



Regular Article

Creating Awareness on Eco-Feminism through Theatre at a Tribal Village in Bishnubati, Birbhum District of West Bengal, India

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Abstract The world has witnessed many social problems in past few decades. Violence against women and violence against nature are probably the most critical issues amongst them. Researchers are of opinion that these two are interconnected because women and children are the worst affected when natural resources like forest are devastated either due to natural or manmade calamities and all their fundamental rights are curbed. In her book ‘Theorizing Patriarchy’, Sylvia Walby calls patriarchy “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990).

Critical ecological problems were acknowledged and some have tried to resolve from a gender perspective. Eco-feminism is a lens through which disturbing facts were brought into the lime light. It pointed out that women and nature both are subjugated by the patriarchal societal structure.

According to a World Bank-CSSS study, participative theatre in South 24 Parganas, has helped empower women and transform lives (Hindusthan Times, 25 April, 2022). The current study also attempts to establish the fact that theater is an extremely powerful communication medium and can reach thousand of hearts with ease in almost no time. The sole objective of the study is to understand what impact theatre has brought after being used as a tool in the preexisting notion of eco feminism. For this study, the researcher opted for a tribal village in Birbhum District of West Bengal, India, named ‘Bisnubati’. 40 respondents were surveyed from this village which was followed by an assessment to gauge the change in consciousness level on Eco-feminism. The result revealed that the majority of respondents agreed upon theatre being the most effective medium of creating public awareness.

Keywords: theatre, eco feminism, awareness

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and nature has been in discussion for over decades. Various studies revealed that there is a deep connection between violence that is inflicted on women as well as the nature. Both are fully controlled by the prevalent patriarchal societal system.

The current study tries to focus on the awareness level of the concept of Eco feminism through the medium of theatre in tribal villages of Birbhum in the district of West Bengal. It also tries to look into the question whether theatre has proven to be an effective medium in raising awareness on the critical issues of violence against women and nature - two integral components of Eco-feminism.

Over the past five decades researchers have become more aware on two very important social problems, namely violence against women and violence against nature and they are correlated. Despite differences of opinion, most researchers believe that women and children around the world are the most affected when natural resources like forest are devastated either due to natural or manmade calamities and all their fundamental rights are curbed (Fortmann & Rcheleau, 1985).

Human beings are now acknowledging their responsibility in devastating the environment through manmade calamities. They are taking the eco-feminist approach or eco-feminism as a school of thought to handle this environmental crisis.

Human development brings many crises along with it that constantly take new forms. Since 1970, environmental issues, especially the crisis arising from the degradation of the environment have taken a front seat in human civilization. This crisis has been projected many a time in research works by several researchers. In the 1970s eco-feminism emerged as a new school of thought which saw the ecological crisis through the lens of gender, and tried to address it accordingly. It is generally believed that awareness or perception of a particular problem is often a precondition for any effort directed to its amelioration. At the same time, studies suggest that such awareness is primarily dependent upon the influence of different socio-demographic factors. This study attempts to understand such influences on eco-feminist awareness from a sociological standpoint.

To stop violence against women and violence against nature, awareness about each of them is specifically required. But to counter both effectively, the correlation between the two have to be established and discussed. Therefore, the central ideas of eco-feminism should be cultivated, nourished and encouraged. Preconceived notion about the similarities between women and nature are deeply ingrained among many people. Hence it is normally concluded that the violence inflicted on both will also be similar in nature. But little awareness has been brought forward as an issue on which activism is required. There are a number of scientific studies on environmental issues and violence against women for raising awareness. Yet studies regarding eco-feminist awareness are very few in number.

Awareness regarding violence against women and awareness regarding violence against nature has been treated as eco-feminist awareness.

In India, historically, some factions of the Hindu people have been subjugated and oppressed due to their caste. Post independence, they were labeled as socially backward in comparison with others. These factions or 'castes' have been noted in the Indian Constitution by a list denoting them as 'Scheduled Castes'. Similarly, people belonging to different tribes have historically been isolated and exploited by other factions of the society as they too appeared socially backward in the post-independence era. These tribes have been listed in the Indian Constitution as 'Scheduled Tribes' to represent the socially backward people of India. This study has selected scheduled tribes of this village.

