

# **Popular Theatre and BRAC**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objectives of the study include evaluation of the popular theatre of BRAC as being performed, the extent of the messages being communicated through theatre, evaluate the changes brought about in the attitude of the attendees towards theatre, and the extent they take initiative in their development. We intensively observed two popular theatres (one organized by the Social Development Programme and the other by the Advocacy Programme of BRAC) and the catchments of these theatres. The villagers from the catchments, i.e., treatment group, were compared with a control group from villages where theatre was never held in terms of certain attributes related to theatres. Findings indicate that the programmes have standardized the process of conducting theatre without sufficient participation of the community for whom the theatres were being played. In spite of this the theatres were well communicated to the audiences, because the themes of the theatres were part of their experience. The theatres managed to conscientize them and brought a change in their attitudes. The audiences did not transform their changed attitude into action for development because they considered the theatres as entertainment only. They did not have a sense of ownership to it as they were not a part in the selection of the play, organizing it and acting in the theatre.



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# Chapter

# 1

## **POPULAR THEATRE AND DEVELOPMENT**

The scope of development has evolved over the past century. Earlier theories of development showed largely a perspective, focusing on the economic and material progress of human being, by believing that the gain of economic and material resources as the keys to accessing to all other resources. Current notion of development shows a marked shift from this stand towards a more holistic perception of development.

Today development emphasizes on the human development – positive change in the quality of life, in social, cultural, economic, and political environment – that can start at individual level and work into society, or vice versa (Todaro 2000, Ackoff 1984). In fact, development is viewed as changes, i.e., growth at the level of knowledge, skills, mind, and spirit. In this sense, development is the growth of a new consciousness, expansion of human mind, uplifting of human spirit (Moemeka 1994), and fusion of human confidence. This approach views human being as the subject, not the object of development, thus believes in the participation of human being in shaping realities for them (Sen 1999, Srampickal 1994, Mabogunje 1980).

While considering development, we must consider its components, its catalysts, and essential elements that work to trigger the reactions engendering development. In context, it is essential to look at three elements of development: communication – tool by which ideas are exchanged between people; participation – involvement of people and their interaction to enable their integration in the process; and empowerment – capacity to control one’s situation and life (Lyons *et al.* 2001).

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These elements have triangular relationship amongst themselves (Zimmerman 1995, Goulet 1995).

- Communication and participation: Communication is the strongest tool by which participation occurs. It emphasizes on dialogue, creating the opportunity for understanding various points of view, ensuring audience-oriented feedback, and joint participation. Without effective communication, participation is compromised.
- Communication and empowerment: Empowerment is a process that entails exchange of ideas communicated usually through dialogue. One can communicate when empowered. Implicit in the processes of empowerment is communication.
- Participation and empowerment: Participation is implicit in the process of empowerment. Empowerment can also be attained as a result of these processes. When people do participate they become active subject of knowledge and action instead of objectives of development, and work towards humanization thus becoming empowered.

As stated there are interplays between development and empowerment, participation, and communication (Lyons *et al.* 2001, Schwerin 1995, Batliwala 1994).

- Participation and development: Without an acceptable degree and level of participation, development becomes a process imposed on the population to be developed rather than designed and implemented by the population. Communication is an essential part of the current development paradigm, aligning itself with the process of participation.
- Empowerment and development: Empowerment processes are a series of experiences where people become aware of the context of their lives and learn how to gain access to and control resources, thereby taking ownership and control of their lives. Thus, empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power.
- Communication and development: Development is the interplay of communication and development processes – exchange of ideas to achieve the objectives of development. The goal of development communication is to generate empathy, raise aspiration and willingness to work to achieve aspirations, teach new skills, and encourage local participation in development; as well as to help reframe and facilitate the reinterpretation of the immediate world to fit into the context of the larger world.



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If development is the desired product, participation is the main catalyst, empowerment is the procedure and the by-product, and communication decides the proportion of these elements in the process.

Popular theatre and empowerment: Paulo Freire considered empowerment in the context of oppression and power (Freire 1972). Central to his discussion is the idea of dehumanization. It is the deprivation of dignity, respect, equity and equality, value, choice of freedom, and most importantly of power. Dehumanization is the basis of oppression. In context, empowerment is freedom from oppression and the opportunity to be as fully human as one is capable of being. Empowerment enables one to achieve dignity, equality, value, self-respect, freedom, and power.

Freire's conceptualization clearly weaves participation into empowerment. He advocates reflection and praxis, or reflection that leads to action, implying participation at the cognitive level and then at the active level. He also integrates communication into empowerment, as remarked – critical and liberating dialogue must be carried on with the oppressed. The focus is, however, on conscientization or raising awareness, and participation in the process of humanization, particularly on the part of the oppressed. This is where theatre plays a role in the process of empowerment. Use of popular theatre as a tool for development is however connected with the philosophy of popular education as advocated by Freire (Freire 1972).

The potential of art as a tool to communicate idea, to teach and educate, to engage people and finally to empower them is extremely high. Of different art forms theatre is believed to be most effective (Oakley 1991). There are several reasons for considering as such, thus choosing theatre as a means of communication for development.

- Theatre has universal appeal and application. It has long been there in the community, and is enjoyed by people therein.
- Theatre has a cultural relevance and can contribute in preserving and strengthening traditional values.
- Communicating in the local language in theatre contributes to the process of community participation.
- It is inexpensive, can initiate a process of reflection and action that can lead to change and has a high level of participation and involvement.

**Popular theatre:** The potential in participation is important to note with regard to theatre, especially when one recalls similar value of participation for development. This participation can translate into empowerment. In context it may be mentioned that popular theatre

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differs from traditional theatre because it is more participatory in nature. Bates (Bates 1996, p 227) defines popular theatre as

a group pedagogy aimed at the active, interpretive study of one's own social, economic, cultural and political conditions with the objective of researching and analyzing community problems, enabling dialogue and communication among community members as learners, and provide the foundation for collective action.

Thus, popular theatre is a learning process that tries to raise the level of critical thinking among all involved – those acting and those observing. Through this theatre audiences can realize that they can fight against oppression and can find a way of fighting against it (Srampickal 1994). Popular theatre as the most important performing visual art establishes real relationship with the society (Piotrow *et al.* 1999). In the process the individual or group by whom the theatre is being conducted are in a position to place their demand for socio-political changes by placing their ideology to the audience.

### **Theatre and communication**

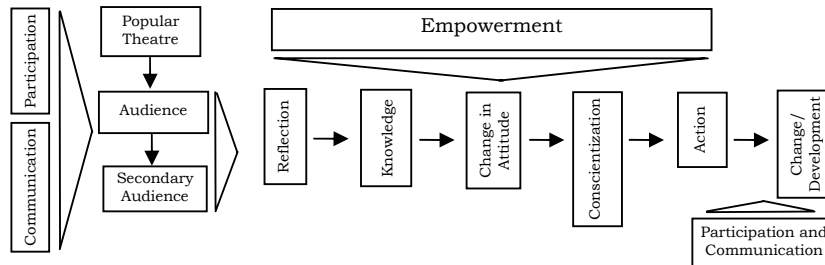
Communication as a concept implies that there should be some sort of information for transmitting to others, i.e., communication can be used as a way of generating knowledge and changing the situation. From this point of view different communicative processes are being used to initiate social development and social progress. Of these processes popular theatre is the most popular one. Communication involves some distinct functions which can be lined with the functions of the popular theatre (White 1994, Prentki 1998). The functions are:

- Expressive function – individuals express themselves effectively in order to create an identity for themselves (and their groups).
- Social function – by communicating with one another people develop a sense of community.
- Informational function – through communication, individuals can share information and thereby increase their knowledge.
- Control activation function – communication leads to joint action, modifying the environment and improving the situation of individuals and their groups.

The linkages amongst the concepts discussed so far are presented diagrammatically in Figure 1.1. Audiences after watching the popular theatre communicate its messages to others within the community not attended the theatre, referred to as secondary audience. The message is communicated through interactive dialogue participated by the players of the theatre and the audiences and then by the latter to the secondary

audiences. Such a dialogue leads audiences into a cognitive process involving critical interpretation of the root cause behind the problem presented in the theatre, e.g., causes behind their being in the oppressed situation. Such a thinking results in gaining a knowledge which in turn

**Figure 1.1. Process of development through popular theatre**



develops implicit responses, predisposition, or state of readiness to act in a characteristic manner to object, person, ideas, values, or situations in the social environment, i.e., attitude. It may be noted that the process of becoming conscientized is germane in attitude. More conscientized one is higher is the vigilance and stronger is the inclination in bringing a change in support to the attitude. Consequently, the person will take certain action to initiate change. Successful implementation of the action will bring change and development for the audiences. The process of reflection, change in knowledge and attitude, and becoming conscientized result into empowerment of the popular theatre audiences. On the other hand, action and development become possible due to participation and communication of the audiences.

Thus, the ‘development arena of popular theatre’ is used to analyze, discuss, and find solutions to problems. Popular theatre is used as a particular form of development communication. In the field of communication the role of theatre is same like opinion leaders. Communication for social change is the heart of popular theatre. In various developing countries popular theatre has been used to make people initiate change. Bangladesh is not an exception to this; Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee<sup>1</sup> (BRAC) has introduced popular theatre in 1998 for rural development.

<sup>1</sup> A non governmental organization devoted to promoting the welfare and development of the poor. Through its integrated multisectoral initiative, BRAC strives to bring the poor into the mainstream of development by empowering them and alleviating their poverty. BRAC is probably the largest non governmental organization in the world. As of March 2009 there were 50,431 fulltime and 63,932 part-time staff working for the organization.

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## POPULAR THEATRE PROGRAMME OF BRAC

Popular Theatre is an important development initiative of BRAC and is organized by its Social Development and Advocacy Programmes. In spite of being organized independently by two programmes the objectives of the theatres and their operational procedures are similar in both the Programmes but with minor differences. The objectives of the popular theatre are to:

- Build up awareness against all sorts of crimes/wrongdoings, injustices and corruption in the community;
- Stimulate the poor to build up their capacity, self-reliance, and self-confidence;
- Promote active participation of the oppressed people of the community in their wellbeing;
- Complement in the achievement of the objectives of other rural development initiatives of BRAC; and
- Promote folk culture of rural Bangladesh by using theatre in the development of people.

In addition to these objectives the theatres organized by Advocacy Programme has several additional ones exclusively focused on the ultra poor<sup>2</sup>. These are: firstly, popular theatre artists/performers would know about ultra poor and apprise others about them; secondly, motivate the people of all types to work for and assist the ultra poor; thirdly, assist in increasing/enhancing access of the ultra poor to resources and facilities; and finally, assist in changing the attitude of the common people towards the ultra poor.

Popular theatre, in fact, works as a communication network, thus, as a catalyst of change making aware and stimulates the audiences about existing problems in their surrounding. It generates dialogues on existing problems and issues so that initiatives and actions for possible solutions to these problems are taken into consideration in rural and urban setups.

The theatre team, headed by a Team Leader, remains in charge of performing the theatre in the village. The team members were employees, businesspersons, and farmers and were from villages around where the theatres were staged. The artists rehearsed the play at Training and Resource Centres of BRAC. The play did not use any script thus performance had a scope to improvise while playing their roles. The

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<sup>2</sup> Considered to be the poorest of the poor. Person with food intake amounting less than 1800 calories per day is considered to be ultra poor.

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artists were all amateurs but were paid a small honorarium for their performance.

The team is assisted by the Programme Organizer, Social Development Programme (PO SDP) stationed at the Area Office, i.e., the lowest tier of BRAC's field office. Both PO and the team are supervised by the Area Manager. As a policy a team stages a theatre in all the villages in a union<sup>3</sup>. After staging the theatre in all villages the team starts with another theatre similarly in the union.

A six-step procedure is followed in conducting a theatre but with a differential emphasis by Social Development and Advocacy Programmes.

**Community research:** It starts with the selection of an area, usually thana<sup>4</sup>, for popular theatre. BRAC staff makes an idea of the socioeconomic condition and state of cultural practices in the area. Next, the enthusiasts and cultural talents from within the area are identified. They are convinced to become the members of the theatre team by familiarizing them with the objectives of the popular theatre. The members of BRAC village organization<sup>5</sup> (VO) or their relatives, and cultural minded non-members committed to the development of poor people are usually included in the team. A team usually includes three females and seven males. As a policy the adult members of the popular theatre must be married and their spouses got priority in the selection. A team leader (Nitho Shokari), also known as Communication Worker (*Jogajog Karmi*), is selected from among the members<sup>6</sup>.

**Workshop:** In order to make forthcoming training a success the team conducts a workshop on venue, time, rules and regulations, agenda and objectives of the training, and mission, vision, and objectives of BRAC. An emphasis is given on orienting about ultra poor in the workshops held for the teams under Advocacy Programme. Regional Coordinator of the Challenging the Frontiers of Ultra Poor/Targeting Ultra Poor (TUP) programme works as a resource person in their workshop.

**Training:** A seven-day training is arranged for the theatre team under the Social Development Programme. Training starts with the community

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<sup>3</sup> Smallest local government administrative unit comprising of *mouza* (a defined revenue unit a jurisdiction list number ) and village

<sup>4</sup> An administrative division of a district. Also known as *upazila*.

<sup>5</sup> It is an organization of the villagers owning less than half-an-acre of land and at least one member of the family selling manual labour for at least for 100 days a year. An organization comprises of 35-55 members are formed with the females from the same village.

<sup>6</sup> Team Leader is responsible for doing the following activities: selection of venue for theatre, communication with community, discussion with elite persons, ensuring favourable environment for staging the theatre, managing equipment, costumes and all other necessary materials, and holding community meetings.

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research (*gano gabeshona*). Each member talks to the poor villagers particularly and others to know about appealing incidences that took place in their community. In the case of the team under TUP programme three days are spent in understanding the condition of the ultra poor, thus, team members develop empathy towards them, and gain ideas on how ultra poor's conditions can be improved by talking to all sections of the society. The members take note of observations and stories they come across.

Next, a story is selected from those collected by the members. The story is divided into 10-15 scenes and then through improvisation it is given a shape of a play for theatre but without distorting its basic form. Although notes are taken on the story to be played a script on the dialogue to be orated while performing the play is never made. The play is 45 minutes to one-hour long. The team rehearses on the play for about 5-6 days. During the rehearsal premiere shows are performed in nearby villages to perfect the play and upgrade the performance of the actors. In this way two plays are usually developed in a year.

**Performing the theatre:** A place centrally located in the village is preferred for the theatre venue as it is likely to be convenient for all villagers from any part of the villages to attend the show. The venue is selected as such that there is enough room for the audiences to sit in front and in sides of the stage. Liaison is made with community leaders and villagers around the venue so that the theatre can be held without any disturbance. PO SDP and Communication Worker go around the village and invites everybody they come across to attend the theatre particularly women. Elected public leaders, local elite, NGO leaders, and government officials all from their and neighbouring villages are especially invited to the theatre. The PO SDP compulsorily and other POs, such as PO Micro Finance from the Area Office, voluntarily attend the theatre to assist the team in their performance.

Staging the theatre starts with building a stage for it. The stage is 10 × 10 feet and is built by drawing local resources and cooperation of the villagers. The theatre starts with playing of songs by the team members. The songs are popular to the villagers as learnt during the community research. As the play does not have a written script the performers have a scope to improvise the dialogue by keeping the plot of the play intact. From the very beginning of the play the performers establish a dialogue with the audiences so that they become a part of the play. But, the dialogues, as a policy, are initiated only when positive themes of the play are in progress.

**Dialogue session:** At the end of the play a dialogue session is conducted by the BRAC staff and theatre team with the audiences. The session in fact is the continuation of the dialogue between the players and the

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audiences that has already been started during the play. The session has three dimensions:

- An organizer, usually PO SDP, of the theatre facilitates the audiences to express their perspectives, opinions, responses, and reactions based on what they have watched in the theatre.
- Any elite like UP member, if present in the session, voluntarily or in response to facilitation share his/her insights and learning from the theatre. This is usually done by combining events presented in theatre with the experiences from the villagers.
- The facilitator requires the audiences to get together at a place next day to hold a community meeting. Facilitator encourages them to think about the existing problems of their village and to figure out how the problems can be resolved/mitigated – issues to be discussed in next days meeting.

Post reactions of the audiences about the play are also recorded.

**Community meeting:** As proposed, next day a SDP-initiated community meeting is organized by the villagers. The objective of the meeting is that the villagers will make some concrete plan to improve their condition after being inspired by the theatre they observed. In the case of the theatres organized by the Advocacy Programme three community meetings are held. The first meeting is held following the theatre day, whereas the second and third meetings are held within 7-15 days intervals.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study has four objectives:

- Evaluate the process as to how the popular theatre of BRAC is being performed.
- Find out the extent the messages of the theatre are being communicated to the secondary audiences.
- Evaluate the changes in the attitude of audience in relation to the theme of the theatre.
- Evaluate the initiative of the audiences for development.





### **METHODS**

A three-member team including two anthropologists and a sociologist conducted this study. The team chalked out a detailed plan in operationalizing the study combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. More specifically the techniques were employed in data collection and in its analysis.

We included two intervention and two control villages located in two districts of Bangladesh. Brahmonkandi and Basudia were the intervention and control villages respectively in Kishoreganj district whereas same in the case of Lalmonirhat district were Fakirtari and Paschim Aambari respectively. The treatment villages were randomly selected from the list of villages where BRAC programmes scheduled to conduct theatre. For control villages, a list of villages where theatre was not performed was first prepared. Next, the control villages were randomly selected from the list.

The theatres watched were first to be arranged in the intervention villages though the villagers had watched some other theatres in the past. These (other) theatres were organized four years back in Brahmonkandi whereas in the case of Fakirtari it was organized about a year-and-half back. No theatre was organized in the control villages. It does not mean that the villagers from these villages never watched theatre as they could have watched the same in villages other than in their own where it was organized. Due to the location of the control villages away from any major road it was likely that the effect of theatre on the control villages was negligible compared to those in the intervention villages. Besides this difference, the control villages by chance were much smaller in size compared to intervention villages.

**Table 2.1. Sample size**

Location (District)	Wealth rank	Household census					Observation		Pictorial diary	Attitude		In-depth
		Intervention		Control			Play	CM		Intervention	Control	
	HH	HHH	HHM	HHH	HHM	Play	CM		Intervention	Control		
Kishoreganj	347	347	466	67	100	1	1	150	154	150	20	
Lalmonirhat	263	263	441	76	107	1	1	150	150	150	20	
Total	610	610	907	143	207	2	2	300	304	300	40	

HH – Household; HHH – Household head; HHM – Household member; CM – Community Meeting

Statistical representation was not a consideration in deciding the sample size in this study rather a size that would provide sufficient data to have adequate understanding of the issues dealt with. Data were collected through wealth ranking, household census, systematic observation of the theatre, pictorial diary, attitudinal survey, in-depth interview, and group discussion. Number of observations under each of these techniques varied depending on the necessity of the study (Table 2.1).

