

**International
Institute of
Social Studies**



**Ending violence against women – One play at a
time!**

**Analysing the effectiveness of Street theatre as a tool
to combat violence against women – A Case study of
Vanangana, a women's organisation based in rural
India**

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List of Acronyms

VAW	Violence Against Women
ST	Street Theatre
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
IPTA	Indian People's Theatre Association
DMS	Dalit Mahila Samiti
TOP	Theatre of the Oppressed
NFHS	National Family Health Survey

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To my dog gypsy, I miss you.

Abstract

Murders and suicide of women due to the violence inflicted on them is a chilling reality of our society. What is a greater issue is the silence that surrounds it and acceptance of the violence. Despite a legal framework for the protection of women, number of cases of violence against women (VAW) filed keep increasing every year. Recognising the need for change in attitudes, this paper analyses the use of Street theatre in creating awareness and raising consciousness on the issue of VAW. The study is carried out using empirical data derived from observation of the audiences and from analysing the content of the plays. The paper shows the different techniques through which Vanangana, an organisation in the district of Chitrakoot uses street theatre to combat VAW.

While this paper focuses on the need for consciousness raising initiatives and changing attitudes, it does not undermine the importance of legal framework for the protection of women.

Keywords

Violence, women, street theatre, structural violence, doxa, cultural norms, awareness, Vanangana, attitudes

Chapter 1 – Introduction

“My husband used to hit me. One day he poured kerosene on me and tried to burn me alive. I somehow managed to run away from there. I had only Rs 20 with me and a burnt dupatta (shawl). I could take the bus but had no money left for the train fare. But I ran and I survived. I believe that women should not kill themselves, they should survive, do anything but live”

- Shama, a survivor woman who ran away from her husband's house in Punjab. She now lives in Karwi and works in the kitchens at Vanangana¹. She was married at the age of 14 and has 6 children.

Around 70%² of Indian women, like Shama have faced physical or sexual violence from their intimate partner in their lifetime. This high number is despite the fact that most cases go unreported due to lack of resources to report and pursue crimes, hostility of the police and the judicial system, patriarchal values and notions of shame and honour associated with women's sexuality preventing them from reporting such incidents of violence (Gupta, A 2014).

Despite 30 years of campaign against domestic violence, women continue to be violently abused (Agnes, F & D'Mello, A 2015). Societal attitudes towards violence against women (VAW) shape the response of the community and institutions towards gender based violence, and also effect the women's response to their victimisation (Flood, M & Pease, B 2009). The campaigns have been focused on the responsibility of the state and the apathy shown by the police towards VAW, while the underlying issue of the subordinate status of women has been overshadowed (Agnes, F & D'Mello, A 2015). There exists the need to focus our efforts on changing attitudes and social norms surrounding VAW.

“Theatre - or theatricality - is the capacity, this human property which allows man to observe himself in action, in activity. Man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking”

- Augusto Boal

The power of the communicative arts be it plays, street theatre, movies, short films, documentaries to connect with people, narrate their life stories and make them evaluate their life choices has always amazed me. The first time I saw a street play, I was surprised by the capability of the play to capture my interest despite narrating a very common story based on the social and political conditions that surrounded our everyday lives. It was the combination of everything – the story, music, props, and the open street that ensured my complete attention. Street theatre (ST) has always been used as a vehicle for social and political activism and is being used to campaign on VAW in India.

¹ Vanangana is the rural based women's rights collective based in Chitrakoot. I have

² The data has been arrived at through studies on National Violence and was reported in the article – <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/crimes-against-women-reported-every-two-minutes-84240>

In this paper, I will be studying the methods, techniques and content of street theatre to combat VAW, by analyzing its capacity to raise awareness, and change attitudes by building a public opinion against VAW.

Violence against Women (VAW) in India

The UN Declaration of 1993 defined VAW as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. The addition of the term gender amplifies that the acts of violence are towards women because of their status in society as women (Saravanan S, 2000).

Violence is “an act of aggression, usually in interpersonal interaction or relations” (Karlekar, M 1998). Female foeticide, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence constitute the reality of most girls’ and women’s lives in India. For this paper, I will be focusing on Domestic Violence and sexual assault by intimate partners.

According to data released by National Crime Records Bureau, (NCRB) crimes against women have doubled in the last 10 years and one crime is reported every two minutes in India (Ministry of Home Affairs 2014). Any kind of violence faced by women is a violation of her human rights, neglect of her well-being and leads to not only physical hurt and trauma but also leads to possible mental illness such as phobia’s, anxieties, PTSD and depression (Karlekar, M 1998).

The gang rape of Mathura, a tribal girl by police officers and the grotesque rape of Rameeza Bee led to the earliest campaigns by feminists and women’s groups on VAW in India in the 1980’s. The focus of these campaigns was to critique the state policies and pressurize the state to take a stand to protect the women. Laws have been amended to protect women ever since. The Domestic Violence Act was revised in 2006 to include sexual, emotional, verbal and economic abuse as acts of violence. The brutal gang rape of a young girl in Delhi in 2012 led to numerous protests for stricter laws in cases of gender based violence especially rape which led to jail time being increased, introduction of a possible charge of death penalty and widening the purview of sexual violence to include stalking, disrobing, acid attacks and sexual harassment (Yanek C, 2015). Despite stricter laws, in 2014 the NCRB reported an increase in crime against women by 9.2% from the previous year and 58.2% from the year 2010 (Mitra N, 2016).

Rising levels of education, pro-women laws, and gender awareness have done little to change the position of women as second-class citizens (Dasgupta K, 2014). Gender based violence enjoys social sanction based on the accepted norm of men being superior than women. Having grown up in the same patriarchal society as men, women sometimes themselves believe that it is their partners right to physically abuse in order to discipline them on committing any mistakes. The concept of marital rape does not exist; it is labelled as a foreign concept not applicable in the Indian society. The problem lies in the deeply rooted societal attitudes and practices of gender discrimination and the need for men to maintain social and economic power over women.

The other highly used method to combat violence against women is the use of campaigns to advocate for ending violence, creating awareness on the causes and consequences of violence and finding ways to respond to violence. Campaigns are means to apply public pressure on individuals and institutions so as to influence their actions. The two main types of campaigns are the ones that aim for policy change and those that aim for change in individual behaviour and social norms (Raab, M and Rocha, J 2011). India now has numerous ongoing campaigns by local NGO's, activists and international organisations to end violence against women such as One billion rising, He for She, Bell Bajao, We Can, 16 days of activism, Abused Goddesses and MARD (Men against rape and discrimination). These are ways in which grassroots activism is being used as a strategy to deal with gender based violence.

One such campaign has been undertaken by a feminist organization Vanangana, based in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which uses the medium of street theatre to combat VAW in the villages of Chitrakoot and Banda³.

Street Theatre – A tool for Social Change

Street theatre (ST) since its inception has been used not only for the purpose of entertainment but also to trigger activism. It can be traced back to 1917, when after the Russian Revolution Vsevolod Meyerhold produced a show *Mystery Bouffe* with revolutionary poetry and performed it in the city square for thousands of people. This marked the beginning of a new type of agitprop theatre political in nature and looked for audience at their places of residences or work; thus performing on the streets, at factory gates, markets, dockyards, palygrounds (Deshpande S, 2007).

In India, ST emerged with the Indian People's Theatre association (IPTA) established by Bijon Bhattacharya, mobilizing it's audiences into the anti-colonial struggle (Deshpande, S 2007). It involved a regiment of progressive artists performing against fascism and imperialism. It was in the 1970's that ST re-emerged to be used for leftwing activism and by women activists. Leading the movement was a radical theatre group called *Jana Natya Manch* founded by Safdar Hashmi. It has performed plays on price rise, elections, communalism, unemployment, women's rights, education system etc (Studio Safdar). At the same time, Badal Sircar created the *Third theatre* that lived amongst the people, spoke about their lives, lived their dreams and cried their tears. It used themes to sensitise people to the condition of the oppressed and discriminated (Chakraborti S, 2015).

ST continues to be used today as a strategy for social transformation. It breaks formal barriers and approaches people directly. It is an efficient medium for critiquing social disparities, for self-exploration and expression (Singh A, 2009). ST is being used to combat gender based violence by using stories to empower women and educate the society against male dominance & normality of women bashing. They are being used to record women's struggles to create

³ These districts are located in the state of Uttar Pradesh and consist of approximately 780 villages

new and more politicized self and collective identities (Mohanty, C & Russo, A 1991). Street theatre is an engaging and powerful medium with the ability to start discussions and is an integral part of mobilization, awareness raising and campaigning (Mangai A, 1998).

Research Question

How effective is street theatre as a tool to combat violence against women by raising consciousness and changing attitudes? A Case study of a women's rights collective Vanangana, based in rural India.

Sub Questions

I will further look to investigating the answers to the following questions -

1. How does the content of the plays contribute in combatting VAW?
2. What are the techniques used by the theatre group to create awareness and change attitudes?
3. What are the reactions of the audience to the performance?
4. What are the goals of the theatre group, how do they plan on achieving these goals?

Methodology

Selection of theatre group

I began my research by reading on the current day usage of ST to campaign for social issues. I found various groups and organizations that used the same medium to spread awareness. I chose Vanangana, a rural community based women's rights collective working on the issue of VAW based on its:

1. Location - Vanangana is based in the state of Uttar Pradesh infamous to be ranked third for the number of crimes reported against women and infamous for high incidents of caste-based violence
2. Objectives - Vanangana uses ST in their campaigns to combat VAW and provides legal recourse to protect the women who approach them for their assistance;

Working with Vanangana helped me gain a nuanced understanding of both strategies, their advantages and limitations.

Researching the performance

Conducting a multi-cited research, I travelled with Vanangana's 11 member theatre group to 4 villages; Laudhiya, Barwara, Bhitakhera and Rehuta and watched them perform their plays "Mujhe Jawab Do" (Answer me) and "Badalti Tasveer" (Changing scenarios).

