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Popular Education And The Theatre For
Building Up Of Peoples Movement
(Labour Union Among Landless
Peasants Of Rural India)

by

Felix N Sugirtjaraj
Our experience in the field of Popular Education and Popular Theatre was based on five assumptions.

1. Mass media, however powerful and quick in reaching people, yet failed in being used as an instrument of socio-cultural change. In the Third World though mass media was expected to promote development goals, yet it created more problems which were unknown earlier.

2. Critical research in this field though biased finally ended up with the finding that radio or T.V might wear out traditionalism. But the recent research studies have shown that development is something unattainable except within a framework of local culture and tradition.

3. In certain underdeveloped countries the traditional modes of communication and media are still capable of making people think differently and act differently at a faster pace.

4. Historically speaking, culture, religion and tradition have been usually associated with responses to preserve values, life styles, customs, civilization etc., especially when societies have been threatened with the shock effects of external influence. Invariably, societies, over the ages have
used their reserves of culture as a cushion to absorb various disruptions caused by war, pestilence, conquests and migrations. Having played the role of a preserver "Culture" has been regarded as a reactionary force, upholding status quo and legitimising the ways of life. Only recently in the Latin American and Indian experiences, we have realized that culture if properly tampered and creatively used, would become a Cultural Action for Freedom and Liberation. Popular forms which inherit a particular tradition, is woven into the fabrics of everyday life of a community and as such these reflect the genius of all people which make them capable of absorbing complicated theories and structures and systems but also preserving them for the use of their future generations through memory systems like oral forms and folk songs etc.,

Dr. Webb, former head of religious broadcasting division of the British Broadcasting Corporation, (BBC) World Service once said "Communication of culture should always be a two way process, springing from below, from the soils of the people and in climate of their experience and nurtured from above through refreshing fertilisation and sensitive pruning. While condemning mass communication techniques, she said, "People become receivers and the multinationals possess the transmitters and all this results in a "Fantasy Culture". She quoted the American Soap series which was reportedly shown in 85 countries for over 365 million viewers and deplored the media "Schizophrenia" engendered by the super
imposition of a superficial culture over the native life and ways. Finally she said, that as media practitioners, we should act as links among various cultures and tap the reserves of universal humanity which we can share with all the people in the world.

Effective Cultural forms, for communication to the masses have been manipulated by the ruling elite in the past to create a myth of "Eternal Culture" though it does not exist. Indian mysticism and vedic beliefs discovered and possessed by one ruling class has always been forced upon Dalits and Tribals, the so called indigenous people of our land, and created an inferiority complex as though their own rich culture is dirty, filthy and untouchable. In order to integrate their culture with the main stream of Indian culture, they have to pay lip service to Gods and Goddess of higher order and thereby humiliated in the course of time as if they are the children of lesser Gods. Otherwise they would not have been segregated to sit in separate cordoned areas, far away from the upper castes while witnessing Epics like Ramayan and Mahabaratha sponsored by a benevolent landlord or Feudal Lord during Hindu festivals in the villages.

The unfortunate thing is that the main stream of culture, full of exploitation and oppressive myths of Kings and Priests was ultimately used to turn human beings into Gods and Goddesses and thus establishing the supremacy of the ruling class and castes. Perhaps this is also true to other countries where "Language" known
to only a few had become the intellectual property right of an oppressive class or people. It is under these historical research and analysis the Cultural Heritage of our country has been determined and propagated. Whenever the so called oppressed [Dalits or Tribals] took the initiative to capture mass media through their songs, dances or creative arts, they were caricatured and their contribution however valuable or relevant was brushed aside as unwanted, unethical and unknown [not popular] to the masses.

CAN THE OPPRESSED USE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA TO BRING IN BETTER IMPACT THAN MASS MEDIA?

Yes, they will do it, provided they are conscientised. Paulo Freire says, At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as people engaged in the vocation of becoming more human. To achieve reflection and action that leads to praxis, a sense of trust is essential. Whoever lacks trust will fail to bring about or will abandon dialogues, reflection and communication. How do others understand the oppressed? Can we think like Paulo Freire when we try to use the oppressed as powerful change agents? While no one liberates themselves by their own efforts, neither nor they are liberated by others. The leaders must realize that their own conviction of the need for struggle was not given to them by anyone else - it is authentic. This conviction cannot be
packed and sold. Only the leader involvement in a real historical situation lead them to criticise it and force them to change it.