Among the media of creating awareness, Theatre seems to be most effective. It is said that theatre is a lively art, and it conveys its message through its actions and dialogues. Because it is an art of togetherness, we can see in theater people from various occupations, religions for its representation. That's why it can be represented to the various types of audience at the same time and with strong financial support irrespective of all class and creed.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Eco-Feminism

Warren (1991) defines eco-feminism as a view that sees critical connections, historical, experimental, symbolic and theoretical between the subjugation of women and the domination of nature. "Eco-feminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Eco-feminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both" (Mellor, 1997). Eco-feminists claim to be part of a distinct social movement (Brammer, 1998). Many contributors directly state that eco-feminism is a social movement (Eisler, 1990), Others outside eco-feminism also consider eco-feminism as a movement (Gelder, 1989). Much academic writing, to this point, has also seen eco-feminism as a movement (Nash, 1989).

2.2 Violence against Women

Violence against Women can be defined as any act or threat of gender-based violence. This includes physical, sexual, economical, psychological and mental harm or suffering to women. Women have been subjected to violence in public or private domain for ages.

2.3 Violence against Nature

Violence against nature or maltreatment of nature is a huge global problem. Increasing forms of pollution, global warming, increased fossil fuel consumption and injudicious use of natural resources leads to the degradation of nature. Tacey has investigated the ecological crisis the world is currently experiencing, the severe biophysical depletion of nature and its resources. It is the result of a loss of awareness of how each natural element pertained to the whole, for the prosperity of mankind. With this mankind began to treat the earth as a stock of resources that people insensitively use for personal gain, innovation and globalization (Tacey, 2009).

2.4 Women-Nature Connections

The relationship between nature and women was first discussed by Sherry B.Ortner. In her *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* Ortner points out that nature and women are always associated with some cultural symbols (Ortner, 1974). “There are at least eight sorts of connections that eco-feminists have identified. These alleged connections provide sometimes competing, sometimes mutually complementary or supportive, analyses of the nature of the twin dominations of women and nature. A casual, albeit philosophically uncritical, perusal of these eight alleged connections helps to identify the range and variety of eco-feminist positions on woman-nature connections” (Warren, 1991).

According to a new IUCN study (Booker et al., 2022), the erosion of nature can result from various forms of gender-based violence including sexual assault, domestic violence and forced prostitution. The study claims that gender-based violence is also used as a means of inflicting control over environmental and human rights defenders. According to eco-feminism, domination of women as a social group, and the domination of nature within patriarchal societies are strongly interconnected. In order to overcome domination, one of its forms cannot be addressed without simultaneously addressing others (Warren, 1996, 1997). Eco-feminism has the capacity to reveal an inherent, normative conceptual analysis and argumentative justification of western society that permits the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment. There is growing evidence that environmental burdens are disproportionately carried by women and children, low-income communities, indigenous people and neighborhoods of racial and ethnic minorities in North America (Bullard, 1993).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Ecofeminism

The women’s movement and the ecological protection movement together gave birth to a new school of thought known as Eco-feminism (Guan, 1996). It came into being because of the contribution of the eminent French feminist writer Francoise d’ Eaubonne. It emerged

among women writers during the 1980s and 1990s of the anti-nuclear, environmental and lesbian-feminist movements (Lorentzen & Eaton, 2002). As because eco-feminism did not develop until the mid to late 1980s (Salleh, 1984), It accommodated a series of approaches through which the connection between the domination of women and nature is evident.

Warren says that eco-feminism observes important connections such as historical, experimental, symbolic and theoretical between the domination of women and the domination of nature. "Eco-feminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Eco-feminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both" (Mellor, 1997). Many contributors state that eco-feminism is a social movement (Brammer, 1998; Eisler, 1990). Academic writers outside of eco-feminism also consider eco-feminism as a movement (Gelder, 1989; Nash, 1989). Because it puts importance on cultural values, eco-feminism emerged as a school of thought that that looked critically into industrial civilization. It also tried to address ecological problems through a gender lens. According to Ling eco-feminism was born when totalitarian rule w compromised (Ling, 2014). Eco-feminism bloomed in the soil of Radical, Socialist and Cultural feminist theories. 'Its formation and development have been established not only on eco-feminism works but also on the theoretical outcomes of Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism and Socialist Feminism in the past 15 years" (Plumwood, 2007).

Eco-feminism is a bridge between ecological ethics and feminism. Both of them seek to explore the conceptual connections between environmental degradation and sexist oppression (Warren, 1997). Just as eco-feminism claims that ecology is not complete without feminism, it claims, similarly, that feminism is incorporeal without the ecological perspective. Ynesta King describes eco-feminism as a holistic way of thinking (King, 1983). Famous eco-feminist Greta Gaard once beautifully portrayed eco-feminists as a lake, from which a number of streams or branches of ecological feminist theory have developed (Ling, 2014).

Ecofeminists have linked environmental degradation and women's subordination in society (Warren, 1997). They have pointed out that understanding women's position in society could lead to an understanding of environmental issues (Halimi, 2011).

