



जनसंस्कृति



JANA SANSKRITI  
CENTRE FOR THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**APRIL 2018-MARCH 2019**

## **ABOUT US**

Jana Sanskriti(JS) Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed established in 1985 was the first exponent of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in India. Today the Centre is seen as one of the most important point of references to the global community of Theatre of the Oppressed. Jana Sanskriti believes that there is perfection latent within every individual –waiting to be discovered and manifested. When a person discovers this perfection he is able to overcome the sense of inferiority imposed upon him by the centralised social culture. He becomes articulate, confident and capable of confronting challenges, which come on the path of development.

Jana Sanskriti's goal is to create a space in which the oppressed will have enormous scope for introspection and discovery of the self and to facilitate a meeting between the individual and the perfection within himself. For "what is this perfection but the richest resource of human society?" Over 3 decades JS has addressed issues like domestic violence, child marriage, girl child trafficking, child abuse, maternal & child health, primary education & health care, illicit liquor, etc. – all through theatre. A recent study headed by Dr. Jyothsna Jalan of Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata has proved the impact of 'spect-acting' in creating a strong community of active & responsible citizens. The study highlights the crucial role of participatory theatre in changing social norms.

### **THE JOURNEY OF JANASANSKRITI BEGAN FROM A SMALL VILLAGE...**

Jana Sanskriti's journey began from a small village in the Sunderbans in 1985. Today it has 30 satellite theatre teams in West Bengal (mostly in the districts of South 24 Parganas and Purulia), two in Tripura, two in Jharkhand, one each in New Delhi and Orissa. Teams have also been formed in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Karnataka. These teams reach at least 2,00,000 spectators every year through their performances. As Augusto Boal said, "Jana Sanskriti is the largest and the longest lasting forum theatre operation in the world". Of the teams in West Bengal, nine are all-women theatre teams, perhaps another first in India.

Jana Sanskriti also organises a bi-annual Forum Theatre festival called Muktaadhara since 2004. The important reason for organizing this Festival is that it becomes an international meeting ground for the Forum Theatre teams across the world as well as those trained by Jana Sanskriti all over India. Each of these teams is active in their own regions; most of them are also heading organizations engaged in struggles to assert the rights of the marginalized. These festivals have been highly successful and attended by noted theatre personalities from India as well as from all the continents.

In November 2015, Jana Sanskriti International Research and Resource Institute (JSIRRI) came into being unifying artist-activists from across the world justifying the Indian ethos represented in "Vasudhaiva Kutum Bakum"

## **OUR PRACTICES**

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a school of theatre first conceptualised by Brazilian theorist & theatre practitioner Augusto Boal. In TO, the oppressed speak, act and express their social will. Jana Sanskriti's theatre teams reach out to thousands of people every month, with aesthetically refined theatre and hard-hitting questions on the reality around us. Jana Sanskriti's theatre does not offer any solutions – the attempt is to arrive at a solution is made with the help of the spect-actors (spectators who intervene during forum sessions)

In India, Jana Sanskriti is the only exponent of Forum Theatre in which members of the theatre team select, construct, and narrate a social problem from their daily life. With artistic direction this play is taken to an audience who must now find a solution to the problem. Passive spectators then become engaged spect-actors. Spect-actors come on stage to enact the solutions they have thought of, debating with trained activists about the feasibility of the solutions suggested. Thus individuals publicly engage in tackling a problem that has thus far provoked the most profound cultural silence and acceptance. This exercise gradually suggests possibilities for liberation from that oppression in real life. Over the years we have seen that the experience of 'spect-acting' has motivated people to be active outside theatre as well.

In Image Theatre actors and spect-actors recreate images of their own reality – through consensus. They look at their reality in an objective manner, try to understand and analyse it. This is called the real image. Spect-actors then proceed to make the image of a situation that they desire – the ideal image - in which the oppression will have disappeared. We then return to the real image and debate begins. Each spect-actor must then show images of different stages in the possible transition from real to ideal. This entire experience becomes a rehearsal of how to deal with oppression in real life. Introspective Theatre affords an individual the scope of being her own spectator. As a spectator she introspects, analyses and understands the reason for every small experience of oppression in her life. She discovers the talent within herself – this gives her confidence. She recognizes how various social values are guiding her actions.