In the villages I used the technique of participant observation to analyse the audience of the plays and their reactions. Participant observation as a technique of Ethnography is the method of collecting data in naturalistic settings by observing/taking part in the common and uncommon activities of the peo-

ple being studied (Dewalkt, KM & DeWalt, 2010). The researcher learns about the people by observing them and taking part in their activities. I played the role of an audience member during the performance and interviewed the other audience members after the performance and the discussions. My analysis on the effectiveness of the plays by Vanangana in combatting VAW, is based on my observations of the audience – number of people that gathered to watch the performances, number of people that left the performance mid-way, emotions expressed (tears, anger, laughter) during the performance, immediate reactions while and after watching the performance and discussions amongst the audience members and with the activists after the performance.

I also observed the review meetings of the Dalit Mahila Samiti (discussed below) with Vanangana to understand their work with Dalit women and their development.



Figure 1 The performing team of Vanangana

Semi-Structured interviews

Participant observation helps in providing a concept for sampling interviewees and guides the interviews (Dewalkt, KM & DeWalt 2010). While observing the audience and the discussions that took place post the performance, I selected people some who were talking during the debates and some who were extremely silent and interviewed them on their feelings after watching the performance.

I interviewed the two member team comprising of Pushpa and Avadesh, that lead the activities of Vanangana, to understand the vision of the organization, the work undertaken to combat VAW, their past experiences with survivors of violence, script writing process of the plays, experiences of performing ST and their reason for using ST as a medium for campaign. I interviewed survivor women who had been helped by Vanangana to understand their struggle of accepting the violence, speaking up against it and finally breaking free from it.

I held semi-structured interviews with the actors of the performances. Instead of conducting these interviews in silent places and a professional environment, I interviewed the performers while we travelled to the villages for the performances. All 13 of us (driver of the jeep included) travelled from one vil-

lage to the other fitting in one car, sitting on top of each other while the performers sang songs on the topics of dowry, violence, marriage and love. The travel was extremely interesting as I learnt a lot about the society of Chitrakoot from the interviews and their normal conversations, the practices of the rural community, the issue of caste discrimination and the daily lives of the girls and women in the villages from the stories and their personal experiences that the performers shared with me. Our travel was filled with heated debates on the role of men in parenting, unpaid care work done by the women in addition to working on the fields, the failures of the current government and poverty in the villages.

I also held semi-structured interviews with 5 feminist's theatre artists who had been a part of the women's movement in India and had performed ST on issues of gender discrimination and oppression to create awareness on VAW. Interviews with these women and their experiences contributed to my analysis of the effectiveness of ST, in my understanding of the effects of ST during the women's movement and the evolution of the form of ST since then. (Refer to Appendix 1 for the list)

Discourse Analysis

As a part of my study, I use the method of Discourse Analysis on the scripts of the plays to understand the effect of the content and the language on the audience members and their attitudes. Using Labov's method for Narrative Analysis, I analyse the Orientation (character, setting), Resolution (results, events) and Evaluation (what keeps the audience hooked) of the plays (Johnstone 2004).

Positionality

As a non-Dalit woman who does not share the lived experience of dalit women I took the conscious standpoint based on Rege's Dalit Feminist standpoint theory to try and see the different realities and the struggles of Dalit women (Rege 1998).

Case Study – Vanangana

Vanangana is a rural based women's rights collective working on the issue of violence against women in the districts of Chitrakoot and Banda, located in Uttar Pradesh. It started with formation of self-help groups to help women acquire skills, earn their livings and credit programs, but soon they recognized the severity of VAW in the district and decided to work on this issue.

They began their work on VAW with rescuing women whose cases came to their attention. Not being aware of the legal provisions that protected women against violence, they used the tactics of scaring the man, beating him at times and lecturing the family on better treatment of the woman in the house. "We realized that we were abusing the power of being an organization the same way the abusive husband uses his power of being a man" says Pushpa. They learnt the legal framework and educated their activists on the legal rights of a woman, women mobilization and started supporting the survivors in their legal battles

They witnessed a case of the death of a woman who had been killed by her husband being covered up by their families, police and the head of the Panchayat⁴. To protest against this case they created their first street play 'Mujhe Jawab Do' and performed it in the village where the crime had transpired. The organization had done many protest campaigns before but faced the issue of people not showing up for discussions. They observed that the entire village had gathered to watch the performance and nobody left. Assessing the effectiveness of the performance the organization decided to use the medium of street theatre to spread awareness and started with the campaign 'Mujhe Jawab Do' that uses street theatre to discuss and solve the issue of VAW. They have developed various plays since on topics such as VAW, sexual abuse of children in the family, women sexuality and oppression of Dalit's⁵ by the upper castes. They perform in 4 villages every month, and the plays on VAW are specially performed in villages where cases of violence have been reported.

Focusing their work on VAW, Vanangana formed a separate organization called the Dalit Mahila Samiti (DMS) for the overall development of Dalit women. Vanangana provided the DMS a grant of Rs 5 lakhs (6700 euros) this year to carry out their operations. They educate the DMS workers on the various government schemes, applicability rules, how to avail these schemes so that these women can then educate the others in the village. Vanangana holds regular review meetings where each DMS representative presents the condition of their village on the topics of health, water and hand pumps, violence against women, monitoring mid-day meal schemes⁶, electricity, monitoring anganwadi centers⁷, MGNREGA⁸ (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and ration cards⁹. They discuss their doubts and team members of Vanangana guide them with alternative solutions. Data collected on women who are being abused is conveyed to the staff of Vanagana for them to follow up with the women

Ethical Concerns

I was faced with the ethical dilemma of getting consent from the members of audience who I interviewed after the performances. I was unable to do

⁴ Panchayat's are self government organisations consisting of elected members from Gram Sabha (A group of elders of the village). One of their main functions include handling social justice and development of the village

⁵ Dalit's are India's former 'untouchables' whose touch was considered polluting due to their occupation of handling dead matter or faeces. Although the constitution declared untouchability illegal, the stigma against the Dalit's continues to this day (Andharia, J 2000).

⁶ Mid-day meals is a government scheme under which a nutritious meal needs to be provided to students in every government and government aided school

⁷ Anganwadi centers have been set up by the government for the health and nourishment of pregnant women and young children

⁸ Social security measure that guarantees right to work for the citizens

⁹ Services provided by the government through which people can buy food grains at subsidized rates

this since there was very little time and since I wanted to know their immediate reactions talking about the research would have affected that aspect. I began with asking their thought on the performance and the discussions

The interviewees stood in different groups divided based on gender and age. I had no time due to moving around different groups and covering them before the audience left.

For all other interviews I had their consent to use a tape recorder for referring back to the interviews and keeping them with me. I took their consent on using their name

Chapter 2 – Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I form the conceptual framework for my research. I use the concepts of Triangle of Violence, Hegemonic Masculinities, and Doxa to explain the continued practice of VAW and the framework of Theatre of the Oppressed as related to the specific use of Street theatre for social change.

Triangle of Violence

The concept of violence and the acceptance of VAW in the rural Indian society is key for my research. I will be using Johan Galtung's concept of Triangle of violence to explore VAW in India.

Galtung developed a theory of violence in which he states the presence of two other two categories of violence apart from Direct Violence – Structural and Cultural, which are also present in the society in much subtler ways (Confortini, C 2006). Direct violence is the type of violence that can be felt physically such as murder, rape, assault and verbal attacks (Hathaway, T 2013).

Where direct violence is with a subject, structural violence is without a subject (Confortini, C 2006), which can be explained as a form of violence, which corresponds with the systematic ways in which the social system hampers the abilities of individuals (Samantroy, E 2010). Structural violence originates from the lack of access of power to protect oneself and by “privileging some class, ethnicities, genders over others which institutionalize unequal opportunities for education, resources and respect” (Hathaway, T 2013). It forms the basis of systems of domination such as patriarchy.

Galtung defines Cultural violence as those aspects of culture that can be used to justify direct and structural violence (1990). It changes the “moral color of an act of violence from red-wrong to green-right or at least yellow-acceptable” (Galtung J, 1990: 292). It comprises of the prevailing attitudes and beliefs that make structural violence in the form of feelings of inferiority/superiority based on class, race, sex, religion and nationality seem natural (Hathaway, T 2013).

Cultural violence is a symbolic violence that is exemplified by religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science, formal science and education. These ideologies contain cultural elements that show how it can be used to justify direct and structural violence such as; the belief in a transcendental god (religion), making women invisible by using the same word for the male gender as for the entire human species (language), the ideology of nationalism defining the normal (Galtung J, 1990). These ideologies imbed the inevitability and the righteousness of violence in people's minds (Confortini, C 2006).

Galtung represents the three types of violence as the corners of a violence triangle and explains the etiology of violence based on the interacting forces of direct, structural and cultural violence.

