

# Human Rights and Theater Communication in Post-war Sri Lanka

Thevanayagam Thevananth

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**T**HE SRI LANKAN MINORITY TAMILS are living in an environment where their right to freedom of expression is denied. This situation was at its worst during the 2005–2015 war period. Although there was a little improvement in the situation after regime change due to the presidential election held on the 8 January 2015, the structures, practices, and attitudes left behind by the former government continued. In 2019, the political party of the former government came back to power only with majority Sinhala voters. The opportunities for free exchange of ideas remained limited. The state stringency that prevailed for more than a decade made the traditional exchange and expression of ideas normally found among the people extinct. In particular, all opportunities for gathering at the village esplanade, temples, playgrounds, and cultural events were hindered by state stringency.

Places where people congregate were subjected to surveillance. Voices critical of the state were monitored by state agents. Hence, congregating and exchanging ideas have become filled with fear. People avoid gathering together because of this situation, where everyone was suspicious of the other. In addition, people who criticized the government were threatened with violence to create an overt fear psychosis. Some people suffered this violence, such as when waste oil was thrown on houses. Fear of death began to dwell in each person as unidentified persons “move around.”

Even today, freedom of expression in Sri Lanka requires a more conducive atmosphere. The fear of monitoring by state intelligence officers or unidentified persons persists. As a result, every individual learned to live with some sort of self-censorship. This situation caused a sort of stagnation, including the environment for artistic creation.

Artistic creation needs a free environment. Because art and culture speak of social problems, people want them. An artist is expected to stir upon seeing the degraded state of the others. But several artists today have

lost their real faces. They have to learn to live by turning a “Nelsonian eye” on injustices. This is dangerous. It is something that is affecting the civilized dynamics of society. Being silent after witnessing an injustice cannot be a situation conducive to a democratic environment.

### **Active Theater Movement: Literature Review**

The main aim of theater is to tell stories of people. Since 2002, Active Theater Movement brought out stories through theater activities. “Personal narrative performance gives shape to social relations, but because such relations are multiple, polysemic [capable of having different meanings], complexly interconnected, and contradictory, it can do so only in unstable and destabilizing ways for narrator and audience ... a story of the body told through the body which makes cultural conflict concrete.” (Langellier, 1999) During the last thirty years, Northern Sri Lankan Tamil theater had presented themes based on the stories of people. When conflict and oppression seem overwhelming, drama can offer a sliver of hope, in a playful way, a pathway of incremental steps. Theater bridges the actual with the possible, letting people imagine how tensions and circumstances could be transformed.

Theater of the Oppressed is used worldwide in streets, fields, schools, churches, prisons, and wherever people gather. It was invented by Augusto Boal in the 1960s during the reign of Brazilian military dictators, who imprisoned him in 1971 and exiled him to Argentina and later to France. In Europe, Boal developed “Rainbow of Desire” to address internalized oppression, the “cops in the head” that plagued Europe’s populace, in spite of the absence of a police state. (Boal and Epstein 1990)

Boal defines oppression as a power dynamic based on monologue rather than dialogue. (Blatner 2007: 220) Through the process of participatory democracy, people reclaim their role as active, transformative agents in the world. (Freire 1970)

To prepare for this proactive physicalization of change, actors use techniques designed to liberate the body from mechanized reactions and gestures. Thus, Boal uses theatrical imagery to dialogue on issues that are both societal and psychological, expressing truths through dramatic representation rather than literal realism. According to Thompson, “Beauty’s power to disturb is crucial and has important, rarely acknowledged, political power.” (2009: 140)

Drama communication is an experiential and dynamic approach to therapy that allows participants to have an environment in which they can go over their life stories, find understanding, express themselves, and ideally attain catharsis. Underlying drama therapy is a belief that dramatic processes can help people who might need assistance with a range of mental health, cognitive and developmental disorders as well as people who are simply going through times of stress, emotional disturbance or disability (Langley, 2006). Further Langley (2006) points out that not all clients who seek drama therapy have a specific disorder or disturbance. In fact, many people simply are looking for a better understanding of themselves, their life, and their personal problems. In fact, it is a normal inclination for a person to want to assess their feelings or issues at some point in their life. Drama, due to its “metaphoric foundation,” offers a perfect creative medium for this exploration to take place (Langley, 2006). Release of deep feelings originally has a connotation of purification of the senses and the soul. The method by which the emotions of pity and terror are evoked is “mimesis”—a combination of vicarious participation and suspending of disbelief. (Jones, 2007)

Traditional theater uses mainly a fictional, presentational approach. Some drama therapy approaches involve clients putting on a play designed to express common themes in their lives; the process of preparing the performance is itself therapeutic. Langley (2006) says that healing can mean a relief or cure, a change of perspective or behavior, adaptation to disability, coming to terms with reality, or simply personal growth.

Active Theater Movement dramas are not limited to a single stage style. There can be various drama forms. When the story is performed as a performance invariably it will be in narrative form. Thus dramas are produced in a variety of drama styles. A drama performed on stage that identifies the self and social problems makes the society vigilant. The intentionality is truly what separates drama therapy from other forms of drama or theater. For instance, while theater and drama are able to be accidentally therapeutic because they increase consciousness to feelings, attitudes and issues, drama therapy purposefully uses drama and theater techniques to adjust or rework attitudes and behaviors as well as to assist in confronting and enlightening many life challenges. (Langley, 2006) While theater often is focused on a certain standard of final performance, drama therapy is much more process-oriented and so the experience of going through drama therapy is

emphasized, as that is where the therapeutic elements are most prevalent. (Langley, 2006; Bailey, 2007)

Dramas for performances can be produced based on the stories of the performers themselves. In one way, majority of the solo performances were very tragic and sentimental in expression. They reveal the problems as similar to those happening to so many people. Theater participants are able to develop a range of dramatic roles which in turn help strengthen their own life roles. Langley (2006) explains:

Clients can consider their lives, relationships and the issues around them by finding a metaphor, exploring it and then connecting their experience to reality. It also encourages a state of personal awareness which, although not necessarily healing in the strict sense of cure, is a means of working towards establishing peace of mind and/or improved functioning.

Many of the Active Theater Movement's psycho-social dramas work in solving gender issues in Tamil society. Sensitive topics such as rape, pregnancy, domestic violence, marriage, and other gender issues can be performed more intimately and without distractions through this drama. The actors do not impose their ideas and visions, but allow the audience to interpret what is relevant for themselves and what is not. Women in this way are not judged on their behavior or way of thinking. It is a way to slowly improve mentalities without imposing a way of thinking. (Barbara, 2005)

Transmitting ideas through performance is found to be a difficult task. Proposed ideas should be based on good research. They should be given in a way not conflicting with the audience. They should also suggest proper solutions as well as further comments. They should facilitate release of deep feelings that originally had a connotation of purification of the senses and the soul.