3.2 Eco-feminism in India

According to the famous Indian eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, both modern science and material advancement are concepts that owe their origin to the patriarchal western world and both of these concepts are equally proactive in oppressing women and nature (Shiva, 1988).

Both Shiva and Mies are of opinion that the Western Development Model has converted both nature and women into consumer goods (Braidotti et al., 1994). According to Meera Nanda, Vandana Shiva deliberately tried to portray the western world as ruthless and inhuman and tried to portray the third world as honest and genuine (Nanda, 1991). Such factors as gender,

class, reproductive power, and resource distribution have contributed to the development of the relationship between nature and women (Agarwal, 1992).

3.3 Patriarchy

Patriarchy literally means rule of the “*pitar*” (father) in a male governed family. It is a social and ideological construct that considers men to be superior to women. Sylvia Walby in “Theorizing Patriarchy” calls it “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy is a system of unequal power distribution and relations. It is essentially hierarchical in nature. In this system, men are in control of women’s productivity, reproductively and sexuality. From the eighteenth century at least, women have been engaged in a relentless examination of gender roles, and privileged, and gendered social and economic arrangements not only locally but also globally and in diverse contexts. Yet it is clear today, that at all times there were protesting women who possessed their own understanding of patriarchy.

3.4 Twin Domination of Patriarchal Society

Eco-feminism identifies and accommodates a series of approaches through which the connection between the domination of women and nature can be observed. Maria Mies supported Shiva and said that women have always supported and organized mass movements whenever there had been a threat of devastation created either naturally or from human intervention. People who joined hands in these mass movements were totally aware of the fact of the patriarchal domination on women and nature (Mies, 1993).

Women and nature are both connected by the same domination of patriarchal society. Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* calls it “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990). “It is an “awareness” that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man’s attitude toward women and tribal cultures...” (Birkeland, 1993). Women are the primary sufferers of environmental degradation and forest resource depletion (Fortmann & Rcheleau, 1985). All eco-feminists are of the view that it is the “logic of domination”, in association with value-hierarchical thinking and value-dualisms that sustains and justifies the twin domination over women and nature (Warren, 1990). We highlight the connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature in order to understand “why the environment is a feminist issue”, as well as “why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns” (Gaard, 1993). Eco-feminism is based on fundamental claims. It draws attention to the existence of critical connections between the oppression of women and oppression of nature. It is important to realize the nature of these connections in order to comprehend the oppression of women and nature. All feminist theories should include an ecological perspective and vice versa (Warren, 1987).

Wherever women acted against ecological destruction or the threat of atomic annihilation, they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature (King, 1983).

3.5 Human Vs Nature

In the patriarchal ideology, human beings are conceived not only as superior to but as different in kind from the non-human. Nature here occupies a lower rung and exists as a mere resource for the human who occupy a higher rung (Plumwood, 2004). This ideology has been functional for Western culture in enabling humans to exploit the non-human world and so-called 'primitive' cultures with little constraint. The mindset that continuously justifies the traditional scientific project of technological control remains in the hands of humans who belong to a superior species. It also entitles them to manipulate and use the commodities the earth for their own benefit. Birds, we know, have evolved just as have humans, but going against the evidence, human-centered culture assumes that humans are the apex of all creation, more intelligent, more communicative, and more important and evolved than other species (Midgley, 1983). This sense of apartness is challenged by the new science of ecology that stresses the importance of biosphere services and ecological processes, and the dependence of humans on a healthy biosphere and a thriving more-than-human world. Eco-feminists understand the relationship between human and non-human nature as one of respect, based not only on reason, but also on the emotional values of love, friendship and care (Plumwood, 1996). The relationship is one of interrelatedness and interconnectedness, with an appreciation for difference and distinctness (Plumwood, 1996).

3.6 Men Control Nature and Women

For Michael E. Zimmerman, Professor of Philosophy at Tulane University, New Orleans, there are eco-feminists who claim that the responsibility of the destruction of the environment and the development of authoritarian practices, both socially and environmentally can be attributed to 10,000 years of patriarchal norms and practices. The master-slave role which marks man's relation with nature is replicated in man's relation with woman. A self-consistent biological egalitarianism cannot be arrived at unless men become open to both facets of this same urge to dominate and use (Salleh, 1984).

3.7 Controlling Power Within Family

A recent study finds that women once enjoyed some sort of freedom, especially the freedom of self-expression in their private domain (Basin, 2017). Modernization has changed both men and women. Gender disparity is been visible all over India. However, the status of women

varies region-wise. In every society, socio-cultural factors determine the status of women. It is culture, comprised of a set of collective experiences, norms, values and beliefs associated with a people, along with the process of socialization that defines gender roles and demarcates the position of women in society. The gender roles defined by social norms are always unequal and patriarchal in nature. This culture, which is a combination of patriarchal norms and values are transmitted from generation to generation. Gender roles are socially constructed, patriarchal in nature. The result is that the Indian family structures are patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal.

