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TRADITIONAL THEATER DESIGN IN BANGLADESH FROM AN INCLUSIVE DESIGN PERSPECTIVE

Abstract. Inclusive design is an approach to designing products, services, and environments that considers the needs and preferences of diverse users, including those with disabilities or marginalized identities. It involves involving a range of users in the design process, providing flexibility and choice, and improving usability. This article focuses on the Traditional theatre design in Bangladesh from the lens of Inclusive design.

Keywords: Inclusive Design, Theater, Bangladesh, Stage, Traditional, Acting.

Introduction

Inclusive design is an approach to designing products, services, and environments that consider the needs and preferences of diverse users, including those with disabilities or other marginalized identities. One of the key principles of inclusive design is to involve a diverse range of users in the design process. This can involve conducting research and user testing with people from different backgrounds,



abilities, and experiences to identify their needs and preferences. By including a range of perspectives, designers can create solutions that work for everyone, rather than just a narrow group of users. Another principle of inclusive design is to provide flexibility and choice. This means offering multiple ways to access and use a product or service. One of the main benefits of inclusive design is that it can improve usability for all users. When products and services are designed with a diverse range of users in mind, they are more likely to be accessible and easy to use for everyone. Inclusive design can also help to promote social inclusion and reduce stigma. When products and services are designed to be accessible and welcoming to all users, it can help to break down barriers and reduce discrimination. For example, a website that is designed with inclusive principles might use gender-neutral language and avoid stereotypes, which can help to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all users.

Bangladesh and Theatre

Bangladesh is a country located in South Asia, bordered by India to the north, east, and west, and Myanmar to the southeast. It has a population of over 160 million people, making it the eighth-most populous country in the world. Bangladesh has a rich history and culture, with evidence of human settlements dating back over 4,000 years. It was ruled by various dynasties and empires throughout its history, including the Maurya, Gupta, and Mughal empires, before coming under British colonial rule in the 18th century. Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, following a nine-month war. Since then, Bangladesh is known for its vibrant culture and cuisine, including its traditional textiles and colorful festivals.

Theatre in Bangladesh has a rich and diverse history that spans several centuries. It has been shaped by a range of cultural and social influences, including traditional folk performances, colonial-era drama, and contemporary theater movements. One of the earliest forms of theater in Bangladesh was Jatra, a traditional form of musical theater that originated in rural Bengal in the 16th century. Jatra



performances typically featured a mix of song, dance, and dialogue, and often dealt with religious and moral themes. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, theater in Bangladesh was heavily influenced by British colonial rule. European-style theater productions, including Shakespearean plays and musicals, were popular among the educated classes.

However, in the 1960s and 1970s, a new wave of Bangladeshi theater emerged, characterized by a focus on social and political issues and a rejection of Western theatrical forms. This movement was led by playwrights and directors such as Syed Jamil Ahmed, Selim Al Deen and Abdullah Al Mamun, who sought to create a distinctly Bangladeshi theater that reflected the country's cultural and political realities. Today, theater in Bangladesh continues to be a vibrant and diverse art form, with a range of styles and genres represented. Traditional forms such as Jatra and Pala continue to be performed, alongside modern plays that deal with a wide range of themes and issues. Overall, theater in Bangladesh remains an important form of cultural expression and a powerful tool for social and political commentary. With a rich history and a vibrant contemporary scene, it continues to play a vital role in shaping the country's cultural landscape.

Theatre Stage Design in Bangladesh

Theatre stage design plays a crucial role in the overall impact and success of a theatrical production. In Bangladesh, stage design has evolved over the years, drawing on a rich tradition of art and craft. Traditional forms of Bangladeshi art, such as Nakshi kantha embroidery and katha stitching, have been incorporated into stage design, adding a unique and distinctly local flavor to productions. Additionally, contemporary designers have also experimented with innovative materials and technology to create striking and memorable stage designs.

Arena-style stage drama is a popular form of theater in Bangladesh that is characterized by its intimate, immersive setting. Unlike traditional proscenium-style theater, where the stage and audience are separated by a frame, arena-style theater



places the stage in the center of the audience, creating a more intimate and interactive experience. In Bangladesh, arena-style theater has become increasingly popular in recent years, with many theater companies embracing this form to create more engaging and immersive productions. One of the most prominent arena-style theater companies in Bangladesh is Dhaka Theatre, which has been at the forefront of this movement.