As a policy all the techniques other than wealth ranking were employed to collect data from those who were 15-60 years of age. It was believed that those below 15 years of age were not matured enough to rationalize their argument in favour of the attitude they preserved or their attitudes were yet to be firmly crystallized. Those who were above 60 years of age might have a well grounded attitude but in many cases due to physical deterioration were not in a normal form to place their arguments effectively for others' understanding.

Data collection started first in Kishoreganj district. After wealth ranking, household survey, and watching the theatre a three member team continued their work in the district; the rest moved to Lalmonirhat for data collection. A 14-member Research Team participated in data collection which continued from mid-December 2005 to mid-February 2006.

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## INSTRUMENTS

**Wealth ranking:** Wealth ranking was done only in intervention villages. The field workers divided themselves into teams of two and transect walked from one end to the other of the villages to gain an overview of their geo-physical and socioeconomic conditions. While walking through the village they took an inventory of the household heads in it and invited them to attend the wealth ranking sessions scheduled for next day. Several wealth ranking sessions were conducted in a village. On an average a session was participated by nine key-informants and continued for about five hours. All members did not stay throughout the period; those left in the middle of the session were replaced by some one so long observing the session. The sessions started with social mapping. Next, the participants classified these households in terms of four wealth categories – rich, middleclass, poor, and ultra poor – based on the criteria considered important by the key-informants.

**Household census:** A door-to-door household census was conducted both in the intervention and control villages. The census, instead of survey, had to be conducted for two reasons. Firstly, the census had to be conducted before the theatres were organized in the village; at that stage it was not known who from the village would attend the theatre. To have the profile of all those who attended the theatre it became necessary to have information on all villagers. Secondly, some of the analysis was on the entire village. It was believed that information based on all households of the village would be more appropriate than based on samples. We collected data mainly on socio-demographic and economic conditions, food security status of the households, interaction of the households with others during crisis, social interaction with others in the village, participation in social and religious events in the village, and experience from popular theatre.

**Observation:** Observation of the theatres involved two tasks – keeping a record of the attendees to the theatre and process documentation of the theatre. The Research Team arrived at the theatre venue more than an hour before it was scheduled. The venues had several entrance/exit points. The Research Team divided themselves into two-member groups and posted themselves in each of these points. The group filled out the audience's name, age, father's name and address in a numbered card while entering the theatre venue and handed them over a small slip with the matching number to the card filled out for them. The slip was taken back from the audiences when they left the theatre and their departure time was recorded on the slip. The process not only gave an idea of number of attendees but also on the length of time they watched the theatre. Number of young villagers helped the Research Team in this exercise particularly in making the children and few others in availing the designated entrances/exits to the theatre. A member of the team observed and recorded the dynamic of the theatre starting from building

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stage till the villagers and staff left the venue after the theatre was over. The observation was a structured one.

Besides theatre, dialogue sessions held after the play was over and the community meetings held on the following and subsequent days were observed. Implementation of the decisions taken in the meetings was also monitored.

**Pictorial diary:** It was likely that the audiences would discuss the themes of the theatre among themselves and others within the village who did not attend the theatre. In order to study such a communication the audiences were selected in proportion to age and gender of those who attended the theatre. The extent to which the messages of the theatre were communicated was recorded with the help of a pictorial diary. The diary had two sets of pictures one representing the selected themes taken from the theatre and the other representing different types of people the audiences might have shared the theme with. The samples selected for this exercise were first oriented on the content and how to keep records in the diary. They were instructed to connect the theme they discussed with the type of people with a pencil drawn line. They were supposed to sit with the diary at the end of the day, recollect all the communications made on that day and accordingly draw lines. For multiple communications multiple lines had to be drawn. In the top right corner of each picture number of communications made were recorded. A page was assigned for all the communications done in a day. Two Research Team members were assigned to monitor the use of diary by the sample audiences. The record keeping on the diary was continued for 22 days in Brahmonkandi and for 19 days in Fakirtari, i.e., period so long the audiences kept on communicating on the theatres.

**Statement:** We tried to fathom the difference in the attitude of the audiences after they attended the theatre in the intervention villages with that of villagers from the corresponding control villages with the help of an attitudinal scale<sup>1</sup>. The scales measured the attitude of the respondents on four parts – discrimination and exploitation, sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Attitude scales consist of sets of standardized statements with which people are asked to agree or disagree. Scaling assumes that an attitude will have various aspects that in their totality constitute the attitude being measured. It also assumes that people can be ranked along a continuum representing varying degree of 'strength' or 'intensity' with which an attitude is held. The sets of standardized statements are selected from some larger pool of items that cover the relevant aspects of the attitude, selection being based initially on exploratory research in which people respond to all statements, or on the judgment of a panel of evaluations. The intensity or strength with which people hold the various aspects of the attitude is measured by rating scale items by asking respondents how much they agree with a statement (often on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') or by asking them to choose between a number of different statements or each item. Attitude scale produces a single score for each individual that is constructed out of this multiplicity of items, so that each respondent can be placed somewhere along the attitude continuum.

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relationship and gender discrimination, social justice and its implementation, and optimism towards positive changes – in relation to the plots of the theatres reflected in selected statements. The statements reflected situations with which respondents were asked to agree or disagree. The statements were selected after a limited reliability test. Sixteen statements were grouped equally under four parts. Total score for each respondent was computed by summing up the responses against each statement.

To compare the attitude the respondents were randomly selected from those who attended the theatre by keeping it proportional to their age and gender. The respondents from the control villages were randomly drawn for the purpose proportionate to age and gender of the respondents drawn from the intervention villages.

**In-depth interview** was conducted at two levels. At one level it diagnosed the attitude of all the respondents who scored the statements. The objective was to find out how respondents rationalized themselves in supporting or not supporting the statements with a special emphasis on decoding their cognitions and affects behind holding the attitudes. The exercise was conducted with the help of unstructured questionnaire where interviewers tabbed above-mentioned information through long conversation with the respondents on each of the statements.

At another level, in-depth interview was conducted on 10 male and 10 female respondents from those selected for the exercise on pictorial diaries from each of the intervention villages. The objective of the interview over here was to understand the dynamics that went in the discussion on theatre between these respondents and others in the society. More specifically the interviews tried to find out how successfully the messages of the theatres were transmitted, efforts made in the transmissions, and reactions while receiving the messages.

## **VARIABLES**

We dealt with three sets of dependent variables mainly attendance to the theatre, communication of the theatres to others, and attitude towards the themes of the play.

The dependent variables were appraised in terms of a set of socio-demographic determinants – age, education, marital status, NGO membership status of the respondents, food security status, and wealth ranking of their households. The section also includes rationalizations as to how these variables could directly or indirectly influence the dependent variables.

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**Age:** An individual increasingly gains experience and knowledge with age until at the later part of the lifecycle when his/her physical and mental capabilities deteriorates. It has also been observed that generally individuals at younger age remain more dynamic, progressive, and receptive to new ideas but with aging gradually loose these capabilities and become more conservative. Thus, lifecycle by itself and for factors associated with it was likely to mold one's attitude.

**Gender:** Males and females besides being physically different are also socialized differently, have different status, responsibility and access to resources. The respondents being influenced by these factors are likely to have a bearing on the dependent variables.

**Education:** Respondent's education was assessed based on the last grade they successfully completed. It was assumed that the respondents with less than three years of education could not make any practical use of formal education and it did not play any role on the formation of their attitude. Number of years spent in education was likely to have positive association with attitude.

**Marital status** can lead to a variation in the dependant variables. The relationship with spouse involves mutual responsibility, authority, dependence, accountability, affection, love, etc., very different from what ones experience prior to marriage. These factors might change or develop attitude on the dependent variables.

**NGO membership:** An overwhelming number of NGOs involved in socioeconomic development in Bangladesh emphasizes upon the empowerment of women. Accordingly, they have programmes to make their members aware of the injustice and disparity that the women are subjected to in our society – conscientization. Such programmes are likely to have an effect on the dependent variables for persons associated with the programmes.

**Food security and wealth ranking:** At the household level, food security is defined as sustainable access of the household to sufficient quantity and quality of food to ensure adequate dietary intake and a healthy life for all members therein (FAO 1992)<sup>2</sup>. The respondents provide information on the food security status of their households. The food security has been assessed based on the perception of respondents; who were asked to provide structural responses on the level of food security of their households by making a self-evaluation on the food produced, food

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<sup>2</sup> The food insecurity of a household can be chronic or transitory. Chronic food insecurity is a persistent inadequacy of diet resulting from the continuous inability of households to acquire required food from production or purchase. Chronic food insecurity is rooted in poverty. Transitory food insecurity, on the other hand, is a temporary decline in a household's access to required food due to factors such as instability in food prices, production, or income.

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available, and their purchasing power during the preceding year<sup>3</sup>. As mentioned before, the villagers were also grouped based on aggregation of selected criteria representing their economic condition by using PRA technique.

Food security and wealth rank groups were likely to be economically homogenous and could be ordered hierarchically forming an ordinal scale. The groups for having a commonality were likely to have a distinct trend in terms of their association with the dependant variables.

**Communication variables:** Two communication variables were employed to understand the process of communication of the theatre messages to the community. The communications were tabbed for three days. It was assumed that the pattern represented the whole year. Communication with relatives in last three days represented mainly the extent of respondent's relationship with the people of his/her group outside the family. Communication with Union Parishad<sup>4</sup> (UP) chairman in last three days indicates the quality of relationship. A person who managed to have contact with the chairman of UP was in a position to establish communication with people of any rank within the village in most cases.

**Attendance in *Waz mahfil*:** Performing of theatre of any kind is proscribed by Islam. *Waz mahfils* are targeted towards preaching the teachings of Islam and in influencing people in following the dictates of Islam. People serious in practicing Islam usually attend the *Waz mahfil*. These religious minded people are not likely to do any things proscribed by Islam, thus would refrain themselves from attending the theatre.

**Participation in group activities:** Participation in arbitration and political activities, and involvement with local clubs were taken as proxy indicators of participation in group activities within the village. Both active and passive participants were considered. Participation in the latter case included just attending and observing the activities of the institution. People participating in these activities were likely to be interested with the problems of the village, in bringing social changes, and in cultural activities. All the three aspects were covered in the theatres observed. Therefore, it was likely that villagers with such

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<sup>3</sup> However, the amount of calorie intake, quality of food, or intrahousehold distribution of food consumption did not receive consideration in assessing the overall food security of the households. To keep the picture simple such nutritional aspects were not covered in this study.

<sup>4</sup> The administrative body (also called as union parishad) in the union, the lowest administrative unit in the rural area. The council is headed by an elected chairman. It also included nine elected ward members each representing a ward and three elected female members each representing three wards.

<sup>5</sup> Religious meetings where teaching on Islam are given to the audiences by the Islamic scholars.

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participation/involvement would likely to be interested in attending the theatre and disseminating its messages.

**Reads newspaper:** Problems of the society are widely covered in the newspaper. A person who reads newspaper is not only more knowledgeable but also likely to be sensitive to social problems. Therefore, they also were likely to attend a theatre dealing with these issues and also disseminate the message of the theatre to others.

### **ANALYSIS PLAN**

Data derived through implementing above instruments complemented/ supplemented each other where found appropriate in the analysis. Number of statistical techniques, ranging from simple frequency distribution of attitudinal scores to regression, tested the association between attending the theatre and communicating the message of theatre have been done. The techniques have been described further where used in the analysis. Qualitative techniques were employed to describe situations, understand the association amongst the quantitative variable, and investigate the rationales behind holding certain attitude. The findings derived from qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were also cross referred where considered necessary.



### **DYNAMICS IN THEATRE**

This section describes the proceedings of popular theatre starting from their inception to dialogue session held at the end of the theatre under selected heads. The section is based on the observation of the process by the research team other than a sub-section on the factors that led to the participation of the villagers to the theatre.

#### **Selection of venue**

The venues of the theatres happened to be the courtyards of the villagers with roads running by the sides, in both cases, were selected by the Communication Worker in consultation with PO Social Development (Appendices 3.1 and 3.2). Some villagers in Brahmonkandi proposed to select the courtyard of UP Ward member's house located by the side of a road and shops as the venue of the theatre. In spite of the location having a space large enough for the theatre was not selected for being located somewhat in western part of the village. It was believed that the theatre at such a location would not draw the expected number of females and children to the theatre, particularly from the eastern parts of the village. The venue selected was somewhat centrally located, believing that it would draw audiences from all sections of the village, particularly women. It was an open space rectangular in shape surrounded by houses and had a BRAC school at its one end. The space allowed the audiences to watch the theatre from the veranda of some of the houses surrounding the venue. Unlike Brahmonkandi, selecting a venue in Fakirtari was not that easy. The number of villagers declined to the proposition of arranging the theatre on their land considered suitable for the purpose. As a result a place had to be selected, quite narrow in breadth with number of trees at one end; likely to obstruct the view of audience under those trees. It was believed that the venue did not have enough room for the entire audiences expected to attend the theatre. As a

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whole the venue was not ideal for arranging a theatre but there was no option.

### **Preparing the stage**

The stage built was about 10x10 feet with three sides open but at the rear covered by cloth and had a roof on four bamboo poles. A greenroom also walled by cloths was built behind the stage attached to its rear wall for the artists. The artists could come to the stage from the green room through an opening with a curtain hanging on it. As a whole the stage was a simple one. BRAC staff started building the stage about two hours before starting of the theatre. They brought cloths with them to make the walls, and roof, but the bamboo pillars holding the roof were supplied by the villagers. In Brahmonkandi, villagers lent a big *chawki*<sup>1</sup> which was used as the floor of the stage but in Fakirtari such a raised platform could not be arranged for better view of the audiences particularly at the back. The stage in Brahmonkandi was illuminated by a tube-light powered by chargeable battery cells but in Fakirtari petromax (hazzak) light was used for the same. In both cases the lights were rented. No sitting arrangement of any sort was provided to the audiences. The villagers not only supplied the resources but also helped BRAC staff in constructing the stages.

### **Campaign for theatre**

A large-scale publicity was not made on the staging of theatre. BRAC staff just invited the villagers verbally to attend the theatre they came across on their way while selecting the venues and arranging the theatre. Of course, the owners of the courtyards invited the villagers they socialized with to watch the theatre. Most of the villagers came to know about staging of the theatre from the children. One of the reasons why staff did not make a large-scale invitation was to avoid the presence of an audience size that the venue could not accommodate.

### **Arrival pattern of audience at the venue**

Audiences, particularly children, started arriving at the venue, about an hour-and-half before the schedule. Again some arrived late as they had to take care of their households before coming to the theatre. Most of the audiences particularly women and girls, came in small groups from their *paras*. Many of these women brought young children and a few outside-village guests with them. The children had to be looked after when play was in progress. A good number of female audiences were accompanied by their husbands. Again a number of females came to the theatre by themselves. They came to the theatre without the consent of their

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<sup>1</sup> Wooden bed without head and foot stands.

guardians, and they believed that they would be excused for their defiance. As the venues, in both the cases, were by the roadside a good number of passersby returning from work or market stopped to watch the theatre.

### Who attended the theatre?

The theatre in Brahmonkandi had 603 audiences attending against 415 in Fakirtari. Some of these audiences were passersby, finding theatre being performed on their way stopped and attended it. The audiences could also be divided into those coming from and outside the theatre-villages. Although a limited campaign on theatres was made by BRAC staff the villagers from neighboring to the theatre-villages learnt about the theatre from inter-village communication and attended it. The theatre in Brahmonkandi had 75 percent (453) audiences as against 76 percent (314) in Fakirtari from their own villages. Of these audiences 49 percent (222) in Brahmonkandi and 60.5 percent (190) in Fakirtari were aged 15 and above. These audiences belong to this age group were all from the theatre villages.

**Table 3.1. Factors contributed to villagers' participation in popular theatre (n=412)**

Variable	R value	Odds ratio	Significance
Communicated with relatives in last three days (1 = communicated, 0 = not communicated)	0.00	1.2	0.16
Communicated with chairman/member in last three days (1 = communicated, 0 = not communicated)	0.00	2.7	0.04
Attend <i>waz mahafil</i> in the locality (1 = not attended, 0 = attended)	0.00	.7	0.02
Participates in village arbitration (1 = participated, 0 = not participated)	0.01	1.6	0.01
Participates in political activities (1 = participate, 0 = not participated)	0.01	.6	0.00
Involved with club activities in locality (1 = involved, 0 = not involved)	0.00	.3	0.02
Reads newspaper (1 = reads, 0 = does not)	0.00	1.5	0.18
Age (Continuous variable)	0.02	1.0	0.00
Education (Continuous variable)	0.00	1.0	0.02
Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>		0.03	

Obvious question arises, what are the factors that contribute to villager's attendance to the theatre? To answer this question a logistic regression, predicting the odds of villagers' participation in the popular theatre<sup>2</sup> have

<sup>2</sup> The dependent variable included villagers 15-60 years of age and have been entered as binary variable (1 = attended theatre, 0 = not attended theatre) in the model.

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been run (Table 3.1). The result indicates that the overall effect of communication with chairman of UP in the last three days, attendance in *Waz mahfil*, participation in village arbitration, participation in political activities, involvement with club activities in the locality on the dependent variable – participation of villagers in popular theatre – was significant. Tests indicate that there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables. Inclusion of the variables – financial security, wealth ranking, and NGO membership status – did not add to the strength of the model. In spite of these it must be mentioned that the model explained only 3 percent of the causes for villagers' participation to the theatre.

It is possible to infer from this analysis that the villagers who communicated with chairman, attended *Waz mahfil*, participated in village arbitration, politically active, and those who were more involved with club activities were the most enthusiastic in participating in the popular theatre.

Although a great enthusiasm was noticed among villagers in attending the theatre, it was also noticed that some of them left the theatre before it was over. About 26 percent of the audience both in Brahmonkandi and Fakirtari left the show before it was over. Such a tendency led us to look for the factors which made audiences to watch theatre till its end.

A logistic regression, predicting the odds of villagers' remaining in the theatre till its end have been run (Table 3.2). Tests indicate that there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables. The result indicates that the effect of attendees' age, sex, and wealth ranking were significant. With the increase in age the chance of audiences remaining in the theatre till its end decreased. Audiences 10-14 years of age were 8 times more likely to stay in the theatre till its end compared to those 35-44 years of age. Compared to female, male had 60 percent higher chance of remaining in the theatre till its end. Poorer had a higher chance of remaining in the theatre till its end than those who were well off. In fact ultra poor had about 5 times more and middle-class had about 2 times more chance of remaining in the theatre till its end compared to upper-class. It can be inferred from the findings that younger and poorer were the audiences and if they were male they had a higher chance of being present in the theatre till its end. In spite of all these, it must be mentioned that the model explained only 6 percent of the variations causing audiences to remain present in the theatre till its end.