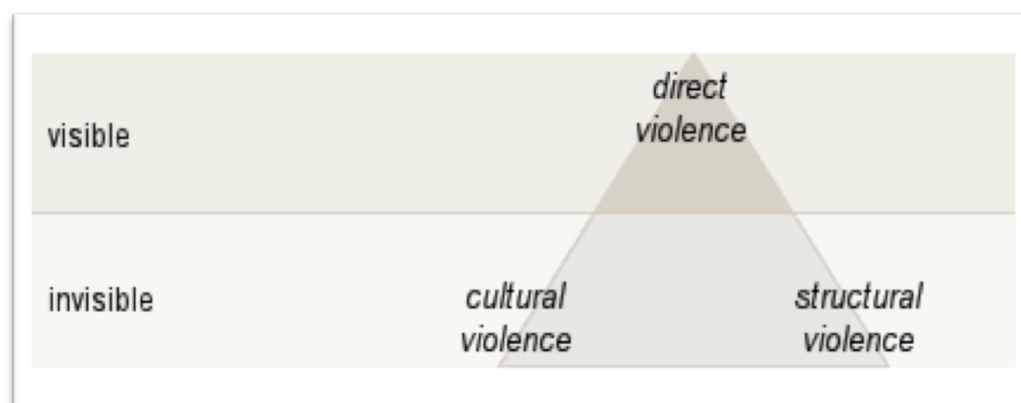


Figure 2 - The violence triangle¹⁰

Explaining the triangle Galtung states, “Standing the triangle on the direct violence head yields the image of cultural and structural violence as sources of direct violence” (1990: 294). Although cultural and structural aspects of conflict are invisible, they cause the direct violence by using violent actors who revolt against the structures and use the culture to legitimize their use of violence (Ziyadov, T 2006). Violence can start from any corner of the triangle and is easily transmitted to the other corners. With the internalization of the culture and institutionalization of the structure, direct violence tends to become repetitive, ritualistic and institutionalized (Galtung, J 1990).

These three forms of violence form the basis of my research where the street performances are based on and enact the direct violence inflicted on women (and) the content and resolution of the plays represent the different forms of structural violence directed against women. VAW in the social structure is reinforced through cultural norms and values embedded in the family and the community.

Gender

Where Galtung fails to explore the role of gender in the social construction of violence and the different forms of patriarchy that regulate the relationships between men and women (Confortini, C 2006) I use Scott’s definition of gender and relate it to the three forms of violence.

Gender as defined by Scott, is a social construct culturally produced historically variable and is reproduced through symbols/ideologies. It is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott, J 1986), and operates on the following fields:

1. Culturally specific representations and symbols

¹⁰ The figure has been taken from the paper on “The Galtung Triangle and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict” by (Ziyadov, T 2006).

2. Normative concepts that provide interpretations of these representations.
3. Social institutions that include the public and private sphere (family/labour market/education/etc.).
4. Subjective Identity

Scott's concept of Gender helps constitute a link for a gender conscious approach to violence where the unequal power relations between men and women in the social institutions lead to structural violence directed at women in the form of restricted access to education, property. I will be looking at these 4 levels while analysing the solutions proposed by the play and look at the different institutions they focus to work on.

Hegemonic Masculinities

Gramsci defines the concept of Hegemony to be derived from the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. Hegemony is created by imposing a definition on the situation, setting terms on the basis of which events are understood and formulating ideals while defining morality (Donaldson, M 1993). According to Connell, the structural fact of male dominance over women forms the basis for Hegemonic Masculinity, which occupies a central position in his 'social theory of gender' (Connell, R 1987). Thus Connell defines Hegemonic Masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and subordination of women" (as cited in Demetriou, D 2001).

Hegemonic masculinity generates dominance not only over women but over other masculinities too that are subordinated by the hegemonic practice. Thus hegemonic masculinity is understood as external hegemony 'hegemony over women' and internal hegemony 'hegemony over subordinate masculinities' (Demetriou, D 2001). Connell derives his understanding of hegemonic masculinity from the following three structures of gender relations:

1. Labor - Men have the advantage of higher income and easier access to education
2. Power - Men control the institutions of power, such as the state, army
3. Emotional Attachment - "the structure of cathexis is characterized by male superiority and violence rather than intimacy" (Demetriou, D 2001:341).

According to Gilmore, concepts of good masculinity are associated with the following three areas of social action that form the core of hegemonic masculinity –

1. Procreation of sexual domination over women
2. Protection of women as property of men
3. Provision of goods and food for the family, which legitimizes the exclusion of women from paid work and decision-making
(as cited in Kersten, J 1996).

Connell views hegemonic masculinity as a 'cultural ideal' that is constantly promoted by the civil society, with the help of media and practices consistent

with the production of patriarchy. When the conditions of the reproduction of patriarchy change, the masculinities adapt themselves accordingly (Demetriou, D 2001). This is viewed as an element of optimism, that a more humane and less oppressive means of being a man can become hegemonic, leading towards the abolition of gender hierarchies and power of patriarchy (Connell, R & Messerschmidt, J 2005).

I will use the concept while analysing the content of the plays, which portrays a single masculinity, the hegemonic one characterised by superiority over women, being the breadwinner of the family, lack of involvement in the upbringing of the children and a 'macho' man with no emotional connect towards the family. The plays spotlight the culture of using masculinity, male honour and the power that comes with it to legitimise treatment of women as objects and use of violence by men. The plays also show violence as a factor involved in the creation of hegemonic masculinity and I will look at the strategies used by the activists to stop VAW by using this concept.

Doxa and Habitus

Identifying ways to bring about social change also requires an understanding of deeply embedded norms.

While researching difficulty to achieve change, Pierre Bourdieu described the concept of Habitus. Habitus are socialised norms that guide behavior and thinking. Bourdieu describes habitus as being located in traditions, lifestyle, internalised in the mind and inscribed in the body. It is very resistant to change (Osterlind E, 2008). Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but is created and reproduced unconsciously without any conscious concentration. Bourdieu states even though habitus resists change, there are possibilities for individuals to break the hegemony (Bourdieu P, 1984).

Doxa is the experience of a sense of reality, created by habitus. It is a set of apparently natural beliefs that do not need to be asserted and are intimately linked to the field and habitus. Bourdieu defines Doxa as what is taken for granted, the reality that goes unanimously unquestioned as it goes "beyond any notion of enquiry" (Grenfell, M 2012). It is the process through which socially and culturally constituted ways of perceiving, evaluating and behaving become accepted as unquestioned and self evident (Throop, C and Murphy, K, 2002). It is created when certain actions are taken for granted through continuous reproduction, it can be a part of the culture, or current political and economic positions. Recognition of doxa is the by product of the internalization of unquestioned norms rather than pressurized by external pressures. (Grenfell, M 2012).

Doxa takes the form of a symbolic power that lies within established institutions and as a symbolic power requires those subjected to it to not question its legitimacy or the legitimacy of those who exert it. In modern societies, legitimization of doxa as a symbolic power is produced from language and misrecognized arbitrary classifications and the reproduction of differentiations (Grenfell, M 2012).

Not as rigid as habitus, the limits of doxa can be broken by exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted nature (Throop, C and Murphy, K, 2002). According to Bordieu in times of crisis, Socio-structural modifications and disruptions can raise critical consciousness and undermine the prevailing doxa. But he also states that a crisis is not sufficient to trigger a critical discourse that will radically unravel the prevailing doxa (Grenfell, M 2012). Here he introduces his concepts of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. Orthodoxy is when the arbitrariness of the doxa is recognized but accepted in action. It is when “the rules of the game are known and played accordingly” (Grenfell, M 2012:118). Heterodoxy is the recognition of the possibility of competing beliefs, which generally come from groups that are poor in economic capital but rich in cultural capital (Grenfell, M 2012). According to Bourdieu, “collective actions which sets out to organize a symbolic struggle capable of questioning practically every tacit presupposition of the phallonnarcissistic vision of the world” is required to bring about change (Moi, T 1991).

The cultural violence that justifies the direct and structural violence directed towards women is formed from the gender habitus and attitudes that exist in the rural Indian society. Thus breaking the habitus is important to combat VAW and its legitimisation. Although changing habits is a long term activity, I can use the concept of doxa to assess how far the content and methods of street theatre break the silence on issues of violence and question the taken for granted attitudes of the intended audience.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Since street theatre can have different objectives it is important to locate the kind of street theatre that I will be researching, in a long tradition and an international movement to use theatre as a vehicle of participatory change (Singhal, A 2004).

Augusto Boal, inspired by the writings of Paulo Freire and from his experiences of dramatic experiences developed the theory of ‘Theatre of the oppressed’ (TO). Boal believed that the audience is not passive but they are theatre in themselves. He calls his audience spectators by identifying the ability to take action while simultaneously observing themselves in action. According to Boal, the fundamental hypothesis for the TO is that if someone who is oppressed performs an action in theatrical fiction, it will enable them to perform the same in real life (Osterlind E, 2008).

The main objective is to change the people i.e the spectators into subjects, actors and transformers of the dramatic action (Boal, A 1979) Aristotle proposes poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character to act and think for him which leads to the occurrence of catharsis. Whereas Brecht proposes the spectator to delegate power to the character to act but reserves the right to think for himself, which leads to the awakening to critical consciousness (Boal, A 1979).

Augusto Boal refers to theatre as a means of promoting social and political change. According to Boal, “theatre is not revolutionary, it is the rehearsal for a revolution” (1979). It encourages people to think and analyse rather than feel and react (Howard L, 2007). TO flips the mode on one-way theatre and uses theatre as a means of social communication, by engaging the audiences in dis-

covery, critical reflection and dialogue in the process of liberation (Thompson L).

His techniques include legislative theatre, forum theatre, rainbow of desire and are designed to address change on the level of formal politics, social interaction and on personal emotional level (Osterlind E, 2008).