Paulo Freire "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" [PP 41-42]

INDIAN REALITY.

The basic Indian problem is not poverty, but exploitation and sweltering oppression. Popular people such as Dalits, Tribals and other backward classes in the unorganised section are continuously marginalised and suffer from lack of power to make use of the available resources. Asserting basic human rights, realizing their selfhood and enter into a process of humanization will be the first step of any kind of social transformation.

India, like most of the other countries of Asia, has come of colonial and feudalistic age. The people, especially toiling masses who happen to be the backbone of Indian agriculture, do not have a tradition of rising up to the resistance. Except for the National Freedom Struggle, which cannot be classified as grass root mass movements, we have a very few important instances of people's resistance movements. The colonial power never allowed the peoples movements to sustain for long and had crushed them ruthlessly with the weapon of aligning with the power elite. Typical examples were Ambedkar's movement in the North and Telegana Peasant Movement in the South. So what we see today, after 46 years of independence is a mixed coalition of National elite, bureaucrats, technocrats and
army being supported by super economic powers such as World Bank, IMF, ABD etc.,

While the new Government at the Centre is implementing the New Economic Policy speedily, the IMF and the World Bank officials have been questioning the Indian officials about the fiscal and economic policies of the Government. There seems to be something fishy emerging out of all this and the common man and woman are to some extent aware of what is going on around them and are afraid that a more serious crisis in Indian democracy is bound to occur though they do not know the economic terms like D.A freeze, credit squeeze, hike in oil prices, privatisation of public sector, liberalization of industrial policy etc., which are so much spoken about in the commercial world. Does this mean that the State has betrayed the masses and become a tool in the hands of the dominant classes and their transnational patrons? The new economic thrust leading to a distortion of national priorities might end up with a larger gap between the rich and the poor.

Therefore the voluntary sector looks at the Government not any longer as an instrument of social security, of law and order, of greater equality and of social justice in this ball game of economic gains. Unemployment, landlessness, literacy, communalism etc., will be side-tracked and the social order built so far upon traditional and cultural values will be eroded.
The regionalist upsurge, the communal carnage, the terrorist threats, the mafia gangsterism, the caste disputes etc., are becoming deep social schisms which result in violent encounters. Secularism Vs Fundamentalism seems to be the key factor upon which party politics is built today. Major and serious conflicts are severe among dominant land owning classes and castes, and the Scheduled Castes, who are mostly landless labourers. With all this, and much more to come, the voluntary agencies are puzzled, perplexed and disillusioned, and keep pondering in a fix whether India will survive these multiply crisis?

Voluntary sector, during the last decade, certainly played a significant role which cannot be easily ignored. Based on an ideology of social transformation, many NGOs worked tirelessly from the grass roots to the top structural levels using mostly the tactics of collective mobilisation within the organised framework of the states. The voluntary sector can be defined as a collective behavior conscientising and mobilising the marginalised groups to influencing individuals, social and political institutions and structures. By and large most of the voluntary agencies have been working with the poor peasants, dalits, tribals, landless labourers, women and urban poor all over the country to bring about new values to the concept of grass root democracy. This sector has been searching for alternatives, trying to exercise a lasting influence on the community and society though it has not always fulfilled its objectives. Those who have been specifically working
with the Dalits, Tribals, feminists and ecological and human rights movements, have sharpened people’s vision and have provided a foundation for new value based democratic rights and responsibilities.

Has the voluntary sector failed? This is a tricky question to answer. Who has genuinely assessed the contribution made by the voluntary sector in our country? Will the government be interested to do it? Only if an objective evaluation is made we can either over or underestimate the dent made, in the sector of Human Resource Development of adult education. When Kerala and Pondicherry boast of one hundred percent literacy, how many voluntary agencies should be proud of making their target groups not only literate, but also functionaries in various mobilising the dalits and tribals, voluntary agencies have succeeded in building their socio-political consciousness and since these are identity based cultural entities which no other party attempted to organise.