Active Theater Movement's dramas focus on matters that are forgotten from the conversation, things that people hesitate to talk about particularly matters connected with war. They dare to speak of things which are unspoken of. This is a consequence of the drama training. It is common for drama therapists, in order to fully understand the process and truly understand their own personal issues, to go through drama therapy themselves. The essence of the drama therapy approach is that the intentional use of any form of drama and/or theater can be used as a channel for change, be it for a per-

son to work through a life crisis or to facilitate a personal growth (Langley, 2006). Theater which has been described by many as a representation of life, a slice of life or imitation of life before an audience has been in existence right from the creation of man. (Wilson, Brettle and Rice, 1994)

### **Active Theater Movement in Sri Lanka**

Tamil-speaking artists in Sri Lanka are in an oppressive environment. Active Theater Movement wants to triumph over this sort of environment and create a situation conducive to freedom of expression. The members believe that reviving the art forms traditionally found among Tamils is one way of exercising freedom of expression. Considering the revival and preservation of the art of drama as important, they commenced the revival and preservation work.

The performing art of drama has an extra-ordinary capacity of attracting people. It can be said that when an artist makes flesh and blood expression of his sentiments through his body language, the lively situation created by it cannot be equaled by any media. As a result, the exchange of ideas easily occurs through it. Literary creators can cross borders and develop whatever stories, articles or poetry desired. These creations can also be shared through today's modern media. But, in the present context of Sri Lanka, exchanging ideas through the medium of drama is not an easy task. Numerous barriers have to be confronted by people who get together to conceive and deliver the creation. There is a high probability that the creation will stagnate. Thus the revival and preservation of the art of drama, which is traditionally integrated into the lifestyle of people, and the best medium to express ideas, is a Himalayan task. A lot of difficulties are encountered in finding the financial support for this. Even if the drama is produced surpassing all these barriers, there are further difficulties to address in finding a suitable place to stage the drama and, worse still, obtaining the required permission to stage the drama.

When the war was raging, dramas were produced in great number in the war zone. Sri Lankan Tamil-drama artists produced dramas on their own. Some did it on a full-time basis. It became their profession. At that time, the strong communication device of drama was utilized by the liberation Tigers for policy dissemination and recruitment of members for its fighting units. They were very successful in it. Meantime, there was a space

for theater activities in the war zone that was why dramas were produced and performed by several theater organizations.

Because of the crises created by the militarized environment that formed after the war ended, the art of drama lapsed into lethargy. The drama related participants scattered and had to seek other occupations for their livelihood. As a consequence, trained dramatists got scattered without an organization to coordinate them. As there was no possibility of integrating into a group, the specially trained drama-related personnel were deprived of their opportunities. The drama sector also lost its chance of moving towards a professional state. As for now, it seemed that a possible way is to revive it in an amateur state. Through this, it could move towards professionalism while theater could exist with vigor.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employed auto-ethnography research method and take advantage of the author's direct observation as creator, performer and trainer. Information was also obtained from participants of the drama training and the drama spectators "Auto-ethnography opens up new ways of writing about social life" and can be defined as a "self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts." (Reed-Danahay, 1997)

Theater communicating human rights issues in post-war Sri Lanka is analyzed by employing the auto-ethnography research method. Theater training process, war stories, storytelling and performances are taken into account in this research. Active Theater Movement dramas speak about post-war problem of war-affected families. They show cases of current northern Sri Lankan problems.

The dynamic and dialectical relation of the text and body emerges as a major theme in auto-ethnographic praxes. In the fieldwork, writing, and performing of auto-ethnography, text and body are redefined, their boundaries blurring dialectically. (Conquergood, 1991) Performed dramas are based on real stories from war-affected families, suffering from systematic violence. "Experience, discourse, and self-understanding, collide against larger cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and age." (Trihn Mihn-ha, 1991)

In auto-ethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns. The desire of

the art is that all artistic productions must help to think about social problems, and come to constructive decisions on them that should lead to action.

Drama is vested with the responsibility of capturing the metamorphic periods of change within the society for future reference and guidance in the society. How the playwright goes about documenting such issues determines how serious the people within the society would view his work. (Eagleton, 2012) The “artistic work of a playwright is a reflection of the society from which he/she emerges from.” (Wa Thiong’o, 1981) Auto-ethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one’s positionality as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their constructions of self, and their interactions with others within socio-historical contexts. (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Goodall, 1998)

## **Discussion**

People living in an environment where the freedom of expression is denied get used to it. This is particularly true in Sri Lanka when the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1978 started to be in force.<sup>1</sup> The limitations prevailing at that time became part of the people’s routine nature who got used to an environment where they tend to think that that was their real life. Particularly because of the Army stringency in Northern Sri Lanka, the people lost their courage to express their ideas, and living under fear, living in submission, waiting, pleading, and begging for their requirements and being submissive occurred. They forgot their rights, self-imposed control over themselves and got used to living in that way.

They did not attempt or did not want to learn what their freedom is or they were pushed into a survival-based attitude of “why should we worry about other things...let us worry only about our affairs.”

The people who live in crisis get into some sort of inability and live in an escapist attitude. The artists could contribute in breaking this and eliminating it. The work for this was started by the Active Theater Movement in Sri Lanka after a long interval and around five years (2008 -2013) of silence. A project was initiated in 2013 to select one hundred youths from five villages to give them theater training and to bring their stories out. The task of transforming the youth to become socially aware through theater was undertaken through this project. They were given a chance to express their feelings, ideas, and criticisms through theater.

The youth brought out through theater activities stories of suffering of people. The stories include displacement and living without a house continuously for twenty years; resettling after two decades in their own lands, but without their kins and relatives; suffering and being unable to live on their own land; losing belongings and lives due to war; suffering poverty; land going barren; and resourceful people being removed deliberately from the community. These stories make the future a question mark, with politicians utilizing militarization as means to hoodwink the people or rob them or cause injustice to them – all in the name of the people. The youth labored to bring these stories out through ten dramas.