## **GIRISH BHAVAN**

Girish Bhavan, located in the lap of nature is the administrative centre of Jana Sanskriti in Kolkata. Girish Bhavan is situated in a small village called Badu, 5 Km from Madhyamgram cross road. This centre derives her name from the father of Bengali theatre - Shri. Girish Chandra Ghosh. Girish Bhavan houses 4 different spaces –

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## MUKTA MANCHA

An "open stage" in Digambarpur village, South 24 Parganas is situated hardly 300 metres away from the Mridangabhangra river. Recognizing "art as the basic need" for every human being irrespective of any socio-economic disparity, Jana Sanskriti along with the local agricultural farmer's community conceptualized MUKTA MANCHA. It was built in early 2000 by the local community using bamboos, mud, hay and ropes. This space is central to Jana Sanskriti's activities in the Sunderbans. This space is utilized by the local government and well as the village community for theatre, dance, drawing, painting, meetings and performances.

ALL throughout the year recitation and dance classes and subsequent performances are held for adolescents and children. The activists of Janasanskriti engaged in harvesting organic farming, demonstrating against social mal-practices as well as enabling the community through the responsible citizens committee (RCC), Mother's Forum, besides the theatre performances of the satellite teams of Jana Sanskriti.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS (MARCH 2018 - MARCH 2019)

### Projects:

#### A) Common wealth Foundation Grants project

Project name: Preventing child marriage, retaining girls in school and developing gender awareness

Project location: Purulia, West Bengal

## PROGRESS ON OUTPUTS

### Output 1.1.1

#### Teaching community & local government sensitized about the problem & our approach to curb it

Our experience of interacting with the teaching community in this project area has been good. Since a pilot was already done among 12 schools in a one of the blocks prior to this project, feedback and references from the headmasters of these schools have been key to approach new head masters in current project area. Many of them find synergy in our vision; few are still sceptical about the impact of theatre to address such deep rooted patriarchal norms. Nevertheless, all school authorities have cooperated to begin work in their schools. We have similar experience with government authorities. Most of them are finding this intervention creatively inspiring. Considering the socially excluded status of our project area, and the complexity of the concept we are trying to address, creative interventions like ours are being gladly welcomed. Some instances are mentioned –

- ❖ Lalpur Maguria Panchayat–Last year, a nursing school was set up by a non-government organisation in this region. Over a period of time, it was found that this was a prostitution centre. Ever since, panchayat of this region is very strict about permitting any new organisation to work in their area. Last year, in spite of sharing our objectives in written, we were not yet officially permitted to work in this area. In the first year of project, whenever we planned a show, it was always in the presence of a member from this Panchayat. But this year the scenario has changed positively. Sufficient mutual trust has been built.
- ❖ Madrasa High School – Culturally it is seen that Muslims do not encourage practice of arts especially in rural areas. But this particular school has a dynamic headmaster who has initiated all girls theatre teams from his school and has requested us to take the lead.
- ❖ Puncha Block Development Officer – This gentleman is proactive in preventing child marriage in his area. However the audio-visual material provided by state government to talk about this concept is dry and does not create impact among young students in school. After he saw Jana Sanskriti theatre team perform, he is now inviting our team to perform in early girl child marriage related programs organised by local government in schools. Bureaucracy and social welfare administration in the sub-divisional and district level have also started showing interest in our work.
- ❖ Puncha OC –JS pilot project was done in Puncha block. Our consistent presence in the area is regularly tracked by the police authorities. Their response is positive towards us. Recently, JS team was invited to perform the play “Golden Girl” at a community program organised inside Puncha Police station. This program was organised in association with SDO and BDO and was performed for Sabar community which is famously known as a criminal tribe.

Overall, fear and suspicions surrounding our interventions have declined. Communication and responsiveness of the teaching community has drastically improved. Our young actors and supervisors are treated as respectful social change makers as compared with the previous view of directionless youth.

## **CHALLENGES:**

- I. Lack of resources for referral shows – Once a show is performed in a school; most often the teaching community suggest performing it in another school/village. We have not been able to respond to these requests dues to lack of resources for mobilising the team.
- II. Responding to publicity of govt. schemes – Sometimes the local government authorities make adhoc suggestions to perform plays on awareness of government schemes. This propaganda mode of theatre does not sit well with our practice of forum theatre. Hence we have to tread carefully, balancing the local government’s involvement and our project aims.