Patriarchy signifies a structure of power, in which males dominate others and particularly women. Various social institutions and structures reinforce patriarchal power, hierarchy and control. Family is the primary institution that carries patriarchal norms and values (Basin, 2017). Indian families discriminate on the basis of sex, and everything is determined by male standards. From the very day they are born women are taught to play a secondary and submissive role. The identities of women are determined with respect to male figures like fathers, brothers and husbands. Women remain behind despite social, political and economic changes and progress. It has been found that in tribal societies, male members do not exercise the same domination over womenfolk. In tribal societies both male and female members work and earn for their family and both of them are economically self-dependent. The tribal society in Koraput reflects the picture of a gender just society which is non-discriminatory and humane in nature, where people belonging to all the genders are tolerant and cooperative to each-other (Mohapatra, 2009). Unlike non-tribal society, they are found to be much more sensitive and respectful in their attitude towards their women folk. While people in non-tribal areas are struggling to achieve gender equality, the tribal people in the hilly areas are natural feminists. There is hardly any incident of gender inequality or discrimination found in their society.

3.8 Violence against Women

The most widely used definition of violence against women (VAW) is the Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993. This document defines Violence Against Women as “any act of gender-based violence against women that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (UN General Assembly, 1993).

Domestic violence refers to violence inflicted on women within the four walls of the home by close relatives, especially in their matrimonial homes. This kind of crime against women leads to the disadvantage of women in the society. Domestic violence takes many forms: physical, emotional, economic and sexual. The threat of such abuse is also counted as violence. The patriarchal socio-cultural condition of our society is the root cause of this violence (Heise et al., 1999). Domestic violence is a major public health problem. It affects the physical and mental health of women creating a remarkable hindrance in the process of women’s empowerment. Some studies have been conducted to gauge the perceptions and attitudes of

married women of reproductive age regarding wife-beating. The studies revealed that wife-beating is largely condoned and justified in our society, especially by women belonging to the lower socio-economic category (Heise et al., 1999). Domestic violence also occurs more frequently among women belonging to the lower socio-economic strata of the society.

A study among Pardhi and the Gond Tribes of Chhattisgarh revealed that almost all tribal women belonging to this community experienced physical violence from time to time. Some have faced it daily. The main perpetrators in these cases were the husbands (Premi, 2016). The reason stated for such violence, as narrated by the respondents, were as trivial as not being able to “perform” household chores up to their husband’s satisfaction.

3.9 Feminist Consciousness/Awareness

Conover and Sapiro (1993) define feminist consciousness as “an awareness of and sensitivity to the unequal and gendered nature of society and a commitment to ending the inequalities”. Cook’s (1989) study of feminist consciousness, while confining itself to female respondents, found that young, college educated, professionally employed women with high income, living in liberal urban, areas with less religiosity, were likely to exhibit feminist consciousness. Scholars, such as Klein (1984), Manjusha Gupte (Jha, 1998) has argued that feminist consciousness is based on personal experience. Thus, while women could possess or experience feminist consciousness, men could only feel feminist sympathy (Klein, 1984). On the other hand the study by Reingold and Foust (1998) shows that both men’s and women’s feminist consciousness is rooted in their ideological beliefs.

3.10 Eco-feminist Awareness and Gender

A study by Harvey (1990), found that girls between ages of 8 to 11 years, consistently reflect more positive attitude towards vegetation than boys. One research by Aydin and Cepni in 2010 revealed that women play a more responsible role in preserving the environment than men. The difference may be attributed to the fact that women and men play separate gender roles within the private domain. As regards nature consciousness, gender plays an important role (Plavsic, 2013). The socialization process has bestowed the capacity for problem solving upon women. Wherever women have acted against ecological destruction or the threat of atomic annihilation, they have become aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature (King, 1983).

