

Kolkata: Spreading health awareness through folk art [Kolkata]

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FULL TEXT

KOLKATA: Albert Einstein had once said, "If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself." But the challenge of scientists, health workers and the administrative machinery, involved in communicating health awareness and promoting the adoption of new health habits, to large segments of people with varying levels of education and exposure remains an arduous task.

In a diverse country like India which has close to 65% of the population living in a rural or semi-urban setup, 30% population devoid of literacy in addition to significant school drop-out rates, rural health communication, particularly in the pandemic situation, demanded novel and localized approaches with scientific ideas explained in the most elementary form.

Recently IIT Kharagpur took up this challenge to improvise an effective method of health communication to a large catchment of the rural population.

Under the project "Folk Artists in the Time of Coronavirus" funded IIT Kharagpur, Prof Anjali Gera Roy, from the Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, engaged with folk artists (Patua) from the Naya village in West Midnapore to hold COVID-19 awareness outreach initiative communicated through visual and musical art forms. The tradition of creating public awareness programs started among the Naya Patuas two decades back with a group of women led by Rani Chitrakar performing on the HIV AIDS issue.

Prof Anjali Gera Roy, who has been working with this community, approached a group of Patuas from Naya to create scroll paintings and songs exclusively to promote hygiene habits among the local people around Kharagpur. While the Institute has been organizing relief camps for the distribution of essential items to the underprivileged community, several of the relief recipients were observed to be nonchalant with regards to hygiene habits such as wearing masks or maintaining social distance despite the Institute repeatedly urging the people to follow the health protocols.

This is where the group of Gurupada Chitrakar, Bahadur Chitrakar, Swarna Chitrakar, Jaba Chitrakar and Sonali Chitrakar were brought in to tell the tale of Covid-19.

The Patuya group composed their songs in local dialects along with scroll paintings in folk art format to help the audience understand the challenges of COVID-19 and best practices to be adhered to.

This mode of communication makes scientific information palatable and cognizable to people in various sections of society, especially in the area of health.

The threat perception, precaution and remedies, when communicated in a language hued in cultural connotations, and coming from their social peers, is easier for the local people to connect with and efficacious in their public compliance.

DETAILS

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