- III. Hura Boys School–Since this is a boys only school, our approach to perform plays on girl child marriage were continuously turned down. They argued that this is a women related problem so it is a waste of time performing in boys school. It took us a good one year to repeatedly visit and convince the headmaster and his teaching staff that the change in thinking pattern of boys is crucial to counter this problem. These boys will one day be a father, brother and husband who if uninitiated would grow up to be oppressive patriarchs. Now we have permission to perform here, however the reluctance exists.
- IV. Managing Committee in schools –Every school has this committee comprising of student guardians and few local government representatives. Almost in all cases ruling party in power control these committees and this is especially true in West Bengal. Ruling parties and opposition fight election to capture managing committees. The strong intervention of Ruling party to control everything in education scenario is exceptionally present and it has become a political culture in West Bengal. This body is very powerful and all headmasters have to consult them before making any decision. In few cases our proposal of theatre shows in schools received resistance from these committees.

### **LESSONS LEARNT:**

- i. Both schools and local government authorities are pressurized to show 100% results in the government sponsored schemes preventing child marriage. As a result data from school and government are not reliable.
- ii. School drop outs are more among boys. This point will be discussed in details in other sections.
- iii. Owing to a positive response to our plays, there is a demand to create new plays on issues like child labour, witch hunts, bane of a girl child.

### **Output 1.1.2: Two Aesthetically refined, hard hitting forum plays created to be performed by strong theatre teams comprising students & experienced folk artists**

It has been an interesting experience reaching out to youth in this community. Participants are enthusiastic about this activity. However, these communities are conservative in nature and open interaction of girls and boys is not encouraged. In this situation, participation of youth is assured only after involving their parents in the selection process. 2 forum plays were created – The Golden Girl (Jana Sanskriti's signature play of patriarchy, used as a seed in communities to open dialogue about patriarchy) and Minu's World (a new play created by the young actors addressing primarily child marriage along with increasing trend of breaking families). Currently, there are 6 theatre teams, comprising of **61 actors of which 77% are girls and 93% of them are from the 'backward' castes. Of them, 32% are folk artists.** Average age of these actors is 20 yrs. We can proudly say that there has been not been any case of early marriage among our actors in the last 2 years. However, we have had 9 dropouts in 1<sup>st</sup> year and 28 dropouts in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. (Please refer enclosed document for relevant data and reasons).

## **CHALLENGES:**

- i. Participation of adolescent girls is a stigma in these communities. On one hand, it is respectable for young girls to dance on stage, as soon as they reach teen-age; the same is seen as vulgar. In this situation, involving girls in street theatre is quite an intervention. But our female actors battle this situation every day to be part of our theatre project. In some cases, even if parents don't have any reservations, the extended family and neighbours criticise this move severely. Repeated engagement with the family of actors has helped us tackle this situation better.
- ii. Since ours is a young team, romantic engagements are expected. However, in a conservative community as this, where girls and boys do not engage publicly, it becomes an excuse for some in the community to blame theatre for encouraging casual interaction between boys and girls. However, we make sure to communicate that it is better for these actors to be in a democratic set up and handle their emotions rationally than being locked up at home, with minimal interaction with peers and resorting to desperate measure such as eloping.
- iii. In the beginning of project period, we had rented a house to be used as field office. The owner was briefed in advance about the nature of our activities. Gender based interaction is an issue here hence we had assured parents of our actors and the house owner that theatre workshops and rehearsals will be organised under the supervision of seniors from our organisation. These were mostly held in office premises in presence of supervisors and project coordinator. Gradually, this house became a meeting place for youth from different castes and economic backgrounds. The house itself was situated in a Brahmin dominated, economically fair area. As days passed, residents of this locality started objecting to girls and boys getting together to have 'fun' and people from lower castes visiting their area. We had to eventually move out and hire another house which is away from residential settlements. The owners here are far more cooperative
- iv. Caste-The caste system here is still a prevalent practice. It directly impacts family honor and women of the household are supposed to carry the primary responsibility to safeguard this. This creates complexity at many levels which will be discussed in the later sections.
- v. It is difficult to engage female actors. Street theatre is not acceptable very easily by girl's parents. Girls are required to perform with boys that too on open streets, interact with audience; all these experiences are objectionable by many parents. We try our best to convince them about the vigilant nature of our work even within the team. Girls in our theatre teams learn to objectively understand their choices in life. It is very difficult for them to take any irrational step like eloping. But it is still a predominant belief that girls who do theatre are bad.

However, 93% of our female actors are from these “lower caste” families where child marriage is prevalent. This is a good indication. Very few female actors are from the upper caste families.

Hence we see that, in spite of government policies of conditional money transfer, our theatre is playing an important role in breaking the patriarchal mind-set of the community. This process is slow but consistent.