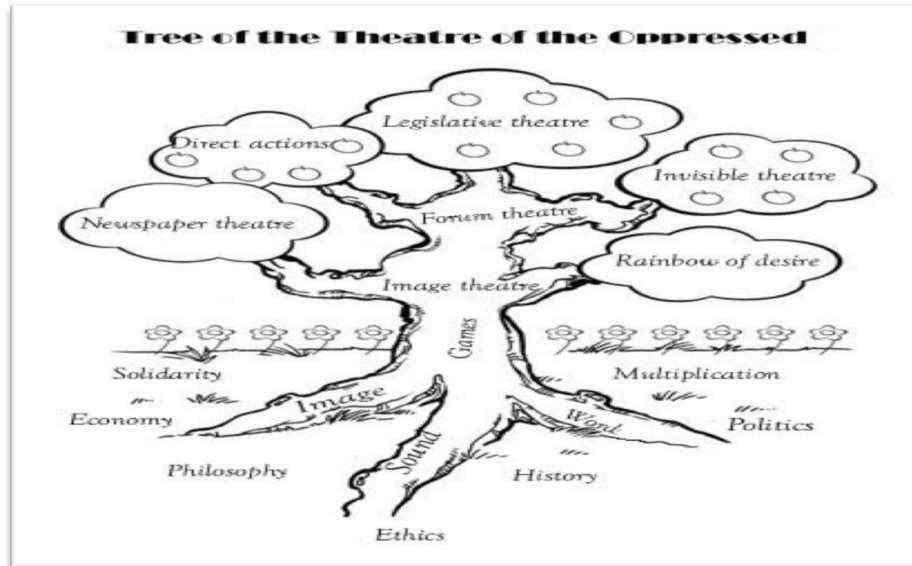


Figure 3- Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed

Boal created his Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to give people an alternative language to discuss, analyze, and resolve oppressions. He insists that theatre can be a mode of action and a rehearsal for life. In this mode, performance is a proactive tool, a way to plan what to do when a situation arises (Howard L, 2007). Boal believes that using the form of theatre as a tool, people in communities can work together to solve problems, learn about themselves and take charge (Howard L, 2007).

This is also the basis of using street theatre as a tool for social change as the performances illuminate the problems and encourage awareness or dissent. I will use Boal's concept while analysing the ways in which the performances affect the subjects of the audience, and the effectiveness of the medium of theatre to raise consciousness and in breaking the silence.

Chapter 3 – Narrative Analysis of the plays performed by Vanangana

Activists of Vanangana use feminist street theatre to bring attention to the issue of VAW and create awareness on domestic violence as a crime. It's aim is to educate the audience on women rights and discuss the root causes of gender-based violence.

In this chapter, I will be using the technique of Narrative Analysis on the scripts of their plays 'Mujhe Jawab Do' (Answer Me) and 'Badalti Tasveer' (Changing times) to analyse the contribution made by the content of the plays.

Context of the plays

Scripts of street plays use real life situations and current events to contextualize issues and to engage effectively with the audience (Nagar R 2002: 59). Following the ideals of *pedagogy of the oppressed*¹¹, the two plays performed by Vanangana MJD and BT have evolved from the real life struggles and domestic life of the women in the team and the women from the rural community of Chitrakoot and Banda. They are based on the daily struggles faced by majority of women in rural India¹², for basic needs such as education, freedom, agency, identity and safe spaces.

On our way to a village for a performance one of the woman performers, Raatrani started singing a song on dowry:

"Dabejava main dulha maange maruti car, ho dabejava maange maruti car. Dulha ki behna maange sone ki angoothi, gori bhoijayi hove, hove na kalooti"

(For dowry the bridegroom asks for a maruti car. His sister asks for ring of gold and a sister-in-law who is fair and not black skinned)

I realized that the song was formed from the realities of all the men and women in that car. Dowry although illegal in India, is prevalent in all classes of the society. The song explained some of the problems that surround the institution of marriage; burden of dowry borne by the woman and her family where every member of the husband's family expects gifts and money from the woman and the obsession of the Indian society with the fair skin and their equating of dark skinned girls as belonging to lower castes and class.

Pushpa, who does the final editing of the plays, describes their script writing process as unique. The initial draft is formed by personal stories shared by the team from their lives and of the cases they have come across. This is then

¹¹ In *pedagogy of the oppressed*, Friere argued that most political, educational and communication interventions are unsuccessful because they fail to take into account the perspectives of their audience (Harter L et al 2007).

¹² As per the results of the NFHS - 2, 75% of women in India face verbal, physical or sexual violence in their lives from and a higher percentage of women in rural india (36%) are subjected to violence than women in the urban areas (28%) (Visaria L 2008).

improvised based on the reactions received by the audiences and the dialogues are not set in stone: “The performers end up delivering dialogues based on their own experiences from the past”.

The script of MJD is based on a real event where a woman in a village in Banda (Uttar Pradesh) was killed while being attacked by her husband. The murder was covered up through negotiations and deals struck amongst the family, head of the village and the police. This is not a one-off case but this practice called ‘Samjhauta’ (Compromise) is widely practiced in the villages of Uttar Pradesh. This real incident was woven into a play by Vanangana and was performed for the first time in the village where the woman was murdered.

Mental, physical abuse and ultimate death by murder of a woman or being ‘forced-to-commit-suicide’ is the bitter truth existing in the Indian society today (Srivastava 2016). From 2012-2015, 24771 dowry deaths have been reported where the woman was either killed for dowry or committed suicide due to the harassment¹³ with the maximum cases reported in the state of Uttar Pradesh. BT is based on the story of all women who have been forced to commit suicide due to the increased harassment endured by them.

What distinguishes the plays of Vanangana from other street performances are the lived experiences of the performers. These women are not theatre actors but survivors whose aim is to end the practices of VAW. They work to rescue women from situations that they too have experienced. They bring with them a deep understanding of the practices of the society and the beliefs of the audiences, which is transferred into the narratives.

Content of the plays – Sequence of Events

Events portrayed in both the narratives highlight different aspects of the lives and relationships of women in rural India. Both the plays comprise of a single story of the protagonist with events that occur in different settings but are not independent of each other. The script follows a logical order where every event shares a cause and effect relationship.

MJD narrates the story of a woman who is regularly beaten up by her husband. She receives no support from her family and community members when she tries to escape the abuse. The woman is ultimately killed by her husband and the story continues to unveil the monetary negotiations that take place to cover up the murder.

There are different settings in the play – the natal house of the protagonist Mantoria, her husband’s house, the village of husband’s house and the morgue where her dead body is taken for examination. The sequence of the events is:

1. Mantoria shown as a victim of domestic violence
2. Her husband opposes to the education of their girl child and physically abuses Mantoria and their daughter
3. Mantoria leaves to protect herself and her daughter

¹³ The figures have been retrieved from an article in the Pioneer on dowry deaths. <http://www.dailypioneer.com/nation/india-sees-22-dowry-deaths-every-day.html>

4. Mantoria's father and brother do not allow her to stay in their house. She is denied her right on her family home and is sent back
5. Mantoria dies as a result of a brutal attack by her husband
6. The Head of the Panchayat reaches the crime scene and helps the husband to cover up the murder to protect the image of the village
7. The police officer is bribed by the husband and the Head of the Panchayat to declare the murder as an accident
8. Mantoria's father is also paid to let go off the murder case and in return the husband agrees to marry his younger daughter without any dowry
9. The doctor performing the investigation is paid by the police to declare it an accident
10. Mantoria's death is declared an accident and the husband remarries
11. Mantoria gets up at the end of the play and questions the audience on the reason of her death and why is a women's death not seen as a crime.

The main event in the play is the violent attack that led to the death of Mantoria which is shown as a result of the apathy shown by the family, community and state towards women who are victims of violence. The events highlight the treatment of gender-based violence as a private issue by the community that only involves the husband and the wife and needs to be kept within the intimate confines of their home. The events also explain the treatment of women as property to be bought and sold, who is finally transferred to the husband upon marriage. It identifies the lack of importance given to the education of the girl child.

Badalti Tasveer (BT) is a narrative of a woman who empowered speaks up against VAW. The settings in the play are – protagonist Sampatiya's husband's house, her natal house and her shop. The sequence of the events in the play is as follows:

1. A woman Sukhiya is attempting to commit suicide after being tortured by her husband, when the protagonist Sampatiya stops her.
2. Sampatiya narrates her own story
3. *'flashback begins'*
4. Sampatiya was not allowed to complete her education and was married at an early age to a much older man.
5. Her husband is unemployed and Sampatiya is being tortured for dowry
6. A pregnant Sampatiya is sent away to her natal home where she gives birth to her son.
7. Sampatiya's son is sick and her husband refuses to take him to the hospital. Her husband kicks her out of the house when she demands to go to the hospital
8. Sampatiya lives at her brother's house and works on his fields. She is soon kicked by her sister-in-law who does not like her.
9. Sampatiya sells the little jewelry she owns and sets up her own shop.
10. After 12 years Sampatiya's husband claims his right over their son and the Panchayat (village council) agrees with him and explain Sampatiya the duties of a good wife
11. Sampatiya speaks up to them about her right to take her own decision and disagrees with the Panchayat

12. *'flashback ends'*

13. Sukhiya gets the courage to live her life and thanks Sampatiya. She announces to the audience that from now she will speak up and make her own decisions.

The main event is dowry related physical violence faced by the protagonist. The narrative problematizes the continued practices of dowry even after the introduction of a legal framework that makes it illegal. It points to the difficulties that arise in the path of a woman when she attempts to start a new, independent life

Both plays uncover critical concerns, such as the subordinate status of women within their natal and marital homes and the lack of support provided to a girl from her natal home after marriage. Thus women are completely dependent on the husband and forced to accept the violence and oppression (Agnes, F & D'Mello, A 2015). These concerns are based on the cultural beliefs and social norms that govern the life of a woman, her married life, her inferior position in the society and if women break these norms they would bring violence upon themselves (Visaria, L 2008).

The narrative highlights a practice in Indian rural society where concern over the conduct of sexually vulnerable girls leads to their **early marriage**. The women are forced to be the honor bearers of the family, where she needs to remain 'pure' (virgin) and untouched to keep the honor intact. The protagonist is married off at an early age to a much older man to protect the honor of the family and transfer the burden (of protecting the honor) to the husband. It problematizes the practice of victim blaming in the society wherein the female is held responsible and her character maligned when harassed or exploited by a man. In the narrative Sampatiya is forced to discontinue her education in the fear of character assassination if harassed.