Research has shown that women are more likely to hold environmental beliefs than men (Arcury et al., 1986). One explanation of women’s environmental attitudes posits that men have more knowledge of issues related to environmental risks and that, generally, people who have such knowledge are less likely to be concerned about these types of risks (Kuklinski et al., 1982). A meta-analysis by Davidson and Freudenburg (1996) indicates, however, that women

are more concerned about environmental hazards “not because they know less but because they care more”. Some researchers like Tripathy (2000) hold that boy students had better environmental awareness than girl students. Whereas a study by Shahnawaj (1990) showed girl students had better environmental awareness than boy students. Researchers like Shobeiri et al. (2006), as well as Rout and Agarwal (2006) reported that sex had no impact on environmental awareness of students. Sundararajan and Rajashekar (1993) also compared the environmental awareness of higher secondary students among boys and girls. The results revealed that the environmental awareness of the higher secondary students in Tamilnadu was not influenced by their sex. Wouters (1997) explored the gender differences in forest practices and environmental awareness of men and women in northwestern Thailand and acknowledged that both men and women were aware of the environmental changes, which were due to increased expectations and needs of the people of the region. Patel and Patel (1994) examined the environmental awareness of school teachers and found that male teachers with long school experience, in urban areas are, more aware of the environmental issues. Another study by Patel (1999) concluded that male teachers had higher environmental awareness than their counterparts. On the other hand, the results of a study by Pradhan (2002), and Shaila (2003) showed no significant difference between male and female teachers regarding their environmental awareness. However, the studies conducted by Patel and Patel (1994), Sabhlok (1995), Chan (1999), Patel (1999), Shobeiri et al. (2006) and Larijani and Yeshodhara (2008) indicate that gender does have a significant influence on environmental awareness of school teachers. A study on the ‘Effect of Gender on Environmental Awareness of Post-graduate Students’ showed that gender had no significant effect on environmental awareness of post-graduate students (Sangeetha et al., 2015). While some studies, Blocker and Eckberg (1997) have found a significant (albeit weak) correlation between gender and environmental concern, others, such as Liere and Dunlap (1980) and Stern et al. (1993), have found no significant relationship between environment and gender.

Conover and Sapiro (1993) define feminist consciousness as “an awareness of and sensitivity to the unequal and gendered nature of society and a commitment to ending the inequalities”. Cook’s (1989) study of feminist consciousness, while confining itself to female respondents, found that those who were young, college educated, professionally employed, high income, urban, liberal, and those showing less religiosity, were likely to exhibit feminist consciousness. Scholars, such as Klein (1984), Jha (1998) has argued that feminist consciousness is based on personal experience. Thus, only women could possess or experience feminist consciousness, while men could only feel feminist sympathy (Klein, 1984). However, Reingold and Foust’s study (1998) shows that both men’s and women’s feminist consciousness is rooted in their ideological beliefs.

3.11 Theatre as a Medium of Awareness

In comparison with other media, Theatre can reach out to thousands of hearts at the same time. It can be used to raise public awareness on any social issue because it involves direct contact with masses and can establish connections and stimulate the feelings of people. This is perhaps why the Indian as well as many other country's government and non government organizations working on rights-based issues use theatre as a tool to spread awareness. These messages create public awareness for prevention of social problems such as HIV AIDS, early marriage, dowry and caste, inequality based on gender, socio-economic status. Theatre has been used to raise voices against injustice and discrimination as well as for propaganda (BasuDas, 2021). Many studies have been done on the efficacy of theatre as a medium to reach out to people and influence public opinion.

According to Christa Blackmon, an American human rights researcher and educator, "Human rights activism relies on an ability to tell stories to diverse audiences that will inspire action toward justice. Distributing information through journalism, whether it is traditional or new media, is the standard method of raising awareness" (Blackmon, 2016). Christa Blackmon preferred theatre over other mass Media because she believed that live theatrical performance has the strength to engage diverse audience in an exceptional and meaningful manner and can generate activism. In theatre, the audience can connect whatever they go through or witness in their real lives. Therefore, theatre is the most preferred medium of raising voice and building public opinion used by the human rights organizations. A study on the effectiveness of theatre as a means to create awareness about VAW "...reveals that the theatre processes... develops cultural values and awareness in communities" (Khan, 2017).

Several studies have been done on the effectiveness of theatre, which revealed that theatre played an important role in raising awareness about Violence against Women, developing cultural values and awareness in communities (BasuDas, 2021). 'Theatre of the Oppressed' has been adapted by Jana Sanskriti, a West Bengal based organization of theatre activism, to bring about community-led action for social change at the grass roots. The empowerment of women has been a major focus, as severe patriarchal exploitation in these areas has curbed their basic human rights. This article studies whether and how social theatre empowers the rural marginalized women of the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal to organize themselves through theatre-based activism and negotiate for their rights (Dutta, 2015). Eminent personality of participatory theatre, Augusto Boal, observed that the participatory theatre is a very powerful medium that played a very crucial role in promoting positive changes in the mindset of people towards the LGBT community. "...participatory theatre has the potential to promote positive change in attitudes toward LGBT individuals" (Logie et al., 2018).