In addition to its immersive and interactive nature, arena-style theater in Bangladesh is also known for its innovative use of technology and multimedia. Productions often incorporate video projections, live music, and other forms of multimedia to create a more dynamic and engaging experience for audiences.

Overall, arena-style theater in Bangladesh has become an important part of the country's cultural landscape, providing a platform for innovative and socially engaged theater productions. With its intimate and immersive setting, this form of theater offers a unique and engaging experience for audiences, helping to make theater more accessible and inclusive for all.

Theatre stage design in Bangladesh from inclusive design perspective

Theatre stage design in Bangladesh has been evolving in recent years, with a greater focus on inclusive design principles. Inclusive design is an approach to design that considers the needs and perspectives of all users, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Inclusive design principles are particularly important in the context of theater stage design, where the physical space and set design play a critical role in shaping the audience's experience. Inclusive design principles can help to ensure that theater productions are accessible to all audiences, including those with disabilities, and can create a more engaging and inclusive experience for all. One example of inclusive design in theater stage design in Bangladesh is the use of accessible seating arrangements. This can include providing designated spaces for wheelchair users, as well as ensuring that there is ample space between seats to accommodate mobility aids such as walkers or crutches.



Another important aspect of inclusive design in theater stage design is the use of lighting and sound design that is accessible to all audiences. This can include using bright lighting to make it easier for visually impaired audience members to navigate the space, as well as ensuring that sound levels are comfortable and not overly loud, which can be uncomfortable or even painful for those with hearing sensitivities. Inclusive design principles can also inform the set design of theater productions in Bangladesh. This can include creating set designs that are easy to navigate for those with mobility impairments, as well as incorporating tactile elements into the set design that can be appreciated by visually impaired audience members.

Accessible seating arrangements

Accessible seating arrangements in Bangladeshi theatre design from an inclusive design perspective refer to the design and arrangement of seating areas that can accommodate audiences with disabilities or mobility impairments. The goal is to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where everyone can enjoy the theatre performance equally. Inclusive seating arrangements may include the provision of wheelchair accessible seating, designated companion seating, and adjustable seating that can accommodate people with different physical needs. The seating area should be designed to provide enough space for wheelchair users to move around comfortably and for staff to assist them if necessary. The seating arrangement should also be flexible enough to allow for various seating arrangements based on the specific needs of the audience. In addition to physical accessibility, inclusive seating arrangements should also be designed to create a comfortable and welcoming environment for everyone. This may include considering the placement of the seating areas in relation to the stage, lighting, and sound design to ensure that all audience members can have an unobstructed view of the performance. The design should also consider the acoustics of the space to ensure that all audience members can hear the performance clearly.



Accessible lighting and sound design

Accessible lighting and sound design in Bangladeshi theatre design from an inclusive design perspective refer to designing lighting and sound systems that are accessible and inclusive for all audiences, including those with disabilities or sensory impairments. The goal is to create a performance environment where all audience members can experience the performance equally.

Accessible lighting design involves the use of lighting techniques and systems that are designed to accommodate people with different visual abilities. This may include providing adequate illumination levels, contrasting colors, and controlling the direction and intensity of light to minimize glare and shadows. The design should also consider the use of audio-described performances, which can provide spoken descriptions of what is happening on stage to help people with visual impairments to follow the action.

Accessible sound design involves the use of sound techniques and systems that are designed to accommodate people with different hearing abilities. This may include using amplification systems, ensuring clear and distinct sound, and controlling the volume and balance of sound to ensure that it is audible to all audience members. The design should also consider the use of closed captioning, which can provide a written transcript of the dialogue and sound effects for people with hearing impairments.

Accessible lighting and sound design in Bangladeshi theatre design are essential aspects of inclusive design. By designing lighting and sound systems that are accessible and inclusive, theatre designers can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all audience members. The design should comply with accessibility standards while still complementing the overall artistic vision of the performance.