### **Preparation of Theater Activists**

The training of people in drama is not only skill-oriented. It involves building capacity to express thoughts and feelings. The task of preparing a hundred youth from selected villages as theater artists with social consciousness and skill took the form of a three-hundred-hour training program over thirty-six days

The training program had diverse and multidisciplinary components and covered four basic areas:

1. Building up social consciousness;
2. Imparting knowledge of human rights;
3. Developing individual personality;
4. Training on drama production.

### **Building social consciousness**

Most of the youth who took part in the training were not conscious of what was happening in the country. They were biased thinkers, and did not know their position regarding social problems and where to place themselves in relation to them. They were in a confused state as to their social responsibilities. Most of them have mob mentality.

The training encouraged them to discuss social matters to widen their social view. Different views on issues were provided and debates were held. Newspaper items were analyzed and attempts were made to find out their own view on them. Case studies were presented and debated. True stories of people who had lived through the final stages of the war were shared and lessons learned from them were debated. Poetry concerning society was



read and understood. Social dramas were read and reviewed. Sentimental dialogues between group members were encouraged.

One important discussion was on the case of gang-rape-murder of a schoolgirl in Pungudu theevu, Jaffna. While the violence involved in that case was discussed, the social protest or frenzy that arose, and how this protest was diverted later and fizzled out were discussed.

In the same way, the long drawn out problem among Tamils, the displacement, the woes of the people affected by it, and the possibilities of accountability were discussed. Ways and means of unloading the mental burden of the affected were also discussed. Drama practices were seen as a platform for motivating people with such experiences.

When exercises were done to relax the mind, the participants cried out their stories. They expressed sorrow for the kins lost in the war. They came out with all sorts of problems like poverty caused by the war, losing lands, loss of education, etc. Some described how their family disintegrated by the addiction of their fathers to drugs.

Relaxation of mind and unloading the mental burdens and through it subsiding the mental stress are made possible during theater training. This helped them to become aware of social problems. When practices were undertaken to concentrate and focus, many said that they were unable to focus their mind. They said that stories of their past and events were embedded in their minds and were hindering their concentration on the activities. Discussion started at this point on several matters including their tribulations that caused the social situation, how to eliminate the issues in the future, how to use the art of drama in this regard.

T. Kajalaksan, who took part in the training made this remark:

Before the Drama Training, if there was a problem in society or at home, we would not take any action over it. But after the practices, a question arose inside me as to why I did not interfere in this problem.

This young man who had just completed his school education confirmed that the training had imparted social responsibility in him. Similarly, several other participants realized their role in society during the training.

S. Kalaraj, a journalism student at the university, expressed his opinion:

When one takes part in a Drama Training several thoughts will occur to him. During the Training, we were able to think of

many things, like the problems found in the society, the solutions to them and the trend of action of the people.

During the drama training, one's thoughts are stimulated. One does not just listen to some advice. At every moment during the training, the participants are active and try and learn several things.

The following are important announcements in the training:

- Participants can do anything they like;
- There is no wrong or right action;
- You should act as if all that you are doing are correct.

When participants are encouraged to act freely, they find out something about themselves and the environment related to them. They learn about innovative things, like a spark. Several new things reach them, and they have the chance to get new imagery. They get the chance to impose things that happened to them on something else. They make metaphorical description of what they have seen and heard. This becomes the foundation for the drama production.

### **Providing basic knowledge on human rights**

The desire of the Active Theater Movement is that all artistic productions must help people think about social problems, come to constructive decisions on the problems and lead them to action. For this, artistic production should be made in a way that can present logical arguments. The production should have a proper mix of feelings and knowledge. Situations causing people's thinking on causality of things and logical argument should be increased. For this, it is essential that knowledge of law, order, and rights be imparted.

Because of the necessity of educating the participants in matters related to law and order, human rights, women's rights, and child rights, the assistance of experts in different sectors and people who have knowledge in them was obtained (especially in relation gender-related matters, strengths and weaknesses of women, the discretion that should be present in social dynamics, among others). The training provided participants with this knowledge.

The relationship between fiction and realism is being discerned by artists through this. At the same time, the ways and means of going from making art to taking action, along with the possible action dynamics, are

thought of. In particular, there are opportunities for thinking about “stage reality” and “real-life reality.”

The training provided opportunities for identifying social problems. A woman participant in the training learned about the sort of authority that a husband could exercise on his wife and its limits. This part of the training helped the participants to understand “stage reality” and “real-life reality.”

A. Jana, a teacher who underwent the training, observed:

As a person who does not get engaged in anything alone, I was unable to express things conceived in my mind at several places. The freedom of expression experienced during drama pieces of the training, group activities and games took me to a stage where I could express my ideas all by myself and I could put into operation several things playing the leading role in doing so.

Her attitude about the abilities of women changed at the end of the training and she was enlightened on the fact that if the woman was daring enough she could achieve several things.

Likewise, they acquired a critical view of the way children are treated at home as well as in school and understood the new path that they should take. They found out what rights were violated. They also learned “logical knowledge” of what to speak, where to speak, and how to speak appropriately for particular situations. J. Jeyaruban, who took part in the training, opined that, in an environment where humility, pleading for help, subservience, remaining silent, and submission, which were consequences of war, were the norm, awareness about rights would pave the way for clear thinking.

The knowledge of rights determines the limits of the expression of ideas. It also gives discretion. This knowledge changes one’s view of society.

### **Developing individual personality**

As far as drama is concerned, human body and personality are its capital. The basis of the Drama Training is the proper development of this concept. The training aims to develop an actor who will rule the stage with good communication skills. The training was divided into three sections for this purpose:

- Release of mental stress and developing personality;
- Releasing tightness of the body and creating relaxation in the body;

- Training on acting (training of new skills).

1. *Exercises for release of mental stress*

The body could be operated at will only if the mind is relaxed. Training is given for the relaxation of the mind. Since the participants are people affected by war, “displacement” affected them very much. They were found to be people with their hearts hardened by several problems such as poverty, being uprooted from their lands, life without land, separation of families, scattering of kins, loss of life, loss of materials, loss of education, guilty conscience of being unable to safeguard lives and properties, addiction to alcohol resulting in poverty, and breakup of families resulting from the above.

