

## The Role of Media in Tribal Health and Educational Progress of Odisha

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### ABSTRACT

Theatre is an effective and popular media for the upliftment of marginalized groups of society, especially the tribal communities. The lack of exposure to education, healthcare, sanitation, lead the community members towards backwardness. The traditional food of tribes plays a vital role in their health and immunity. Theatre can provide good exposure to the community members to believe in themselves, to promote their culture and for their overall development. Applied theatre can educate the community more easily than speeches or any other mode of awareness given to them. Applied theatre can influence both literate and illiterate populations which have the potential to convey lifeless contents effectively. Drama, documentary, and other visual content can influence the mass is more than other mediums. The specialty of the brain to store visuals more than the audio signals can be also a reason behind its reachability to the masses. This can provide long time effect and can also be seen as a way to educate a community without their knowledge or active participation. The present study discusses the applied theatre initiatives of the Government of Odisha and other NGOs for the development of tribal communities, especially in the health and education sectors.

**KEYWORDS:** Applied Theatre, Tribal Health, Education, NGOs, Odisha

### INTRODUCTION

Theatre is one of the entertaining mediums which have been used since ancient times. In addition to the function of entertainment, it can act as a medium of education and awareness also. Theatre refers to a dramatic art of communication by which the audience can follow and understand the content of the same without any difficulty. It can create human connections across all boundaries for development. Theatre can be performed with or without a stage (street play). At present, both government and private organizations conduct theatrical programmes to convey their messages effectively to the masses. The role of theatre in the tribal area is more important than in any other area of society due to the backwardness of tribal communities. They are not educated enough to read/listen to and understand unattractive content. Such communities especially children focus on the awareness campaigns through mediums that can grab their attention. It is only through the medium of the theatre that the tribal people can socialize and come

out from their stigmas which are necessary for their overall development. The tribal communities reside in the hilly and dense forest areas where good transport and communication facilities are not available. The health and education status of tribes is very poor for several reasons such as lack of family support, low economic status, unawareness of modern skills and technology etc. The government and private organizations conduct various awareness programmes through the medium of theatre to educate the community and to improve the social, economic and health status of the community members. The contents delivered through theatre mediums can influence the audience more than the other education methods and thereby can ensure effectiveness.

According to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeva, "Theater Korle Lokashikkhe Hoy" theatre is the medium of mass education. As it can influence the mass easily and effectively, theatre can be used as a

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development tool for the upliftment of marginalized and underprivileged sections of society. Applied theatres are a good medium to convey messages or to educate a community. It has the potential to reach the grass root level, the illiterate and marginalized groups of society. They are a very effective way to discuss the issues of society/ community. They can hold the audience and deliver even lifeless content and create awareness. The contents delivered through theatre can effectively reach the masses and they give voice to the voiceless communities. There are a considerable number of such initiatives from the side of the government for community development.

The term tribes refer to the indigenous people who live in a remote area and have their own specific language, customs, tradition, and religious beliefs which distinguish them from other groups of people. Agriculture and the selling of forest products is the primary occupation of many tribal groups. Still, some are also engaged in hunting and hereditary occupation such as making craft products from bamboo, animal horns etc.

In the words of D. N. Majumdar, the tribe can be defined “as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes” (Dirani, et. al (2022) India is the homeland of around 645 distinct tribal groups as per schedule 5 of the Indian Constitution. According to the 2011 census, the tribal population shares 8.6% of the total population of India. Odisha is the residence of 62 tribal groups and form 22.8% of the total population of the state.

There are several challenges faced by tribal people which became a barrier to their upliftment, socio-economic condition and status of living. Tribes are backward in many areas, especially in the fields of health and education. They are shy natured and do not mingle with the main stream and thereby not aware of development activities and the need for the same. They are not aware of the importance of sanitation, nutrition, health, education and the problems created by the lack of sanitation facilities in the households. Many awareness campaigns are usually given in the local language of the state or Hindi/English. But, their mother tongue is rarely used. The government provides various schemes and facilities to improve the educational and health condition of tribal

communities but a lack of awareness about the importance of health and education aids their backwardness.

Nwadiwe (2012) found that drama and other theatre arts could make awareness programmes much more effective in the African societies, especially while dealing with culturally sensitive topics such as reproductive health. Thakur (2013) has studied how theatre has been used in India for various developmental programmes effectively. The researcher has done various case studies in different parts of the country and found that theatre is an effective tool to eradicate several evils such as gender discrimination, religious intolerance, poor health awareness, women trafficking, alcohol, drug addiction etc. which exist in the society. Sextou et, al (2020) found that the use of puppetry in health care awareness has a higher rate of success and through this medium, social messages can easily be delivered to the audience. Pehere & Yadavalli (2021) studied street plays which provide eye health education among the low-income communities in South India. They found that the audience of the play could reproduce the key messages of the play easily. Thereby street plays are a better way to educate people and to erase myths, blind religious beliefs, fear to undergo medication etc. from their minds.