**Table 3.2. Factors contributed to villagers' participation in popular theatre (n=305)**

Indicators	B	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Age in years			
10-14	0.00	1	
15-24	-0.377	0.7	(0.2-2.2)
25-34	-1.023	0.4	(0.1-1.4)
35-44	-1.416	0.2**	(0.6-1.0)
≥ 45	-0.701	0.5	(0.1-2.1)
Sex			
Female	0.00	1	
Male	0.67	1.6*	(0.9-2.8)
Marital status			
Unmarried	0.00	1	
Married	-0.120	1.1	(0.5-2.5)
Widow/widower/divorce	-0.068	0.9	(0.2-3.9)
Year of schooling			
No schooling	0.00	1	
Primary	-0.428	0.7	(0.3-1.3)
Secondary ≥	-0.029	1.0	(0.5-2.1)
NGO involvement			
NGO household	0.00	1	
Non NGO household	0.289	1.3	(0.7-2.4)
Wealth ranking			
Upper	0.00	1	
Middle	0.596	1.8	(0.8-4.1)
Poor	0.726	2.1*	(0.9-4.8)
Ultra poor	1.524	4.6***	(1.9-11.3)
Constant	0.912		
- 2 Log likelihood		427.924	
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>		0.06	

\*\*\*Significance at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$

### **Familiarity of villagers with popular theatre**

Villagers were not unaware of the theatres being organized in the neighborhood before. In fact, 57.3 percent (868) of the respondents from the intervention villages and 48.0 percent (168) from the control villages knew that the theatres were being organized in their or in neighboring villages. These performances mainly included popular theatre and musical dramas (*giti natyo*) organized by local schools or clubs and outside organizations like BRAC, Rongpur Dinajpur Rural Services, and Information Ministry of the government. These organizations, like BRAC, also drew local supports and resources in staging their shows. Majority of the respondents, i.e., 72.8 percent (809) from intervention and control villages together, mentioned that BRAC was most active in organizing these theatres. About four years back theatre was last held in Brahmonkandi whereas it was one and half years back in Fakirtari.

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Although most of the respondents were interested in attending theatres whereas only 9.5 percent (177) would do that if organized in villages outside their own.

The villagers were not only aware of the fact that theatres were being organized but also to an extent of the probable effects of observing on the audiences particularly those organized by NGOs. Forty-three percent (447) of the respondents mentioned that their knowledge on the issues focused in the theatres increased after observing these theatres. In contrast, 21.4 percent (222) were very specific by mentioning that they became more conscious about certain issues dealt by the theatres and those were related to their lives. Of the respondents, believing that the theatre they watched had an awareness building and educational value, 81.9 percent (174) for the intervention and 75.5 percent (170) for the control villages, were not associated with any NGO. The respondents happened to be deficit in food supply and those aged in between 15-34 years believed more in number compared to others that the dramas had impacts on awareness and on education raising. Eighty-three percent (863) of the respondents believed that the theatres could bring social change.

### **Sitting pattern**

Although sitting of the audiences to a great extent was shaped by the physical setup of the courtyard, even within this a sitting pattern in both the locations could be observed (Maps 3.1 and 3.2). Children sat on the ground closest to the stage covering all three of its open sides. Females also sat close to the stage but on the left and/or right sides of it just after the children. Behind these groups a large number of males were sitting. All these groups were sitting on the ground. There was another group of males standing on the far end of the courtyard. In Brahmonkandi this standing group positioned themselves in a crescent shape whereas, in Fakirtari the group took position from the left end of the stage after children and extended themselves under the trees at the far end. A group of female crammed themselves in a triangular shaped space in the right central part of the gallery. Those who brought chair and bench with them took position in the right side of those sitting on the ground. Some females watched theatre from the veranda of their houses surrounding the courtyard. Some audiences brought mats and straws with them to sit on the ground, but most of them sat on the ground without anything under. As a whole both the places were crowded by the audiences. So, many people, especially women and adolescent girls had to struggle to watch the theatre.

### **Starting of theatre**

The theatre started on time after Magreb prayer (6:00 pm) in Fakirtari. Same was scheduled after Esha prayer (7:30 pm) in Brahmonkandi but

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the starting got delayed by about a hour-and-half due to late reporting of an artist to the venue. He could manage to report only after closing his business. The show started with a session of songs played by the theatre team. A few instruments like harmonium, *tabla*, and *dhole* supported the songs. Due to the late arrival of the artists the session on songs was prolonged in Brahmonkandi. This was done to keep the audiences occupied and refrained them from making complains for the delay in starting the play.

**Box 3.1 Plot of the play: wakeup consciousness**

There was a poor man who used to work as a security guard in the local weekly market, but was discharged from the job by the market committee for becoming too old. His son moved out to in-law's house after marriage and was not supporting him at all, even after he lost the job. As a result economically he became helpless. In the midst of this a bad man of the village started harassing his grownup daughter. To protect her from the bad man he wanted to arrange her marriage immediately, but failed because he could not provide dowry. To make the situation worse, an influential businessman from the locality, happened to be a member of UP, forcefully took possession of his land after producing a fake document of ownership. The poor man could not prove his ownership, as he could not pay the fees to get the duplicate of the original document of ownership issued by the land registration office.

In spite of wrong doing of the businessman the villagers did not dare to come to poor man's help due to the influence he had in the locality. But, unlike the businessman his son Mutaleb used to come to the help of the helpless and the oppressed. After some time he and a young doctor from the village stood up against the illegal act of the businessman. The doctor by spending his own money got the original document of the land issued from the registration office showing the ownership of the poor man. Not only that, he and Mutaleb created an opinion against the businessman by showing the document to the villagers. As a result a *shalish*<sup>3</sup> (village arbitration) was organized. The verdict of the village arbitration went in favour of the poor man, thus he got back his land with the help of a few good men of the village.

Location: Brahmonkandi, Kishoregonj

**Plot of the theatre**

The plays were developed based on the incidences (plots) that took place within the localities but not necessarily in the villages where the theatres were held (Boxes 1 and 2). Both the plays focused on the incidences of

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<sup>3</sup> It is a customary justice, which usually runs by village head/chief in counsel with their traditional culture or beliefs in term of pre-modern notions of statehood and local governance. These are not recognized by the state law as official forms and their decisions and subsequent enforcement actions have no force in law. It has no fixed dimension and its size and structure depend entirely on the nature and gravity of the problem at hand. Schraf (undated: 4)

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exploitation and deception which victimized the weaker sections of the villagers – the female and the poor. Although the plays depicted the sad incidences from rural lives ended with a ray of light hinting how to make the society a better place for all. A good number of villagers attended the theatre were familiar with the plots. As because of this in one hand it became easier for them to follow the play, and on the other it interested them the most. The theatre and related issues are discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

**Box 3.2 Plot of the play: For how long?**

Apurba Ray was a teacher in a government primary school. He used to perform in cultural events. In one such event he met Rupali, who used to stay in a mess close to her house. Apurba and Rupali started seeing each other and soon it developed into a love relationship between them. Seeing this Rupali's friends advised her to get Apurba in her control.

The love relation at one stage led to a sexual one and she became pregnant. She kept the news secret to herself but had to disclose it to Apurba after 5-6 months and proposed him for a marriage. Apurba said that she should go for abortion first and only then he would marry her. Rupali did not accept the condition. Finding no other way Rupali broke the news to her parents. They informed the incidence to the local chairman and members. They asked them to get married but Apurba did not agree to it. Apurba kept on insisting on abortion. One day Apurba allured her to a clinic in local bazaar for abortion. After understanding Apurba's motive in bringing her to the clinic Rupali played a trick and escaped from there to the local police station. The police station handed them over to the chairman of UP. The chairman got them married.

Apurba started staying at Rupali's house but escaped from there after a few days. Apurba proposed money to Rupali's father for a divorce to be initiated by her. Her father refused to take money rather insisted on their continuing of married life. As he was adamant, Apurba's elder brother hid one of Rupali's friends and then filed a trafficking case against her in the court. Rupali was arrested. Finding no way out her father went to Apurba's family and proposed for a settlement but received a cold shoulder from them. Later on the case was withdrawn from the court only after money was given to Apurba's family and of course after the divorce from Rupali.

Rupali was released from the jail. She was still carrying Apurba's baby and was in a miserable condition. Who would be her partner and baby's father? She became almost insane by questing answers to these questions. The well-off and the influential in the society often taunt Rupali whenever they get a chance. She thought of committing suicide for being deceived and humiliation that she was facing in the society but could not because of the baby she was carrying.

Location: Fakirtari, Lalmonirhat



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## **Theatre environment**

The intervention villages had limited scope for entertainment. Thus, many villagers particularly children were eagerly looking forward in watching the theatre. The audiences arrived at the venue spontaneously, and irrespective of age and gender they were in a festive mood throughout the show. That is why the audiences did not hesitate to stay in an open space without a pandal overhead during one of the coldest winter night to enjoy the theatre.

Although enthusiastic, audiences were not very supportive in maintaining a congenial environment for the theatre, i.e., not quiet before and when the show was in progress so that the dialogue could be heard by all the audiences. There were varieties of reasons, not equally relevant for all audiences, for that.

- Some audiences were talking, as they did not have any idea that it was important to remain silent to allow others to hear the dialogue.
- A group of audiences were making noise as hearing songs or the dialogue of the play was of no interest to them. Finding themselves together in the venue they became more interested in socializing rather than watching the theatre.
- Some others started making noise as they failed to see the play from their spots. In making an effort to view the play they infringed upon viewing of others or crossed into others' seats. The process made them talk unpleasantly amongst themselves. The group of women who crammed themselves uncomfortably in the courtyard in Fakirtari particularly talked, quarreled, and complained amongst themselves for not being able to watch the theatre properly and in making an effort to do that throughout the show.
- The theatres did not use loudspeaker. The songs and dialogues were not loud enough to the audiences so the performers failed to hold the attention of some of the audiences, thus they talked.

These factors complemented each other in creating noise in the theatre. Of course a good number of the audiences stopped talking and concentrated on the theatre soon it was commenced but that was not enough to bring the noise to a level as should have been particularly in Fakirtari.

In order to have an environment congenial for theatre some youths volunteered to keep the audiences disciplined, and some male audiences warned females not to make noises but was not of much use. In Fakirtari, even the artist playing the role of the UP, attempted to silence the females by improvising his dialogue, asking them to remain quiet. The attempt also was not of much help. The audiences in Brahmonkandi

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were more cooperative in keeping the surrounding environment disciplined, thus more favourable for them to listen to the dialogue and watch the show.

### **Dialogue during the play**

Players initiated dialogues with the audiences several times during the play. In most cases it was in the form of asking questions and taking their consents on the scenes that was being played. Although the artists were loud enough in the dialogues but the audiences. They responded cordially in groups. Thus the dialogues that took place between artists and audiences were one sided and not voluntary and participatory. In none of the cases audience initiated any dialogue. In fact there was no much scope for that because of the crowd and level of noise during the play, moreover, the audience did not have any idea that they could initiate a dialogue, and dialogue exercise was an integral component of the theatre that they were watching. In spite of such an ineffective interaction during the play a part of the audiences was of the opinion that it helped them in following the play.

### **Reaction during play**

The performers were successful in lining the audiences with them. Some scenes of the play made a good part of the audiences excited and emotional. For example, the audiences reacted loudly when a scene showed that a poor man was refused of relief goods by the UP Ward member. At this, an audience out of emotion spoke out loudly, "Is it (relief good) your father's wealth? Why don't you give it to the poor man?" Again some audiences could not hold their tears during some of the heartbreaking scenes of the play.

### **Complaints**

Audiences expressed dissatisfaction on some issues related to the theatre that was likely to have a bearing on following the play. These are:

- Length of the play was much shorter than what was expected. As a result some of the audiences grumbled and expressed their dissatisfaction about it. In Fakirtari, some old audiences expected that they would be given relief goods just after the theatre, so they came to the venue much before the commencement of the theatre but left the place with disappointment.
- There were a few complaints on the poor quality performance of the artists.
- The theatre in Brahmonkandi got delayed due to late arrival of a key artist. The audiences complaints for the delay in starting the play.

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BRAC staff were not indifferent to the complaints. They tried their best to manage the delay by playing songs. But the songs were sung in a low voice that could not be heard by the audiences thus failed to hold their attention. They kept on making noise.

- Reaction to lack of any seating arrangement in a cold winter evening was mixed. Some audiences complained for not making seating arrangement to the theatre team. The complaint came most from the women who could not watch the play comfortably due to crowd or could not sit inside the inner courtyard adjacent to the stage. In contrast, a few female in spite of sitting on the ground remarked – this kind of theatre interests us, we can't get out of house like male persons (*Ei dharoner natok amader anondo dei, amrato aar chheleder moto ghar theke berute pari na*). They were not at all concerned about where they were sitting.
- The courtyards had larger audiences than it could allow comfortable viewing for all of them particularly in Fakirtari. The lack of space was a serious complaint by many of the attendees.

### **Effect of the theatre on the audiences – during and immediately after the theatre**

It was too early to see the impact of the theatre on the audiences during or immediately after the theatre was over. Of course, it was evident that the audiences could follow the play and could grasp the underlying message of the play to an extent.

Most of the respondents admitted that staging of the theatres was a positive move by BRAC. A few audiences reported that they fully understood or understood no part of the play against the majority who mentioned that they understood most of it. A good number mentioned that they could not listen the dialogues completely but their understandings of the play from dialogue was compensated by the acting of the players which they could view. A few female audiences also mentioned that they could understand the plot as the incidence reflected in the play was known to them.

These theatres were not only educational but also entertaining to them. The audiences attended the theatre with an expectation of being entertained but this expectation varied among different groups of the audiences. The younger section of the audiences enjoyed the role of comedians (joker) most, a delightful section of the play. It was noticed that they were talking to themselves and sometimes laughing when the sorrowful part of the plays were being performed. On the other hand the vices of the society and the underlying theme of the play became more interesting to the grownups as in many cases those were close to their life experiences.

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### **Impression immediately after theatre was over**

The audiences believed that the theatres offered them an opportunity to watch almost the similar problems and issues, underlying causes behind these problems and their implications on the villagers, and how the villagers could resolve those problems. Thus, an elderly woman expressed her impression by saying – This is not merely a theatre, it is part of the life of the poor people and this kind of incident occurs in our lives too. (*Etatho natok na gorib manusher kahini, erokom ghatona amader jiboneo ghate*).

### **DIALOGUE SESSION**

Just before the theatre ended the Team Leader took an initiative in organizing a dialogue session amongst the audiences and the theatre staff. The initiative was taken at this stage to involve more audiences in the session but it was observed to have disrupted the attention of the audiences from the play to an extent. The audiences also mentioned about this undesired interruption.

Audiences started leaving the venue immediately after the theatre. The audiences in general were not in a mood to stay any longer at the venue, thus also not interested in participating in the dialogue session. Finding the audiences leaving the venue in a large scale the Team Leader at one point requested the audiences not to leave the venue in a very loud voice. Although most of the audiences had already left the venue the team managed to hold the sessions with a smaller number of male audiences.

As the dialogue session started with a group halfhearted in participation a good number of participants did not pay attention to the conversation going on in or did not take part in it. In contrast a small number spontaneously participated in the conversation and encouraged their mates to do the same.

In the theatre, the audiences viewed the problems that the villagers faced, their impact on the victim, exploitation of the poor and marginal people by the rich, and influential persons, organizing and mobilizing common people and protest against the exploitations. They discussed on these themes and in cases referred villagers who went through similar experience.

The theatres enlightened the audiences particularly the females. The audiences became aware of the deception and violence that were being done on women. The women realized that their lives would be ruined, if they step into the love trap of the male. One female attendee mentioned that the theatre could be an effective means to motivate men not to do

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wrong on them. At the same time they also learned a few clues on how to handle these deceptions, if they were targeted. A few married women mentioned that they would organize themselves to protest against torture by their husbands in asking dowry. It seemed that the theatres had created an awareness among them, which might make them take proper initiative to stop dowry – a milestone departure from an age old practice. The audiences were proposed for organizing a community meeting combining both male and female persons in their village.

Some audiences believed that the theatres created an awareness amongst the audiences. But, others differed with this by mentioning that it was not possible to change the attitude by organizing just one or two theatres in a village. Of course, they believed that if theatres were staged more frequently it might be effective in creating awareness amongst the audiences and subsequently, their attitude would be changed.

In a nutshell, they talked about the common problems of their villages. Identification of the problems automatically called for their solutions. They came to a consensus that they need to sit together to discuss about the problem in depth and come to a solution. At this, BRAC staff proposed and it was agreed that they should have a community meeting with a larger participation on the issue next day.

This dialogue sessions held in two locations did not follow the same format. A considerable portion of the session was spent on discussing on the play, problems of the village, and their solutions by the audiences and the BRAC counterpart in Brahmonkandi. The process was almost absent in Fakirtari. The District Communication Officer, coordinating the meeting from the stage and ended it with a brief discussion and then scheduled community meeting at 8:00 am next day. In such scheduling it was mentioned to him that the participants would prefer to have the meeting in the afternoon. But the Officer did not take the suggestion into consideration, indicating that the process was much less democratic compared to Brahmonkandi. The venues for the meetings were also fixed in the session. The community meetings are discussed in Chapter 6.



### **COMMUNICATION**

Audiences that watched the theatre were part of a large community, i.e., their village. Altogether, 18.6 percent (393) of the villagers aged 15 and above, from two villages attended the theatres (Table 4.1). Because of their participation theatres were likely to have a direct bearing on them, i.e., changed their level of knowledge, influenced their attitudes, and even behaviours. That was probably not the end of the impact of theatres on the villages where theatres were performed.

It is beyond doubt that the villagers attending the theatre did not live in the pigeonhole isolated from others. The attendees interacted with each other during the show to meet variety of needs or simply for entertainments. They also interacted with their families and others in their community after leaving the theatre. Such interactions, besides many other things, of course, included discussion on the theatre they observed.

Meaning that rest of the villagers, although not attended the theatre, learnt about it indirectly from those attended. It was likely that larger was the size of the audience attended the theatre larger was the proportion of the villagers not attended but receive the message of the theatre from those attended. Similarly, more the number of days and times the theatres have been communicated larger would be the dissemination of the themes and in turn its impact on the villagers who did not attend the theatre. Of course, such an impact of the theatre on the villagers could be different from one occurred in the case of those attended the theatre. This was because while communicating the attendees could have blended the themes of the play with their attitudes and feelings thus presenting it slightly different from what was actually shown.

