Asha Tamasha:
Theatre workshop with adolescents in Gautampuri and Gurgaon

"It is not the place of theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths can be examined. Maybe theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a rehearsal for revolution (1985:141)."

Details:
Gautampuri: On 26 March, 2022 with 21 adolescents (19 girls, 2 boys)
Gurgaon: On 31 March, 2022 with 18 adolescents (10 girls, 8 boys)

Introduction

Theatre is a possible medium to find possible venues to create or advocate for social justice and change. There is a vast amount of research that favours arts as a tool for empowerment for communities. Whether through poetry, music, paintings, graffiti, dance, or theatre, all who participate in the creation and exposition of such pieces claim that they possess a personal attached meaning.

Theatre is a great instrument for community development because it can identify and address the issues that a community experiences. It can encourage active participation from people to voice out their problems, tell stories which are used to help people express their understanding of what happens to them in their daily lives. It enriches the lives of people who participate in it as well as those who live in the community as well. Those involved on both sides of the stage represent a wide range of ages, cultures, and life experiences. A form of art which can be used as a tool for advocacy also leads to social and behavioural change. The arts encourage creativity and innovation, which are tools for building communities; they have the ability to promote sustainable communities, social cooperation and adaptation.

Theatre has the power to put people's realities in front of the people, it helps in realisation and acceptance, it builds perspective and helps in understanding questions of marginalisation, existence and power dynamics.

Two theatre workshops were conducted in Gautampuri and Gurgaon with adolescents. The workshops were designed to strengthen the learnings from previously held sessions on building self confidence and finding voice. The design also included modules on teamwork, building trusting relationships, non judgemental attitude, communication skills and critical thinking on using theatre for storytelling and advocacy. These are critical aspects for groups who want to design interventions for addressing issues of gender based violence through community based action.

21 adolescents (19 girls and 2 boys) in Gautampuri and 18 (10 girls and 8 boys) in Gurgaon attended the workshop. While both the workshops followed the same design, the content  

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1 The gender disaggregation is based on the genders assigned to participants at birth in both locations for the purposes of the report. Through subsequent conversations, any change in identity or orientation expressed by the individual will be recorded (with anonymity, if requested).
and discussions were different, given the different contexts and perspectives that participating groups brought to the discussion.

Because in earlier sessions, adolescents had spoken about how such a simple thing like dreaming and imagination now seems like a privilege in the face of their current realities, t

Adolescents participate in the Theatre Workshop in Gautampuri

Teamwork was an important element in this exercise, reflecting on their own performance, Priya, 18 year old in Gautampuri said “Mujhe bilkul accha nahi laga ki hum logo mein bilkul bhi patience aur coordination nahi tha. Hum agar aaram se karte toh kar sakte the issko (I did not like that we did not have patience and coordination amongst ourselves. If we would have done it with little patience we would have been able to complete the activity).”

Communication with each other was another learning and Neha, 17 years felt “Hum team mea perform hi nahi kar paa rahe the, koi kisi ki baat sunn hi nahi raha tha. (We were not able to perform as a team since nobody was listening to each other)”.

Since the adolescent group in Gautampuri have been conducting safety assessments in their community, a large part of their workshop focused on the concept of safety and visualising what a safe space would look like. While some did mention their school and their homes as safe spaces, one girl wrote “I feel there is no place safe for me”.

A 17-year-old girl in Gautampuri shared, “Mujhe apne ghar mein safe feel hota hai jab gharwaale na ho (I feel safe at home when my family members are not there)”.
The workshop in Gurgaon focused on framing storylines and scripting for a ‘nukkad natak’ (street play) on addressing gender stereotypes. Though the activity was light and fun, some of the stories that were shared were rooted in past and present experiences of violence and trauma in their lives. A young girl wrote about how someone was rejected by their parents for having done something wrong, it disempowered them and made them feel sad and angry. She went on to narrate that this individual then went to a place far away and learnt many new things to become strong and empowered again.
Adolescents framing storylines and scripting during the Theatre Workshop in Gurgaon

Adolescents shared how they felt after participating in the session:

“Mujhe bahut accha laga ki hume sirf apne pe focus karna tha kisi aur pe focus nahi karna tha. (I really liked how we had to focus on ourselves and did not have to focus on anyone else)”, shared a 16-year old adolescent girl in Gautampuri.

“Hume ye session bahut accha laga, hume bahut kuch seekhne ko mila jaise ki kaise humare beech mein jaane anjaane leadership nikli (We really liked this session and we learnt a lot about how leadership potential exists in us, whether we know it or not)”, shared a 17-year-old girl in Gurgaon.

Learnings

- Imagination, something that is taken for granted is also a privilege for many. The challenges of building back after covid becomes an even more pressing need when even young people as young as these view dreaming and imagining as a luxury and have all but given it up in the face of their present reality.
- It was hard for the participants to imagine safety and what a safe space would look like. The use of art based methods has been successful in creating safe spaces for holding even the most difficult conversations.