Dirani, et. al (2022) reported that the theatrical methods are effective in conveying culturally sensitive messages to the society. Researchers studied the effectiveness of a reproductive awareness given to a community in Jordan through the medium of theatre and found it successful.

### **Objectives:**

To describe and assess the theatre initiatives by NGOs and the Government of Odisha for tribal upliftment to understand the role played by theatre in the health and educational progress of Odisha.

### **Research Methodology:**

The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. It is an attempt by the researchers to understand and analyse the theatre initiatives of the Government of Odisha and NGOs and the role of theatre in the health and educational progress of the state. The necessary data for the study was collected from various government websites, by conducting interviews with NGO workers, different tribal community members, etc.

## Results

### Theatre Initiatives by Government of Odisha:

#### 1. Adivasi Mela



(Source: [http://www.jantajanardan.com/daily\\_img/1167\\_S\\_Adivasi-h-3.jpg](http://www.jantajanardan.com/daily_img/1167_S_Adivasi-h-3.jpg))

The Adivasi Mela has been one of the most popular annual programmes organized by the ST and SC Development Department, Government Of Odisha at Bhubaneswar since 1954. Initially, it was a fair of one week, but from 2010 onwards, it has been conducted for 15 days considering the popularity of the event. The Adivasi Mela aims to promote tribal culture, tradition, craftwork and style of the living condition of Odisha. In this fair, all the tribal communities of the state participated with great zeal for representing their culture on a big platform. Because of the proper support and encouragement from the government, it became one of the most successful events in the state. The tribes who participate in the festival, make their traditional, tribal musical instruments, other types of equipment, etc. which attracts the urban population. During the festival time, every evening there will be cultural programmes presented by the tribal groups. Such programmes are the representation of their culture and the theme of the programmes will mostly be their medicinal practices, food habits etc.

This festival is also a platform for the tribes to sell the forest products and thereby, it is beneficial for the tribal communities economically also. This is also an encouragement for the younger generations to follow their traditional practices and art forms. In addition to this, it is an opportunity for both tribal and non-tribal communities to learn about each other's culture and traditions (Nwadijwe, C. E. 2012)

#### 2. Malyabanta Mahostav



(Source: <https://www.orissapost.com/malyabanta-mahostav-kicks-off-in-malkangiri/amp/>)

The three days Malyabanta Mahostav(fair) is organized by the District Council of Culture in association with the district administration during February the month at Malkangiri, Odisha. The Mahotsav is a platform for different tribal communities of the state and out of state to represent their culture and tradition through the medium of dance, drama, etc. It is also an opportunity for the tribes of Odisha to know about the tribal cultures and traditions of other states.



### Mayurbhanj Ustav

The Mayurbhanj Cultural Association is the co-coordinators of the three days Mayurbhanj Ustav at Bhubaneswar. The programme aims to promote the tribal culture of the Mayurbhanj district and protect the heritage of the district through theatrical activities. The “Makara Festival” of tribes performed in the form of drama is one of the attractions of this Utsav. The tribes are also allowed to sell their craft and forest products, food items etc. The local food stalls are also an attraction of the programme.



(Source:[https://m.timesofindia.com/city/bhubaneswar/mayurbhanj-fest-kicks-of-in-bhubaneswar/amp\\_articles/63336779.cms](https://m.timesofindia.com/city/bhubaneswar/mayurbhanj-fest-kicks-of-in-bhubaneswar/amp_articles/63336779.cms))

### Parab Festival

The District Council of Culture, Koraput organises the Parab Festival each year in the month of November. The festival includes several events such as sports, culture, seminars, mountain trekking, boat race and painting camps, etc. throughout the district. In addition to this, essay and debate competitions, book fairs, quiz and poetry competitions, and folk music and dance performances are the chief events of the festival. The festival also promotes the tribal culture and helps to improve the tribal education, health and socioeconomic status, etc. by ensuring the participation of tribes in the festival (Pehera, N. K. & Yadavalli, S. 2021)

### Theatre Initiatives NGOs

#### The Kandhei Nacha:

The Puppet dance- has been organised by the South Odisha Voluntary Association (SOVA) NGO of Koraput district. They use the puppet dance as a tool to promote education among the tribal communities of the area. The performers make aware the tribal parents, of the value of education and convince them to send their children to school. The doll dance also entertains the audience which is why, the tribes are interested to listen to the performance, and at the same time, the community members learn the importance of education as well