**Table 4.1. Proportion of villagers attended the theatre**

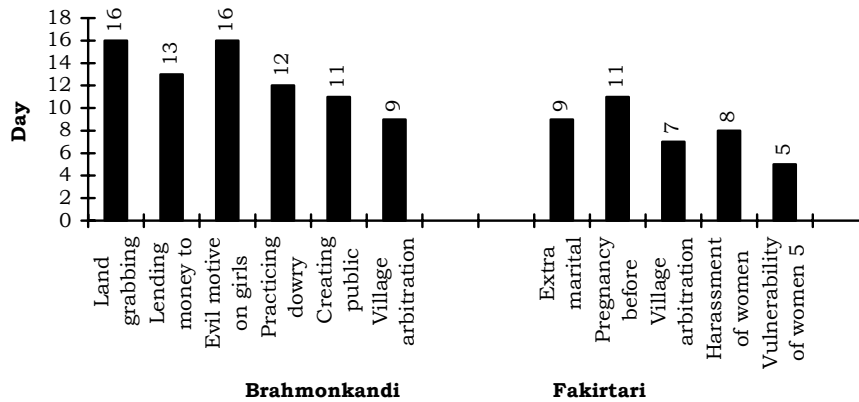
Age	Present in theatre	Total
≤ 14		1,490
15-24	21.3 (122)	572
25-34	22.2 (114)	514
35-44	18.3 (77)	421
45-54	21.2 (64)	302
≥ 55	5.3 (16)	301
Total	18.6 (393)	3,600

**Table 4.2. Themes of the plays**

Brahmonkandi	Fakirtari
Land grabbing	Extramarital sexual relationship
Preparing ground to grab land by lending money	Pregnancy before marriage
Evil motive on unmarried girls	Village arbitration on pregnancy before marriage
Practicing dowry	Harassment of women
Creating public opinion	Vulnerability of women
Village arbitration on land grabbing	

It was likely that the content of whole theatre was communicated to others but was also likely that some aspects of the theatre were only communicated leaving aside others. We identified several themes from the plot of the play likely to have been communicated by the attendees during their conversations with others (Table 4.2).

**Figure 4.1. Number of days a theme was discussed by locations**



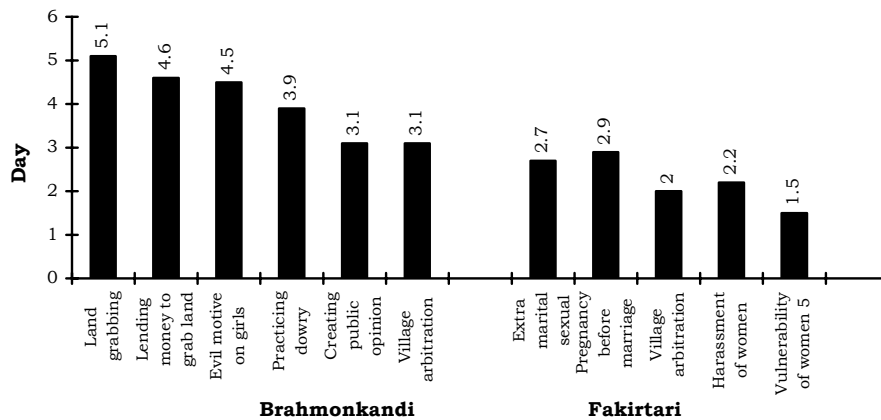


We took into consideration the period when the themes were communicated with an objective of disseminating theme or in the conversation where the communication was not initially planned. Dissemination of the themes, in terms of time period, projected different patterns. For some themes days passed before they were initially communicated but for others it was communicated immediately after the theatre with or without intermissions for some time and then stopped.

Figure 4.1 shows the maximum number of days together in which the themes were discussed by the attendees. When all themes taken together, they were discussed for 16 days in Brahmonkandi against 11 days in Fakirtari. 'Land grabbing' and 'evil motive on unmarried girls' were discussed for maximum number of days against 'village arbitration' being discussed for minimum number of days, in Brahmonkandi. On the other hand 'pregnancy before marriage' was discussed for maximum number of days in Fakirtari against 'vulnerability of women' for minimum number of days in the same village.

Different tendencies were observed in the process of communicating the themes. In cases a theme was discussed only once in a day but for others same theme was discussed more than once or several themes were discussed on the same day either in one sitting or in several sittings. On an average, themes were discussed 5.1 days by the audiences in Brahmonkandi as against 2.9 days in Fakirtari.

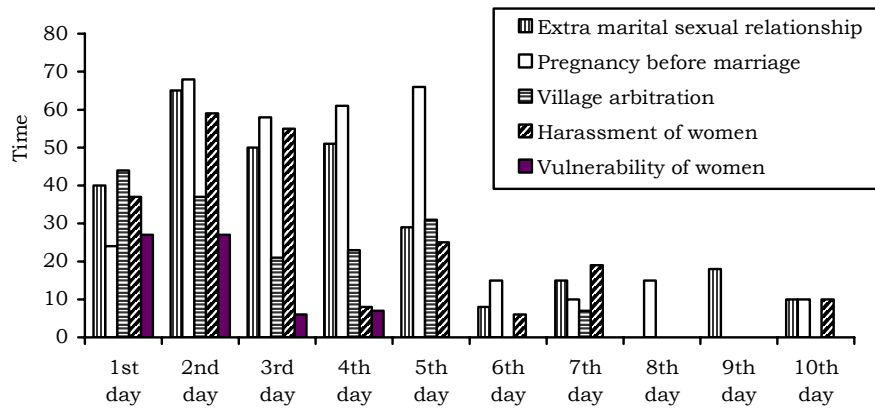
**Figure 4.2. Average number of days a theme communicated by locations**



Number of days in which the themes were communicated varied from one to another (Fig. 4.2). On an average, maximum number of days were given to the communication on 'land grabbing' against village arbitration

with minimum number of days in Brahmonkandi. On the other hand, maximum and minimum numbers of days were spent in communicating 'pregnancy before marriage' and 'vulnerability of women' respectively in Fakirtari. It must be noted that 'village arbitration on land grabbing' in Brahmonkandi and 'village arbitration on deception of women' in Fakirtari did not receive same importance in terms of number of women days in which the themes were communicated within the villages.

**Figure 4.3. Number of times a theme was discussed by days in Fakirtari**

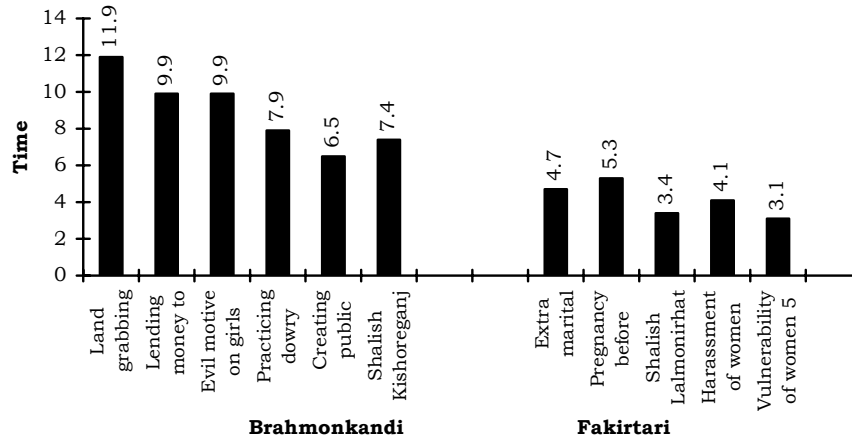


Respondents were monitored for 11 days to find out how many times they communicated the themes to others in Fakirtari (Fig. 4.3). It appears that the frequency of communication gradually increased from the second day after the theatre, plotted, and then abruptly decreased from 6<sup>th</sup> day. During 2-5<sup>th</sup> day of the period the discussion on 'pregnancy before marriage' followed by 'extramarital sexual relationship' and 'harassment of women' to an extent received considerable priority compared to other themes. Even after 5<sup>th</sup> day these themes were communicated more than other themes. On 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> days no other theme other than 'pregnancy before marriage' and 'extra marital sexual relationship' were communicated. The number of times a theme was communicated during the observation period did not project any distinct trend.

On an average, attendees communicated each theme 9.1 times during the observation periods in Brahmonkandi as against 4.3 times in Fakirtari. Consistent with the findings presented earlier all the themes in Brahmonkandi were communicated more number of times than those in Fakirtari (Fig. 4.4). There were wide variations in number of times the themes have been communicated in the study areas. On an average, 'land grabbing' was communicated 11.9 times as against 'creating public

opinion' 6.5 times in Brahmonkandi. On the other hand 'pregnancy before marriage' was communicated 5.3 times on an average as against 'vulnerability of women' communicated 3.1 times, in Fakirtari.

**Figure 4.4. Average number of times each theme was communicated to audiences by location**



**Table 4.3 Communication groups**

Family member	Included all members related by blood or matrimony sharing same economy.
Friend	Any male member outside the family considered friend by the communicator
Adolescent boy	Boys above 14 years of age known to the communicator but not considered as friend.
Adolescent girl	Girl above 12 years of age known to the communicator but not considered as friend.
Occupational	Known to the communicator and interacted the occupation conducted jointly.
Women	Female members outside the family communicates individually or collectively with the communicator.
Tea stall	Includes male group in the bazaar discusses different issues. The members of the group in cases were known to the communicator

All societies have prescriptions and proscriptions on issues to be discussed in different groups within the society. The groups might be differentiated based on criterions like age, relationship within the family, intimacy, etc. Thus, it was likely that the themes considered in the study would not be discussed uniformly across groups within the community and family members. In terms of communicating the themes of the plays we identified seven groups where differentiations in communication were likely to be made (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.4. Distribution of the themes of plays communicated by different groups in village (%)**

Theme	Groups						
	Family member	Friend	Adolescent boy	Adolescent girl	Occupational	Women	Tea stall
<b>Brahmonkandi</b>							
Land grabbing	14.1	4.8	2.2	2.1	.4	1.2	.8
Lending <sup>1</sup>	1.9	6.5	3.8	3.4	1.2	1.9	.7
Evil motive <sup>2</sup>	.7	1.2	3.3	7.5	1.3	4.8	.9
Dowry <sup>3</sup>	.5	.4	1.1	4.1	3.7	5.1	.6
Public opinion <sup>4</sup>	.4	.7	.6	2.2	2.9	3.1	1.4
Vill. Arbitration <sup>5</sup>	.2	.2	.1	.7	.8	2.8	2.9
<b>Fakirtari</b>							
Love affairs <sup>6</sup>	10.9	3.1	2.1	1.0	1.0	4.4	1.4
Illegal pregnancy <sup>7</sup>	4.5	8.2	2.7	3.4	1.4	10.5	.9
Vill. arbitration <sup>8</sup>	1.4	1.7	3.4	2.2	1.4	5.0	.5
Harrasmen <sup>8</sup>	1.0	1.1	2.2	3.7	2.1	8.8	3.0
Vulnerability <sup>10</sup>	.2	.8	.3	.7	.5	3.6	1.3

n: Brahmonkandi – 5,024; Fakirtari - 1,699

<sup>1</sup> Preparing ground to grab land by

lending money

<sup>2</sup> Evil motive on unmarried girls

<sup>3</sup> Practicing dowry

<sup>4</sup> Creating public opinion

<sup>5</sup> Village arbitration on land grabbing

<sup>6</sup> Extramarital sexual relationship

<sup>7</sup> Pregnancy before marriage

<sup>8</sup> Village arbitration on pregnancy before marriage

<sup>9</sup> Harrasment of women

<sup>10</sup> Vulnerability of women

Table 4.4 presents the variations in the themes communicated amongst the selected groups within the village. In the case of Brahmonkandi 'land grabbing' was communicated the most with the family against 'village arbitration on land grabbing' being communicated the least with the adolescent boys. Similarly 'land grabbing' and 'preparing ground to grab land by lending money' were also communicated considerable number of times amongst the friends. The themes, 'evil motive on unmarried girls' and 'practicing dowry' were also communicated considerable number of times amongst the adolescent girls and with the women group. In the case of Fakirtari 'extramarital sexual relation' was communicated most and 'vulnerability of women' the least with the family members. Communication on 'extramarital sexual relation' and 'pregnancy before marriage' also received considerable importance in communication within the family. Communication on 'pregnancy before marriage' with friends also received considerable importance. All the themes got considerable importance in communication with the women group. Of these, 'pregnancy before marriage' received the most importance. Communications on 'village arbitration on land grabbing' in Brahmonkandi and 'vulnerability of women' in Fakirtari were communicated the least number of times to all groups other than women and those present in tea

stalls. In general, the themes were communicated the least in tea stall compared to other groups in both the villages.

The above mentioned figures on number of days and times the themes discussed indicate that respondents varied in communicating the themes. These variations were determined by the choice of the respondents in communicating and the communicated and presence of opportunities in making a communication. Usually, a theme would not be communicated if it was of no interest to the communicator. The theme might be appealing to the communicator, thus, communicating the same to others might be self-satisfying to the person. On the other hand if a person was not interested in receiving the theme as because it was of no likings to him/her, communication might not be done if it was known to the communicator in advance or would not be continued if understood after initiation. If the communicator realized that the message was received with an interest by the communicated s/he would be encouraged to transmit the message and the transmission was likely to be a success. The study was not designed to identify the factors that interested the person communicated.

**Table 4.5. Regression on number of days the themes of popular theatres were communicated in villages (n=228)**

Independent variable	Coefficient	Standard error	p>  t
Age	-.087	.042	.039
(Age) <sup>2</sup>	.001	.000	.049
Education	-.059	.019	.002
Marital status 1=married; 0=not married	-.347	.180	.056
NGO membership status 1=member; 0=not member	.091	.137	.504
Wealth rank by villagers	-.112	.069	.106
Self assessment of food security	-.005	.088	.958
Constant	4.774	.670	.000
R <sup>2</sup>		0.11	

The number of days the themes of popular theatres were communicated by the respondents was regressed on selected variables (Table 4.5). Number of independent variables – marital status of the respondents, their age, (age)<sup>2</sup> and education – have determined communication of the themes of the play by the respondents to the villagers. It may be noted that up to certain age it negatively affected the number of communications, then after the relationship reversed. For the group having inverse relationship increase in age by 36 days led to the decrease in communication by one unit. Similarly increase in education by 22 days led to decrease in communication by one unit. The R<sup>2</sup> indicates that the model was effective in explaining 11% of the communication of the themes in the village.



### **ATTITUDES IN INTERVENTION AND CONTROL VILLAGES**

This chapter fathoms attitude of the villagers from intervention and control villages with the help of statements divided into four parts – domination and exploitation, sexual relationship and gender discrimination, social justice and its implementation, and optimism about positive changes (Table 5.1). Reactions to the statements were assumed to have reflected the attitude of the respondents on the statements and collectively on the parts. The assessments were done by using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Respondents' attitude in each of these statements were captured in a four-point Likert scale – completely agreed, partially agreed, partially disagreed, and completely disagreed. Each point was given a numerical weight ranging from one to four. The differences between the scores were considered to be equal in all cases. Lower score from a statement meant an attitude and conscientization more towards just and ideal state of social condition according to the theatre. Cumulated score of a respondent for all the parts together have ranged from 16-64, representing from least to most favourable attitudes.

Total score of a respondent was computed by summing up scores from the responses against each statement. The scores against each statement for intervention and control groups were chi-square tested to find out significant differences between them. The scores below and above median were considered to have represented attitudes for and not for an ideal condition respectively. The scores were computed for each of the scales. Respondents with a median score were considered to have a neutral attitude. In order to find out the factors influenced attitude an ANOVA was done on the total score from all the statements together of the respondents from the intervention and control villages in terms of respondents' age, sex, education, marital status, wealth rank, food security status, and NGO membership status.

**Table 5.1. Parts and statements for assessing attitudes**

Parts and statements	Corresponding themes from the play
<b>Domination and exploitation</b>	
1. Since time immemorial the rich have grabbed the land of the poor. There is nothing to protest if they grab their land again now.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land grabbing</li> <li>• Preparing ground to grab land by lending money</li> <li>• Practicing dowry</li> </ul>
2. There is nothing wrong if a person loses the possession of land if the same fails to show the document proving the ownership when required.	
3. Male has to run the family so it is likely that he will ask for dowry.	
4. Dowry has to be given in daughter's marriage so there is no shame in demanding it in son's marriage.	
<b>Sexual relationship and gender discrimination</b>	
5. Male lover does not have much fault if his female counterpart allows free mixing with her and consequently if she becomes pregnant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra marital sexual relationship</li> <li>• Vulnerability of women</li> <li>• Harassment of women</li> <li>• Pregnancy before marriage</li> <li>• Evil motive on unmarried girls</li> </ul>
6. Due to premarital sexual relationship if female partner becomes pregnant, she must have an abortion if male counterpart desires.	
7. The pressure of male lover on the female counterpart for an abortion cannot be accepted.	
8. If female lover becomes pregnant due to sexual relationship it will be appropriate for the male counterpart to marry her and take responsibility of the prospective baby.	
<b>Social justice and its implementation</b>	
9. When faced with conflict, injustice and torture it is better not to take law in one's own hand to solve the problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Village arbitration</li> </ul>
10. As the village influential have more education and money they should be in charge of <i>shalish</i> .	
11. If a female becomes pregnant due to free mixing with her male lover the adjudicators should be in her support.	
12. We learn lot of things from our teachers. They should face exemplary punishment if they are found guilty of premarital sex.	
<b>Optimism about positive changes</b>	
13. There are some good people besides influential and bad in the society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating public opinion</li> </ul>
14. Son may not be a wrongdoer in spite of the father being one.	
15. The good people in the village can resist the wrongdoing of bad and influential people in the same.	
16. Injustice can be protested by organizing people and creating opinion against it.	



Qualitative assessment focused on the nature of attitudes held and investigated the reasons for holding such attitude. The investigation of the rationale was considered significant as understanding of the same was needed to induce change in the attitude. An analysis of the attitude in terms of intervention and control groups has not been done here as that was addressed sufficiently in the quantitative exercise.

As presented, quantitative findings were followed by qualitative analyses for each of the parts in the following sections. Qualitative analysis included description of the attitude followed by the argument for having the attitude. Again arguments supporting the statement were followed by those not supporting the same.

### **DOMINATION AND EXPLOITATION**

The scale deals with two issues – land and dowry. Land being the most important means of production in rural Bangladesh, its possession not only places one at a higher economic position compared to those not possessing the same but also provides the former with a greater power in the society. Such power embodies them with strength to control and exploit others. The practice of dowry is a form of exploitation widely prevalent in the society. The practice places wife in a subservient position in the matrimonial relationship.

**Table 5.2. Significance test result of intervention and control groups on domination and exploitation statements (n=605)**

Statement	Chi-square	Sig. level
1. Since time immemorial the rich have grabbed the land of the poor. There is nothing to protest if they grab their land again now.	19.1	.00
2. There is nothing wrong if a person loses the possession of land if the same fails to show the document proving the ownership when required	10.6	.00
3. Male has to run the family so it is likely that he will ask for dowry.	7.7	.05
4. Dowry has to be given in daughter's marriage so there is no shame in demanding it in son's marriage.	17.9	.00

Respondents from intervention villages had a higher score from that of the control villages for all the statements under domination and exploitation. The chi-square tests on the attitudinal scores of the respondents from the intervention and control villages indicate that the scores of the former were significantly different from that of the latter for all the statements (Table 5.2).