Some renowned theatre groups have done remarkable works in this area. For example, the Delhi-based group named 'Aatish' has addressed the issues of women's empowerment, child education, child labour, child rights, and the need to vote, through street plays. The Bengal-based group 'Bahurupee', through their world-famous play Doll's House (Putul Khela) brought

the issue of woman's education, eco-feminism, deprivation by patriarchal society (Gangopadhyay, 1996) etc. into public view. The famous playwright and the pioneer of Third Theatre, Badal Sircar through his presentations focused on the plight of the Santhal people and the women belonging to their community (Anuradha, 2019). Under the direction of Partha Gupta, the Santhali theatre produced outstanding plays, including Rabindranath Tagore's 'Red Oleanders' and 'Hnasa Ora Ria Sereng' (The song of the Earthen Cottage) which brilliantly depicted the Bengali and Santhali traditions of theatre, rituals and language (Riaz, 2019).

The use of theatre as a participatory development communication tool beyond entertainment emerged in the decade of 1960 and in parallel to alternative and post-development theories. The process of community empowerment was facilitated using social theatre as an effective tool which turned out to be a successful strategy. Here, social development is given more importance than aesthetics. Another important reason for theatre to be used as a medium is its cost effectiveness. It does not always have to be of high budget. Using low-cost stage crafts and a low budget, street plays, dramas, summer theatres can also be staged to spread the message through entertainment.

Thus, it is established that theatre is one of the most powerful and popular media for spreading awareness.

4. RESEARCH GAP

With respect to the review of literature this research has focused on raising awareness of problems emerging from two social issues: Violence against women and nature. Though ecofeminism speaks about patriarchal control and suppression of both women and nature, no evidence of awareness based survey or research work has been available as yet.

On the other hand, the role of theatre as a medium of raising awareness on various social issues has been a subject for many researches or studies. But again, there has been no evidence of the role of theatre in raising awareness on the issue of ecofeminism.

So, conducting research on the two above-mentioned social issues is absolute necessity.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does the level of consciousness on eco-feminism change after watching a theatre performance on this issue? If yes, how?
2. How do the Respondents perceive theatre as a medium that can be instrumental in raising awareness as well as influence public opinion on complex issues like eco-feminism?

6. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to gauge how the marginalized people of a tribal society of Bishnubati village in Birbhum district of West Bengal, India, understand the concept of eco-feminism. It also tries to capture the role played by theatre in shaping such ideas. With the data collected from Bishnubati village, the study tries to find the answers to the basic following questions:

1. Does the level of consciousness on eco-feminism change after watching a theatre performance on this issue? If yes, how?
2. How do the respondents perceive theatre as a medium that can be instrumental in raising awareness as well as influence public opinion on complex issues like ecofeminism.

The study takes into consideration the following components as indicators.

- Opinion from all the genders – male, female and transgender persons on similarities between men consuming women and nature
- Opinion on consciousness on violence against women and violence against nature.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Data

- The study has been done in a descriptive manner. It is also a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods.
- A field survey was conducted among 40 tribal people as respondents in the first stage. This was done to map their level of awareness of eco-feminism.
- In the second stage, forty respondents were selected to develop a qualitative understanding.
- To understand the impact of the theatre on the respondents, a performance was staged for them and finally
- To develop a better understanding, two case narratives are also presented here.

BISHNUBATI VILLAGE

Area of Research

Bishnubati is a medium sized village located in Bolpur Sriniketan block of Birbhum district, West Bengal (Figure 1). According to the 2011 Population Census by Govt. of India, its population is 691. 156 families reside in this village. Altogether, 40 people from this village were surveyed.

7.2 Method

Before analyzing the responses, the study explores the samples gathered. Following this, three critical questions were asked by the surveyor. The study intends to investigate the frequency distribution of the respondents as by gender with the help of tables and a pie chart. The respondents were either Bengalee or Santhali. The question was asked in Bengali to those who could understand Bengali well. To ask the question to the Santhali people and to record their responses, help from a local interpreter was taken.

The respondents were approached with three questions.

1. “Opinion on awareness about violence against women and violence against nature”
2. “Opinion on similarities between Men consuming women and consuming nature”
3. “Opinions about the most powerful means to address this problem”

The answer was multiple-choice.

For question number 1 there were 3 choices –

1. Don't know
2. No
3. Yes

For question number 2 there were five choices –

1. Disagree
2. Mildly Disagree
3. Unsure
4. Mildly agree
5. Agree

For question number 3 there were five choices –

1. Drama
2. Dance
3. Song
4. Cinema
5. Others

All the tables will be prepared in SPSS (v.19) and the graphs will be prepared using SPSS (v.19) and MS Excel. As mentioned earlier at the second stage of research a qualitative method has been attempted by all forty respondents.