Forms of violence

The plays explore and educate their audience on the following forms of violence faced by women in their lifetime and the reasons for the said violence:

1. Physical domestic violence, which is the use of physical force that results in bodily injury and also death in the case of MJD.
2. Dowry related physical domestic violence in the family.
3. Psychological violence inflicted on the women through constant humiliation, threat of violence and prohibiting the protagonist in BT and the daughter in MJD from attending school.
4. Economic violence, where the husband refuses to pay hospital bills of the son¹⁴.

MJD and BT also deal with the indirect violence on women, when the family and the community are engaged in the production and reproduction of

¹⁴ <http://www.health-genderviolence.org/news/191>

attitudes that normalize violence against women and when they follow norms and stereotypes around gender¹⁵.

Representations: Character Analysis

The protagonist's of the plays are the two women Mantoria and Sampatiya. The plays sheroes the ordinary woman through the realistic portrayal of these characters, and almost every woman in the audience watching the performance can relate to these characters at a personal level. I could see women nodding in agreement when Mantoria was being beaten for not putting enough salt in the curry. Post the performance, they remembered that scene and discussed how that has happened to all of them.

Representation of the victim

Mantoria in MJD is portrayed as a helpless woman being tortured by her husband and is accepting it. But she is also shown as a fierce mother who decides to take the step of leaving her husband to protect her daughter. The play tries to evoke the emotions of the mothers in the audience using Mantoria; they use her role to encourage women to speak up if not for themselves but for the betterment of their children when she says:

"Oh god, I have had enough now. Till now he used to only bit me, but now he has started hitting my daughter as well. Now I won't bear this pain anymore. Now I will tell everyone in the village about my conditions"

On the other hand, Sampatiya is characterized as a wife who stands up against her husband when she is abused for more dowry money and demands her husband to fulfill his duties as a father and a husband. This is shown with the use of evocative dialogues between them:

Sampatiya – Our son is sick since four days, give money and come with me to take him to the hospital

Husband – I don't have any money, you father and brother did not give me a bundle of notes in dowry

Sampatiya – It's your son and so your responsibility. My brother and father are not responsible to fund your entire life

Husband – Stop arguing else I will throw you out of the house

Sampatiya – You have married me, how can you just throw me out. It's my house as well

After being thrown out by her husband, Sampatiya seeks out to change gender roles and decides to earn a living for the family. Where rigid gender roles are viewed as a cause of gender-based violence, the character breaks that and seeks to achieve equal treatment (Heise 1998).

¹⁵ <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence/forms-gender-based-violence>

She is portrayed as a woman who does not accept the abuse in silence and is not afraid of being ashamed by accepting that she was abused by someone known to her and who she shares a relation with¹⁶. She disapproves marital violence and is portrayed as a figure of encouragement to the women in the audience, who continue to bear abuse, as they are wary of their future without their husband's support.

Linking the individual to the collective

The narrative formed a collective identity of a 'woman' in the play MJD. This can be seen various times in the script with the use of the word woman instead of referring to the protagonist such as,

1. Husband – A *woman* is like the sole of my shoe. I will wear it and throw it away as per my wish
2. Husband - There is no dearth of *women* in this world, if this one dies I will always get another *wife*
3. Chorus – He is a man, a man. And she is a *woman*
4. Police – 5 *women* have died since morning, I am tired of this job
5. Police – You people always have the strength to kill a *woman*
6. Mantoria to the audience –
7. No one saved that *woman* when she was being beaten
8. You covered up the murder of a *woman*
9. Is a *woman* an object?
10. Is a *woman* not a part of the community?
11. Is this the status of a *woman* in the society?
12. Why is the murder of a *woman* not a crime?

The narrative uses the collective identity to explain that all women despite the difference of class and caste face these problems of violence, discrimination and restricted agency. They seek to inform all the women that they understand their hidden experiences of pain and anger and make the men question the unfair treatment of all women in the society.

The use of the word 'woman' instead of 'wife' helps form an emotional connect with the men in the audience as they are forced to think about the same happening to their sisters and daughters. Maya Krishna Rao¹⁷, while performing the role of a woman who was murdered for dowry demands in the play 'Om Swaha' observed that generally it was the men in the audience that were most moved and affected by the performance¹⁸. She explains this

¹⁶ Most women do not disclose what happens within the home environment out of the fear of being ostracized and shamed by the communities in which they reside. The sense of shame associated with being abused by someone close to them also leads to the culture of silence (Visaria, L 2008).

¹⁷ Maya Krishna Rao is a feminist theatre artist based out of Delhi. The play 'Om Swaha' was performed in 1979 to create awareness on the problem of dowry and the severity of dowry related deaths.

¹⁸ Personal interview with Maya Krishna Rao

phenomenon as a result of the men seeing their own daughters and sisters in her role and this scared them. They immediately agreed that the practice of dowry needed to end.

Representations of Men

It's the men that are identified as the antagonists in the plays. They are shown in various negative roles such as the abusive husband who is takes pride in his masculinity wanting to be a part of the hegemony in MJD and the husband who sees his wife as a way to earn money via dowry in BT. All men in both the plays are shown as culprits in one way or another, such as the brother and father of the women who denied her the right to reside in her natal house asserting the belief that woman becomes the property and responsibility of the husband after her marriage. The roles of the corrupt police officer and conservative chief of the village in MJD were also shown to be men. This portrayal of all men as negative made the men in the audience extremely defensive. It led to heated discussions after which the men would eventually agree that men like the characters exist in their own community and the events shown were unfair.

Two male characters Changu and Mangu are present in the play BT as friends of Sampatiya's husband who in every scene mock and challenge the husband's masculinity. At the beginning of the play they belittle the husband because of the low amount of dowry received and towards the end they use Sampatiya's financial and personal independence to insult him and question his 'masculinity'. Through these character the narrative discusses how the attitudes and behavior of peer groups encourage aggression. In the narrative after the husband is insulted by Changu and Mangu, he confronts his wife and demands that she close her shop and stay at home. These characters are seen as a representation of the existing larger society that carry with them their traditional understanding of masculinity (how a man should behave) and femininity (how a woman should not behave) and work towards enforcing these norms on all other members of the society.

Portrayal of men as the villains can be helpful in changing their attitudes towards crimes against women when they watch the effect of their actions on the entire the life of the woman. During a workshop Tripurari Sharma read to the men in the audience what women felt about eve teasing; she observed how shocked the men were. For the men it was a frivolous activity to boost their self-confidence not thinking of the effect it had on the woman¹⁹. In BT the narrative shows the effect of eve teasing on restricted access to **public spaces and education for the woman**. Member of Vanangana believe it is important for the men in the audience to realize and reflect on the consequences of their actions and the narrative is used to trigger that.

¹⁹ Personal interview with Tripurari Sharma

Form and the Process of Narration

“Using the art form of theatre involves looking at the way I move, the way I speak which should be evocative of a certain image and does not involve just giving dialogues as if giving a lecture,” states Maya Krishna Rao.

Theatre activist Jaya Iyer conducts acting workshops for the performers of Vanangana, where she trains them in the use of correct expressions and form of delivery in order to communicate their message to the audience. Theatre as a form of communication uses a sum of all languages such as words, colors, forms, movements and sound to substantiate the reality (Boal 1979). The content of both the narratives is designed to evoke the emotions of the audience (Boal 1979) and Vanangana use the help of songs and chorus to express their messages and connect with the audience’s feelings.

In the opening scene of MJD, the husband continuously beats his wife while the performers sing in chorus describing the plight of a woman’s life who gets abused by her husband and tortured by her mother-in-law. The combination of the action, music and the content of the song made it an impactful opening scene that portrayed the understanding of the trauma faced by the women.

“There is nobody to support a woman, listen my sister
Nobody there to open their doors for you
The world has alienated you
It’s a shame
The daughter has now become an outsider
Her own people won’t accept her anymore”

Songs like these are used in the chorus of the plays to express the thoughts and feelings of the women in audience, which they fail to express in their actual lives. It helps the women realize that their experiences of discrimination are not isolated and gives expression to the collective thought of women. Listening to these thoughts being expressed liberates the women of the mental pain they carry along and encourages them to voice their own experiences.

In a similar situation in BT when the brother dismisses the protagonist from their house, the chorus is used to explain the disadvantaged position of women due to lack of recognition in the family. The narrative speaks about the discrimination in the treatment between the male and female child while constructing the message of equal treatment:

*Tell me of brother, why have I become an outsider today
I took birth in front of your eyes
Grew up and played with you
So why today after my marriage have you disowned me
How have I become an outsider today*

The songs captured and communicated the immense pain, abuse and torture faced by women in their daily lives. The songs create an emotional connect with the audience and a feeling of curiosity to know what happens next in the life of the protagonist; as they see their personal lives and their own family in the narrative.

According to Mala Hashmi “A play is powerful if it is creative, layered, talks of the larger and smaller picture, when it connects to the individual and to the society and is also entertaining”²⁰. While the songs used within the plays created an emotional tone; songs performed before the plays used powerful narratives to pique the interest of the audience. Following are the compilation of short songs that were performed before the plays:

“Break the silence and join us
Break all your ties that trouble you and join us
This world is yours
This world is mine
Let’s break the silence.”

“I have broken all the chains
Now no one will stop us
We have broken all the barriers
Now we will be successful
There is a spark inside me now
Now I will fight all the injustice
I will not accept the rules made by men anymore
I have found my wings now.”

I won’t stay quiet anymore
I will fight now
Give me my rights peacefully
Or I will snatch them from you
Give me my rights.”

Street theatre does not have a fixed audience for the performance, but the actors need to invite people. These songs characterized by their radical thoughts immediately captured the interest of the villagers and they gathered to watch the play. They wanted answers to questions that these songs had created such as; what is the injustice that they are fighting, how will they break their chains, how will they change the world and what are the rights of a woman.

²⁰ Personal interview with Mala Hashmi. Mala is a radical theatre artist who is currently heading the theatre group Jana Natya Manch.