Tactile set design

Tactile set design in Bangladeshi theatre design from an inclusive design perspective involves creating sets that can be experienced not only visually, but also through touch. The goal is to create a performance environment where people with



visual impairments can experience the performance equally, by using tactile elements that provide information about the setting, props, and other elements on stage.

The tactile elements in set design can be achieved by using different materials and textures that can be easily recognized through touch. For example, a brick wall set can be designed using real bricks or textured materials that mimic the texture of bricks. Similarly, props and other elements can be designed using tactile elements such as different fabrics, materials, and shapes.

In addition to complying with accessibility standards, inclusive tactile set design should also consider the aesthetics of the performance. The design should complement the overall artistic vision of the performance while still providing tactile elements for people with visual impairments.

In conclusion, tactile set design in Bangladeshi theatre design is an essential aspect of inclusive design. By designing sets that can be experienced through touch, theatre designers can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for people with visual impairments. The design should comply with accessibility standards while still complementing the overall artistic vision of the performance. Working with experts in the field of tactile design can provide valuable guidance and help ensure that the set design is accessible and inclusive for all audience members.

Addressing social justice and inclusion

Addressing social justice and inclusion in Bangladeshi theatre design from an inclusive design point of view involves creating performances that not only showcase artistic talent but also reflect the diverse voices and perspectives of the community. Inclusive theatre design aims to promote social justice by ensuring that everyone, regardless of their race, gender, ability, or background, has equal access to participate in and enjoy the performance.

One way to address social justice and inclusion in theatre design is through the selection and casting of actors. The theatre industry in Bangladesh can promote diversity by selecting actors from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and by



ensuring that actors with disabilities are not excluded from casting calls. Inclusive casting can help to promote diversity and social justice, while also providing an opportunity for actors to showcase their talents.

Another way to promote social justice and inclusion in Bangladeshi theatre design is through the themes and messages conveyed in the performance. By addressing social issues and promoting diversity, theatre designers can help to educate and inspire audiences on important social justice topics. Inclusive theatre design should promote messages of equality, acceptance, and understanding of different cultures and experiences. The design of theatre spaces in Bangladesh can also promote social justice and inclusion. Inclusive theatre design should include accessible seating, assistive listening devices, and other accommodations that allow people with disabilities to enjoy the performance equally. This can also include creating gender-neutral restrooms and providing accessible routes to and from the theatre.

Finally, inclusive theatre design can also involve engaging with the local community and promoting cultural awareness. By involving community members in the production process, theatre designers can ensure that the performance is relevant to the local community and reflects the diversity of their experiences. Inclusive theatre design can also involve using traditional cultural elements in the design of the set, props, and costumes to showcase the unique heritage and identity of the community.

In conclusion, addressing social justice and inclusion in Bangladeshi theatre design from an inclusive design point of view involves promoting diversity, equality, and accessibility. By selecting diverse actors, promoting important social issues, providing accessible accommodations, and engaging with the local community, theatre designers can create performances that are both artistically engaging and socially relevant. Inclusive theatre design has the power to promote positive social change, promote cultural awareness, and provide opportunities for all members of the community to participate and enjoy the performance.



Collaborative approach

A collaborative approach to Bangladeshi theatre design from an inclusive design point of view involves involving a diverse range of stakeholders in the design process, including artists, designers, performers, community members, and accessibility experts. Inclusive theatre design should be a collaborative process that values the contributions of all stakeholders and ensures that the performance is accessible and relevant to the local community. One key aspect of a collaborative approach to inclusive theatre design is involving individuals with disabilities in the design process. This can include consulting with disability rights organizations, disability advocates, and accessibility experts to ensure that the performance is designed with the needs of people with disabilities in mind. This can include ensuring that the performance is accessible for individuals with different types of disabilities, such as hearing or visual impairments, mobility challenges, or sensory sensitivities.