## **LESSONS LEARNT**

- i. Traditional art forms are at a decline. These art forms are normally preserved as a lineage. Present generation once they reach college, don't find it interesting to practice these art forms. Also the demand for traditional art forms in the villages is seasonal and the money is scarce. As a result, we have few folk artists in our team who are being encouraged to contribute their art form in the play as well. Artist details are provided in the attached excel sheet. Our theatre intervention is helping restore practice of traditional art forms in these communities.
- ii. Migration is a growing trend in this area. Young boys and girls irrespective of their level of education have to migrate to nearby cities as daily wage labours. This is impacting the stability of our teams. Since this trend is unpredictable, we have to constantly invest in training and development of new actors.

### **Output 1.2.1: Capacity built in student spectators & youth actors to articulate their thoughts about the issue**

Once theatre teams were formed, all actors were then involved in training for forum discussions. Especially the artists enacting oppressor characters are encouraged to problematize the situation so that spectators do not arrive at a simple solution easily and think deeper and approach the issue from multiple perspectives. This process scripts intellectual power among the actors. This critical thinking makes them more logical to take a decision in this matter. With this experience; they started performing in schools and engage the student audience in dialogue. This activity also helps them understand the complexities involved in addressing this issue and prepare them better to handle child marriage cases. Now school students are actively participating in timely reporting of child marriage cases. Headmasters' timely intervention has been crucial in deterring child marriage cases in schools.

**6 active theatre teams have performed 123 schools shows reaching 12,535 student audiences in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of project.**



## **CHALLENGE:**

- One particular trend we often face during forum is that forum discussions tend to get streamlined towards supporting government schemes. By default, teachers prompt students to mention the importance of government schemes of conditional cash transfers for young girls to help them stay in school. Initially discussions used to stagnate here, not delving into the faculties existing within the girls to oppose this pattern. Though these schemes have resulted in a considerable rise of girls just toeing the 18yrs mark, but it in no way addresses the patriarchal ideas surrounding early marriage, dowry system and life of a girl after marriage. 18yrs might be an indication towards physical maturity but is definitely not a mental age for marriage. In rural India, it is still common to consider girls beyond the age of 20 yrs as aged. Relatives and neighbours pressurize the girl's father to get her married as soon as possible. The "joker" plays an important role here to navigate the conversation towards deeper discussions.

## **LESSONS LEARNT:**

- i. Initial forum interventions mostly result in loud arguments. Gradually, once the most obvious arguments are dealt with, rational reasoning begins. Here is a memorable moment -
  - At Tatari Kendadi High School –During the show, a girl in the audience was silently weeping. After the play, when invited to forum, she was shaking beyond control. Especially the child marriage scene and domestic violence scene was very strong for her and she could not control herself. Her forum intervention clearly indicated that she was talking from experience. She identified herself in the protagonist which indicated the existence of this scenario in the community. Our theatre team found this experience overwhelming. However, they managed to calm her and encourage a rational discourse on stage.
- ii. Headmasters have reported increased participation of students in class. This has directly impacted their academic progress.

**Output 1.2.2: Students encouraged to independently practice theatre arts in school premises**

**7 drama clubs have been formed this year consisting 131 students of which 92 are girls.**

Schools are welcoming of the concept. The spect-actors from forum shows in schools are usually the ones initiating. Gradually they bring their friends along. As of now, Jana Sanskriti theatre team members have helped these drama clubs to prepare for cultural activities, create plays from scripts contributed by school teachers and prepare them for annual events in their school as well as inter-school competitions. The response has been great so far. We gradually plan to introduce themes from academic subjects, gender studies and environmental science into the drama club activities. Plays could be created on specific chapters/topics and using forum could be used to easily understand the concept and debate it.

## **Output 2.1.1**

### **Community engaged to participate in Forum theatre sessions and in forum meetings to discuss the issue in a collective**

Our teams began to perform new forum plays from April last year. Most responses have been extremely encouraging. Issues portrayed in the villages strike a chord with these communities. Forum sessions bring out the practical complexities in addressing child marriage. Many times, children who have seen the same play in their school watch it again with their family and fearlessly engage in the discussions on stage. This process successfully sparks intergenerational dialogue. We are observing stronger participation of women in forum. Most often, while playing *The Golden Girl*, married women in the audience are found weeping, especially the young ones accompanied by their children. They might not participate in forum directly but actively observe the discussions and sometimes provide rational arguments. When these shows are followed up with meetings with spect-actors, we see good participation and the will to come together and collectively discuss our project goals. These meetings at a later stage seed RCC & MFs.