**Table 5.3. Attitude of respondents on domination and exploitation statistics (n=605)**

Statistics	Result	
	Intervention	Control
Score range	6-16	10-16
Mean	14.4	15.3
Median	15.0	16.0
Mode	16.0	16.0
Respondent with more favourable attitude	44.9% (80)	0%
Respondent with less favourable attitude	41.6% (74)	28.2% (42)

Thirteen-point-five percent of the respondents from intervention and 71.8 percent from control villages had a neutral attitude towards domination and exploitation. In the case of respondents from intervention villages, slightly greater number of respondents (3.3 percent) maintained a more favourable attitude compared to those having less favourable one (Table 5.3). In contrast none for the control villages had a favourable attitude. In the case of inter-group comparison 45 percent of the respondents had more favourable attitude, i.e., an attitude in intervention villages against none in the control villages. It may also be noted that more respondents (13.4 percent) were with less favourable attitude in intervention villages compared to those in control villages.

Attitude of the poor towards the rich, to an extent, was shaped by the belief that they held about the rich people's impression towards them. The poor believed that the rich were not empathetic to their pain. Whenever the poor asked for assistance of the rich in their needs and difficulties instead of providing them with necessary support they were often mistreated. It was believed that the rich did not even consider the poor as human being. Such an impression influenced the reaction of the poor on the statement.

**Statement 1. Since time immemorial the rich have grabbed the land of the poor. There is nothing to protest if they grab their land again now.**

**Agreed:** Some in the group rephrase the statement by remarking that the land of the poor were grabbed in the past, at the present, and will be done in the future. Since it is evident there is nothing to be concerned about it. It was believed that nothing that the poor could do against it. A few respondents believed that the rich did not grab the land of the poor but government land (*khas land*) not in possession of the poor.

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**Disagreed:** Respondents in this group detailed out how the land of the poor get grabbed<sup>1</sup>. They were under the impression that one should have sympathy on the victims of land grabbing. It was emphasized that the protest by the victims and resistance against land grabbing was a must to regain the land and to prevent the rich from repeating it in the future. Some of the respondents, very much against the statement, remarked that such offenders must be spanked with bamboo sticks as punishment and if needed should be imprisoned for life.

The respondents were unanimous about the idea of resisting the land grabber but not about how the resistance would be made. This was because of the backfire from the rich that the resistance was likely to result. Three modes of resistances were proposed:

- A group believed that the resistance should include the poor only. The poor should get themselves united and then campaign on their rights and injustice done on the victim to create public opinion, thus mobilize them in favour of the victim. They should seek assistance of the senior members of the community, elected leaders like UP chairman and members, and even the ordinary villagers for justice through village arbitration. In case they failed to get justice they should take help of police and the court. Justice through village arbitration was recommended to be the first choice in the process as it was cheaper.
- Others were of the opinion that not all rich and powerful were bad, some of them were good as well. The protest against land grabbing and initiative for justice by the poor was more likely to be successful when initiated by taking this power group into their side. The idea generated in them from the belief that the poor had difficulties in protesting against land grabbing even though they were more empowered than before<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Usually the land of the poor got grabbed in two circumstances. When a poor did not possess necessary document of its ownership bad rich person often prepares a fake document of its ownership and by presenting the document grabs the land. Again in some instances dire need forces the poor to approach the rich for help. The rich, lends money to them knowing very well that the poor will not be able to pay back the loan. After sometime the rich asked for the repayment. As the poor fails to meet the demand, the lender on this pretext grabbed the land of the borrower.

In above cases the land was grabbed by using force and they had all sorts of power needed to do that. Most importantly they had money which, as mentioned, 'could make any impossible on the earth possible'. With the help of money they could hire musclemen to implement their order, and bring village arbitration and local law implementation agencies in their support. Other rich even if not in collusion with land grabber because of affinity does not protest against such a wrongdoing.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike before, their children are going to school, thus increasing the level of literacy within the family, they have greater access to information on legal procedures related to land, and had a greater scope of communicating with others, and participating in social activities – conditions very much helpful in fighting against injustice.

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- According to many respondents, no matter how powerful were the bad rich would never win against the combined power of the poor; and, such a power could be channeled only by organizing and mobilizing common people by a leader.

A section within the group was also pessimistic about the outcome of the protest. It was mentioned that the poor did not come in support of the victim fearing that they might be harassed by the land grabber in future or because they were dependent on them for their livelihood. It was also believed that protest by the victim against grabbing was not likely to bring any positive result rather was likely to raise the wrath of the grabber, and increasing the possibility of further harassment on the victim. In context it was remarked – One who had power has the state in his side (*Jore jar mullock tar*). The attitude indicates that the respondents took the stand of no protest against land grabber, not because they justify such act but for believing that protesting against it would bring no positive result.

**Statement 2. There is nothing wrong if a person loses the possession of land if the same fails to show the document proving the ownership when required.**

**Agreed:** In the case of a challenge on the ownership of a land strong protest could not be raised until and unless the landowner presented the document of ownership. Similarly when multiple claims were made and if the claims were taken to the court the owner in order to establish his/her rightful ownership would have to present the document proving it in the court. In the case of failure the claim would not be proved that the land belonged to the owner rather she/he would be placed in the same footing with or lower than other claimants. Again, if it became known that the owner did not have documents against his/her land some unfair influential persons might prepare false document and by showing it could claim and take possession of the land. Thus, the respondents maintained that possession of the document was the ultimate instrument to safeguard one's own land.

The owner might have lost the document of ownership but s/he was expected to be careful in preserving the document like most others. Failing to preserve the document was a serious negligence. The owner might have the document preserved in the Land Registration office. But, that would be of no help as it was the procedure that the document should be shown when somebody claimed the ownership of the land. Respondents believing that one should face the consequences for the failure to show the document as a proof of ownership when needed. Thus, it was considered okay and there was nothing illegal in it, if the possessor loses his/her possession due to failure in presenting documents to prove the ownership. That was why the supporters of the

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statement reacted to the statement by questioning why land grabbing would be an illegal act or crime when the document of the land was not in possession of the claiming owner?

**Disagreed:** Respondents disagreeing with the statement believed that it was not the duty of the land grabber to look around for the owners who did not have documents for their land and obviously it was not fair for them to grab such land. These respondents emphasized upon the physically owning and social ownership of the land rather than on the possession of the document. The owners were in possession of their land and have been cultivating the same for years over generation and their possession was socially recognized. Possession of such land by itself was considered to be lawful proof of ownership. Thus, possession of document was believed not to be the ultimate condition for proving the ownership of the land.

Respondents pointed out to factors responsible for not possessing or loosing the document by the poor villagers.

- They could not pay the fees and additional charges in getting the document issued by the land registration office. The villagers in most cases were illiterate or had a little education to draw documents from the office by themselves.
- They were not aware of land related laws, rules, and regulation thus failed to value the possession of documents by themselves in the case of problems.
- They did not have a safe place to preserve their documents.

Of course these constraints were not taken as excuses for not having document. Respondents in the group also believed that the documents of ownership should be shown in the case of dispute even if it become necessary to borrow money or mortgage-out land in order to collect the document from the land registration office. But, the poor landowner often could not get the documents issued on time for want of money. So, they should be given time to get it issued. It was expected that educated section of the village, could provide the victim with financial assistance, advice, and other help in getting the document issued from the land registration office.

Conflict on land grabbing dispute could be settled in village arbitration. It was considered effective in identifying real owner of the land through discussion with and by the local people having correct information about it. In most cases, the grabbers did not have any document or at best possessed a fake document of the land grabbed. The arbitrator could ask the grabber to show his document as a proof of ownership for verification.

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**Statement 3. Male has to run the family so it is likely that he will ask for dowry.**

**Agreed:** Attitude supporting the statement was well stated in the remark – Males are the head of the community, so they are to maintain their households by means of their capabilities. (*Purush somajer matha, taraito poribar chalai, tader poribar chalano uchit nijeder jagyotai*). The statement not only legitimizes male domination within the household and society at large but also recognizes the practice of dowry for it being very much compatible with patriarchy. Of course, according to some, taking dowry was justified if offered willingly.

Support to the statement was justified on the ground that managing family was considered to be an additional job that the male had to perform. To others, in some cases male had to take up the responsibility of managing family when their wives were not capable. So, males were expected to be rewarded for taking up additional responsibilities. In both the cases dowry was considered to be a way of rewarding the husband. According to some asking for dowry was justified if that becomes necessary to maintain certain standard in the family. Such a support from wives' relatives, i.e., taking dowry was acceptable. Similarly dowry might also be demanded when son-in-law intends to improve his family's economic condition by investing dowry in the business.

**Disagreed:** Respondents not supporting the statement although unanimously expressed their desire for the abolishment of the practice maintained different attitudes against it. According to some taking dowry was simply a bad practice, no male with dignity and good personality would receive dowry in marriage under any circumstance. Even if an unemployed male demand dowry in marriage to maintain his family it would stain his manhood. Respondents who were most against the practice opined that person who demands dowry should be handed over to police and should not be released until an undertaken for not demanding it in future was received. In extreme cases it was mentioned that the grooms must be punished for demanding dowry.

Respondents presented variety of arguments for not supporting the statement. Although the practice of dowry has been made almost an integral part of marriage in Bangladesh according to some it should not be practiced as it is prohibited in Islam. Some also mentioned that dowry was an illegal matrimonial transaction in Bangladesh.

The practice of dowry was believed to have an adverse effect on the relationship between the spouses. It gives the wife a scope to mention about the dowry derogatorily to her husband. Besides in hypergamous<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Marriage of a rich bride with a poor groom.

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marriage where bride's parents have offered dowry there developed a tendency in her to dominate, disobey, and not-cooperate with husband. Such a tendency was likely to interrupt smooth functioning of the family. Bride from a rich family often looked down upon relatives from her husband's side as because her parents offered dowry in marriage.

Respondents in the group did not agree to the argument that dowry was needed to maintain or improve family standard. They pointed out that there were males doing hard work and maintaining families of their own without any support from dowry. So it was questioned why dowry should be demanded in marriages? Further they observed that the dowry was never judiciously planned and effectively drawn in productive purposes. The money in most cases was spent on luxury items having short term utility to the users. Thus, it was remarked – *money from dowry can buy less and is spent fast (Joutuker takai barkat nai)*. Some viewing the issue from humanitarian ground observed that the poor parents of the girls were forced to sell land, livestock, and other assets, and/or borrow from others to meet the demand of dowry – leading to a tremendous economic hardship for the bride's family.

Some respondents emphasized on the division of labour maintained amongst male and female members within the family to keep it going. They believed that girls played the vital role in carrying out household chores. Undermining or denying their contribution in the family was unfair and illogical, as their contribution in household work was much more than their male counterparts. Others believed that both male and female had equal share in running the family so the justification for accepting dowry on the pretext that male had to run the family did not make much sense to them.

**Statement 4. Dowry has to be given in daughter's marriage so there is no shame in demanding it in son's marriage.**

Supporting or negating the statement tantamount to accepting or rejecting the practice of dowry. In spite of the prevailing notion that women were also against the practice of dowry, attitude of the respondents towards the statement and their argument in holding such an attitude did not project any variation on gender line.

**Agreed:** Only argument forwarded in support to the statement was that the parents were compelled to provide dowry in their daughters' marriages, so it was legitimate for them to demand dowry in their sons' marriages to compensate the loss they incurred due to providing the same earlier. In the name of finding a way out to make up the loss for providing dowry in daughter's marriage the argument in fact support prevailing practice of dowry in the society.

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**Disagreed:** Respondents not supporting the statement noted that dowry whether offered or received was illegal, unfair, unjust, and was a punishable offence, besides it being considered to be an act of indignity and shame. Dowry recipients were labeled as low graded people (*chhoto lok*). Respondents metaphorically referred demanding dowry same like begging.

The group believed that even if parents were compelled to give dowry in their daughters' marriages it would be a shame for them to demand it in sons' marriages to compensate loss incurred earlier. Whatever might be the reason giving dowry was considered an illegal act, and taking dowry was more so, i.e., committing a direct crime.

Some respondents pointed out that if offspring come to know that his/her father received dowry in his marriage they might have a low opinion about him. Despite being compelled to give dowry in daughters' marriages arranging son's marriages without dowry would be a good example to his son-in-law and brother-in-law (*beyais*) that marriage should and could be solemnized without dowry.

Other arguments against the statement were same like those presented against the previous statement but with the difference that in the previous one the arguments were directed toward bride but here it was towards bridegroom.

### **SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

The part dealt with the perception of the society on the fault of male and female in the case of illicit sex and what was supposed to be the role of male when female partner becomes pregnant due to such an act. In cases the themes of statements are overlapping thus the arguments provided against those statements to an extent were similar. Such similarities in arguments have in fact confirmed the attitude of the respondents on the theme.

The scores against the statements relating to sexual relationship and gender discrimination from intervention villages were higher than to those in the control villages. The differences were statistically significant for three of the statements but for – If female lover becomes pregnant due to sexual relationship it will be appropriate for the male counterpart to marry her and take responsibility of the baby (Table 5.4).



**Table 5.4. Significance test result of intervention and control groups on sexual relationship and gender discrimination statements (n=605)**

Statement	Chi-square	Sig. level
5. Male lover does not have much fault if his female counterpart allows free mixing with her and consequently if she becomes pregnant.	13.1	.00
6. Due to sexual relationship if female partner becomes pregnant, she must have an abortion if male counterpart desires.	6.7	.08
7. The pressure of male lover on the female counterpart for an abortion cannot be accepted.	8.0	.05
8. If female lover becomes pregnant due to sexual relationship it will be appropriate for the male counterpart to marry her and take responsibility of the prospective baby.	6.1	.11

**Table 5.5. Attitude of respondents on sexual relationship and gender discrimination statements (n=605)**

Statistics	Result	
	Intervention	Control
Score range	7-16	6-16
Mean	13.9	13.9
Median	14.0	15.0
Mode	16.0	16.0
Respondent with more favourable attitude	47.9 (91)	31.0% (44)
Respondent with less favourable attitude	34.7% (66)	41.5% (59)

Distribution of scores for sexual relationship and gender discrimination was quite straightforward. About 17 percent of the respondents in the intervention and 27.5 percent in control villages had a neutral attitude towards the part (Table 5.5). In the case of the respondents from intervention villages greater number of respondents (13 percent) maintained a more favourable attitude compared to those with less favourable one. In contrast the control villages had about 10 percent less respondents with more favourable attitude compared to those having less favourable one. In the case of inter-group comparison intervention villages had greater number (seven percent) of the respondents with more favourable attitude compared to those from control villages. On the other hand there were about seven percent more respondents in control villages against those in intervention villages with less favourable attitude.

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**Statement 5. Male lover does not have much fault if his female counterpart allows free mixing with her and consequently if she becomes pregnant.**

**Agreed:** While supporting the statement the respondents took into account the involvement of male and female lovers in sexual act irrespective of whether done willingly or not, becoming pregnant, and its adverse effect on the girl, as well as on her family.

The respondents based their logic on the premise that the attraction between a guy and a girl might turn to a love relationship and courtship but that should strictly be away from any sexual act between them. Aim of love affairs was to get married not to have sex. After marriage the lovers would have ample opportunity to cohabit and sex was allowed only after their marriage, meaning that pregnancy was acceptable only within the marital relationship.

Girls who become pregnant before marriage obviously did not abide by the codes of Islam like keeping body covered as recommended (*pardah*). Not maintaining *pardah*, during courtship could have provoked the guy for a sex with her. According to some respondents desire for sex was a natural instinct. Above this, if the guy was provoked to have sex it was natural that he would avail the opportunity and in this case the guilt would lie with the girl.

It was believed that the girls had full control over their bodies. If they do not allow it would never be possible for male partner to have sex with them. In other words, the sex could be possible only when she consented to it. Moreover, a mature girl was likely to be fully aware of what was good and bad for her and what could be the consequence of an illicit sex. That is, becoming pregnant followed by all types of adverse effect on her from family and community. Thus, it was believed if a girl became pregnant before marriage, when sex was not forced upon her, there was no reason for the male partner to be blamed for the incidence. There were others in the group instead of giving full blame to female partner opined that under such a situation 75 percent of the fault would lie with the girl and the rest with her male lover.

Number of female respondents blamed girl for planning to marry male partner by putting him in a 'love-trap'. That includes provoking male partner to have sex; followed by becoming pregnant and then blackmailing him to marry her by threatening to make the incidence of her becoming pregnant public. In cases the incidence were made public and then take help of legal institutions to force him to marry her.

**Disagreed:** Respondents negated the statement on variety of grounds. A group maintained that even if the girl seduced her lover to have sex he was not supposed to be influenced by it. Being influenced would mean

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that he was also guilty same like the girl. The group based their reasoning on the premise that fault for an action had nothing to do with the gender of the guilty person.

Others disagreeing with the statement viewed girls as soft hearted and emotional. When they liked guys they genuinely fell in love with them. Very soon they start loving their partners with heart and soul. Not only that, they trusted and respected their lovers, believing that they were also loved similarly and dreamed of marrying them for life. Because of such an emotion girls could not resist sexual moves from their lovers though knowing very well that it was wrong to cooperate with such desire of their and that would mean end to their virginity/chastity.

Others in the group mentioned that the male lovers were opportunists and adopt strategies in order to achieve their sex objective. When a guy liked a girl he shamelessly and repeatedly expresses his feeling to her. As a reaction to this at one point the girl started liking the guy, developed trust on him and subsequently started loving him. The guy promised to marry her which allured and enticed her to dream of a happy family after marriage. He also offered gifts frequently in order to keep her pleased. Above this, his touch and caressing, and patting at time made her weak to his lustful desire. As a result when the guy proposed and made a move for sex at one stage she could not refuse it even after being aware of risks associated with illicit sex. Thus the male lover achieved his objective through an 'allurement for sex' by taking advantage of her softness, simplicity, and emotional attachments towards him but, with a consequence of her becoming pregnant. It was believed that the girl had given her lover a chance to have sex due to lack of understanding of his evil motive.

Those who were a little less disagreeing to the statement mentioned that it was very likely that the girl because of sexual urges provoked male lover to have sex with her and eventually became pregnant. In context to such instances it was questioned why she solely be made responsible for becoming pregnant and bore adverse implication of the incident? If a girl becomes pregnant due to illicit sex both the partners were expected to bear the consequence of its outcome.

**Statement 6. Due to premarital sexual relationship if female partner becomes pregnant, she must have an abortion if male counterpart desires**

**Agreed:** Some of the male respondents mentioned that there were girls having sexual relationship with multiple partners. When such a girl becomes pregnant before marriage, even she herself might not be sure of the actual father of the child to be born. Such a girl was considered to be of a loose character and was likely that her partners would avoid marrying her. In such a situation she might claim one of the partners as

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the father of the child and force him to marry her. In order to avoid being the victim of such a blackmail it was believed that he could ask her for abortion.