Sugirtha, a teacher by profession who participated in the training, opined:

I was five years old when we got displaced from Myliddy due to military operation. We came and stayed in a camp. Evening school was held for us. We were excluded because we were refugees. My father had no employment. We had no money to buy food. We were displaced seventeen times after that. I can remember putting up huts every time and staying in them. We were displaced to Vanni in 1995. We could not find any place to stay there. We cleared the jungle and stayed there. Father went in search of employment. We lost contact with him. Mother stayed with us (children) alone. We did not have anything to eat. There was a tamarind tree on our way to school. We plucked some young tamarind fruit, pounded them and ate them. Mother did some odd jobs and sustained us. Father was told very often that we should return home. We came to Jaffna from Vanni. We started working. We often asked our father whether we could buy some land and live on it, as we could never return to Myliddy. He always replied that if we wanted a land of our own, that should be in our native place. We should not stay anywhere else. To date, we could not go to our native village. Father had died. We always carry the guilty conscience, about father dying without his wishes fulfilled and we would be unable to do anything about it. I heard about this training and came here to get relieved from this grief in the heart.

There were several participants like Sugirtha. They were given training on theater games, development of the five senses, building up confidence,

reaching a consensus, working as a team, and developing relationship within a group. A. Jena, a young girl who took part in the training after losing one of her eyes in an accident due to alcoholism of her father, expressed the following view:

Coming out from something is a task that is not possible to everybody. But because of several types of activities in this Drama Training we were able to focus our mind, bring something out from within us, transform ourselves into some character and then bring us out of it. Before the training, they all seemed highly impossible tasks. But we were able to do them very easily after undergoing several training activities continuously. I should come out of the problems that would crop up not only on stage but also in our practical life.

Her opinion shows that these drama trainings release the mind and help to decide on the future target. Group activities were encouraged during the training; while some training activities meant to develop their leadership qualities were also given. They gained self-confidence through these activities.

All participants were made to act as groups and provided opportunity to interact with everyone. Every participant was encouraged to come forward to do games, act and sing.

Pavitha, a teacher who participated in the training, explained that the Drama Training helps an individual to reveal in a good way the roles he/ she play in his/her life. She expressed the following observations:

Now, I have transformed into a person who can say anything with courage in front of others. I have changed into a person who can say any matter that formed in my mind without any tension. I have learned in my own life that the Drama Training would induce several changes in the personality of an individual. I also felt the changes that occurred in myself. The truth I learned was that drama training is essential for our life.

Carefree dancing is an important training activity for “releasing the mind.” Participating in this, several people, voyaged into their past. Some cried. Some were found frenzied. Some went into trance. After dancing till they are tired, they told their stories. In their stories, they highlighted the

injustices perpetrated on them. What could be done to this? they asked. Others expressed their opinions about injustices. They consoled one another. They held their hands saying they would be helpful to others. In this way, their minds were relaxed. Thus many of them poured out their feelings hitherto imprisoned in their minds. In the field training, they unwound their minds.

A teacher-participant, P. Nageswary, observed:

As we are participating in the training we caused a change in our personality. Because of this, we could feel that an idea rising inside us on how to control feelings like shyness, fear, and anger. Group integrity, that is, a feeling of unity emerges when each one start commenting like “it will be better if you do like this,” “what you are doing is correct,” “it will be better if you do little more.” Unity and an understanding and honoring the opinions of others occur.

Her opinion reveals that building up confidence as a group is the best platform to unwind the mind.

Mental barriers had been created by the controls that prevail in the society, regarding male-female relationship. Relaxed-state training became necessary to reduce the shyness involved in the interaction between males and females, and to instill a concept that they are all equal and equally abled. Several theater games were used to encourage males and females to engage in activities together. 80 percent of the females danced for the first time. All female participants danced for the first time with males and displayed equal skill. They got the confidence doing these things. They noted later that this gave them courage to speak and act in front of others.

Another participant, Mithursan, expressed his thoughts:

Training transformed me into a man with personality. Earlier, I was afraid to speak in meetings. But I have gained a skill to speak out my opinions in front of any number of people without any fear. I have gained an ability to volunteer first and do things. I am now able to even take clear decisions in some matters and problems. I have much tolerance, stage fright is absent and I have gotten out of fear. The differentiation of males and females had vanished. A thought that all are equal came into the mind. A strong will formed in me.

This opinion confirms the observation that training changes the personality of people. All participants noted the change in their personality and told others about it. J. Kajarubans' opinion is a testimony that this could be achieved through theater training: "The first experience from our activities was that we could take the social problems of the country to the audience through our personalities."

Personality development will be beneficial to society only when it is coupled with social consciousness.

## *2. Releasing tightness of the body and creating relaxation in the body;*

Following the training for relaxation of the mind, it is important to concentrate on the relaxation of the body. This is the training for body robustness and for the muscles. Similar to a sportsperson who keeps his body robust through training, a drama artist also must keep his body robust and flexible. That is, he should keep his body taut like a rope.

Training is essential to keep the muscles relaxed in order to bend the body at will and to take it to the desired position. Along with this, an actor should find the rhythm within him. He gets the ability to move synchronized with this rhythm, through this training.

This is made possible by physical exercises every day. Energy is supplied by these exercises. The participant can also get body strength. At the same time, he could learn the strengths and weaknesses of his body. Physical exercises are essential to moving the body beautifully on the stage. The eyes of an actor are considered as the main part of communication. The training for the eyes also develops the sharpness of the eyes. The communication through eyes is very important to attract people and make them to continue focusing on the audience.

A lot of energy is needed for an actor to express the role he has taken. With this energy, he could perform without fatigue. And only then could the actor kindle feelings in the audience. Physical exercises help find this inherent energy and preserve it.

As a result of the traditional notions in society, women are not aware of their inherent energy. These notions make them think that they will not be able to do everything that a man can do. To overcome this thinking, women should know their own bodies. Through that, they could understand this inherent energy. Physical exercises help then to understand their anatomy and

enjoy the beauty of their body. Hence, the women place faith in their bodies through theater training. The women who had received the theater training of the Active Theater Movement presented their performances with extraordinary energy. When they do solo performance, their excellent body movements stand out as evidence of this energy.

### 3. *Training on acting (training of new skills).*

Several of those who participated in the training did not have any prior experience in acting. Several participants have shy nature, hesitation, affected by social control, inferiority complex, and fear about their body. Especially, several participants retained the thought that they were not beautiful and doubt how they could act in front of so many people. Removing this inferiority complex from them and putting them on stage in front of many people was a challenging task. We had to make them act without being conscious that they are acting for this.

All of them were active. They were encouraged to participate as much as possible. Through that, they were convinced that they could do things.

A university student was hesitant at the start of the training about what he could do. But later, he came forward voluntarily and acted in several dramas. He said

I got an opportunity to mount the stage as an actor due to the training given to me several times. Through this, I was able to gain a variety of experience with regard to acting and drama. Apart from these, as an ordinary man, I was able to get several experiences needed for human life.