**This year, 170 village shows were performed reaching 25,944 rural audience of which 9,990 were female.**

**631 spect-actors actively engaged in forum discussions of which 423 were female.**

#### **CHALLENGES:**

- i. Eloping/caste barriers – We observe the undemocratic nature of families. Fathers are feared by the children. There is no space for young adults to express their emotions freely. Hence, eloping is common. In addition, caste is a big problem. As a cultural practice, love marriages are not a norm. More so, if the relationship is inter-caste, there are chances of violent rejections. Hence young couples do not wait for their parents' approval and run away. This is one of the reasons why parents prefer to marry their daughters away early in fear of losing family honor.
- ii. Role of political party representatives – Many a times, when early girl child marriage has been fixed and they suspect interventions to stop it, the father might visit the local party representatives to gather support to let it continue. In this case, to keep their vote bank satisfied, local party representatives ensure that this marriage is not stopped.

- iii. Actual stats shaky – In rural India, official registration of the marriage is only a formality. A wedding held in a temple or in presence of family members is socially accepted. Hence, many underage marriages happen in temples or in a relative’s house (outside our project area), which will be officially registered once they attain legal age. Hence it is extremely difficult to consolidate the actual child marriage cases.

## **LESSONS LEARNT**

- i. Practical complexities expressed in forums – Forum discussions accelerate multi-perspective approach to the problem of child marriage. We have learnt that the causes are not just limited to cultural practices. In a marginal family, where both parents are working, to ensure their daughter’s security, she might be married off. Also, it is one less mouth to feed. Sometimes, a ‘good boy ‘might approach for marriage without dowry, parents go ahead in desperation. If there are more than one daughter in the family, the situation is even worse. . Girls are brought up in a way that once married; they will never consider breaking off the marriage at any cost. So once married, the girl’s family can consider her burden gone forever.
- ii. Young brides import – In our project area, more that the number of young girls marrying early, boys are bringing child brides from bordering areas of the district. Here the marriageable age can be as young as 12-13 yrs. Boys drop out of schools at a higher rate than girls. They migrate outside their region in search of work, earn quick money and marry early to primarily add a member to the household work force. Child marriage cases from border areas are very difficult to intervene as it gets caught in jurisdiction debates.
- iii. Caste based trends - Trend of child marriage is more in financially challenged, socially excluded ‘lower caste’; But the trend is lower among upper-caste families; in mixed caste areas, it is seen that the trend is lower in ‘lower caste’ families.
- iv. Trend in Tribals – Child marriage, especially among boys is a cultural practice among tribals. However, they do not have the custom of dowry. The young bride becomes an additional earning member in the family as compared to the ‘upper caste’ brides being confined to home post marriage.

## **Output 2.1.2**

**Mothers forum, RCC constituted and ready to act on the issue in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, we have formed 6 RCCs and 18 Mother Forums.**

These committees were constituted after regular meetings following forum theatre sessions in the communities. We are now working closely with government established all women self-help groups. This strategy evolved once we started performing in villages and hosting forum meetings. We realised that most of these groups are inactive and only concerned with small savings. Jana Sanskriti theatre teams are playing an important role activating these women groups by involving them into issues like child marriage, domestic violence and reproductive health. The government is also interested to activate these groups. In 2 years, we have met close to 300 SHGs (Self-help groups) which is close to 4000 women in these communities. We have also introduced Kisho-kishori vahinis, which are the exclusive groups for adolescent girls and boys which creates a safe space for them to learn and discuss issues pertaining to them. We have created 6 so far, comprising of 55 adolescent girls. They will be direct watch committees for identifying, reporting and intervening in child marriages in their area.

## **Output 2.2.1**

### **Community & local govt. become mutually active for the cause**

We have managed to gather the support of some sensitive bureaucrats. As mentioned in the first output, our association with the BDO and police has been strong so far. Our theatre team is now formally recognized and are invited to perform during government sponsored functions. We are building base ultimately to bridge the gap between these socially excluded communities and local government. This is an exponential process and we hope to see direct engagement between these entities from next year. We have also started negotiating to introduce Marriage registers.