Apart from above argument the respondents supported the statement by thinking about the consequence of becoming pregnant and giving birth to a child, on herself, her family, and the baby to be born.

If the people around became aware of her premarital pregnancy they would reproached or rebuked her and even her family for their children being involved in such an act. If she was married after pregnancy she might not be treated well by her in-laws. Considering these adverse possibilities the respondents believed that induced abortion would be the best choice to handle the situation and her male partner could press her for that. It was also argued that in the case of real love the guy would marry her, in any case, even after abortion, but the benefit of induced abortion was that nobody would know about the premarital pregnancy thus her and her family's honour would remain intact.

Defamation associated with illegitimate birth could be so intensive in the community that even her parents might not shelter her and her baby. Nobody in the community would be sympathetic to her rather there would be a tendency to abandon her. She would have to undertake all hardships and sufferings of rearing baby by herself in the middle of non-cooperation and rapprochements from many. The child born would be referred to as a bastard (*zaroj*) by the community. And the child would have to live with such a stigma for whole life. Imagining such a consequence the respondents justified their support for the argument.

**Disagreed:** Argument against the statement emphasized on the dictates of the Holy Koran on the issue – abortion is prohibited (*haram*). Impregnating female partner before marriage was considered nothing but committing sin. They believed that it was not fair for the guy to impose his sin on his female partner by compelling her to undergo induced abortion. In fact, the guy should marry her instead of pressuring her for an abortion and take up responsibility of the baby to be born. Only when this was done he would be considered a good man otherwise a cheat.

It was also argued that love relationship entices physical or sexual relationship between the lovers. Despite knowing that she could be pregnant due to sex without precaution she and her male partner might have engaged in it for not being able to control their sexual impulses. Such a sex along with becoming pregnant was considered to be an accident where both the partners were equally guilty. In the case of such an accident if the guy avoid taking up the responsibility of her and baby to be born by marrying her she should seek justice to compel him for marriage.

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Respondents argued that girls were viewed as commodities for consumption by having sex with them. Because of this, guys would like to have sex with them but not share its consequences. So, it was natural that when his partner became pregnant he would propose and even force her for an abortion. This was also believed because the news of premarital pregnancy was likely to bring defamation for him. In order to save his reputation from being tainted or just to avoid taking responsibilities the guy might ask for abortion first with a promise of marrying her afterwards. The respondents believed that such a promise was nothing but deception. In fact, not having an induced abortion might compel the guy to marry her. As the baby in her womb was the only proof in support for her claim that the baby was the offspring of her male lover, disclosing the fact would force the guy to marry her. If the guy does not agree to marry her, he must be brought to justice.

It was pointed out that induced abortion involves considerable health risk including making her infertile for rest of life or even cause death. If so, it was questioned could one force her to have an induced abortion against her will? Most importantly the baby growing in her womb was innocent. Thus, it was also questioned whether to be father had the right to prevent the baby from being born by forcing his/her mother to go for an abortion?

**Statement 7. The pressure of male lover on the female counterpart for an abortion cannot be accepted.**

**Agreed:** Induced abortion destroys the proof of loving relationship. The respondents wondered how bad was the guy who pressured his lover for an induced abortion? They emphasized upon the fact that induced abortion was not only prohibited in Islam but also illegal according to the law of the country. In support to this argument it was pointed out that the guy's pursuance for his lover to undergo an induced abortion would be a sin according to the religion and a crime both from legal and social perspective.

A few male respondents opined that the decision of the pregnant girl whether she would like to go for an abortion should be the only consideration in such case. Thus, induced abortion against the will of the girl was considered unjust. As believed induced abortion involved considerable health risk for the girl. It could cause permanent infertility, other gynaecological problems for the rest of her life and even death. As girls knew better about suffering and adverse implications associated with pregnancy and induced abortion they were believed to be in a better position to understand the health risks associated with it. Nobody but herself had exclusive right to take decision for abortion. In context, a male respondent opined – *The lover can make his female partner aware of the need of an abortion.* But, he must not compel her for it. The attitude

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provided a scope for convincing each other without imposing one's decision on the other.

A good number of respondents viewed her going through an abortion in terms of reactions that she would have to face in the community. It was believed that after becoming pregnant best way out for the girl would be to get herself married to the guy. In order for that to take place without any hitch that the girl should keep the baby in her womb. The baby in the womb was the proof that the guy was the genitor of the baby. If she goes through an abortion it would not be possible for her to prove that she was pregnant.

After abortion if she goes to the village arbitration in order to get the guy marry her it would not be of much help for her, rather lack of proof would make the arbitrators and others believe that she was a plotter (*fondibaz*). People would get a scope to spread rumour on her pregnancy in the community. If the guy was not true to his love after abortion he would also not hesitate to disclose the incidence of abortion in a distorted form to others and based on that people would make stories on her pregnancy in the community. This would not only defame her but also her family. As a result it would become difficult for her to get married in future. It was feared that the pain of such consequence could even compel her to commit suicide.

**Disagreed:** A few male respondents in the group remarked that the males run the family so female in it should agree with their decisions. The argument was believed to be applicable not only in the case of wives after marriage but also before they were married including any decision on abortion, i.e., the guy also retained the right to decide whether the baby should be born or not. Thus, it was argued if guy decided that the baby should not be born he could rightfully pressurize his lover to go for abortion. A girl might get herself pregnant in order to place her partner into a 'love-trap'. In such an instance her male partner could always press her for abortion.

It was also believed that if the guy had a plan not to marry his lover after induced abortion, still he could ask her to go for it, as what she would do by giving birth to a baby who would lack paternal identity. The child there-of born would keep alive her love relation, illegal pregnancy, and giving birth of an illegitimate child fresh in every bodies mind. The illegitimate child would have to suffer for such a birth for whole life, though the child was not responsible for it. But if she undergoes an abortion people might forget the matter in course of time.

Some argued that if the lovers got married just after the pregnancy induced abortion would not be needed as nobody would doubt if she became pregnant before marriage. But, in most cases some preparations

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over a few months, had to be taken to solemnize a marriage. While taking such preparation it might get detected by others that she had already become pregnant. Premarital pregnancy can also be detected if the baby is born between 8 and 10 months from the marriage – periods vary for baby needs to remain in mother’s womb. Such identifications would place herself and her family into tremendous shame and embarrassment. Induced abortion in this case could save their faces. If she was not married to the guy the scandal would make it difficult for her to get married elsewhere. She would be mistreated both by her family and community for doing something not acceptable, as a result she would have to spend her day under great pain.

**Statement 8. If female lover becomes pregnant due to sexual relationship it will be appropriate for the male counterpart to marry her and take responsibility of the prospective baby.**

**Agreed:** The respondents supporting the statement believed that in many cases, love enticed male and female lovers to involve into illicit sex. It was argued that no girl approaches guy for a sex, in fact, guys always reach them for love and allure their lovers for sex.

As because the guilt for becoming pregnant lies with her male partner he should makeup for his guilt by marrying her and by taking the responsibility of the prospective child. If it is not done he should be punished. Apart from the guilt it was also believed that the genitor of the baby could not deny his responsibility towards the child to be born and it could be best settled by marrying his lover. A few male respondents despite sharing this argument mentioned that if the girl was maintaining multiple partners simultaneously and after becoming pregnant if she tried to blackmail one of them to marry her in such instance the guy targeted would not remain obliged to marry her.

The respondents in the group also thought about the consequences that would come upon on the girl because of such pregnancy. After the incidence become public everybody would consider her to be with a loose character and ostracize her. The family and the community she belonged to would not recognize the paternal identity of the baby. Such a treatment from her family and community in one hand and on the other the agony of not being able to marry her lover along with the anxiety as to who would take charge of child to be born would create a psychological trauma so deep that she might be forced to commit suicide.

If the guy does not marry her she could be married possibly only in exchange of huge amount of dowry; definitely that would cause tremendous hardship for her family. As against this, if they get married good relation could be established between their families.

The respondents also thought about the effect on the child thus born. If her male lover does not marry her and take responsibility of their baby, the baby would not have any paternal identity. The community would consider the baby as bastard. The child would have to face derogatory comments, reproach, and defamation from the society. The child's peers would not be allowed to associate with him/her. Mother would have to face awkward questions from the baby – why he/she is looked upon differently than others. As the baby to be born would be innocent thus did not deserve such a treatment.

**Disagreed:** Group not supporting the statement argued that the girl in this case gave her male partner a chance for an illicit sex. Probably she was unaware of the risk involved in illicit sex and illegal pregnancy. Not knowing probable consequences of illicit sex should not be an excuse rather it was considered to be an offence for the girls. Others in the group mentioned that if any girl does not want to have sex her male lover could not force her to it. As the risk of illicit sex was obviously known to her so in no way she should have consented to it. She should have clearly mentioned it to her lover that they were supposed to have sex only after marriage. As she gave a chance to her lover for a sex so she was considered guilty and had to face the consequence.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The scale revolved around the legal issues while assessing people's confidence on the existing legal system and who should be in charge of the system. The statements were evaluated in terms of village arbitration rather than any other institution.

**Table 5.6. Significance test result of intervention and control groups on social justice and its implementation statements (n=605)**

Statement	Chi-square	Sig. level
9. When faced with conflict, injustice and torture it is better not to take law in one's own hand to solve the problem.	22.8	.00
10. As the village influential have more education and money they should be in charge of <i>shalish</i>	12.1	.01
11. If a female becomes pregnant due to free mixing with her male lover the law implementing organizations and local leaders should be in her support.	6.0	.11
12. We learn lot of things from our teachers. They should face exemplary punishment if they are found guilty of free mixing.	4.3	.23



Majority of the respondents, both from the intervention and control villages, did not agree with the statements under social justice and its implementation. Other than this, distribution of scores amongst different points of the scales against the statements did not project any trend for both the groups. In spite of this the scores from first two statements for intervention and control groups were significantly different (Table 5.6).

**Table 5.7. Attitude of respondents on social justice and its implementation statements (n=605)**

Statistics	Group	
	Intervention	Control
Score range	2-8	1-8
Mean	7.0	7.3
Median	8.0	8.0
Mode	8.0	8.0
Respondent with more favourable attitude	-	-
Respondent with less favourable attitude	43.8% (161)	35.7% (108)

About 56 percent of the respondents in the intervention and 64.3 percent in control villages had a neutral attitude towards social justice and its implication. In general none of the respondents from the intervention and control villages shared a favourable attitude towards the scale (Table 5.7). Of those respondents with less favourable attitude, proportionally a larger number of respondents, i.e., 8.1 percent more, belonged to intervention villages compared to those in control villages.

**Statement 9. When faced with conflict, injustice and torture it is better not to take law in one’s own hand to solve the problem.**

**Agreed:** It was argued that there were conflict, feud, domination, and even oppression and repression in all societies but one was not expected to take law in own hand when becoming victim to these incidences. It was believed that such an act would not resolve the problem rather would aggravate the conflict. Moreover, taking law in one’s own hand was a crime.

If a perpetrator severely wounds a victim the former would be guilty and subject to punishment. The perpetrator would have to compensate the victim for treatment of the injury and other losses. If the victim hits back the perpetrator, other than to save him/herself, the victim would also be considered an offender same like perpetrator. In this case the victim would also have to compensate for the damage that the perpetrator underwent. Thus, it was opined that when law was taken in own hand instead of solving that would compound the problem.

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In the case of disputes the respondents recommended that the parties involved should take help of village arbitration. The group believed that the elected leaders of Union Parishad, traditional leaders<sup>4</sup> (*matbar*), and senior members of the village collectively could ensure peaceful solution to any problem through village arbitration. But, a section within the group although believing that the village arbitration was effective in resolving disputes commented that the interest of the poor was hardly upheld in such instance. It was recommended that the plaintiffs should seek justice first in village arbitration, if failed, should take help of the court. Court was believed to be the ultimate institution to provide fair justice and resolve all disputes.

**Disagreed:** Some respondents in the group questioned how perfect were the arbitrators? According to them as village arbitration was conducted by individuals with shortcomings thus fair justice could not be expected from such institution. Union parishad chairman, its members, and senior citizens of the society conducting arbitration often violate their women, so they were not in a position to appreciate the seriousness of the state of violence on women. As a result women did not get fair justice against violence in village arbitration.

Conflicts and feuds could be resolved peacefully in arbitration and was also considered to be cost-effective, but it was found to be effective in resolving certain kind of disputes but those related to grabbing land (Box 5.1). In such disputes in order to repossess land the plaintiffs were compelled to go to the court for litigation. But, the land grabbers for having greater economic power could bear the court expenses for a longer period than the plaintiff. Land grabber could also use the return from the land grabbed to continue case in the court.

In most cases verdict of village arbitration imposes monetary fine of a small amount on the wrongdoers or asks them to beg pardon to the plaintiff not compensating the plaintiff as required for the harm done on them. It was also observed that village arbitration could not impose severe punishment on the wrongdoers. Worst of all the village arbitration had turned to be a corrupt institution and gave verdict in favour of the litigant bribing them. Power (associated with stick) was the dominant factor for controlling the village arbitration. In arbitration, when the plaintiffs were poor and women, they had to listen to abuses from the accused which were very much offensive and insulting to the plaintiff. It was remarked that if village arbitration would have provided justice all would have preferred village arbitration.

Because of above mentioned limitations of village arbitration the respondents believed that the violated person had the right to take up

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<sup>4</sup> Leaders settling disputes in village arbitration.

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law in own hand to safeguard their rightful interest, but before that the litigants should make an effort to resolve the dispute peacefully by themselves.

**Box 5.1 Illegal land grabbing**

Elder brother of a respondent's husband illegally grabbed a piece of land belonging to her husband. An arbitration was organized on this incidence in their village. Many of the attendees at the arbitration were aware that her husband did not sell the land to his elder brother as the grabber claimed, but none of them dared to mention this fact in the arbitration. As a result her husband did not get fair justice and could not repossess the land.

**Statement 10. As the village influential have more education and money they should be in charge of *shalish*.**

**Agreed:** In support to the statement it was remarked that possession of education and money should be the yardstick (*mapkathi*) for one to be the adjudicator in the village arbitration. Such a remark emanated from the belief that intelligence and knowledge was prerequisites for one to be in charge of arbitration. An educated, for being intelligence and knowledge, was in a better position to understand what was right and what was wrong. Thus, use of intelligence and knowledge make the educated the fittest for providing correct judgment in an arbitration. Moreover, people obey one with education. Supplementary to education possession of money makes one additionally competent to conduct arbitration and possession of power, which goes hand-to-hand with riches, was considered very much needed for the implementation of the verdicts.

In contrast to these qualities, it was mentioned that, persons who were illiterate could make right decision. Nobody values opinion of the poor. When poor made decisions in village arbitrations hardly they could execute those. The reason behind this was that the poor lacked money, power, and authority in their community.

Based on above observation the respondents believed that person with wealth and education should be the heads of village; they were capable of conducting village arbitration and got the verdict pronounced implemented. The wealthy could control everything by using money. So, conducting arbitration by them was desirable.

**Disagreed:** The respondents not supporting the statement argued that those who understood legal issues and justice better were the appropriate persons for conducting village arbitration. Common people having these qualities and capabilities should also be considered eligible to conduct arbitration. The quality to do justice was considered to be the ultimate condition to have the responsibility to conduct arbitration.

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The respondents observed that the village arbitration conducted by the rich turned out to a corrupt institution where verdicts were given in favour of the litigants bribing the arbitrators. Besides, the influential in charge of arbitration favours people of their feather in giving verdict in village arbitration. The poor plaintiff does not get fair justice until and unless other poor stood in their support but such supporters could easily be intimidated to refrain themselves from standing in support of the fellow plaintiff in arbitration.

As the rich and educated influential people were not offering justice it was questioned why they should be in charge of village arbitration? On the other hand, if an illiterate person could prove to conduct arbitration more efficiently than the influential they should be placed with the responsibility to conduct arbitration. In context a respondent remarked – *People obey those who are honest, literate, wise and capable to conduct village arbitration.* Wealth alone could not be a criterion for a person to become eligible to conduct arbitration.

**Statement 11. If a female becomes pregnant due to free mixing with her male lover the arbitrators should be in her support.**

**Agreed:** The respondents rationalized their arguments in support of the statement, on the premise that women did not earn money, were dependent on men in the family, and had to suffer a lot. As they were in a disfavoured position it was expected that they should get support from the adjudicators and law enforcing agencies.

It was also believed that her becoming pregnant was the result of allurements for sex by her male partner. By exploiting her naivety and soft-heartedness and by giving a word to marry her he establishes an illicit sexual relationship with her, but did not have any intention in marrying her. Obviously her lover would try his best to escape from marrying her even though he was solely responsible for her becoming pregnant. Not marrying her after pregnancy would bring tremendous defamation not only for her but also to her family. She would receive no sympathy from family members rather would be ill treated. Community would ostracize her and rumour about her illegal pregnancy.

Because of shame associated with pregnancy without wedlock and lack of empowerment she would not be able to defend her case as required in arbitration. In such a situation arbitration should facilitate her to tell the truth without fear to defend herself. Not only that, as it was known that in case of any illegal pregnancy the guy did not face any loss but the girl had to bear the burden that was to come, the arbitrator should be in her support. Otherwise, she would be deprived of fair justice. If male lover does not abide by the verdict of the arbitrators the law enforcing agencies

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should force him to comply with the verdict. It was emphasized that the male wrongdoers must be punished.

**Disagreed:** Respondents disagreeing with the statement emphasized that fair justice would not be ensured, if arbitrators favour only the girl. The arbitrators must be neutral to provide fair justice to both male and female lovers. They should take into account that the defamation associated with her pregnancy was same for both the lovers. Thus, instead of punishing only the male lover they should make an effort to convince their parents to marry them as that was likely to bring good to both of them.

One male respondent argued that generally the arbitrators support the girl in village arbitration, but it was not fair, as it bore an adverse impact on the male lover. Arbitrators should not be lenient towards the girl rather they should investigate the matter with a neutral stand and come up with an unbiased verdict. It was believed that by following these policies fair justice could be ensured for both.

Some respondents in the group gave conditional support to the statement. The group emphasized upon the possible hidden motive of the girls in having sex with her lover, i.e., love-trap him for a marriage. In this case she would be labeled with a loose character (*kharap*). In such an instance she should not be given any preference by the adjudicators. A few female respondents opined that if the girl resisted her lover's lustful proposal for premarital sex, in no way the guy could have sex with her. Allah gave intelligence and capacity to foresee the consequence of such action to all girls. If the girl does not foresee the adverse implication of premarital sex, i.e., becoming pregnant, village arbitration and law implementing agencies should not favour her unduly in their verdict and their application respectively.