A small target placed before them is to dance to the beat (or *Thalam*). Whoever danced to the beat was asked to discover his body. They were asked to think about the various possibilities of using the body. This chance is not available in society or at home. Chances of attempting them are also refused, only skilled persons are encouraged. Because of this, several youths are living with the notion that they could not do it. Frustration and inferiority complex pushed them into misery.

Eliminating this and bringing a person to the state of acting a character is in fact a very difficult task. But this task was made possible through theatrical training.

J. Kajaruban opined that



The training helped us develop our personalities. It made our personality to grow. Several personalities like, how to put drama in writing, how to produce dramas were gained by us through the training. Several matters such as how to join others to act a drama, how the ideas should be presented to the audience had transformed us into actors with personalities. We have gained several experiences and had learned several personality development methods and these made us think for a moment, it made us people with personalities to a level where we didn't have to think about how to function.

Women had very backward ideas about their bodies and movement. Eliminating these ideas and releasing her body from her thinking and her control was important in this training. There is a notion that spreading the legs, jumping, crawling, distorting the mouth, laughing aloud, screaming are taboo for women. It is a hard task to demolish this notion and make women act.

As far as the man-woman relationship is concerned, a drama group needs new views and changes in thinking beyond the traditional understanding of it. Male and female acting together is important in training on acting. A lot of training had to be done for this. When a woman acts she considers several things. The thought of what will her family think if they happened to see her acting in the drama, while the drama is in progress or even afterward, confuse her. They are confused over whether or not the husband will allow this. During the training, we used metaphor for a scene of a king coming in his chariot. They made an innovative production of women standing over men and entering the stage. The scene came off beautifully. But the women asked us not to include this seen in the performance for the public.

They said the males in their families will not approve it. Contexts occurred where scenes had to be changed considering this social reality.

Breathing exercises and voice training played the roles of resources in the creation of an actor. It is usual to conduct breathing exercises and voice training after one hour of physical exercises. Voice culture is very important in acting.

As far as the Active Theater Movement is concerned, the body of the actor is everything. Hence more attention is paid on preparing the actor's

body for the performances, which need the best use of the whole body of the actor.

Solo Theater is the best procedure for the training for acting. It is the performance of a single person, a story selected by him, using his body as the capital. Here, a single person had to bring several circumstances and several characters onto the stage. This is like interacting with the stage elements after integrating his body and voice.

Those who participated in the training were asked to make a solo performance using their own story or a story they had agreed upon. Through this, they gained the skill of performing in front of several people.

Mithursan, who had just completed school education, observed:

This Drama Training course helped the occurrence of several personality changes in me. This Drama Training course was a guide to me in remaining without mental fatigue and physical fatigue. This was beneficial not only to my acting but also for my life. When I was called up, I for one moment thought whether or not the drama practice was necessary. I also thought why can't we act directly in the drama without this training? When I went through the training I did not realize its worth. But when I went on stage, I realized the fact that I could not have acted up to this level without the drama training. Training means games. Several small games made up the training. The mixture of fruits, finding the leader, identifying places and people using noises, physical exercises, meditation, musical drama, all these were very essential for a drama.

The observation of Mithursan clearly shows that training is essential for acting.

The training provides for the procedures of identifying one's energy, further developing it, and later projecting it towards the audience. An actor could keep the audience under his control with his powerful performance. He can also deliver his message in a lively way.

It is important that an actor engages in different styles of drama. Each style has a unique acting method. The training related to them will mold the actor into a person with a good personality.

In this training course, participants learn several acting methods such as acting for children's theater, traditional *koothu* acting, traditional musical drama acting, miming, realistic acting and stylized acting.

## **Performing Space**

At a time when presenting people's problems in public was next to impossible, the Active Theater Movement endeavored to perform dramas in a public space which spoke of the long-term problems of the people and the feeling they have buried deep inside their minds. The youth got the courage to do so through the Active Theater Movement. During those days, if the dramas were staged inside halls the audience would not attend the performance. Hence the youths decided to stage their dramas in places where people used to congregate. It was decided to construct the stage in empty spaces, by the side of the roads, and to perform the dramas on them. It was decided that the staging platforms and performance space should be newly created.

It was also realized that the traditional picture frame stages are not appropriate for this. They decided on a theater presentation method or style suitable for bringing out the subjected feelings and oppressive or refused stories. In this type of theater form, there was some frenzy, some fury was found and a sentimental surge arose. We had to search for a stage form that could permeate the audience. A V-shaped stage incorporating three circles was planned for this. This came to be acknowledged as a new addition to the history of Tamil theater. It was constructed with wood in a public place where people normally congregated. The Drama Festival was held for two nights in the Sangilian Park, which was earlier known as Kiddu Park. The festival was called Open Air Drama Festival.

As the stage was constructed in close proximity to the road, people traveling on the road also came into joining the audience. They later informed their friends and relatives about the festival. The second day's performances were presented with a "house full" of the audience. In the militarized environment of Northern Sri Lanka, several people were found in a state of having lost their night life. The holding of events at night was avoided. Moving around at night was considered dangerous. Hence, the task of redeeming nightlife also arose through this Drama festival.

It would be dangerous for the performers to speak about matters overtly. Because of this, instead of the speaking of ideas overtly, they had to be spoken through symbolism or use things with inherent meanings. The audience was able to understand this symbolism; while the performers were able to bring out things that were deeply hidden among the audience. This



Spectators at Theatre Festival in Chankanai, North Sri Lanka.



Music Crew at Theatre Festival, Nallur, North Sri Lanka.

created an inherent communication between the actors and the audience. It could be said that sentimental exchanges occurred in a wonderful way.

The Drama Festival was held among threats, in a militarized environment. Even when the festival was progressing, people who identified themselves as military intelligence personnel had made inquiries. This was an attempt at creating a covert fear psychosis. However, the Drama Festival was held for two days on the basis of self-discretion.

Several members of the audience in the Drama Festival watched the dramas in awe. The matters spoken in them gave them a surprise. They were wondering how these people were speaking about the problems in an environment where freedom of speech was denied. Even while watching the dramas some of them shouted at the actors on stage “you will definitely get rehabilitation.” Here, it is necessary to clarify what “rehabilitation” means. It means that people who speak against the government will be arrested by the army soldiers and detained for some period of time under the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act. During the detention period, they are subjected to rehabilitation in way that would make them no longer act against the government. Some people who were released after rehabilitation said that sometimes they had to face torture situations during the rehabilitation period.