Some of these questions are answered in the sequence of the narrative and the others were answered in the discussion after the performance.

Resolution of the problem – Methods and proposed strategies for change

The content of the plays highlight a cluster of attitudes relating to gender and masculinities that justify VAW. Using an approach of gender analysis, it locates gender subordination in institutions such as the family, courts, Panchayats and not the men themselves as the reason for VAW. The narratives recognize the oppressions embedded in popular discourses of honor, shame, masculinity, femininity, community, crime and justice (Nagar R 2002) and uses them as a part of the narratives to communicate strategies and arguments for change.

Moral arguments and shaming

MJD ends with the protagonist questioning the indifference of the community towards a woman who is being beaten in front of them:

People of the community answer me,

Is a woman an object that is sold to her husband when alive,

And then sold for twice the amount once she is dead.

The murder of a woman was covered up to protect the honor of the family, village and the community,

Isn't a woman a part of this same family and community?

Answer me, why is the murder of a woman not a crime?

Gender issues are often looked at as cultural issues and become ground for moral regulation. In this deeply patriarchal society, women are perceived to be the bearers of the family reputation and abuse of the women is hidden to maintain this honor. The narrative recognizes that upholding this reputation and honour is both an individual and community concern, which actively works against recognition of VAW as a crime. It aims at breaking the fear of bringing dishonor to their family amongst the women and encourages them to break the culture of silence.

The narrative uses the discourse of honor and shame, which is used to ostracize and silence women, to stop the VAW instead. It defines acts of inflicting violence, taking dowry, covering up the murder as shameful acts that bring dishonor to the individual, family and the community. The narrative tries to change the notion of VAW from acts that signify manhood to acts that shame the man. It instills the fear of losing respect within the community if their acts and the involvement of the family in VAW are revealed.

Challenging Male entitlement and Masculinities

During my interactions with the workers at Vanangana and observing the discussions after the performances I realized the embeddedness of patriarchal beliefs and the formation of hegemonic masculinity in the villages which justi-

fied a man's right to be violent with his wife for certain instances; such as when she does not agree with him, when she does not perform as per his expectations, when he is under stress and blames it on her etc. Men and women still follow the traditional school of thought wherein a husband was given the legal right to use force against his wife to ensure she fulfills her wifely obligations and where domestic responsibilities that wives must perform were listed out along with the acceptable behavior of being with their husbands²¹. The content of the narratives clears such misconceptions communicating to the audience that under no circumstance whatsoever is a man justified to abuse his wife; and no woman has to accept this violence.

The man in MJD delivers a monologue asserting the power of his masculinity that allows him to treat his wife any way he desires. The narrative identifies the symbolic violence, with the man as holder of position in society, having the legitimacy to become the spokesperson for the Doxa (Moi, T 1991):

I am a man, a man

Did you see how I beat up my wife

That's because I am a man

It's my wife and can treat her any way I want to

She's like the sole of my shoe

I can wear it and throw it whenever I wish

I am a man, a man

If she dies, there is no dearth of women in this world

I will get another

I am a man, a man

The narrative uses satire to disregard and break the hegemonic masculinity and aims to create an image of positive masculinity where men believe in the equality of genders. The monologue is followed by conversation of the husband and other performers who too disregard the ideals of hegemonic masculinity stating to him that his practices will not certify him as a proper man but will lead to his imprisonment under the DV Act. The narratives proposes to redefine masculinity to **include characteristics of a man, who does not abuse his wife and treat her like an object – with no identity and agency.**

²¹ The English common law stated that a “wife came under the control of the husband and he had the legal right to use force against her in order to ensure that she fulfilled her wifely obligations”. According to the Hindu script of Skandapurana, “a wife should take her meals after her husband, sleeps after he sleeps. If he assaults her she should never lose her temper. Never look angrily at her husband” (Heise, L 1998). Manusmriti, the ancient text on Hindu Law quotes, “Animals, drums, illiterates, low castes and women are worthy of being beaten”.

Where hegemonic masculinities prevent men from parenting their children, BT looks to redefine manhood.

Sampatiya to the village:

A father is not someone who just helps give birth

A man needs to fulfill the duties of a father

The man needs to take care of his child and is responsible for their upbringing

All of you are advising me on the duties of a wife

Has anyone ever told him the duties of a husband

Is the husbands job only to beat his wife and remove her from the house whenever he wishes to

The narrative with the aim of breaking the hegemony, redefines real men as fathers who are responsible and take part in the upbringing of their children.

Many times feminists activists and women's organisations are ignored by the community and labeled as groups that only lecture on women's rights and look to break families. To prevent from being ignored the narrative begins with defining the duties of a wife set by the society and takes this forward logically to question then the absence of defined duties of a husband. The narrative while defining the duties of a husband affirms to the model of male being the breadwinner of the family. Vanangana undertakes the process of social change one step at a time. Instead of aiming for radical change in the attitudes and norms of the society and propagating for equal responsibility of male and female in the family, it begins with placing the responsibility of the family on the husband to prevent the men from physically abusing the women and the children.

Building awareness on Women's Rights and Feminist Solidarity

Where MJD ends with the death of the woman, BT ends with the story of a woman 'empowered' who eventually stops another victim from giving up and committing suicide:

Listen girl, having overcome a lot of difficulties I could take my own decisions,

Now you have to do the same.

I started my own shop and the earnings funded my children's education and marriage.

During my time I had no support from the state,

But you now have the Domestic Violence Act to protect you

Go to the court and fight for your rights

The message communicated to the audience as a strategy to stop VAW, is three-fold:

The narratives educate the women in the audience to identify abuse by their husbands as a criminal act, and inspire them to speak up against the violence.

1. The narratives educate the women on their rights and on the avenues created for their protection, which is legal framework. It encourages them to make use of these legal ammunitions to claim their rights. It also informs the men on this legal provisioning that can put them behind bars as a word of caution.
2. A popular belief among the women is the necessary requirement of education, skills training or land to be able to earn an independent living. The narratives aim to break this notion and inform women on the different avenues through which they can lead their life without being dependent on their husbands.

The narrative encourages women to claim their rights of making their own decisions, to education, to raise their children.

Strategies for combatting VAW – The Judiciary and the Panchayats

In BT the Panchayat rules against the woman who has brought up the child and provides custody of the son to the husband based on their belief that a man is supposed to be the head of the family and the decision-making power lies with him. They advise Sampatiya to return to her husband's house, as a woman is incomplete without her husband and a good wife does not argue with her husband.

The traditional norms that lead to rationalisation and internalization of oppression also guide the workings of the police, courts and the Panchayats; and they remain patriarchal. Many times instead of functioning as the viable and inviting institution meant to protect the rights of violated women, the courts focus on saving the marriage and protecting the family bond (Agnes, F & D'Mello, A 2015).

According to Pushpa, "Many platforms have been created to protect women; Women's cell in the Police superintendent office, special cells for cases of Samjhauta (Compromise), but they all place family at the center. "The family should not break, let the women break. But we at Vanangana firmly believe – "Let the family break but the first priority is to protect the woman"

The fear of humiliation because of long court battles, and having to deal with an insensitive police with little sympathy unnerves and discourages most women from demanding justice (Visaria, L 2008). The narratives recognize the difficulties of taking legal action and getting justice faced by women:

*When I take my issues to the police,
They insult me and ask me to leave.
When I approach the courts hoping to get justice,
They ask for money*

*Where do I get the money from,
When i can barely feed myself
Even when I get the money,
I am insulted on the stand and asked offensive questions
Not going to bear the injustice anymore
Will not stay quiet anymore
(MJD)*

The narratives do not paint a false picture of the way the judiciary works and the treatment of women by the courts. Understanding the suspicion of the women to approach the police and the courts, the narratives describes the difficulties faced by women in order to attain legal justice but also motivates them to endure and move forward. Through the play, the group asks the women to not get discouraged and speaking on the objectives and mission of Vanangana, promises the support of the organization to help support them in their legal battle.

Chapter 4 – Effectiveness of Street theatre used by Vanangana

Reaching a mass audience

Every performance saw a minimum of 150-200 (majority of the population of the village) people coming out, leaving their work to watch the performance. Whether it was early morning or in the middle of day under the hot sun; men, women, children, elderly and the youth all gathered around the performers and watched the plays with rapt attention. In the village of Rehuta, the school gave a break to the students to watch the performance, once they heard performers of Vanangana singing their songs and inviting the villagers to watch a drama.

The ability of street theatre to garner people's attention was the reason behind Vanangana's decision to use performances for their campaigns on VAW. When they began their work on VAW, people did not show up for discussions and trainings, women too did not want to discuss violence. They decided to then bring issues from the community to the community through the medium of street theatre. "Villagers always get together to watch drama and hence we chose to perform on the issue of VAW," states Pushpa. Through the use of street performances Vanangana caters to a large and diverse group of audience to create awareness on the issue of VAW and has been provided the platform to reach out to more women who need their help and support.

Intergenerational transmission of beliefs and attitudes is a key factor in the process of attitude formation in relation to VAW (Flood, M & Pease, B 2009). Practices and the environment of the family, community, and school influence the attitudes of children and form the basis of their belief system. With children forming a large proportion of the audience, the performances aimed to sensitize them to the oppression of girls and women, and educate them on gender equality ensuring that the children and youth remained as informed as the adults of the community.

The village of Bhitakhera was divided into two parts, one where the Dalit's resided and the other belonged to the Patel's (people from the upper caste). The movement of the Dalit's was restricted only to the area allotted to them. The curiosity and excitement of watching a

live drama performance is equally attractive to all members of the community. The performance had to be held on the Dalit side of the village and even though the Patel's did not cross over to watch the performance, they stood at a slight distance and watched the performance.

Vanangana reaches out to every part of the community through their performances and ensures that every member of the community irrespective of caste, class and gender and age has equal access to the information that it is communicating.