#### Nutritional Awareness for Pregnant Tribal Women and Infants – through Dance and Drama by SAKHA & KISS of Rayagada District:

The Kalinga Institute of Social Science (KISS) in association with SAKHA, is an NGO managed by transgender groups strive to create awareness of nutritional awareness for pregnant tribal women and

infants. Usually, tribal women are not conscious of their health even during the pregnancy period. Such neglect leads to poor food intake and various health issues for the mother and child. In this scenario, the volunteers of KISS and SAKHA educate the tribal women about the importance of nutritious food, the need to take care of pregnant women, etc. through the mediums of drama, dance, etc. (Sextou, P., Karypidou, A., & Sextou, E. K. 2020).

#### Jindal Stainless limited & Synergies CSR initiative through Pala for Malaria awareness:

Industrial times and the corporate sector also make significant contributions to creating health and educational awareness in society. Their methods of awareness are through camps, plays, rallies etc. and their main focus is to make the mass is aware of malaria through *Pala* (ballads) in the Jajpur district, an area vulnerable to malaria fever. There will be four to five people in the pala group, they sing and act to convey the message to the audience (Sextou, P., Karypidou, A., & Sextou, E. K., 2020)

#### ‘Bugin Ho’ school– Education through the medium of songs, dance, storytelling, skits etc. at Chandaka, Bhubaneswar:

The tribal term *Bugin Ho* means a place for good people, one of the innovative schools started by Bandana Patnaik (NRI), in Godibari near Chandaka, Bhubaneswar. The main objective of the school is to provide education to the tribal students through storytelling, song, dance, book reading and skits. It also gives importance to tribal students who drop out of school and encourages them to rejoin school and continue their education. This institution also creates awareness among the tribes about the importance of education and the need to get educated

### **Awareness programme on AIDS & Substance abuse, through the medium of Drama by the Phuntsokling Menlha Hospital of Gajapati district:**

The Phunstokling Menlha Hospital of Gajapati district, Odisha has been conducting awareness through drama in the backward tribal populated areas of the district about AIDS and substance abuse. The performers explain to the audience about preventive measures for AIDS, the problems of alcohol, drug addiction, etc. This programme has reported a positive change in society (Thakur, P. B. 2013)

#### **Implication on Tribes**

##### **Educational progress:**

Theatrical programmes also influence tribal children towards school education. The creative and new methods in the curriculum help to increase their interest in studies. Earlier, the school was a place exclusive for study purposes, but it has changed to a platform to express the skills and abilities of a child. Both teacher and student can enjoy the teaching-learning process through the medium of theatre which is very effective in the tribal areas.

##### **Health progress:**

The tribal mothers are more aware of the need for proper sanitation, healthy diet, covid precautions, etc. In addition, the health awareness programmes educate the tribal women about pregnancy care, sanitation, hygiene, healthy food habits, covid precautions etc. Both government and private organizations use various types of theatre oriented programmes to reach illiterate tribes who reside in remote areas to make them aware of health-related challenges and also to get proper solutions to these issues.

##### **Behavioral Changes and Socialization:**

Tribal people always prefer to stay isolated. They are comfortable mainly in their community and surrounding environment. Theatre programmes like dance, drama, and plays help the tribes to become confident, to get rid of their shy nature, etc. Theatre also plays a role in the process of socialization of tribes which is essential for their mental health and development.

##### **Economical upliftment- The traditional products of tribes become an income source:**

The annual tribal festivals are a platform for the tribes to sell the forest and handmade products. The majority of the tribes depend on forest products, which are very demandable in the market but due to the lack of transport and communication facilities, many were not able to come out and get benefits out of the same. Tribal festivals can address this problem to a limit. Such economic benefits also attract the

members of the tribal community to take part in the festival.

#### **Conclusion:**

The present study discusses the theatre oriented programmes of the Government of Odisha and the NGOs of the state. Drama, street plays, songs, etc. can have an impact on society more than other methods of awareness. Because of the ability of theatrical performances to deliver even mundane content effectively, such methods have been followed by various organizations to create awareness in the society especially to educate the illiterates and children. The researchers found that, theatrical performances can make a positive impact on the society, especially on the tribal health and educational progress of Odisha. The theatre modes of instruction make learning joyful and attract the students to school. It can reduce the drop-outs from the tribal areas. As theatrical performances have a high rate of success in the awareness programmes, the Government should conduct awareness programmes through the medium of drama or street play at least in the tribal areas, which will be much more effective.

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