Another important aspect of a collaborative approach to Bangladeshi theatre design is involving the local community in the design process. This can include holding community meetings, focus groups, and other forms of engagement to ensure that the performance reflects the unique cultural experiences and perspectives of the community. Community engagement can also involve promoting diversity and social justice by ensuring that the performance reflects the diversity of the community. Inclusive theatre design should also involve collaboration between artists, designers, and performers. By working together, they can create performances that are not only visually stunning but also accessible and relevant to the local community. Collaboration can also help to promote diversity and social justice by providing opportunities for artists from different backgrounds and experiences to showcase their talents. Finally, inclusive theatre design should involve ongoing evaluation and feedback from stakeholders. This can include post-performance surveys, focus groups, and other forms of evaluation to ensure that the performance is meeting the needs and expectations of the local community. Ongoing feedback and evaluation can help to improve the accessibility and relevance of the performance over time.



Use of technology

The use of technology in Bangladeshi drama set design from an inclusive design point of view can play a significant role in enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of performances. Technology can help to provide a more immersive and engaging experience for audiences, while also addressing specific accessibility needs of individuals with disabilities. One key area where technology can be used in Bangladeshi drama set design is in the use of audio and visual effects. Audio effects can be used to create a more immersive experience for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. For example, soundscapes can be used to provide an audio representation of the environment and atmosphere of the set design. This can be especially important in outdoor performances or performances where the set design plays a significant role in the storytelling. Visual effects can also be used to enhance the inclusivity of Bangladeshi drama set design. For example, projection mapping technology can be used to create dynamic, interactive projections that respond to the performers and the environment. This can be especially effective in creating an immersive experience for individuals with hearing impairments, who may rely on visual cues to understand the performance.

Another way technology can be used in Bangladeshi drama set design is through the use of assistive technology. Assistive technology can include anything from hearing aids and cochlear implants to motorized wheelchairs and communication devices. The integration of assistive technology into the set design can help to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in the performance. In addition, technology can also be used to promote accessibility and inclusivity outside of the performance space. For example, online resources and social media can be used to promote upcoming performances and provide information on accessibility services, such as audio and visual effects, and assistive technology. Digital resources can also be used to provide educational materials on the importance of inclusivity and accessibility in drama set design. Finally, technology can be used to create more sustainable and eco-friendly drama set designs. The use of



3D printing technology can help to reduce waste and energy consumption, while also providing a more efficient and cost-effective way of creating set designs. The integration of sustainable materials, such as bamboo and recycled materials, can also help to reduce the environmental impact of drama set design.

Non-traditional spaces

Non-traditional spaces have been a significant aspect of Bangladeshi theatre set design, especially in recent years. These spaces, such as public parks, open courtyards, abandoned buildings, and even streets, offer a unique opportunity to experiment with the set design and create an immersive experience for the audience. From an inclusive design point of view, non-traditional spaces present both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, these spaces may not be inherently accessible, and the set design may need to be modified to accommodate people with disabilities. For example, if the performance is taking place in an open courtyard, the set designer may need to ensure that there is an accessible path for people using wheelchairs or mobility aids. On the other hand, non-traditional spaces offer a chance to incorporate local elements and create a more inclusive experience for the audience. For instance, a performance taking place in a public park could incorporate natural elements such as trees, rocks, and water bodies into the set design, providing a unique sensory experience for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, theater stage design in Bangladesh is evolving to incorporate inclusive design principles, with a focus on creating accessible and engaging productions that can be appreciated by all audiences. From accessible seating arrangements to the use of tactile set design and multimedia technology, designers are finding new ways to create more dynamic and engaging productions that are accessible to all. Inclusive design in theater stage design in Bangladesh involves a collaborative approach, with designers working closely with theater companies and



other stakeholders to ensure that productions are accessible to all audiences. By incorporating these principles, designers can create theater productions that are more engaging, inclusive, and accessible to all.

Theater productions that address issues of social justice and inclusion and incorporate diverse perspectives and voices in their storytelling can help to foster a greater sense of understanding and empathy among audiences. Inclusive theater productions can also provide an opportunity for people with disabilities and other underrepresented groups to see themselves reflected on stage and to feel more included in the broader cultural conversation. As the field of theater stage design in Bangladesh continues to evolve, it is likely that we will see even more innovative and inclusive productions in the years to come. By embracing inclusive design principles and working collaboratively with stakeholders, designers can create theater productions that are truly accessible and engaging for all audiences.

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