People watching the dramas were afraid that some of the youth who were telling their stories on stage might meet the same fate. They expressed the warning about it, in a loud voice.

There was a constant fear prevailing that the Drama Festival could be stopped at any time by the Army or the civil administration under the influence of the Army. The drama group also feared that drama events like this, where people could congregate and express ideas could be banned in the future.

The Drama Festival taught them a hope that the theater could be used as a tool to break up an oppressive environment, where freedom of expression was denied. The drama group decided to continue the festival over the years. Hence the Active Theater Movement decided that such Drama Festival should be held at least once a year.

The movement selected matters that were forgotten in conversations or hardly discussed openly; particularly matters connected with war, as the themes of their dramas and presented them to the people as performances. They dared to speak of the unspoken themes. Ten dramas were created and staged in the Drama Festival, namely, *Vedatharikal* (Hypocrites), *Venmai Ezhil* (White Beauty), *Kalarai Kavithaikal* (Epitaph), *Ehantham* (Solitude), *Thali* (Wedding Chain), *Maranachchanrithazh* (Death Certificate), *Payanankalin Valikal* (Pains of Travels), *Valikalil Vilimpil* (On the Brink of Pain), *Marunthukku Poraddam* (Struggle for Medicine), and *Thanthai Pasam* (Love of a Father).

## Dramas and their Themes

The dramas were based on the stories of the youth involved in the Drama Festival. The story of each drama as well as comments of the youth-creators are presented below.

### *Vedatharikal* (Hypocrites)

*Vedatharikal* depicts the problem prevailing in Jaffna District such as unemployment of graduates, young doing work for politicians to ensure later employment in the government, and readiness of young people to do anything to get a job.

Following is a clarification on the *Vedatharikal* by actor J.Kajaruban:

In highlighting unemployment, the main problem of youth, *Vedatharikal* made the audience laugh to exhaustion but made them think at the end. A lot of youngsters, who graduated from the universities and thought that government employment was the whole world, were not aware of the worthiness of our motherland. Several of us just forgot things like “our soil” and “our rights”. *Vedatharikal* was staged to emphasize the fact that if we preserved our soil and used it properly the solutions to the economic problems could be obtained.

Their opinions indicate that they understood the theme and meaning of the *Vedatharikal*, and consequently acted with much clarity.

*Vedatharikal* speaks about the graduates “mass-produced” by the Sri Lankan universities, who are reluctant and unable to become self-employed, who do not engage in self-thinking, and who perform “penance” behind politicians as a result.

The drama clearly explains that an “unemployed Graduate” is the consequence of the shortcomings of the higher education system.

The drama spoke of several problems like fakeness of politicians who live off empty sentimental speeches, declining recognition of the value of land due to lack of self-thinking, sorrow of being away from the life of dependence on the land, the encroachment of land by others, acceptance of the consumerist culture without any question and suffering.

Many of those who participated in the training had completed higher education. Many of them were teachers, university students, and the like.

Many were job hunting. Some worked for politicians for several days for the election campaigns. They were compelled to issue statements in support of particular politicians. They were promised several things by the politicians. In the end, they could not get anything. What was left was only disappointment. *Vedatharikal* spoke about these things. Several people who got caught in and affected by this “cyclone,” took part in the Drama Training. Their sorrows, frustrations, and anger came out as drama.

### ***Kalarai Kavithaikal (Epitaph)***

As far as the civil war of Sri Lanka is concerned, the question of missing persons is considered as the most important problem. Many families lost their kins and are in misery due to forced disappearances. This drama speaks of this. The alleged genocide and forced disappearances in Sri Lanka are spoken of as a great human misery. *Kalarai Kavithaikal* speaks of the lowly politics involved in this matter, cheating by the government, the importance of the commissions, military stringency, continued fear of death, the spineless nature of the United Nations, and other problems. All those who participated in the training had prior experience of these problems. People from their families or from the neighborhood had gone missing. They had firsthand knowledge of grief of those families. They have felt them themselves.

These youth had among themselves a desire that the missing persons should obtain justice. They grieved about their being impotent to do anything about it. The Drama Festival provided them an opening to reveal these problems. They wanted to make this problem the theme of their drama. It should be considered a great achievement that the training helped the youth who had participated in it gain the courage to demand justice for the missing persons, an important issue in the Sri Lankan politics and at the international level, in the context of restraint on speaking against the government.

### ***Muhamoodi Nadakam Ehantham (Solitude)***

*Muhamoodi Nadakam Ehantham* is about the misery of the aged Sri Lankans who sent their children abroad to protect their lives due to the war situation and remained isolated in the country. The drama revealed as well as argued about these aged people living in insecure situations and the social context that had not provided them safety. It helped the youth to contemplate about the deep social problems such as the reduced power of the

human resources of the country because of the migration of the younger generation outside the country and the inability of the isolated aged to cope with the situation.

### *Venmai Ezhil (White Beauty)*

*Venmai Ezhil* is the first drama produced in the training. The participants selected this theme with sentimentality and involvement. The story was derived from the case of a Panguduthevu school girl. In that incident, the schoolgirl was abducted in her school uniform, her hands and legs bound by her school tie and shoelaces, gang-raped and finally murdered. The incident caused much heart-rending to those who participated in developing the drama during the training.

This could not happen in a civilized society, they fumed. They developed the drama based on the concept that a civilized society should preserve the school uniform rather than desecrate it, and presented issues such as sexual violence against women, deterioration of the social structure by the war, destruction of humanism by antisocial activities and the need for a social structure needed to address these evils. They realized that it is the duty of the youth to identify the problems that cropped up in a country devastated by and recovering from war, and to think of the proper solutions to them. The training provided a favorable space for that.

### *Thali (Wedding Chain)*

In the Drama Training, the Solo Theater performances are regarded as very big achievements. For these performances, political problems related to society and Individuals were selected and used. The general problem in the situation of singleton was spoken of.

During the war period, the youth and students in the war zones were conscripted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who sent them to war after undergoing military training. Many of them were killed. Parents used various techniques to safeguard their children from this misery. It was a great human misery. They went from one misery into another to save their young children without realizing the real impact of their actions.

To save their children, they got them married at very young ages. They dug bunkers and hid them for days in the bunkers, or hid them in the jungle, or hid them inside houses. But the Tigers came and found them. Boys and girls were taken away, even married couples were taken and separated.