Figure 1. Location of Birbhum District in the map of West Bengal
Source: Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birbhum_district

7.3 Case Study Method

Case study research involves the study of a case in a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). Although Stake (2005) states that case study research is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied (i.e., a case within a bounded system, bounded by time and place), others present it as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Denzin et al., 2008). Procedures for Conducting a Case Study are available (Merriam et al., 1998). The case can be single or collective, multi-sited or within one site, and focused on a case or on an issue (intrinsic, instrumental) (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). When multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is first to provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 provides opinions of all respondents (40) about awareness of the concept of Eco-feminism. The respondents were asked whether they know about the concept of Eco-feminism. The same question was asked before and after the theatre performance. All those respondents were interviewed for the first time before watching the performance and after.

A significant difference was observed in their opinion on the concept of Eco-feminism, before and after the performance. Similarly, while 82.5% respondents had no idea about these issues before, the response decreased to 15.0% after witnessing the theatre performance.

Table 1. Opinions on awareness of the concept of eco-feminism

	Before staging of Theatre		After staging of Theatre	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Don't know	26	65.0	6	15.0
No	7	17.5	0	0
Yes	7	17.5	34	85.0
Total	40	100	40	100

Authors own calculations based on primary data 2021. Source: Survey data

It is clear from Table 2, that the majority of respondents (20.0%), were “unsure” about any similarities between men consuming women and human beings consuming nature.

The percentage of those respondents who were “unsure” decreased notably (5.0%) after the theatre performance. At the same time, it is evident from the Table that a larger proportion of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed with the issue (70% and 17.5% respectively) after watching the theatre show.

Table 3 reflects the opinion of all respondents who were surveyed. They all opined that theatre is the most effective and powerful medium to improve the level of awareness on issues related to eco-feminism.

38 among 40 respondents (95.0%) believed that theatre is the main medium. The second-best preferred medium was Cinema [only 2 (5.0%)].

These 40 respondents were selected and were exposed to a theatre performance that spreads the message of eco-feminism.

The theatre script was written by an expert in the profession and directed by another expert in consultation with the present researcher.

Most of them (thirty-eight respondents) strongly supported the role of theatre in creation of eco-feminist awareness among the villagers (Figure 3).

Table 2. Awareness on similarities between ‘men consuming women’ and ‘human beings consuming nature’

	Before staging of Theatre		After staging of Theatre	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Unsure	11	91.7	2	16.7
Mildly Agree	0	0	3	25.0
Agree	1	8.3	7	58.3
Total	12	100	12	100

Authors own calculations based on primary data 2021. Source: Survey data

Table 3. Frequency distribution of opinion on most powerful medium

	Before staging of Theatre		After staging of Theatre	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Drama	9	22.5	38	95.0
Song	0	0	0	0
Cinema	10	25.0	2	5.0
Dance	0	0	0	0
Others	21	52.5	0	0
Total	40	100	140	100

Authors own calculations based on primary data 2021. Source: Survey data

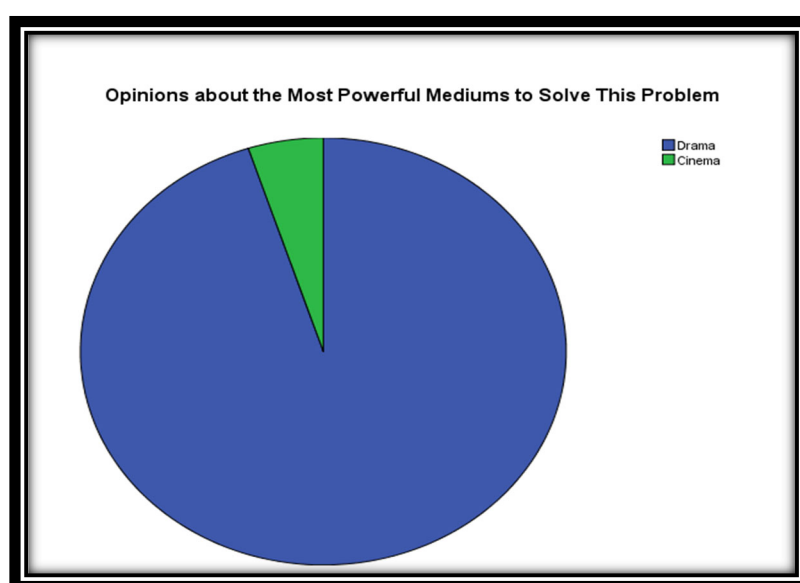


Figure 3. Frequency distribution of opinion on most powerful medium

8.1 Case Study

It has been further observed that in choosing the most powerful medium for creating awareness, females prefer theatre over their male counterparts irrespective of their pre-existing conception about the core idea of eco-feminism (BasuDas, 2021).