In terms of land distribution, how many cases have been fought against illegal land holdings and how many acres of land redeemed for the sake of the landless? How many villages have had drinking water wells, houses for the weaker sections, income generation programmes and successful social forestry programmes through the intervention of voluntary sector? How many writ petitions have been filed in the High Courts and the Supreme Courts in public interests.
Other concepts such as sustainable development without destruction etc., have really influenced official thinking at the top levels. Environment movements have made the Government machinery stop displacing the deprived groups and change policies. Women’s movements have contributed not only in controlling the atrocities on women in general, but common issues such as health, right to work, energy conservation etc., have been knitted along with them. Chipko Movement in the North and Western Ghat movement in the west and Protect Nature and Protect water in the South have all sprang up from the grass roots after they were mobilised by voluntary sector through cultural action programme involving dance, drama and songs.

In the unorganised sector, demonstration, agitations, protest, legal cases against the law breakers have strengthened the people’s movements and these movements are in conflict with the large peasant movements whose class interests are only to strengthen the rich farmers’ lobbies. Today it is only in the voluntary sector, where a genuine attempt to the question of communal harmony based on pluralistic humanism, is being accepted and proclaimed.

Yet, because of certain constraints which are inherent in the voluntary sector due to its registration under the Societies Registration Act and FCRA, the voluntary sector kept away from party politics and has contributed nothing towards it. As somebody put it "The struggle for creating a visible and credible alternan-
tive for India needs to break out of the confines of voluntary action and become the concern of Indian society and polity as a whole. Political parties are always busy in vote catching. The voluntary sector which has rich experience with the grass root people should motivate the party people on specific issues of the dalits, tribals, women, poor peasants and unorganised rural labour of all sorts, so as to enable each of the parties to understand that political process has to begin at the bottom and grow towards the top.

All the Five Year plans have to some extent, brought the objective of economic growth. But it was all possible without social justice. The so called rural poor have been kept outside the Development paradigm and lost the purchasing power on the one hand and the bargaining strength on the other. Therefore there prevails an anti people trend with communal forces gaining momentum. Hindu fundamentalism in the form of Hinduvtva can be an ideology of the State if the present ruling party fails to deliver the goods and services to the poor. There is a greater danger of counter democratic forces breeding fascism in the form of religious upsurge and nationalism.

Nearly fifty percent of the labour force of our country consists of only farm labourers, stone cutters, salt pan workers, bonded laboures, small peasants and marginalised farmers with nothing as assets except their labour. They are the poorest among
us with low and unsteady earnings and miserable living conditions. With the Structural Adjustments Policy which is on full swing, these poorest of the poor will lose their subsidies and other welfare packets such as rural credits since this will hamper economic growth. The implications of such International conspiracy can be seen in the pauperization of the Indian masses. Only women, children, Dalits and Tribals are the worst affected - and are thrown out of the entire political process and are de-politicised. It is in this context we have to analyses the Cultural ethos of the so-called ancient people of our country.

OUR FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS ON CULTURE AND ALTERNATE MEDIA

The Culture of the people, the so called Popular culture among the Dalits and Tribals indeed refers to language, signs, symbols, consciousness, oral forms of expression etc., All these and much more give meaning to their life and make them worth living. It is this reality that is close to their daily lives. Therefore it is essential to re-discover the Popular codes with which we can interact with them and unfold history in their own concepts of social theory and practice. Fortunately this popular culture is yet unhampered and untapped and this remains popular than becoming dominant. It is precisely because of the essence in it, it is ideological, authentic and futuristic. It is this culture which gives strength to the oppressed, though not socially used creatively yet the richness of it reaches different dimensions for socio-
political and economic transformation. Therefore instead of saying that we will use our own theory of Popular Theatre, defined in the Workshops and impose it upon them, we shall say that we shall work with the people a realistic goal for change by using their cultural media for creating and sustaining communities. It may not lead them to protest all the time. But it will ultimately lift them to a process of socialization of their knowledge and practice.