Those who participated in the training spoke about these tribulations. They argued on them. They made them into a drama depicting the story of a woman. Having this as the core theme, they insisted that attention should be paid on the hapless women, who were carrying the Thali (wedding chain). The drama made us realize the level that the war had affected women in society and how it had exerted excessive pressures on them.

It could be said that the violations of human rights by the Army and the LTTE had never before spoken of in the same stage by the Tamils who were affected by war. It is a great achievement that this training had impartially viewed human rights violations in general.

### ***Maranach chanrithazh (Death Certificate)***

The civil war in Sri Lanka caused the worst effects on human rights as highlighted in the reports of the United Nations. Various stories had been given in evidence. The case of militants who surrendered in the field and went missing afterward remains a controversy to date.

The families of the militants had handed over their father or husband to the Army as per the army's request. But it is not known to date what hap-



SOLO performance at play 'Thali' in Nallur, North Sri Lanka.

pened to them. The Army is washing off their hands saying it had not taken them. Because of this, the women who lost their husbands are wandering here and there searching for their husbands. They went to the Army camps and detention camps. They struggled to be heard and testified before inquiry commissions. Because of this, they are confronted with threats from unidentified persons and military intelligence agents.

Unacceptable solutions are being forced on them. They are being compelled to accept death certificates for persons who had gone missing

Young wives do not want to receive death certificates for their husbands who might still be alive. This drama speaks of this problematic situation and openly subjects the importance of organizations such as the United Nations into questioning. Several problems such as the insecure situation of women living alone, unsolved cases of missing persons, rejection of opinions of people who had been affected by the war, and useless investigation commissions were talked about in this drama. A young female performer superbly performed it.

### ***Marunthukku Poraddam (Struggle for Medicine)***

*Marunthukku Poraddam* is about the conversation of two old men who live alone on how struggle against injustice can hurt ordinary people. This drama criticizes the single-faceted nature of a trade union's struggle in the medical service, an essential service. This drama expresses the problem about loss of lives in this struggle. It narrates the story of the murder of the Punkudutheevu school girl where miscreants burned tires on the road and prevented the ambulance service from reaching the school girl. This formed the theme of this drama.

### ***Valikalin Vilimpil (On the Brink of Pain)***

*Valikalin Vilimpil* is a story of a young man who went about to look for a job and returned back home. Several issues are covered in the story such as children orphaned by the war being left alone, abuses committed on them and unemployment of youth. The story deals with a young man who was swindled by recruitment agents when he went to the Middle East to work, the dangerous sea travel by small boat to Australia at great expense, the failure to earn money by working abroad, the return to his own village, the sudden changes that occurred in the village, and the resulting attitude which did not allow him to live in harmony with the people of the village.

### ***Payanangalin Valikal (Pains of Travels)***

All those who participated in this training had been displaced forcefully, at least five times from their native places. One of them is a twenty-two year-old school teacher, who was displaced seventeen times. He had lived in seventeen houses. Most of them were *cadjan* (with roof made of coconut leaves) sheds. His father's dream was to return to his own village and live in his own house. He died without his dream being fulfilled. He could not go to school due to poverty and the repeated displacements. Without education, he was forced to live in grip of poverty with the name "refugee" being given to him by society. Many more tribulations occurred, long and continuous displacements happened, and problems remained unsolved even to date. These are expressed in the drama with fury. The drama speaks of problems dragging too long and interest on them declining. It also suggests that the problems of the displaced should be solved.

### ***Thanthai Pasam (Love of a Father)***

The ethnic war of Sri Lanka disintegrated families and forced kins out into different directions. Families disintegrated while searching for their kins, after losing them in the calamity of war. The story of a father going in search of his daughter he had lost is revealed in the drama of *Thanthai Pasam*.

A young man who lived through the war and directly witnessed the misery and monstrosity of war selected this story as the theme of his solo theater.

He revealed in his drama the misery of a father who traveled with him his daughter in the war zone in his quest to save her life. But he lost his daughter in the midst of war. While searching for his lost daughter, the father lost one of his legs from a land mine liberally sown on the battlefields and remained not knowing what to do next. Several people lost their belongings, relatives, along with their life in the pitiless battlefields. These were spoken by the drama.

Pains imparted by war, disappointment in the struggle, monstrosity of the war, and the people in war zone being rendered refugees and into utter helplessness, losing all their hopes, were revealed in this drama. These youngsters had revealed their social responsibility by presenting the idea that war should not be forced on anybody.

## Audience Opinion

One thousand five hundred people participated in the two days of the Drama Festival. The President of the National Arts Council, S. Devarajah,



Oppressor image in a play at Theater Festival in Chankanai, North Sri Lanka.



Play image about poverty at Theater Festival in Nallur, North Sri Lanka.

witnessed this Drama Festival and expressed his anger on people who waste their time in front of television screens. He had expressed his opinion in the following words:



Play image about political satire in North Sri Lanka.



Scene in the play *Akantham* at Nallur, North Sri Lanka.



Tragedy scene about political dilemma, North Sri Lanka.



Scene in a play about displacement, North Sri Lanka.

A Drama should be staged several times. That is the duty of all of us. The poisonous films which had afflicted the Tamil people should be thrown away. The ruinous environs of being frozen into the TV Boxes which are the coffins in our houses must be done away with. Priority should be given to theater activities.

Prof. Daya Somasekaram of the Psycho–Medical Department of Jaffna University, after participating in the Drama Festival also insisted on the need for such activities. He observed:

It is stirring up several deep social problems and the thought streams about them. It makes us think. These ideas could be absorbed carefully and without getting confused not only by mature people but also by children. The problems, the events which had occurred to us, challenges that are confronted by youths currently, being enslaved due to the difficult life they are leading, and above all the sorrowful lives of the elders are depicted well through these dramas. The current situation is being expressed beautifully and in a way touching our hearts. It is very commendable, it urges us to think about these problems and take appropriate action with regard to them and think carefully about our future.

Similarly, the Cultural Officer of Jaffna District, K. Malini, after participating in the Drama Festival said that because of the sentiments that arose, the drama activities were necessary for the preservation of social consciousness and culture. He explained

The Active Theater Movement had provided such opportunity in an appropriate environment. The revelations of the dramas staged with dedication by a drama group were treated with such grandeur. Although opinions could be placed before people through newspapers, a drama performance is a project which merges with the heart and people become engrossed in it and makes them dedicate themselves to it. This had gained several victories. This is an excellent medium. Children should be involved in theater activities. A bright future will dawn on them. All of us should face the distresses and obstacles with a social consciousness and build a predictable good future.