The male lover might have a lust for sex with his female partner and if she voluntarily had sex with him and if such sex leads to her pregnancy in that case both of them would be considered equally guilty.

**Statement 12. We learn lot of things from our teachers. They should face exemplary punishment if they are found guilty of free mixing.**

**Agreed:** Respondents supporting the statement mentioned that teachers were the wiser section of the society and were to be revered. Everyone listens, obeys, and follows them. Because of such a belief and reverence towards them it should not be taken for granted that they were above justice rather it was believed that justice was supposed to be more intensive in their case. Any illegal activity by them should be considered nothing, but crime. It was also noted that such teacher would not bring

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any good to the society but harm. Nobody should give him value and learn from such a teacher; according to some everyone should rather hate such a teacher.

The teachers were never supposed to establish illicit sexual relationship with their students. Because of young age and lack of experience girls and guys might not realize the implication of premarital sex, but the teachers were supposed to be well aware of that. Teachers should make their students aware about negative implication of such a sexual relationship, i.e., the act might spoil girls' career. Instead of this, if teachers themselves indulge in illicit sexual relationship others were likely to indulge more into it. When a teacher indulges himself into sexual relationship the community should bring such a teacher to village arbitration and should award exemplary punishment in his case so that the punishment could become an exemplary one in the community.

**Disagreed:** The respondents not supporting the statement argued that the teachers were also human being with flesh, heart, and mind. It was natural that he would love a girl as love comes out of everybody. He could do mistake due to uncontrolled emotional attachment with his lover. So, it was questioned why he should be punished so severely for a mistake? In case of a wrongdoing his punishment should be same like any other wrongdoer. If he develops sexual relationship with a girl after her consent nobody should interfere in the matter and if he marries the girl after she accidentally become pregnant there would be nothing wrong in it.

It was most important to know whether the students were getting proper lesson from the teacher or not. If he maintains good relationship with the students, imparts them knowledge, and does not cause them any harm, it should be unfair to interfere into his personal life. Of course, he was supposed to keep in mind that he was a teacher, so if he gets involved in illicit sexual relationship everyone would consider him a bad person not more than others with a similar act.

### **OPTIMISM ABOUT POSITIVE CHANGES**

Statements under this scale are expected to indicate respondents' optimism towards having a social change for a better society. The statements were expected to capture attitude towards social changes through existing system and by changing the system.

The respondents from the intervention villages had a higher score for all optimism and positive change statements compared to those in the control villages and these differences were statistically significant for all the statements (Table 5.8). The differences indicate that the respondents in intervention villages were more optimistic about positive changes compared to those in control villages.

**Table 5.8. Significance test result of intervention and control groups on optimism and positive change variables (n=605)**

Statement	Chi-square	Sig. level
13. There are some good people besides influential and bad in the society.	6.2	.10
14. Son may not be a wrongdoer in spite of the father being one.	12.7	.01
15. The good people in the village can resist the wrongdoing of its bad and influential people.	31.9	.00
16. Injustice can be protested by organizing people and creating opinion against it.	23.4	.00

**Table 5.9. Optimism about positive changes (n=605)**

Statistics	Result	
	Intervention	Control
Score range	8-16	7-16
Mean	14.6	14.7
Median	15.0	16.0
Mode	16.0	16.0
Respondent with more favourable attitude	48.9% (87)	0%
Respondent with less favourable attitude	34.8% (62)	40.9% (61)

About 17 percent of the respondents from the intervention and 59.1 percent from the control villages had a neutral attitude towards positive changes in the society. In the case of respondents from intervention villages about 14 percent more respondents maintained a more favourable attitude compared to those from the control villages (Table 5.9). In contrast none from the control villages had a favourable attitude. In the case of inter-group comparison about 49 percent of the respondents from the intervention villages maintained a positive attitude against none from the control villages. On the other hand, about six percent more respondents from the control villages compared to those in intervention villages maintained a less favourable attitude towards the part.

**Statement 13. There are some good people besides influential and bad in the society.**

The statement considered the influential in the society as bad but not necessarily by the respondents. The respondents both supporting the statement and not mentioned that there were both good and bad people in the society but debated on their proportion.

**Agreed:** All male respondents were in agreement with the statement. They along with some females supporting the statement emphasized on the role of good people in the society.

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Good people were portrayed as honest and trustworthy and villagers like, love, and respect them for their deeds. When a problem arose or injustice took place in their community good people voluntarily came forward to resolve the problem and stood against the injustice. They did this even by taking the risk of harm coming upon them.

Good people took concerted action to resolve the problems. They worked on awareness raising amongst the poor and illiterate so that they could protest the wrongdoing. They also talked to the wrongdoers to convince them that they should not have done what they had as it was unjust rather they should do good for others. They even sought assistance of the law implementing organizations to solve the problems. Finally, if all these did not work they resist the wrongdoers from creating problem and doing injustice on others.

In the whole process good man not only led but also sacrificed labour, time and resources, and in many cases undertook harm done on them by those who had vested interest in wrongdoing. The good people bore the consciousness of the society. Their presence irrespective of size made it possible for most to live with peace in the society. Generally, the villagers supported them for their roles in doing good works.

It was believed that the willpower of the good people made them successful in protesting and resisting wrongdoing in most cases. Of course there were a few instances where good people failed to stop the wrongdoers from wrongdoing for they had money, weapons, and support of other bad people like them.

**Disagreed:** A few female respondents not supporting the statement believed that there were very few good people in the society, as such they could not be of much help for the society. It was believed so as because the bad people were not only much larger in size but also very powerful in the society.

**Statement 14. Son may not be a wrongdoer in spite of the father being one.**

Good son was viewed as one who tried to aware the exploited about their rights, and mobilized and united them to protest and resist exploitation and domination by the wrongdoers.

**Agreed:** The respondents pointed out that the human being were not born bad or good. Son of a Chairman might not be elected as chairman. Similarly, son of a thief could be grown up as a good boy and again son of a good man could be a thief. The respondents supporting the statement questioned why a son would be bad like his father? They pointed out variety of reasons for not being the same as father.



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Son of a bad man might have a strong sense of justice thus valued the idea that it was unfair to cause harm and exploit others. Such a sense of justice was likely to encourage him to resist any wrongdoing. Again son might be aware of legal matters having intelligence, education, sense of fair judgment, and social responsibilities; consequently he would not only promote legal matters but also resist illegal activities within their society. Sons with these attributes were supposed to feel most the suffering of the victim of injustice particularly if they were poor and likely to be different from their fathers.

It was mentioned that a son could notice the reaction of others towards his father's wrongdoing, i.e., people dislike and disrespect him. A few who respected and obeyed him did so outwardly out of fear to avoid any harm that might be done on them by his father. The victims of wrongdoing imprecated their father. These reactions of people towards such a wrongdower was disliked thus his son might not like becoming same like father to avoid being reacted upon similar. Family members of a wrongdoing person also suffer from image crisis. Because of this it was also possible that his son might not engage in similar acts to undo bad image that the family earned due to his father.

Some emphasized on the process of socialization that molds a person to be a good or a bad one. Son was not only to be socialized by his father to grow up as a bad person nor was he the first to socialize him. It was pointed out that mother played a vital role in growing up her children. Bitter experience from wrongdoing of her husband and a thought that if her son grew like his father he would also cause pain and suffering to others might made mother to decide in bringing up her son in a way so that he does not become like his father. It was remarked that when wrongdoer's wife was a good and honest person she could have a profound impact on bringing up her son to be a good person. As they grew up, a son was likely to come in contact with persons beyond immediate family members and get influenced by them. A good social environment could help grow up the son to be a good person.

**Disagreed:** A male respondent not agreeing with the statement remarked – *Blood does not betray with one of its kind and it attracts each other (Rakto rakter sathey beimani korey na, rakto raktorey tanbei)*. It was believed that when a son observed the wrongdoing of his father he was definitely encouraged to copy the same. At young age son wants to be like his father without any understanding of what was right and wrong. So, son would copy his father's wrongdoing to be same like him. If father decides to raise his son to be a bad person like him in none of the cases it would be a failure.

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**Statement 15. The good people in the village can resist the wrongdoing of its bad and influential people in the same.**

**Agreed:** The respondents supporting the statement observed that the bad people were always morally weak as they did not have any acceptance in the community.

Good people always thought about something that benefits others, as such they wanted to remove pains and sufferings of the exploited. They did not compromise or got sold out to the wrongdoers and influential. Good people have acceptance to the majority of the village and everyone obeyed and respected them. They also had influence in the village like the rich in the village. If the rich and influential did anything illegal in presence of the good people they unfailingly protect and resist to such an act. For example, when land of the poor was grabbed by them good people mobilized others against it so that the interest of the poor might be protected.

A few respondents argued that the good people were more powerful than the bad and influential people in the village because of acceptance and wholehearted support of general mass towards them. When good people took initiative to protest and resist wrongdoing of the bad and influential they could always mobilize a large number of people in their support. Unity of villagers under the leadership of good people appeared to be a solid power certainly could stop wrongdoing of any force in the village. That's why the bad and influential were always afraid of protesting and resisting initiative of the good people and their supporters.

The bad and influential were bound to accept the judgment given by the arbitrators who happened to be good people; and if such judgment was not abided by the bad and influential, as reported, would be driven out of the village.

**Disagreed:** The respondents in this group believed that there were a few good people in the community. The bad and influential had more power than the good people could mobilize.

Sometime common villagers come forward to the assistance of the good people but they often get scared by seeing the power of the rich and their supporters including hired terrorists. The bad and influential did not hesitate in using their weapons when needed to safeguard their interest. They did not listen to good men. Despite the good people trying to protect and resist wrongdoers hardly they could stop any wrongdoing.

Persons who conducted and controlled arbitration were also influential and rich, and they favoured the influential defenders in arbitration. Moreover, they pronounce verdict in favour of the litigant who bribed

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them – the influential rich were in the best position to do that. Good people with wealth, influence, and power could successfully resist the wrongdoing but none would listen to good people with poor background, so they failed to resist the wrongdoing of the bad and influential.

**Statement 16. Injustice can be protested by organizing people and creating opinion against it.**

**Agreed:** The respondents observed that there were always some people who unknowingly cooperated with bad people in their wrongdoing. It was believed that these people could be made aware that what they were doing wrong. Apart from this, initiatives could also be taken to make people aware of their rights and what was correct course of action for them. With these knowledge people would be able to become their own judge in taking due course of action and at the same time protect their rights. Not only that such conscious people being courageous, honest, and morally powerful would resist wrongdoers in the society.

It was believed that if villagers did not protest and resist wrongdoing, e.g., harming a victim, that would be an encouragement to the wrongdoer in repeating such an act. Subsequently more people would be victims to wrongdoing. Community must include all wrongdoers, whether minor or major, and try to protest and prevent that.

The respondents believed that people were the source of all power and might. If majority in a locality planned to take an action against wrongdoer undoubtedly they would be successful. Thus, it was remarked if they all joined together and came with a decision that they would not tolerate any wrongdoing by anyone no matter how powerful was the person certainly wrongdoing would vanish from their community.

**Disagreed:** The respondents not supporting the statement have argued that the wrongdoers although small in number have weapons and armed group (*lathial bahini*), to compensate their numerical weakness. Even if the people become united their combined strength would not match the strength of the wrongdoers. Common people were helpless and bewildered at the wake of being attacked by the wrongdoers equipped with weapons. In such a situation good people were at risk due to protest against the wrongdoing of the criminals. Protesting wrongdoing meant taking risk, nobody would like to do it in most cases. Good people could hardly protest the wrongdoing of powerful persons equipped with weapons.

**Table 5.10. Regression on attitudinal score of the respondents (n=228)**

Independent variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p> t	Sig.
Age	-.010	.017	-.596	.551
Gender Female=1; Male=0	.396	.392	1.009	.313
Marital status Married=1; Not married=0	.080	.475	.169	.866
Education Round the year food security status 1=surplus; 2=Break even; 3 Deficit	.072	.044	1.623	.105
NGO membership status 1=Not member; 0=Member	-.287	.258	-1.112	.266
Type of respondent 1=Intervention; 0=Control	-.950	.433	-2.194	.029
Constant	-1.255	.350	-3.589	.000
R <sup>2</sup>	44.967	.943	47.679	.000
			.03	

The respondents' attitudinal score was regressed on several independent variables (Table 5.10). NGO participation and type of respondents, i.e., whether from intervention or control villages, determined respondents' attitude. NGO membership was likely to decrease attitudinal score by about 1 unit. Similarly being from intervention village, i.e., attended theatre, likely to decrease attitudinal score by 1.3 units. It may be noted that lower score indicates possession of an attitude as intended by the theatres held. The R<sup>2</sup> indicates that the model was effective in explaining 3 percent of the causes leading to the development of the attitude.

### **COMMUNITY MEETING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS DECISION**

As mentioned earlier the members participated in the dialogue sessions, held after the theatres, decided to hold a community meeting next day with a larger participation of the community to discuss about the problems in depth and come to a solution. The meetings were scheduled at 9:00 a.m. in Brahmonkandi and 8:00 a.m. in Fakirtari at the same places where the theatres were held.

The PO SDP, members of theatre team including Communication Worker, and the research team arrived at the venues of community meetings a few minutes before the time selected. The group found a very few villagers present at the venues. The reason for such a low turnout was that the villagers were located close to district headquarter or local town, so a good number of villagers of all ages went there for work. In addition to this the villagers in Fakirtari did not like the meeting to be held in the morning.

On arrival to the spot the theatre team immediately went to mobilize villagers to attend the meeting. As BRAC was involved in the community meeting it did not become difficult to convince some people to attend the meeting. Particularly those who were deriving benefits from BRAC or would like to derive the same. The team member brought some chairs and benches from the houses around for the attendees to use them during meeting.

The meeting at Brahmonkandi was attended by 12 males and 3 females. One of them was the local UP Ward member and the other was a rising junior village leader. In Fakirtari 12 males and 13 females attended the meeting. It is worth noticing that the UP Ward member who set the time for the meeting reported about an hour late. Four of the attendees were elderly and the rest were in their middle ages.

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The attendees to the meeting included a larger group of poor including ultra poor with no or a little education, in most cases affiliated with BRAC's credit programme and hoped that they would receive some kind of benefit, e.g., VGD card, at the end of the meeting. The other group included rich villagers with some education like, government workers, school teachers, and students all represented or associated with village power structure. Females were very curious about the meeting; they stood behind the male in clusters. None of them sat by the side of male in the meeting. After a sizable number of members arrived BRAC staff became busy in registering their attendance in the book rather than starting the meeting.

### **Decisions taken and their implementations**

**Brahmonkandi:** The meeting started with a discussion on different problems of their village like land grabbing, drug addiction, gambling, illicit sex, dowry, early marriage, and breakup of family. In the process they compared these problems with the themes of the theatre they attended previous evening, but the discussion was not in-depth enough to diagnose their causes.

After a teacher proposed the meeting decided to take initiative to get electricity supply in the Madhyapara, a *para* in the village. Once before they tried to get electricity in the *para*<sup>1</sup> but failed for not being able to place the concerted effort of the villagers for it. Now by watching the theatre they became inspired to get the electric supply but were also skeptic about whether they would be successful in achieving their objective this time. In spite of doubt they requested the Power Development Board for the supply and within 10 days of the initiative the *para* was supplied with the electricity. For electricity being supplied within such a short notice and with so little effort some believed that the connection was given for it being already in the agenda of the Board. Of course BRAC considered the supply of electricity in the *para* was the result of the effort of the villagers taken only after they became inspired by watching the theatre.

The village had a good number of, 10-12 years old, working children who never attended school. Some in the meeting thought that it was necessary to create an opportunity so that these children might have a chance to educate themselves. Thus, it was proposed that a preprimary school for over aged children might be started in the village. No initiative was taken to materlize the decision.

Popular theatres ware organized in the village in the past and the respondents set example on their action followed from watching one of

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<sup>1</sup> Subdivision of a village.

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such theatres. Teachers from colleges and schools and GO and NGO workers resided in the eastern border of the village. In spite of decent people residing a tea stall was selling drugs in the middle of the locality. The stall was always full of drug addicts who often teased the girls passing by. Despite such harassment people did not dare to protest against drug selling as local musclemen were involved with the drug business.

The Social Development Programme on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2004 staged a theatre just behind the tea stall. The subject matter of the theatre was about drug addiction and its impact on the young people. In the dialogue session of the theatre audiences talked about their tea stall and how selling of drugs in it was harming them. In the community meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2004 participants decided to take initiatives against the drug seller. They informed local police station about selling of drugs in the tea stall. Then the shop owner begged pardon to the community and promised that he would never sell drug again at his stall. People of the community acknowledged that popular theatre of BRAC not only inspired but also provided courage to villagers to protest against the drug seller. The drug seller was compelled to stop his illegal business only because of collective initiative of the community against him.

**Fakirtari:** At the outset of the meeting in Fakirtari the attendees elected the UP Ward member as the chair of the committee through majority's consent. The meeting had two parts.

During the first part the attendees discussed on the theatre – their impression on different themes of the theatre and in the process they expressed their feeling and emotions on the themes. An old man remarked that there was a need to make the society aware of and stand against the activities and initiatives of a few bad people within them. A member of the theatre team asked the participants whether the theatre reflected the existing social reality or not. The attendees unanimously expressed their views that it reflected the social reality

In the second part of the meeting, the PO of TUP programme of BRAC discussed about the ultra poor. The group identified and then made a list of nine ultra poor in their village. A woman in the meeting claimed herself to be an ultra poor and requested for her enlistment but the group declined to do that. Next, the group discussed about what they should do for the ultra poor in their village. Different propositions came out of the discussion. The group suggested that they should help the vulnerable of the village during their crisis. They should assist the poor in acquiring skill required for their development on the areas like poultry rearing, to get easy loan, and receive different government services which could be helpful for the ultra poor of the villages, like VGD, VGF, old age allowance, etc. They added that becoming conscious and aware about education, dowry, and sanitation was very much important for their

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improvement. They decided to raise a fund for the ultra poor and managed to collect Tk.386 on the spot for the treatment of a sick woman in their village. At the end of the meeting they fixed another date to form a committee to help the ultra poor during risks and dangers they might face in future. Although the money was given to the sick the meeting decided was not held.



### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Besides being a form of popular education, popular theatre also attempts to engender building a different system of education within the community – non-formal education accessible to all. Implying that it does not rely on literacy that would at once exclude the vast majority of the poor. It is a process centered round the people, starting and ending with the expressive potential of the human body. Thus, learning over here is more than entertainment, as the process of learning is user-friendly. Popular theatre is inexpensive to organize as it does not require an expensive outlay in equipment or infrastructure.