THE ORIGIN OF ARP [ASSOCIATION FOR THE RURAL POOR]
ALTERNATE MEDIA FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ITS OBJECTIVES

ARP was established in the year 1980 by a group of experienced social activists including me who had promoted a Rural Harijan Agricultural Development Society in 1979 after a tireless conscientisation programme among landless Harijan coolies in a remote part of Tamilnadu. A book depicting our experience titled "The Roots of a Peasant Movement" was published in 1980 explaining the details of the methodology, analysis and achievement of the movement from 1974-79.

When ARP was founded in the year 1980, it had specific objectives. They were as follows:

- To conscientise and mobilise the rural workers such as agricultural labourers, salt workers, stone cutters, traditional fishworkers and other rural artisans for
effective participation in the socio-economic and political sphere at both micro and macro levels.

- To understand the cultural norms, values and history of the Dalits and Tribals through meaningful dialogue and down to earth insertion into their communities.

- To sensitise the oppressed rural poor and liberate them from the clutches of money lenders, feudal lords and caste fanatics and solidify them into People's Movements to oppose a structural injustice and regain citizens basic rights privileges.

- To organise study circles and provide awareness education and perform popular theatre plays to build self confidence and collective power and resistance among the marginalised.

- To engage in Study and Research of the different sections of rural poor all over the country and form a National Forum of rural workers to voice public opinion in support of people's struggle to reaffirm grass root democracy.

- To build alliance with other pro-people's movements and human rights organisations, feminist organisations and support their struggle for a just human society.
ARP's methodology was influenced by the Community Organisation techniques of Saul Alinsky, Paulo Freire's theories of education for cultural action, Gandhi's concept of Sathyagraha [Struggle for Truth] and Ambedkar's teachings of Teach, unit and revolutionize.

The ARP animator first conducts a detailed survey of the socio and political situation of the village with its potential of cultural norms and values. He or she moves on to a village and lives with the people for empowering them by intervening at a critical historical situation. He/she conducts regular village meetings in the evenings in a circle and collects the history of the village, the struggle that people participated, their failures, the land holding system, the disparity between the rich and the poor and the caste domination that exists.

After collecting the key words which have historical significance and inner meaning to life, he/she prepares a syllabus for six months and introduces a Popular Education class combined with Popular Theatre. From the experience of signing their names, people go to the next step of reading and writing. The third step is to discuss all kinds of issues such as caste atrocities, land alienation unemployment, wage structure, migration, village council elections, leadership patterns between men and women and youth, oral traditions of song, music and dance etc.
People who become co-investigators in this process of questioning and critical reflection become change agents by taking interest in resolving a few issues rather than brooding over them for many years. The issues at the first instance will be simple such as drinking water and street lighting, schooling for kids etc., and then becomes complicated as it involves socio-political intervention.

At this stage begins resistance to accept Tea in a separate Tea glass, walking without footwear in the caste village and willing to meet the consequences, and gong on wage strike directly confronting the landed gentry with whom they used to live in harmony and subordination. When people become stronger and are able to perceive the reality of human and civil rights, they begin to contest in the local body elections standing on par with the cast hierarchy and becoming active members of the Block Development Councils. In the course of all these, people will be able to meet Government officials whom they were afraid to meet earlier, demand a fair share in all welfare schemes and Food For Work Schemes meant for them, file public litigation cases over land illegally taken, meet police officers to lodge complaints against criminal offenses of the upper castes. Suddenly people realise that there is some inner difference between existence and consciousness and unless the contradiction is seen is reality, self development is not achieved.
History of Theatre growth during the last two decades in the developing countries, clearly indicates that the performing arts has been used more by voluntary organisation as a codification for discussion and as a means of critical analysis in the context and motivation process.