P. Chithra, a bank manager recorded her opinion as follows:

At a time when we are expressing fear whether our arts are on a decline, this event is giving us much pleasure. This festival which is being held integrating all arts is a fine occurrence. The trend of the parents and children now is to exclude these arts and other activities and their thinking had changed into taking up only educational activities. I believe that we had to bring together arts, other activities and our children and we too should join them and use these thoughts to change the people.

Likewise, KrishnaKumar, who served as a Senior Register of the University of Jaffna remarked thus:

Our ancient culture is the confluence of Tamil speech, music, and drama. This drama is not connected only to acting. It is a fine feature, which in one way conditions and enhances our lifestyles. It makes us willingly entwine several things minutely. The Art of Drama had over the years developed through several forms and with several specialties. This growth is attracting people without the discrimination of young or old. When watching dramas, not only we watch the acting and dialogues but also what is implicated by them penetrating our feelings. In that way, each drama performed here expressed something that is needed in the society. This Drama Festival had made different types of people to think in different angles. In a context where mass media is considered the strongest, this Drama Festival explains the fact that the theater is a strong instrument, a means to drain the hate on mass media, especially, in demolishing the illusion created by it.

Professor Sivanathan, a university economics professor, also insists on this:

Drama is a performance. I consider this a great victory of the performance. The situation where someone creating an artwork, within a predetermined framework, and changing people as they gather together, the performers and audience alike, to participate in it is happening only now. When the continuity of the history of dramas is viewed, it is evident that it had become more and more polished, and had grown to a level that could not be described in words.



Cultural values are essential for good social dynamism. Social enthusiasts insist that a good young generation could be created only through them. For this, the necessity of artistic activities is insisted. This is what Jaffna District Children's Psycho-social Coordinator, K. Kauthaman, is insisting on the basis of his work experience. He insisted on the importance of the drama activities thus:

Dramas play a big role in developing our Artistic, Cultural and Civilizational Values. These had transformed the lifestyles of many important men. A question is being raised by media and social well-wishers as to whether the Artistic, Cultural, and Civilization Values of the Jaffna District had been ruined or afflicted by the post-war conflict. Hence, the holding of these events and people taking part in them are the biggest evidence to indicate that our Artistic and Cultural Values have not been afflicted. So far, dramas are the very best force in creating an awareness in our people's lives.

The same type of opinion was recorded by the Chairperson of the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations, Mr. Thatparan, thus:

It is not an ordinary thing to adhere to rituals and traditions. The art of drama had gone on a decline because the youth had stayed away from Drama because it is not a profession to earn money or great honors in Tamil society. A situation exists here where a group of people studies Drama and Theater, just because there is a stream of studies offered in Drama and Theater. It is heartwarming to see such an event is held.

Karnan, a year 10 student at the Jaffna Hindu College who watched a drama, noted that the educational system in Sri Lanka was not based on self-thinking, and explained:

After the Theater Movement had come, I have been watching their dramas continuously. Every drama expresses personal opinions. In today's drama "Hypocrites", they have realistically depicted the unemployment problems faced by the students who study in Jaffna and of the trend of them being sidetracked because of it. All the dramas are good.

The art form of drama had acted with social consciousness from the Greek period to date. It always reflects society. This has always been true.

The comments recorded by drama enthusiast K.V. Krishnanantham also indicate this:

Today's theater performances expressed the need for preserving social interest and humanism and humanitarianism. They indicate the grief, affectations caused and losses we see on a daily basis. It is true that the dramas speak about the things happening in the country and domestically.

There were several people, who traveled long distances to participate in this event. One of them, Navaneethan, a Tamil teacher by profession, commented:

I have come from Vadamaradchchi to enjoy the dramas after a lapse of a very long time. I have seen today some soul searching dramas in the Tamil drama space. We are living in a period where there is a need for people-oriented dramas.



Open space performance under the tree in war affected area Puthukudiyiruppu, North Sri Lanka.



Spectators take part in the performance of a play about gender issue in war affected area, Vanni, North Sri Lanka.

## **Conclusion**

The Drama Festival had become a historical event. It created a context where the art of drama resurged, after an upsurge during the war period.

S. Nirmalan who had not seen dramas for a long time, opined:

My best wishes for the Active Theater Movement to grow more and more. I have witnessed several dramas in Vanni during the war. I liked those dramas. The Active Theater Movement had given me the opportunity of seeing good dramas after that.

Some others in the audience also expressed their feelings such as the impression of a volunteer worker, N. Kamalathas:

Your work is further needed by our society. Let us move towards a theater for change in society. Thanks for giving experiences such as pleasure, deep sympathy, scene composition, acting, music, and techniques. Let us move beyond reminding,

again and again, the impacting memories and travel in the direction of laying straight forward foundations.

The opinion of another NGO worker based in Colombo, Seela, is also important:

Thanks for a memorable event and thought provoking initiative. May the healing touch of the performing arts contribute to the healing of our communities.

This Drama Festival had kindled the thoughts of several people by pointing out the disputes in society. I think that the deep trauma and empirical images were revealed through dramas. Social reality was reflected in the drama scenes.

It is apparent that social aberrations and several types of problems could be pointed out through dramas; while self-confidence could be also gained through it at the same time.

Hope has risen that drama could drum up the minds of people who had been oppressive. When the dialogue “We want red soil ... we want our soil” was recited in *Vedatharikal* Drama, several people’s sentiments were kindled. The viewers expect the drama to say time-suitable ideas and when that is done they welcome it.

This Drama Festival provided an opportunity for people to see how theater revives humanity. Because of this, several people became very eager to join the Active Theater Movement.

The Drama Festival clearly demonstrated that drama represents a cross-section of society and a social mirror.

They also requested that Drama Festivals should be held not only in suburbs but also in the villages.

K. Wijaya Kumar expressed his concern after watching a few of the dramas:

Actually the Art of Drama is on a decline. It is a cause for happiness that this movement is working towards changing all that. Drama conditions the life of man. I enjoyed the events. All the events were excellent. They also revealed good ideas.

E. Kugathas opined that artistic activity was needed for this time. A. Sathiyamoorthy a social service worker and a bank manager expressed this opinion that can be considered a concluding remark:

Attracting people during the Festival season may be a start, this should be transformed for the needs and the changes of people, transformed into a great beacon showing light to people and should lead the people into a new path that is needed for them. It could be identified here that the Active Theater Movement has all the energy and ability for it.

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## Endnote

- 1 This law is still in force up to the present.