To understand more specifically the impact of theatre as a medium to influence people's awareness of eco-feminism, ten case studies were carried out among some theatre-loving respondents of Bishnubati.

The extent to which the opinions of these ten theatre-loving villagers can support the role of theatre as the most powerful medium, requires more intensive exploration.

To that end, ten case studies were separately conducted with these respondents. Two such case studies are reported here.

8.1.1 Case Study1

Bimal Baske, a fifty year old school teacher, lives in a tribal village Bishnubati in Birbhum district, West Bengal. He presents a comparative picture where he shares the most common story of two generations of his tribal land, with the present researcher. As a well-known person in his village Bimal Baske has seen how Mother Nature (prokiti) had to change through ages for the sake of development. Villagers there mostly prefer to use wood as the dominant source of fuel. He does agree that cutting trees would be a problem for future generations. He also believes that protecting the environment is a key responsibility. He states “ *Worshipping nature is a normal practice of us. In our every custom nature is there*”. In several of their customs Mother Nature plays an important role. In the rituals of tribal marriage, for instance, he said “*it's needed for survival*”.

Violence against women is not known in tribal society. Bimal Baske states that “*In most of the households women lead the family. Yet he also admitted that “it's not so high in comparison to other societies and it's happens due to taking of excessive alcohol. It affects the children of those families very much.*”

Women and nature are very much related to each other. “*We call both of them as Mother (Ma)*”. The theatre has an immense impact as seen from Bimal's instant opinions. “*We have a history of theatre, jatra over here, but we haven't seen this type of theatre before, I liked the character of the teacher (Didimoni), who is leading the movement for abolishing of both kinds of violence.*”

8.1.2 Case Study 2

Rani Baske, a thirty-seven years old Health worker (in regional language Asha Kormi), lives in a tribal village (Bishnubati). In her opinion “*Before cutting a tree one should plant a tree first. Worshipping nature is a normal practice of tribal society, especially the Santhal tribe.*

For her violence against women (VAW) is a known factor. She states that cases of domestic violence are mostly resolved by village community because women are not ready go to the police. In our society, she say, *“the taking alcohol is a regular practice for a maximum of families but it is also one of the root causes of violence against women within family. It affects the children of those families negatively as well”*.

The theatre created a strong impact on this community as we can see from Rani's instant opinions.

“This type of theatre we haven't seen before, I like the last scene of the drama the most, where the villain got punished by the community for his sins against women (meyechele) and earth (Mati)”.

9. MAJOR FINDING

LIMITATION

The researcher is a resident and student of Kolkata, the capital city of the state of West Bengal of India. At first, this village showed interest and spontaneity, and offered their support for conducting the research. But later, in some places, the women became more conservative about the entire process. Hence the researcher was compelled to use a convenient sample method as a tool of survey for this research.

Secondly, the survey was conducted at Bishnubati village near Bolpur in Birbhum District of West Bengal. All the respondents here spoke the Santhali language as their mother tongue. A major portion of them could also speak and understand Bengali. Nevertheless, the researcher was compelled to employ the support of a local interpreter for those who could neither speak nor understand Bengali.

A non sampling error can be a major limitation in any research. . Despite precautions,(such as the training of interpreters about the questionnaire, and explaining what will be considered as right answers), the probability of response errors (or non-sampling errors) cannot be completely ruled out. One of the limitations of this research is the question whether the interpreter could narrate all the questions correctly to the respondents and be certain they have understood it correctly, as the answers delivered in Santhali language by the respondents are narrated back verbatim to the researcher.

10. RECOMMENDATION

- Survey on ecofeminism is much needed.

- The impact of patriarchal control over women and environment should not be treated separately, but brought under one umbrella
- To solve the problem effectively they should be brought under one single umbrella.
- Theatre should be used as a medium to spread awareness of eco-feminism.

Theatre has been used profoundly in this research to raise awareness on the issue of ecofeminism and its positive impact. Theatre should be used more and more to create awareness for combating two social problems.

11. CONCLUSION

Further research in this area with a larger sample is proceeding. Several research studies on the effectiveness of the theatre as a medium have shown that, theatre plays an important role in raising awareness about such social issues as violence against women, and developing cultural values and awareness. It is significant that the gender difference among the respondents had no role in selecting theatre as the most powerful medium for creating awareness. Gender is not a likely significant factor in preferring the best medium for the purpose.

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