Figure 4 – Villagers from the upper caste sat on the left end to the performers



Figure 5- Dalit community sat on the right side

Reactions and Critical Dialogues

Empathy and Catharsis

With the power and legitimacy to speak their mind, it was the men in the audience that discussed and debated confidently with the activists on their perspectives on VAW while the women rarely spoke other than agreeing to the play being representative of true real-life incidents. The times when the women would speak up were when they saw a scene and connected with it instantly.

During the scene that showed the parents fighting for the custody of their son; in the village of Rehuta; a woman spoke up “*When it’s the mother who gives birth to the child, how does the father have the first claim? Why just because he is a man?*” The women in the audience agreed with her and started discussions on the equal right of the mother on her children and whether the husband would have fought for custody of a girl child. These are the reactions and discussions that a theatre group aims to generate with their performances. The women together created a collective identity and spoke not of them as individuals but on rights of all ‘women’ and discrimination of the ‘girl child’.

In the village of Laudhiya, after watching the way in which the murder of a woman was covered up, women discussed the other different ways in which the murder of women have been covered up in their village and the unsafe conditions of women in the village; for instance a woman was burnt by her family and the police were told that she died in a fire while cooking. Sampatiya’s speech on the responsibilities of a husband and father were met with numerous and collective “yes she is right” from the women in the audience and during Mantoria’s speech on the apathy shown by the community, women in the audience exclaimed as to how nobody cared about the life and death of women. In the village of Laudhiya, women reasoned their silence with their extreme dependability on others to survive, due to lack of education and experience having never been allowed to leave their homes. “How will I feed my children without my husband” a lady asked at the end of the play MJD, “It is better if I die”.

A reaction that was constant during all performance across villages was the laughter from the audience during scenes that enacted the physical violence - wife being beaten by her husband, wife being thrown out by her husband and wife being yelled at by her husband. The reason behind the laughter from men, women and children in the

audience can be explained as a mechanism to cover up the discomfort felt by the audience while watching a private moment being exposed in the public space. But the women too would laugh at times, despite it being a reminder of their real lives. Deepti Mehrohra explains the laughter as the relief of a woman and feeling safe when she watches that it is someone else being beaten and not her²²

Through the performances the women were able to re-live an already lived experience, thus experiencing catharsis. This helped them view social problems from a new point of view (Dattoo, A 2011). The performances were therapeutic for the women as they enabled them to recognize personal oppression and realize that their experiences of oppression or discrimination were not isolated, which formed the basis for awakening of critical consciousness amongst the audience. It was emotionally liberating and motivating for the women to watch a positive and empowering end to their personal stories that were being enacted; like a rehearsal for their for their real life actions where the women had delegated the power to the character to act in their place (Boal, A 1979).

Emergence of Critical Consciousness – Private to the Public

The street theatre performances provided Vanangana with the chance to bring out the debate of VAW in public spaces and break the tradition of silence and awkwardness surrounding the issue. However complex the issue, theatre open spaces to discuss them.

The performances motivated and provided the women with the chance to speak and express their views on topics that are labeled 'sensitive and private' in front of their in-laws, husbands and children. When women shared their point of views and stories, they were stepping out of their personal habitus and by getting the women to speak the performances had achieved to affect the audience's habitus at a group level (Osterlind, E 2008).

Vanangana activists showed critical awareness by choosing to perform in those villages where reports of VAW and death of women due to violence had been reported. These villages where the events performed were fresh in the minds of the people and it directed the critical discussions post the performance. All the performances I observed were followed by extremely constructive discussions on ways of alternative thinking, stopping traditions that are harmful to women,

²² Personal interview with Deepti Mehrohra

moving ahead with the new times and developments in the rights of women and the legal framework.

The activists addressed the need for change from the traditional practices and the formation of an egalitarian society; by having discussions on the importance of education of the girl child, perils of early marriage and dowry, difference in the treatment of girl and boy child. Through these discussions the activists pushed back the limits of doxa exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted practices (Moi, T 1991) and generated critical reflection on the need for social change.

The performances were followed by constructive arguments that got heated at times. In the village of Barawara, a few men including the Head of the Panchayat took up the role of orthodox defenders, and constantly argued with the activist that it was the actions of the women that forced the men to be violent with them. The debate lasted for a while until the Head of the Panchayat advised the men to get a divorce in such cases but not abuse the woman. This was an extremely successful moment for the activists where the head of the village spoke in favor of the women, condemning VAW and supported the practice of divorce.

Importance of Collective actions

The performances provoked the redefinition of women's experiences and the performers advised methods for the community to work together in order to end VAW. Vanangana tried to build up a public opinion against VAW and educate the audience on the power of their actions when followed collectively.

They advised all parents in the audience to not wed their daughters in families that demanded dowry and to boycott such families. When no family is ready to wed their daughters to the man, he and his family will be forced to boycott the practice of dowry. It directed the village to boycott families that tortured women in their house and where women had been murdered, to stop inviting and involving them in social actions. According to the performers fear of being excluded from the community and of losing their family honor, two of the most important things for families in the rural areas would ensure proper treatment of women.

It informed the audience that when crimes are reported the headlines use the name of the village and not the individual. Hence crimes against women will bring shame upon the entire village. Thus performers used fear of shame to ensure collective action against VAW.

They appealed to the community to provide complete education to their daughters and not get her married before the age of 21.

Follow up and Supportive actions post the performances

While women don't always speak of their personal abuse during the performance, they contact Vanangana later either through calls or visiting their office. Vanangana received a minimum of 55-60 cases where women approach them after watching their performances. Often times they receive calls from the mothers of daughters who are facing abuse at their husband's house in a different village, asking them to help her. By daring to break the rules of acceptance and silence, women take the first step towards social change

Vanangana then proceeds with their work on protecting and supporting the woman through her fight to get justice. They provide temporary shelter to survivors and if the woman wants a divorce they help her with all the legal procedures. But if the woman wishes to return to husband, they have discussions with the husband and advise him to not repeat the abuse; once the woman returns the activists make sure to visit regularly to follow up on her condition. Many women that work with Vanangana now are survivors who were helped by the organization to escape the abuse and are now leading independent lives with the ability to bring up their children. Vanangana holds regular trainings for survivor women where they are provided with gender trainings on their rights, agency, sexuality; and skills trainings to earn a living.

Other Campaigns Initiatives

Despite the statistics there is growing awareness and an emerging public discourse on VAW in India. The work that Vanangana does with ST at the local level, is complemented with the use of social and digital media which has given rise to various innovative campaigns that reach wide audiences on a national level.

As a response to the numerous statements made by politicians and lawyers in India blaming the victim of rape and defending the rapists, a group of young stand-up comedians called 'All India Bakchod' created a video 'It's my fault'. The video featuring a famous Bollywood actress used satire to communicate their main message to stop blaming the victim:

"Ladies, do you think rape is something men do out of a desire for control, empowered by years of patriarchy. You've clearly been misled by the notion that women are people, too. Because, let's face it, ladies: rape... it's your fault."

The video discusses some of the statements made in public to defend the rapist such as women's provocative clothing, consumption of Chinese food that increases hormone levels and negative influence of Bollywood movies. The video received 5.9 million views and was widely discussed between people of all age groups on social media. Using the tool of satire, another group named Girlyapa released a video on marital rape, 'How I raped your mother'

which discussed the need for recognition of criminalization of marital rape and was viewed by 1.5million people.

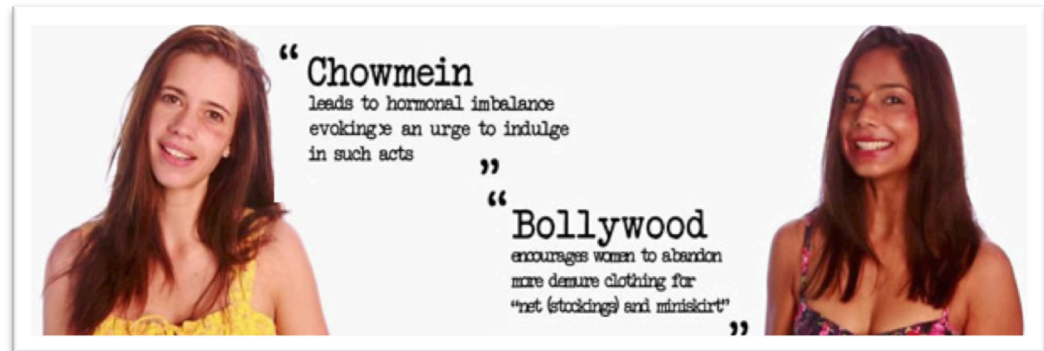


Figure 6 - AIB's It's your fault

'Bell Bajao (ring the door bell)' is another innovative campaign launched to combat domestic violence against women. The campaign released series of videos in which young boys and men rang the doorbells of houses where the woman was being abused to stop the act of violence and asked it's audience to do the same. It was a campaign specifically directed to involve men to combat gender-based violence. The campaign boasts of reaching 130 million people in India²³.

These campaigns cater primarily to the youth, upper middle class and upper class of the country that have access to the Internet and understand English. They directly impact the mind-set of the audience and contribute to their learning through logical and interesting discussions, between large groups of people with different point of views²⁴ and focus on involving, challenging and changing the attitudes of men. Social media has proven to be an effective medium for public campaigns; by bringing the issue of women rights to the attention of the larger public and mobilizing action and protests (Loiseau, E & Nowacka, K 2015).

Mainstream media has also started shows to promote change on television. Aamir Khan, a Bollywood super-star started a show 'Satyamev Jayate (Truth alone prevails)' which discussed various social issues that exist in India. The show narrated the personal struggles of the victims and educated the audience on the right practices via discussion with the experts and activists. Declared as one of India's most successful television series, it held discussions on issues of female foeticide, masculinities, VAW, waste management, caste system, LGBT rights. The show was telecasted in six regional languages and

²³ <http://www.bellbajao.org/home/about/>

²⁴ <http://www.careerride.com/view.aspx?id=15203>

watched by 600 million Indians (40% of the population)²⁵. The show raised over \$45million via donations for their NGO partners. A new legal framework was created for female feticide and the laws on child abuse and generic drug access revised due to societal pressure applied on the state after the telecast of the show.