#### **CHALLENGES-**

- Administration and Police have the pressure on them to show their active involvement in government sponsored anti-child marriage schemes. On one hand, we are happy about our collaboration in government sponsored cultural programs, however, as of now, it tends to be limited to documentation on their behalf rather than first hand interventions. One more reason for this is all of them being overburdened with too many administrative responsibilities, that it prevents them from connecting directly with the communities at deeper level.
- Local government is mostly dominated by upper caste people. Even if the nomination is given to some marginal representatives, the post is controlled by the upper caste. As a result, their attitude towards the marginal people is feudal in nature.

## **Output 2.2.2**

### **Local & district visual & print media activated**

We have started interacting with local media. However, for them to take notice and feature Jana Sanskriti can be expected next year. Local media generally do not show interest to cover marginal communities. Very often they are controlled by government in power. Though they are taking notice of our activities, coverage can be expected next year.

## PROGRESS TOWARDS SHORT TERM OUTCOMES

### **Short-term outcome 1.1: Better understanding and general acceptance of the issues following strong plays performed by student actors**

Below given is a snap-shot of the baseline survey. Statistics of school dropout and child marriage is based on 10 years family history. Survey data can be presented on request.

<b>BLOCK</b>	<b>NO. Of Respondent (No. Of families)</b>	<b>School Drop Out</b>	<b>Child Marriage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Hura	659	346	60	17.34%
Manbazar	375	216	44	20.37%
Puncha	701	267	58	21.72%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1735</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>19.54%</b>

According to the project logical framework, first two indicators towards achieving this outcome were in terms of no. of early marriage and school dropout cases among the selected actors. We are proud to share that in the last two years project period we have not found any such cases among all our actors. However, some of them have discontinued after joining our theatre teams. Reasons for their discontinuation are mentioned in the enclosed sheet on artist details.

### **Short-term outcome 1.2: Students will be able to understand the issues and articulate them and act them out during forum sessions**

This process has begun, as justified in the progress on output 1.2.1 and 1.2.2. However, to substantiate the indicators set for this short-term outcome, we have to reach a stage where repeat performances are happening, which for now are few. We will be able to see the actual effect in the following year. Tracking unique interventions during repeat performances at a school or village will better indicate the improved capacity of these student actors to facilitate dialogue and inspire multi-dimensional thinking patterns during forum sessions.

The momentum with which our student actors are evolving is promising. We have also received some promising interventions from students in schools. For example, in Ramnagar school which mostly has tribal students, students have presented logical suggestions to combat patriarchy. Similarly in Hura girls school, students are seen to provide suggestions moving away from a concrete theatre scene and talk about women's rights as a whole. Such thoughtful logical interventions are not seen in urban schools.

As mentioned before, we could not entertain any requests for referral shows due to limited resources for travel. In Purulia, distance is a huge factor.

All forum show sheets have been enclosed.

### **Short-term outcome 2.1: Passive community intellectually empowered to break silence, engage in dialogue and become thought multipliers**

Similarly, this process has been initiated as described in output 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. But what we can sense now is the initiations of inter-generational dialogue. A change oriented mentality is seen in the community. As mentioned before, multiple perspectives discussed during forum empower the community. We will present a compilation of the best forum interventions, showing the evolving thought processes by end of the project period.

### **Short-term outcome 2.2: Increased dialogue between community, local government and media in reducing the incidence of child marriage and promoting the retention of girls in school**

As described in output 2.2.1 and outcome 2.2.2, this process is in the initial stages. Based on our experience of working in this project area, we are sure of enabling this interaction very soon in the forthcoming year. We have a promising district bureaucracy in the project area.

B) **'NORA QUESTIONS PATRIARCH IN BENGAL'** :International IBSEN Award for the performance (using forum theatre techniques a pioneering effort), of 'A Doll's House' adapted as 'Khelaghar' – the contemporary adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's 'A Doll's House'. For the 1<sup>st</sup> time in the history of World theatre a classical text was performed using forum theatre techniques. Workshops and performances and two seminars comprising the spectators who participated in the subsequent forum sessions. The protagonist of the play Nora Helmer or Aparajita as named in our play executed the decision she took for herself, unlike the forum theatre tradition. The main themes depicted in the original play like parental and familial obligations, the sacrificial role of women, gender roles- is still relevant in contemporary times. The living of Nora, her trials and tribulations, the roles and responsibilities of men and women in household decisions, the construction of patriarchy in raising children and interpersonal relationship constituted the symbolic elements in our portrayal. A book is in progress about the spectators view points that emerged from the seminars.

