

# Theatre Economics: The Impact of Rural Women’s Decision-Making

**Dr. A. Sangamithra**

*Professor of Economics, Dean- Faculty of Arts  
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India*

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**Abstract**

Theatre plays a crucial role in rural areas where education and communication options are limited, as it is essential for cultural expression and social dialogue. For rural women, theatre provides both a cultural escape and a pathway to financial independence and individual growth. The economic context of rural theatre, such as financial support, engagement, and resource availability, plays a crucial role in shaping the decision-making capacities of these women. This article highlights how the financial aspects of rural theatre impact the choices made by rural women in domains such as family, education, business, and governance. It also discusses the financial difficulties that rural women encounter in engaging in theatre activities and how theatre plays a part in influencing their socio-economic independence.

**Keywords:** *Theatre, Rural Women, Decision Making, Socio Economic Independence, Family Choices*

**Introduction**

Theatre has long been recognized as a powerful means of narrative learning, artistic expression, and community engagement. In rural areas, it serves a unique role as both an artistic space and a driver of socio-economic creativity. It acts as a dual-purpose entity, functioning as a centre for artistic expression while also fostering socio-economic development. Women in rural areas often face challenges such as exclusion from education, business opportunities, and even governance. However, theatre can provide a platform for these women to voice their thoughts, gain financial independence, and initiate change within their homes and communities. Unfortunately, issues like underfunding, barriers to cultural expression, and a significant lack of necessary infrastructure pose major obstacles to women’s participation and empowerment. This analysis examines the economic realities of rural theatre and their impact on women’s decision-making, exploring the connections between the economic frameworks of rural theatres and the empowerment and autonomy of women. The paper emphasizes the vital importance of local funding, government support, and community involvement in advancing social innovation projects through theatre.

**Review of Literature**

The economic aspects of theatre, particularly in rural contexts, have been explored from various disciplinary perspectives, including cultural economics, sociology, and gender studies. Throsby (2001) underscores the importance of arts in rural development, pointing out that arts programs often flourish in rural areas despite economic obstacles due to their cultural and economic value. Towse (2019) suggests that cultural sectors like theatre play a vital role in boosting rural economies

through job creation and enhancing community involvement. Nevertheless, the economic advantages are frequently unevenly distributed, with women encountering substantial obstacles to engagement because of financial limitations and cultural expectations. It discusses the importance of the “cultural industries” in fostering economic development in rural regions, emphasizing the role of theatre as a catalyst for promoting societal transformation points out that rural theatre’s economic structures are frequently delicate, depending significantly on outside financial support and unpaid work from volunteers may impact women more severely due to their potential lack of financial resources or social capital needed to fully engage in theatre production or management.

## **The Role of theatre in Rural Women’s Lives**

### **a. Cultural Representation and Identity Formation**

Many rural women view theatre as a unique chance to engage in public life, shape their identities, and challenge traditional gender roles. Through theatre, women can break free from societal definitions of their roles and discover new ways to express themselves and assert control. As Hesmondhalgh (2018) notes, cultural productions like theatre often help marginalized groups assert their identities and resist the status quo. Economically, this involvement can empower women by providing them with income for their work and enhancing their skills, which can improve their job prospects. Typically, rural theatres address social issues that impact women, particularly concerning gender, reproductive health, and education, thereby influencing perceptions of feminine roles within families and communities. The more women engage in theatre, the more likely they are to take on leadership roles and influence decisions about their lives, including family planning, education, and entrepreneurship.

### **b. Theatre as an Educational and Awareness Tool**

In rural areas, theatre becomes an education out of school as this enlightens the rural women about social, economic, and health issues. The researcher has supported that fundraising of NGOs and governmental agencies in funding rural theatre projects has primarily revolved around educating women on their legal rights, health practices, and economic opportunities. Such education through the theatre can have major impacts on women’s decision-making in areas where formal education is not well developed. For example, if a drama portrays the importance of education or entrepreneurship among women, it will make the rural women realize and strive to get further education or be their entrepreneurs. Plays with issues of health topics such as maternity, how to prevent HIV should also inform female audiences to make the best decisions regarding health and their families’ health. That means that through facilitation of dialogue spaces and access to information, the theatre will empower women in the countryside towards more efficacious involvement in their local communities.