With the ability to reach a mass audience these campaigns challenge the doxa not only at the local level but lead to debates and discussions on a national platform. VAW is now in the public sphere and is being debated amongst many sections of society. This supports the rural based ST work by Vanangana by contributing to breaking the silence and adds (Bollywood star legitimacy!) to their efforts of creating a public opinion against gender-based violence. While discussing the effect of Satyamev Jayate, activists from Vanangana shared that the show had created an impact on the people and was discussed in the villages.

²⁵ <https://impact.21cf.com/case-studies/satyamev-jayate---changing-a-n.html>

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

In this concluding chapter an assessment is made of the positive effects of ST and the role of Vanangana in dealing with VAW in rural India. In addition some limitations in their conceptualization and strategies are discussed.

Vanangana's use of Street theatre

In the larger battle against patriarchal power and authority these rural-based activists use the medium of street theatre to focus on the protection of women from violence. They highlight the gendered injustices in the society and create awareness for the formation of an egalitarian society where women will not be oppressed and have the freedom to speak up without any cultural, political or structural barriers.

The content of the plays direct the community to stop the acceptance of VAW and ignorance of it as a crime by treating women as equal members of the society with the same rights as men. Focussing on the structure of rights, the narratives create a framework of women's rights are human rights and recognizes the rights of a women to education, their legal rights to life, liberty, freedom of expression and right to work. However , Vanagana strategically choses to ignore two crucial violations of human rights in form of sexual violence faced by women and lack of property rights. As a strategy to end VAW, the plays help the women in recognizing their experiences of violence as a crime and aims to break the hegemony created by men and maintained due to acceptance by the women. While analysing cultural violence, the plays encourage the women to break the culture of silence by addressing the need to stop the internalization of social and cultural norms that legitimize VAW. The plays educate the audience on the legal framework developed and available for the protection of women. Through the content the plays introduce a urban based modern thought process (challenging the doxa), which affect the various structures of the village and aims to break the social consensus among the group on acceptance of the direct and structural violence.

The content places the responsibility of VAW on the gendered structures of family, judiciary, Panchayats. But the content of the play and solutions proposed focus the analysis on the structural violence mainly on the family. While the performances are not used as methods to apply pressure on the judiciary and the Panchayats, it critiques them for being gender biased and established on patriarchal beliefs, thus are unfair to the women who fight against the abuse and instructs them to compromise and focus on their families.

The street performances help the activists to break the socially constructed divide between the public and private that allow for continued oppression and violation of women. Watching a woman face the same abuse as her and then fighting out of it provides the women in the audience a platform for liberating their emotions when they can cry and be happy with the characters, provides them motivation to fight their abuse and the realization that they are not alone in their fight against violence. Its reach to the entire community provides the platform for activists to create a negative public opinion on violence and encourage collective action of the people against VAW.

The performers of Vanangana are members of the community and survivors of violence who communicate their personal experiences as individuals and members of an oppressed group. Street theatre provides the activists a platform to share their personal stories of abuse and their successful escape from this abuse. It is easier for women in the audience to connect with the performers because of their similar backgrounds in terms of levels of education, socio-economic status and similar identities as women who have been abused by their partners. The performances help the women to form a collective identity with the other women in the audience and with the activists of Vanangana. The performers act as role models for the women in the audience and motivate them to speak up; it instils the feeling of “if she fight the abuse and survive, then maybe so can I”.

“The communication process does not end with the construction of the message as empowerment through communication is not a fixed outcome” (Riano, P ed. 1994). Unlike other forms of theatre and groups performing street theatre, which too help in creating awareness, Vanangana is embedded in the community it works with. Along with raising consciousness, they support the women through the legal procedures, perform regular follow ups on the condition of the women and provide trainings for their development.

Although being embedded in the community comes with its own risks; despite the empowering performances of the women of the group and the inspirational stories of their life that portrayed their strength of their character; these performers faced the risk of being objectified as a public spectacle (Khan A 2000). In an interview with a performer of Vanangana Kes Rani she explained her nervousness every time she performs in a village where people from her family reside; “Some call my brother and tell him that his sister has become a nautanki wali” Nautanki Wali translates to street performer but is also used with negative connotation in society to disparage and stigmatize women as those who earn money by dancing for the entertainment of men. “Once I start performing my nervousness disappears and then I don’t care anymore”, she signs off.

Women as a homogenous category?

While analysing direct violence, the plays fail to include rape as its form even though most women of the survivor women I interviewed had been sexually assaulted. Rape is also one of the common forms of violence faced by Dalit women that form a part of the audience. The activists do not apply a fully intersectional approach and do not consider the differences in experiences of violence faced by the marginalised Dalit women from those of the upper caste women.

The plays create a homogenized identity of women in their narratives. They recognize the gender biases faced by all as a common struggle to form a bond of sisterhood amongst them. They recognize that women’s experiences of oppression are not isolated and encourage them to take a collective stand against VAW.

The focus is placed on women as a homogenous category based on gender discrimination and gender-based violence faced by all women. It does not consider the difference in treatment of women and the type of violence inflicted

based on their class and caste. A woman may experience violence on the basis her gender and caste, class and gender, religion and gender or only gender (Nanda, B nd). The narratives address the unfair treatment of women by the justice system, but there surely exists a difference in the treatment of a Brahmin and a Dalit woman by the courts, which they fail to take into account.

An analysis of VAW based on caste suggests that cases of dowry deaths and violent regulations on sexuality and mobility of women by their family are more prominent amongst women of the upper castes. Dalit women are most likely to face threat of rape and sexual assault at the work place and in public (Rege 1998). The vertical violence faced by women on the basis of their caste inequality includes gang rape by higher case men, punishments for being too assertive and demanding higher wages and right to land, public shaming and stripped and paraded to punish dalit men as a group (Nanda, B nd). In the district of Chitrakoot and Banda Dalit women face specific instances of gender based violence in the form of harassment and rape by forest officials when they go to collect wood, harassment by railway officials when they are caught without a ticket as they are poor and cannot afford the ticket and abuse by the hands of police officials in addition to the violence faced in the family²⁶.

While explaining Dalit standpoint theory Rege says that it is imperative for the 'difference' to be located to look at the real struggles of marginalized women and locating the 'different voice' of the Dalit women in their struggles (1998). Both the narrative's MJD and BT, fail to address the specific types of violence faced by the Dalit women and do not include their struggles. The plays speak about the issues that effect women regardless of their class and caste and the performance seeks to capture the minds of all the villagers regardless of their class, caste, gender or generation (Nagar R 2002).

The interventions required to tackle violence faced by Dalit women include changing the perspective and attitudes of people belonging to the upper caste towards Dalit's and their occupations, create avenues to help Dalit women report against state officials and projects to better the living conditions of Dalit women by access to resources and opportunities to give them strength and social standing in the community

The activists in their discussions with the audience suggest collective efforts to end VAW and call upon collective actions as an answer to achieve social change. It opens spaces by transporting the discourses of oppression from the individual (personal experiences) to the organization and finally to the public forming the narrative for the performances.

Concluding reflections

Pushpa (who leads the operations of Vanangana) describes her low days when she questions the meaning of all her work. "What difference does my work make in the society? Am I contributing to any sort of change? Numbers of domestic violence cases keep increasing but then I tell myself that it can be justified as increasing number of people speaking up against violence as well.

²⁶ Telephonic interview with Pushpa from vanangana

'That makes me feel better'. The increase in number is also an indicator of change where more women are claiming their rights. Number of women seen in the police stations and courts in the rural area of Chitrakoot and Banda are increasing²⁷. Topics of violence and sex are discussed openly both on public forums through various outlets of media and on private/public spaces of the streets.

While I observed the successful ability of street theatre to discuss the issue of VAW in public spaces, enabling women to accept their abuse as violence, encouraging women to speak up against gender discrimination, accepting the need for change by the audience; these can possibly be temporary reactions as well. Apart from the women who approach Vanangana to file a case; the question of the long-term effect of the performances on the audiences remain unanswered.

Street theatre is an effective method to initiate discussions on issues that are not spoken of in the public spaces of these villages and "in a very unobtrusive way they find a toe hole of getting people to think about discrimination"²⁸. But is street theatre an effective tool to attain social change and break out of one's habitus? There is a need for longer and in-depth studies to analyse the long-term effects of Street Theatre in the creation of a society free of violence against women.

²⁷ Personal interview with Pushpa

²⁸ Personal interview with Mala Hashmi

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Annexures

Annexure 1 – List of Feminist theatre artists/activists interviewed

- Mala Hashmi – Member of Jana Natya Manch (Janam) since 1977. Scriptwriter, artist and activist.
- Jyoti Mhapsekar – Founder of the Stree Mukti Sanghatana (Women's liberation organization). Scriptwriter of the play “Mulgi Jhali ho” (It's a girl!) and many others. Performing since 1983. Activist for women rights and solid waste management.
- Tripurari Sharma – Theatre artist. Active participant of the women's movement. Sangeet natak akademi award and Safdar hashmi award winner. Current acting director at the National School of Drama.
- Maya Krishna Rao – Theatre artist. Performed in the street play ‘Om Swaha’ on the topic of dowry related deaths. Also interviewed her on her street performance “Walk” on safe spaces for women after the brutal gang rape of a girl in Delhi.
- Deepti Mehrotra – Author. Academic. Was a part of the play ‘Om Swaha’ during the women's movement. Currently publishing on the use of street theatre during the women's movement.

