. But performing there was one of the best things for me. I was able to share with people about sexual harassment and about my experience. I learnt about how to express my points of view in front of people.

When we were going out to the theatre, there was a fear that what kind of people would be there, how would I be able to bring my character in front of people. But when I performed there, I felt that it was the best for me. Because it was to show me how people misbehave with girls, so talking about my experience, I learned a lot about how to put my point in front of people.

Anjani

Hello, my name is Anjani, I am from Jharkhand. Currently I am pursuing a Rural Development course from SS. My experience in theatre class is very good because otherwise we are just drowning in study. In theatre class, we are able to learn something while doing different activities. I like that we don't have to read or study anything but are still learning. We feel very relaxed in theatre class. Usually after class, we need something to energise us but ever since we've started theatre classes, we have got an opportunity to feel relaxed in a different way. This session should always continue, its experience is very good.

We've been exploring some social issues in theatre class. Earlier I used to see that there are many types of discrimination in our society. I used to watch, but never spoke about it. But in theatre class we are learning to present our issues through play and drama. We also have been understand our womb in theatre class. I have always known that it is a part of our body, but I have never listened to it to understand it. In theatre class we also worked on our relationship with nature...how to listen to our wombs and understand its nature and the connection between our wombs and nature. Theatre class is very interesting. While there is a lot of bookish knowledge in the world, in theatre class we learn about real social issues through action.

My story was selected to be further worked on in theatre class. It felt good, because I hadn't told anyone my story till date...but during theatre class, I got an opportunity to share this story in front of people. I want to tell people that when I went through this incident, I was silent. But now I think we should raise our voice when something like this happens so that the people around us can help us.

APPENDIX B

Listen to her.... The Body Knows

by Arundathi

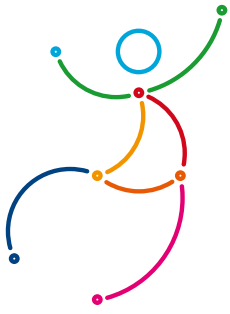
Voices one too many
All webbed up in my head
like the Cops of Right and Wrong
red taping the footsteps I tread.

What if my body could speak her truth instead?
All of the shame my breasts would shed.

What if my wild child could jump, dance and play?
With the wind, the trees, her bare feet kissing the earth in prayer

What if I told you that the breath takes us to the nature within?
It is in her lap that the learning could truly begin.





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