### **C) KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND LEARNING**

The basic principle underlining Jana Sanskriti's theory of change is to inspire questioning and interpreting one's reality. Introspective theatre techniques including theatre games as social metaphors play a crucial role in this movement of one's mind. Apart from such techniques, we have always tried to provide creative stimulus to the young student actors. We are doing this in the following ways –

- ❖ **Dr.Sanjoy Ganguly** plays an important role in consistently inspiring our student actors to debate about varied subjects ranging from philosophy, sociology to defining empowerment, interrogating patriarchal norms etc. These discussions and debates are facilitated in addition to sharing real time experiences of working in the communities on specific topics of school dropout and early girl child marriage. Student actors find these sessions very interesting as it helps them to think about the problem in hand from various angles and formulate arguments which they use during forum sessions.

- ❖ **Exposure to South 24 Parganas:** Jana Sanskriti's theatre movement began 32 years back in Sunderbans, South 24 Parganas. In the first year of project, Jana Sanskriti organised a week long exposure trip there for the supervisors, documentationist and Project Coordinator of Purulia project. They were given a hand-holding by senior theatre workers about the various segments in a village community, how to interact with people in villages and with stake holders in the local government, how to create clear communication channels across this network and how to gradually organise and progress towards creating RCC and Mother Forums. In the second year, senior members from South 24 pargans team visited Purulia and did knowledge transfer about community meetings and community mobilisation. The young actors and supervisors of Purulia worked along with these senior members in real time to apply their experience in the Purulia context.
- ❖ **Muktadhara**–Jana Sanskriti organises a bi-annual forum theatre festival at the administrative base in Kolkata. These festivals are a meeting ground for artists and academics across the world, using forum theatre as a medium of change in their communities. In December 2016, we had invited the supervisors of this project to participate in this 15 day festival and learn and interact from this rich experience. In December 2018 as well, actors from Purulia participated in the international forum theatre festival which had 52 participants from 16 countries, all using applied theatre in various context. Some of the actors were also part of a theatre experiment which combined Henrik Ibsen's classical naturalism and Augusto Boal's Forum theatre. This year long experiment is part of the Ibsen scholarship which Jana Sanskriti received in 2017. Click here for more details <http://www.ibsenawards.com/scholarship/winners/nora-questions-patriarchy-in-bengal>

We have not had the opportunity to exchange our learning in the grant network. We will be more than happy to participate. We have been doing this anyway. Jana Sanskriti is the international point of reference for forum theatre. Regular exchanges happen between academics, artists and applied theatre practitioners in India and across the world. Please visit our Facebook page @JanaSanskritiBadu for further details.

## D) INNOVATIONS

**1. Marriage registers** – This year we have proposed to track each and every village level marriage details at their gram panchayat. From the long experience of working with the grass root JS field workers have evolved this design to track the possibilities of child marriage to initiate action before the incident happens. A scientific database of marriages happening has been developed. We have started negotiating with the local government authority called Gram Panchayat. JS field workers are trying to convince those authorities to build a systematic database regarding all the marriages in their area of operations. Once the process will be structured then Child Marriage, Normal Marriage, Average age of marriage in the locality, Men Women marriage ratio in the locality and many more information will easily be analyzed. Most importantly, for tracking every marriage proactively by local govt. authority, child marriage will be stopped and after marriage

trafficking will obviously be reduced. This is the first initiatives of its kind. We have introduced it in 7 Gram panchayat ( Lowest tier of local government) in South 24 Parganas as well. There was no such initiative in Panchayat system in West Bengal. This will be definitely an addition in the government system on the question of child marriage and trafficking. No such organised moves have been taken before this. Proposed database is given below.

Sl. No.	Na me	Gen der	Guardian's Name	Date of Birth	Date of Marriage	A ge	Marriage Category	Edu. Qlfn.	Vill age	G P	Superv isor
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**2. Committee of Priests** –Two years back there was an incident in Punch block (our pilot area of work) where a priest responsible for marriage rituals refused to marry a couple as both of them were underage. This inspired us to organise and form committees of priests facilitating marriage rituals and ensure that they forma check point for this.

**3. Kishore-kishori vahini-** This initiative has developed organically from our consistent efforts in this region. This is a dedicated group for adolescents (separately for girls and boys) where they can discuss personal issues ranging from their body to their interactions with society. They also act as the direct watch committee to spot, report and intervene in child marriages. We have formed 6 such groups comprising of 55 girls. We are hopeful for creating more in the following year.