Popular theatre works to educate active audience through a three-way communication – actors learn from the audiences but most importantly audiences learn from the actors and audiences from each other. Popular theatre may stimulate the audiences to think about their life and identify their problems so that they can try to resolve those problems and make development possible in the long run. People can learn about how to protest illegal activities of the influential persons. Besides, they can learn about what one should do when he or she fell in a troublesome incident. Learning from theatre is more than entertainment, as this process of learning is user-friendly. Theatre can give the future generation direction to lead a better life. It can influence, encourage, and aspire people to take initiatives to do something, which may bring good fortunes for the community people. Thus, popular theatre leads to nothing but empowerment.

Exponents of popular theatre, e.g., August Boal from Brazil and Badal Sarkar from India, after experimentation and observation prescribed a format to be followed in the theatre to make it most effective in achieving its objectives (Boal 1985, Sarkar 2002). Of course with the variation of

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the objectives to make the theatre effective its format is likely to diverge to an extent from one proposed by the exponents.

**Popular theatre in BRAC:** It may be commented now that the popular theatre of BRAC diverged from that proposed by the exponents in a major way. The divergence obviously raises two sets of questions – how BRAC’s theatre is different from the proposed one and whether BRAC’s model is effective compared to one proposed by the exponents. Answer to the first question to an extent is provided in the discussion that follows but later question remains unanswered as study was not designed to answer the same. Of course, we have seen the effectiveness of BRAC’s theatre in the preceding chapters.

Popular theatre of BRAC can be divided into several major steps – selection of plot for theatre, converting the plot into a play and rehearsing on it, staging the theatre along with related activities like site selection, conducting dialogue session, holding community meeting, and finally implementing the decision of the community meeting for the improvement of the community.

**Workshop:** Popular theatre as visualized by the exponents started with a workshop conducted to explain how popular theatre works in the community and to communicate that this process is truly theirs – that community members are director, actor, writer, stage managers. At this stage it clarifies that the initiators/facilitators of the workshop are nobody more than those to help them in conducting the workshop and others steps of the theatre. Clarification of these issues to the community was likely to build trust not only on the facilitators but also on themselves. The essence of the whole process lies in the fact that it is not only highly communicative but also very much participatory.

The workshops may also explore current social and community issues. Once this has been satisfactorily accomplished and enough interest has been raised, the request for participation is made. When sufficient number of community members have come forward, the real essence of popular theatre begins. There is no pre-written script or agenda, rather the community provides the direction. Participants choose the subject matter, become the actor, direct the course of the action, and also intervene in the process.

Popular theatres in BRAC did not start by organizing a workshop involving the community rather it started with the collection of plots for the theatre by the theatre team members from the community. In the process the informants were explained about the objective of collecting plots from them. But, the process never let them have an impression that they were anything more than informants. They never could see themselves as part of the group conducting the theatre. This was because

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they did not know the members of the team and in most cases the plot based on which the play was developed were not from the villages where the theatre was organized.

The members of the team recruited from different parts of the thana in most cases were not known or formerly known to each other. Although they became close to each other for working together it did not make them believe that they belonged to same community. Also the villagers of the villages where theatres were played did not consider them as part of their community. Moreover, no effort in real sense was made to involve the community in any of the steps in performing the theatre. Only involvement of the community in the theatre was that the villagers were approached to provide a venue for the theatre, asked for the support of those in power structure so that theatre could be performed without a hitch, take limited help from a few villagers in constructing the stages, and a few villagers voluntarily came forward to maintain discipline when the theatre was in progress.

Workshops of organizers, including theatre team and BRAC staff, facilitating theatre, were also organized in the case of theatre observed. The purpose of the workshop was to construct plays based on plots received from the villagers and rehearse on that in order to perform in presence of audiences – objectives of workshop were very much different from what exponents proposed.

**Themes of the play:** The theatres divided the society in terms of the oppressed and the oppressor. Two sets of oppressor/oppressed divides were thought about in the plays.

- The oppressors group forming the power structure was rich, influential, and powerful against the oppressed group which was poor, helpless, and powerless in the society. People with riches, influence, and power for being oppressors were considered to be the bad people. Besides such generalization theatre also pointed out to a deviation within them, i.e., there are some rich who are good people for not being oppressors and standing in support of the oppressed.
- The community was viewed in terms of gender where males were portrayed as exploiter, opportunist, cheat, womanizer against female being innocent, helpless, honest, and loving. As because of such qualities female often become victim of foul play by the male.

The theatres not only view society as a dichotomy of good and bad where the latter oppressing the former but by following the trend of popular theatre highlighted the cause of the oppressed in the society. The theatres not only highlighted the implication of the problems, but also the causes behind the problems, and most importantly hinted on how these problems could be resolved.

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**Communication:** Popular theatre suggests engendering communication between facilitators and participants, amongst participants through the process of creating theatre, and through the subject matter of the theatre. Open interaction and open relationships amongst the parties involved are supposed to be integral part of such communication. The communication expressed in the form of dialogue amongst the parties involved are supposed to be interpreted into the form of education, conscientization, and change or formation of attitude in the participants.

Players initiated dialogues with the audiences several times during the play. In most cases it was in the form of asking questions and taking consent of the audiences on certain scenes of the play being shown. Although the artists were loud enough in the dialogues addressed to audiences but the audiences in responding those. The audiences responded cordially in groups. All these indicate that the dialogue that took place was one sided, not voluntary, and of course not participatory. In none of the cases audience initiated any dialogue. In fact, there was not much scope for that as because the spots were quite crowded and audiences were noisy during the play particularly in the case of Fakirtari. Most importantly the audiences did not initiate any dialogue as because they did not have any idea that they could do the same during the play and doing so was an integral component of the theatre being played.

Popular theatre is considered to be a tool for unveiling the conditions and situations in the community to its members; for pooling resources, and for seeing strengths, weaknesses, and identify their location in the community. We can cast doubt on the extent the theatres were contributory to the achievement of their objectives. This was because:

- In the community meeting audiences selected agendas for their development which were not linked or remotely linked to the themes covered in the theatres.
- As a policy dialogues were initiated on the positive sequences of the play like the oppressed collectively achieving something for themselves not on the negative sequences like people in the power structure exploiting the poor villagers. Such a policy helped audiences to think about only on selected dimension of the play. In other words, not much on the exploitation and injustice to which they were victims.
- Dialogues in some cases were initiated to keep the audiences disciplined by keeping their attention towards the theatre. In some cases it also appeared that the dialogues were initiated to maintain the rituals. Dialogues in some cases were not of quality to conscientized them or to make them analyze their situations in context to the realities and look for their solution.

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In spite of ineffectiveness of dialogues during the play a few audiences remarked that it helped them in following the play particularly in the case of those who left the venue before the theatre was over.

Dialogue amongst the audiences on the theatre, particularly when it was in progress, was totally absent. The interactions amongst them remained confined to socializing and in cases to arguments which interrupted watching the theatre by others. Popular theatre was also supposed to serve not only as an information provider but as a tool for gathering information from the audiences. Dialogue between the actors and the audiences did not appear to have added to the learning of the actors. Of course dialogue in some cases and observation of the actors on their performance in a play helped them to perfect it in subsequent staging.

The participation of audiences in the dialogue can be increased by explaining it to them what was the nature of popular theatre and by categorically mentioning it that they are supposed to initiate and participate in dialogue when the theatre is in progress before it commences.

**Reaction during theatre:** The theatres were very much successful in attracting audiences in spite of those being staged in the coldest month of the year and no sitting arrangement was made for them. In spite of the theatre not having a congenial environment for following the dialogue it appeared the audiences, who wanted to, could follow the themes of the theatre. This was because audiences were familiar with similar incidences as shown in the theatre. As a result a respondent remarked – They had seen same misbehaviour and exploitation by the UP member as in the theatre actually occurred in their villages. Past experience compensated in their understanding of the theme that did not take place due to failure in hearing the dialogue. As an example it may be mentioned that domination and exploitation of UP member as a villain in the play performed in Fakirtari arose such a deep reaction amongst some of the audiences, that they could not control them from not scolding/rebuking the actor as if he was exploitative in reality other than acting. Reaction of audiences when the play was in progress indicates that the theatres managed to appeal audiences deeply.

The similarities between the plot of the theatre and life experience of the audiences managed to rekindle their thought related to wrong doings and problems in their community which in turn conscientized them. This was why the findings indicated that the certain attitude of the respondents from the intervention villages related to the theatre was distinctly different from those of the control villages.

**Attitude:** As mentioned earlier popular theatre attempts in building a non-formal education accessible to all. Education imparted manifests itself through formation of attitude and conscientization them in turn.

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Such formation was fathomed by comparing the attitude of the villagers in intervention with the control villages. It must be mentioned here that the villagers were exposed to popular theatre in the past. Attitude formed due to such exposure was not controlled in the study.

In spite of being less participatory theatres appeared to be quite successful in educating people thus contributed to their empowerment. The education that the theatre provided manifested themselves in conscientizing and in changing their attitude. As a result the respondents from the intervention villages had a lower score for all the parts in the attitude index – domination and exploitation, sexual relationship and gender discrimination, social justice, and its implementation, and optimism about positive changes. Lower score indicated that the respondents from the intervention villages had a more positive attitude towards a society with equal rights for all, ensuring justice, free from exploitation, and oppression (pp. 31-32).

Section on attitude concentrated considerably on the rationale of the respondents in holding their attitudes. Respondents in some cases justified their stand in relation to a statement based on certain beliefs, e.g., impression about the rich often influenced their acceptance or rejection of certain act of the rich that the statement reflected. Some of the arguments that the respondents' places had relevance to the scenes shown in the play and was believed that those had an influence in their cognition while placing arguments on the statements. Discussion on rationalization is likely to be helpful in strategizing the initiatives on changing their attitudes by the Programme.

Analysis in this section was not done in terms of intervention and control groups rather in terms of gender, age, etc. Associations between the respondents' education, marital status, wealth rank, food security status, NGO membership status, and attitude held was observed. The findings contradicted with certain beliefs widely held, e.g., women folk are against the practice of dowry. The findings indicated that they all were not against it.

Although respondents were quite categorical in agreeing or disagreeing with the statements in some cases they referred to situations where exceptions could be made. For example, a good number of respondents agreed that a male should marry his lover if she becomes pregnant due to premarital sex. But, a number of these respondents at the end mentioned that the guy was not liable to marry her if she maintained sexual relationship with multiple partners and after becoming pregnant she targeted him for marriage.

**Dialogue session:** Lack of effective dialogue between performers and audiences during the play to an extent was compensated by the dialogue session held immediately after the theatre. Discussion between the

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artists and the audiences was channeled towards finding the similarities between the themes of the theatre with the realities that the audiences observed in their community, i.e., injustice being done on them, thus helped them to identify problems within their community and develop an urge in them to resolve these problems. They also wanted to resolve those problems with some assistance from BRAC. At least the audiences expressed their commitment in assisting each other in the dialogue session. Thus, dialogue session was able to steer the awareness of those who joined in the session particularly in Brahmonkandi as intended by the popular theatre.

Despite such a positive reaction among the participants dialogue session can be considered to be of partial success. In spite of an aggressive drive by facilitators to make participants join the dialogue session the session failed to retain majority of the audiences in it after the theatre was over. Quick departure of the audiences after the theatre indicated that they were more interested in entertainment rather than in the ultimate objective of popular theatre. Again a good portion of the audiences who stayed back to join the session was visibly disinterested in participating in the discussion held. The dialogue session in Fakirtari was short, conducted from the stage providing hardly a scope for any dialogue in real sense. It remained almost confined to announcing the time/date of the community meeting and inviting them to attend it. In order to make audiences stay back for the dialogue session after the theatre is over a short cultural programme may be arranged after the session.

**Community meeting:** Community meetings and implementation of the decisions taken were supposed to be the ultimate step towards achieving the objectives of the popular theatre. The meetings were characterized by low and late turnout, most of the attendees had to be persuaded to attend the meeting in spite of venue having been announced on previous day, and attendees in most cases were located close to the meeting spot, besides few being associated with BRAC programme. Although the significant section of the audiences was poor but they were disproportionately represented in the meeting. Most of the attendees, particularly the male, were from upper-middle class with some education. They were representing or close to power structure in the village. These observations may raise a question whether such meeting could really be called community meeting in its true sense. Moreover, not holding follow-up meetings further confirmed half-heartedness in implementing the decisions by defeating the whole purpose of popular theatre.

In spite of having similar objectives the meetings held after the theatres followed different formats. The first half of the meeting in Fakirtari discussed the issues related to theatre which was done in the dialogue session after the theatre in Brahmonkandi. The second half of the

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meeting was directed and remained confined on issues related to ultra poor. Such a regulation definitely barred the participants from discussing other issues might have been considered important for the community.

As mentioned earlier the theatres dealt with some fundamental form of relationship being societal in nature – exploitation of the poor by the rich and the influential people. But, the issues discussed in the meeting and the decisions taken were more mundane in nature resulting to immediate material gain like setting up school, getting electricity, or preventing drug selling in the locality. The meeting in Fakirtari while discussing on how to help the poor did not discuss the root cause of their poverty although it was shown in the theatre and they were convinced that it was there mainly because of exploitation by the rich and the influential people. The meeting raised the empathy of the attendees on the poor and collected donations to help a needy. The act although appreciable was not a solution to the problem. The meetings did not take any decision on hitting the root cause of the problem. Failure of the meetings to take agenda reflecting the theatre staged indicates that the theatres and community meetings were not effective enough to make audiences analyze their situation and come out with appropriate programme for that.

There were other possible reasons for failure to come up with effective programme for the development of the poor. Hitting the root cause of the problem of the poor was not possible in a meeting involving both rich and poor particularly where the development of the poor or solving their problem was likely to affect legitimate or illegitimate interest of the rich. Besides, the rich were not supposed to be interested in any programme which would not benefit them. On the other hand the poor in the meeting could not press much for taking agenda serving their interest because of functional dependence of the poor on the rich or for fearing that such a proposition might antagonize the rich. As a result meeting had to select development agenda that would not affect the rich but necessarily not hitting the cause of the problem. A community meeting including only the poor may be organized after the theatre to observe their effectiveness.

Of course it cannot be denied that the rich are also a part of the community and their assistance could be instrumental in many development works. It should also be kept in mind that any agenda taken in community meeting antagonizing the rich can be detrimental to the poor. So, the poor should keep in mind that they need to be tactful in achieving their objectives.

**Coverage:** Villagers attended the theatre were younger, could read and write, and were from poorer section in most cases. Regression result indicates that their age, education, and involvement in public relations, e.g., participation in village arbitration, political activities, club, etc. had an influence on the villagers attending the theatre.



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It is the policy of the Popular Theatre programme to stage a theatre in all the villages in a union. The policy is not likely to bring all the people within the scope of a theatre in a village, thus also not in the union it belong to. It was observed that about 77 percent of the villagers from intervention villages did not watch the theatre. Of course those who did not watch the theatre could have watched it when staged in the neighboring village. It is also true that a portion of those who did not attend the theatre might have learnt about it from those who attended. Communication of the theatre content by the attendees to those who did not attend was not likely to be uniform in all cases. The attendees were selective in communication in terms of themes, number of times communicated, and groups communicated. Thus, it was concluded that the impact of theatre on the audiences who observed it was likely to be more than on those who learnt about it from the audiences.

It was estimated that about 72 percent of the villagers from the intervention villages would not watch the theatre even it would be staged in neighboring villages thus they would not be educated directly by the theatre. Not much effort was given in inviting the villagers to the theatre by believing that if that was done the venue would have larger audiences than it could accommodate. But, it should be kept in mind that more the number of people were educated in an area easier it would become for them to implement a decision for the betterment of their community. Thus, it should be the policy of the Programme to make an effort to bring maximum number of villagers to the theatre. This can be done by:

- Making a wider advertisement and invitation of the theatre to the villagers.
- Theatre team should have an idea about probable number of villagers that would attend the theatre and population within a village. Based on this information the team should decide on number of theatres they should arrange in the village to provide an opportunity for maximum attendance.

Conducting more number of theatres in a village is likely to make the coverage of a union more labour intensive. Thus, make coverage slower and expensive than what it is now but likely to make it more effective in attaining the objectives of the programme.

**Themes:** The themes of the play held in Fakirtari were not ultra poor focused, but a good portion of time in the community meeting was spent on the ultra poor and how to help them. As the objective of the programme was to develop the ultra poor it would have been more appropriate to stage a theatre relevant to ultra poor. In that case attendance in the community meeting could have come up with the development agenda for the ultra poor in reflection to their learning in the theatre.

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The theatres in Brahmonkandi and Fakirtari had six and five themes respectively. Including so many themes gives an impression that the theatres intended to cover maximum number of dimensions or problems that the poor face in a community. In a situation where audiences of different age, education, and economic groups were differentially receptive to themes the policy of having multiple themes in a play was likely to be effective in making them enjoy and learn from the theatre. This is because all the groups could find something of their interest in the theatre.

Contrary to the policy of targeting maximum attendance to the theatre the Programme can set up a policy of targeting a type of villagers thought to be instrumental to the development of the community. In this case, selection of the play should take into consideration whether it would be appreciated by the type of villagers targeted and also the group they would communicate the theme of the theatre with.

**Attendance in community meeting:** It is subject to question why there were so little participation in the dialogue session and in the community meeting, and so little initiative in implementing the decisions taken in the meeting. The facilitators were not less particular in involving the villagers in different steps of the theatre, dialogue sessions, and community meeting. But involving them was ritualistic in nature. Different groups got involved in different stages of the theatre and it was not clear to them what would be the next step and their position in the whole process. As a result they did not own the whole process. They did not feel that participation in the process was a mission for them and they were doing something for themselves, rather they took the theatre as an entertainment. So, when they were asked to stay back for the dialogue session and to attend the community meeting they did not find any interest in doing that.

Such a limited contact of the community in conducting the theatre whether selection of the theme, their involvement in performing the play, and organizing it did not encourage them to feel that the theatre belonged to them. Involvement of the community whatever was there was fragmentary, not with the same person or group throughout the whole process. For these reasons audiences referred the theatres as 'BRAC's theatre' rather than 'our theatre'.

It is suggested that whole process of popular theatre starting from organizing a workshop to community meeting should be made participatory in its true sense by initiating where a core group of villagers substantial in size should participate in each step. Such participation is likely to make them understand the essence of popular theatre and rationale behind each step in the process, empower them with the knowledge and analytical capability, and most importantly make them to

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own the process. Such an ownership was likely to encourage them to participate in the dialogue session, community meetings, and finally in the implementation of the decisions taken in the meeting. Of course the policy is likely to become more expensive and slowdown the speed of covering an area with a theatre. In spite of these limitations it would be worth implementing above proposition in the line of the exponents of popular theatre in order to make it effective.

At the end it may be reiterated that the popular theatres of BRAC was strong enough in imparting knowledge, bringing change in the attitude and in conscientizing – definitely contributing to the empowerment of the audiences. Such an empowerment was of course achieved with the help of communication and participation. Thus, the process took care of all the elements needed to be touched upon in order to achieve development. It has also been observed that the theatres were not strong enough in motivating the community in materializing development. This is where the programme should focus to achieve its objectives.

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