### **c. Economic Empowerment through Theatre Participation**

As theatre contributes to the economic lives of women in the countryside, it goes further beyond the texts themselves and encompasses creating money opportunities theatre allows. Theatre in many rural communities offers women the possibilities of generating extra income through acting, costume making, set design, or administration. Although these functions may not be very remunerative, they are very impactful in impacting the economic independence of women, especially in their general locations where full-time employment does not exist. As Throsby (2001) argues, there exist employment opportunities in cultural industries that can help women significantly in rural settings. Income levels obtained from engaging in theatre may be meager, but through it, rural women can make direct financial contributions in their homes; thereby, their influence in family decision-making would grow. In addition, women who end up as leaders in the staging of theatrical shows as either directors,

producers, or coordinators acquire skills that are very useful in financial management, negotiation, and project planning. Such abilities make them not only contributing personalities in the economic aspects of theatre but also leadership personalities in community governance and entrepreneurship.

## **Challenges Faced by Rural Women in Theatre Economics**

### **a. Financial Barriers and Limited Access to Resources**

Another significant challenge that rural women face in theatre economics is accessibility to financial sources. Towse (2019) asserts that funding for most rural theatre initiatives usually remains low and usually depends heavily on community support or grants coming from external sources. Besides this economic vulnerability, women are further likely to be distant from financial capitals or economic networks that can connect them to participate in any theatre project. The most crucial point in securing a woman's economic liberty is that without enough money to pay properly, rural theatres cannot afford competitive wages and women may be forced to accept unpaid or underpaid positions while regenerating a type of economic inequality. Without adequate infrastructure in rural areas-and by infrastructure it mean, in large part, suitable venues, technical equipment, and training programs-a woman cannot engage fully with the productive process. Most rural women have to deal with household chores and childcare; thus, their participation in theatres remains inconsistent, hence limiting the time and energy to be invested to fully participate in thriving theatre economies.

### **b. Cultural Norms and Gender Roles**

In many rural communities, cultural definitions enforce that the domains of women are primarily within the house. Involvement in public life, including theatre, therefore would not make much sense for most women since it can never take precedence over the demands of housework. Again, these cultural norms may prevent women's presence in the theatre both as performers and as economic actors. Researcher brings out how social pressures rebuff women in the countryside from practicing theatre because, generally these cultural taboos restrain the power to decide held by women not only in matters of theatre but also in society. However, as soon as women enter into theatre and break free from these taboos, they start changing the cultural values of their community themselves. From the cultural perspective, plays on gender equity, women's rights, and social justice will dramatically change the way people perceive what women do and should do. This opens new doors for women to be involved in public life and its decision-making processes. However, the persistent efforts of theatre practitioners and local communities who promulgate gender equity and empower women through theatre have yet to be fully able to do so.

### **c. Sustainability of Rural Theatre Initiatives**

Most initiatives sustaining theatre projects find it challenging in the rural areas due to a lack of financial and institutional support. It often becomes difficult for the theatres in the countryside to plan for long-term sustainability when they sustain themselves with funding that NGOs, governmental programs, or international organizations may offer for short durations. This fluctuation in finance prevents rural women from engaging themselves any further in the theatre projects since most women receive some sort of remuneration or personal development from engaging with the arts. Throsby pushes for sustainable funding by local and regional governments, private patrons, and community groups for enforcing rural arts initiatives. Without such an incentive, economic potential for women in rural theatres is limited, and chances of changing the decision-making roles of women through theatre are decreased. For that reason, financial investment into the creation of inclusive and equitable spaces and ensuring full participation of women in the economic as well as the creative aspects of the theatre would be an indication of its sustainability.

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**Conclusion**

The theatre economics plays a crucial role in the development of decision-making abilities among the women. In fact, women are empowered through theatres to possess avenues for financial access, educational facilities, and leadership positions to augment more informed decisions in personal as well as community lives. However, huge economic as well as cultural barriers still persist in order to acquire added financial access, leadership and social support in the communities. Local government, NGOs, and private sponsors will have a role to address these challenges because they need to provide sustainable funding for rural theatre initiative and have effective promotion of gender equality in cultural production. Investing in theatre as an economic and cultural platform for women in the rural areas can facilitate social and economic empowerment where women can be active decision-makers on both household and community levels.

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