## **E) COMMUNITY INITIATIVE IN HEALTH CARE**

JS has been able to challenge existing social norms in rural West Bengal around issues, such as domestic violence, alcoholism, status of the girl child and dowry. In a study conducted in the villages of two districts in West Bengal, Jalan (2016) examined the effectiveness of JS's work in women's 8 Asia Pacific Media Educator empowerment, addressing some social norms underlying patriarchy and domestic violence against women. The study found that JS has not only been able to give voice to the oppressed women, but has also been able to change the mindset of the men towards gender equality. Health especially health care of women in rural Bengal remains one of the most neglected areas at individual, household and community levels. It is imperative for health care practitioners as well as both men and women to have a comprehensive understanding and approach towards bodies, diseases, health care, et al.

### **OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAM :-**

- Improving the health of socially and economically marginalised communities in rural areas, particularly among women and children.
- Using community health as an instrument for gender equity & justice.
- Contributing to the public debate on community health.



## **NECESSITY OF COMMUNITY INITIATIVE FOR HEALTH CARE :**

Spectacular developments in medical technology and large scale invasion of profit seekers in medicare have not only inflated cost of clinical services to absurdity- incidentally health related expenses are a major cause of impoverishment of marginal families- the notion of healthcare itself is getting bizarrely distorted. The distortion seems to emanate from a shift in the perspective from which healthcare system is being viewed. For community, for every household, for every mother of a child it is more important not to get ill, to remain in health. But the corporate – technocratic nexus in healthcare has nothing to do until someone gets sick.

Unfortunately, the dominant paradigm has largely shifted from the community perspective to the commercial perspective. For instance, there are empirical evidences to show that the infant mortality can be reduced up to 13/ % simply by ensuring exclusive breast feeding by all children before six months; while till date there is no evidence to show that setting up NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) facilities has any significant impact in reducing morbidity or mortality. Nevertheless, it has been the modern wisdom to measure ‘development’ in child health by counting the number of NICUs, while being ignorant to the fact that nearly 60% of the children are being deprived from exclusive breast feeding during the first six months of life.

Such anomalies in healthcare can be addressed by encouraging community initiative in healthcare management. The existing 3 tier public healthcare system is fairly rational, but suffers from the missing community participation. Independent and spirited community initiatives can wonderfully collaborate with the public healthcare system and at its’ own perspective and priorities. Extent of such participation will obviously differ at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of health care. Generally speaking, community can help in promoting care and preventing, for example (oral rehydration therapy in diarrhoea) at the primary level or at the secondary level, it can actively cooperate with and the public healthcare facilities to serve the actual need of the community.

To explore the potential and challenge of such initiatives we propose-

- Primary Care of Under- Five Children

### **PROGRAM DETAILS : - PRIMARY CARE OF UNDER FIVE CHILDREN**

AGENDA - 1) To ensure exclusive breast feeding before 6 months and proper complementary feeding from 6 months to 2 years in all children.

2) Counselling of all mothers regarding exclusive breast feeding and complementary feeding.

3) Monitoring growth of all children.

4) Identification of protein energy malnutrition & micronutrient deficiency at the earliest.

- 5) Correction of nutritional deficiency.
- 6) Identification of general danger sign in any sick child and arrangement for referral.
- 7) Classification of dehydration in all children with diarrhoea and administration of oral rehydration therapy as per WHO guidelines.
- 8) Assessment of all children with cough/ respiratory distress and their management as per IMCI guidelines.
- 9) General care of children with fever.

**TENURESHIP** :- 1 Year / batch. Each batch would comprise (15-20) women from the villages in the Blocks Patharpratima and Kulpi where Jana Sanskriti, Centre for Theatre of the oppressed is active.

**PROPOSED ACTIVITIES** : 1) A team of a medico and a healthcare expert would conduct weekend workshops, once a fortnight for both theoretical and practical sessions.

2) Awareness programme by skit presentation on the said theme by the respective women participants.

3) Routine evaluation and term end examination to assess the efficacy and learning of the participants.

**OUTCOME** : Educated health workers among the village women to play a leading role in preventive and promotive care, to intervene both at the primary and the secondary level, to the extent where they can actively cooperate with the sensitise the public healthcare facilities to serve the actual need of the community.

Janasanskriti using Forum Theatre technicalities is thus committed to take theatre to the margins in order to stop the internalized authoritarianism in the development/ social/ political sectors to initiate collective actions for enabling communities for sustainable solutions to their problems and conflicts.

# CONTACT US



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