

ABSTRACT

Theatre is a powerful performing art form that serves as both an expression of creativity and a reflection of society. This study explores the professional lives and experiences of theatre actors within the Indian cultural landscape, emphasizing Assam's regional theatre industry. By portraying imaginative or real-life events, theatre actors contribute to the cultural economy and perform immaterial labour that influences social, economic, and environmental development. Theatre's sociological significance lies in its deep-rooted connection to culture, where it has historically functioned as a mirror of societal values, norms, and tensions. It plays a crucial role in identity formation, community-building, and the promotion of social cohesion. As actors embody various characters, theatre becomes a space for audience members to gain insight into diverse perspectives, offering a unique exploration of human consciousness, empathy, and social reality. The collaborative process of theatre highlights the shared experiences and cultural values that define societies, revealing the norms and social structures that shape individual and group interactions.

The research identifies key challenges and phenomena associated with the profession, particularly focusing on three major aspects. First, the study examines the nature of work in theatre, investigating the multifaceted dimensions of theatre acting, including its economic constraints, artistic demands, and structural organization. This analysis includes an exploration of the demands placed on actors who work under precarious employment conditions and rely on intricate collaborations among cast and crew members. Second, the thesis delves into the emotional labour of actors as they develop and sustain emotions to bring roles to life. This process, essential to their craft, requires both personal and professional investment, often resulting in psychological and emotional repercussions. The concept of emotional labour provides a framework to understand how actors manage the affective demands of their work, drawing on their own experiences to create authentic, resonant performances. Third, the study investigates gender dynamics within the theatre industry, highlighting how gendered experiences affect the roles, opportunities, and treatment of actors. Gender not only shapes the allocation of roles but also influences how actors are perceived and valued within the industry, revealing power imbalances that affect career trajectories and access to professional resources.

The study employs a qualitative methodology, gathering data through in-depth interviews and participant observation to gain insights into the personal and professional lives of Assam's theatre actors. Building rapport with participants was a critical step, allowing the researcher to engage openly with the actors, and gaining their trust to facilitate honest, reflective discussions about their experiences. Observations of rehearsals and performances enabled a closer understanding of the actors' craft and their on-stage dynamics, while pre-interview conversations provided an opportunity to clarify the purpose of the study and establish a comfortable environment for dialogue. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the data, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and intricacies involved in theatre acting as a profession.

This research contributes to the field by providing a nuanced understanding of the professional landscape of theatre in Assam, a region where cultural heritage and traditional theatre practices play a vital role in society. By examining the unique intersection of work, emotional labour, and gender within the theatre, the study reveals the complex reality of actors' lives and the socio-cultural factors shaping their profession. The findings offer valuable insights for theatre practitioners, cultural policymakers, and scholars interested in understanding the intricate dynamics of the theatre industry in India, contributing to the broader discourse on the socio-cultural significance of performing arts.

Keywords: Theatre, Emotional Labour, Gender Dynamics, Cultural Economy, Assam, Actor