Performing arts used for Government propaganda and for propagating unconventional development concepts has been totally neglected since it failed to communicate centrally initiated information. In India, Indonesia and even in Malaysia in the 1960's special song and drama units have been attached to the Ministry of Broadcasting and Information and were supported with the Government funds for over a number of years. In India the troupes have been sent during the "Emergency" for mobilising men and women for family planning operations. I was told that in Mexico information theatre is supported by the Government for campaigning for Education, Public Health, Social Security, Cultural Heritage etc., In Ghana in the 50's and 60's drama was used in mass campaigns for agricultural development and sanitation. In Indonesia, in the early 70's drama was used to promote consumption of American Wheat provided as food aid. The Raun Raun Theatre of Papau New Guinea used themes on malnutrition, scabies, diarrhoea and vernal diseases to activate local government programmes. In
Punjab, a Popular Theatre group has been used to challenge terrorism and build people's confidence to resist militants.

In the 50's some local theatre groups who believed that the Government in power was good and must therefore be stabilised went on their own campaigns narrating the goodness of the Government through role plays and dramas. Typical examples can be found in China and Cuba. In 80's Nicaraguans went about mobilising people's support to the Popular Government through performing arts.

Yet, all these failed to achieve desired goals due to various factors which most of us are aware of. It was in this context more and more popular theatre groups emerged voluntarily and began to convey a message for change in the attitude of the people, change at the local power structures and even at the national level.

The Social Action Groups in India [NGO's] were the first to use the performing arts - media for teaching functional literacy and train village cadres in leadership traits. In this situation social drama, role playing, mime, folk songs, folk dances etc., began to help maintain interest and participate in the study sessions and provided a medium for self expression, collective discussion and decision making, problem solving, building up of a village Sangham etc.,
In many parts of Andhra and Karnataka folk performers in Burrakatha became learners and ultimately within a period of five years 97% became literates. In ARP’s experience, literacy campaigns through a process of conscientisation go beyond the initial stage of mere experiences of drama, song and dance to a problem posing skit which is discussed by the actors and people and performed as a real drama of life the next day by an agitation or demonstration of gheroing of a Government official for failing to implement a scheme meant for the weaker sections. Through demanding, analysing, redramatising and doing something in concrete terms, participants gain new ideas and insights and implications of each course of action and the underlying political-cultural and economic features which stand against social change are demythified.

ARP organised workshops for village cadres, both men and women in the remote outcaste villages for offering conceptual clarity in the fostering up of People’s Movements. During these workshops all the trainees without any theatre experiences have been given assignments to improvise and express their emotions towards serious caste issues in the villages. [To challenge the caste hierarchy for offering tea in a separate cup in Tea shops]. The drama helped the revitalisation has no didactic aim. The main objective is a cultural resurgence which can provide the basis for popular action. The ARP tried a number of other methods such as involving grass root members of the Dalit Landless Movement to take part in the
cultural activities. These ordinary people - a kind of activists without any theatre experience put up a superb performance and realised how weak their movements have been and how they should work hard to lift it to a higher level.

In the context of Popular Education, small dramas by learners, provide a means for effective participation and a Forum for raising and analysing local problems, decision making and collective action in a community. In both cases the emphasis is on stimulating discussion and a particular message conveyed. In this process the performing arts represent recovery, revival, re-assertion or the validity of People's culture. People also resist a dominant culture in the course of time by affirming faith on themselves, their own values, aspirations and Popular issues which redefine Popular Culture. Learners also develop critical consciousness through a question and answer method and denounce the existing socio-cultural factors which stand against people's transformation. Even while struggling for wages and grabbing land each play a different role in the performance of stage and try to follow it in real life struggle the next day. This helps people to expose injustice, voice protests and working together for a public cause.

In the context of Popular education, the dramas are not only left "unfinished" but they are also presented and discussed in ways which provoke a critical analysis of the problems and the various possibilities for action. The object is not to impose our views
nor to prescribe readymade solutions but to challenge people to ask their own questions about the political-economic structure which conditions their oppression. Theatre in this category validates for the caste hierarchy which is subtle and helps people to reassert their caste as equal to others as per the institution.

In some of the programmes drama is performed by animators. The form of the drama often permits audience involvement and the drama changes from performance to performance based on audience and critical remarks. In these programmes peasants and workers create their own theatre with activists expressing their view of the world. Instead of passively receiving the finished plays of a Professional troupe, they are making their own theatre and using it to develop their own ideas and try out various strategies for overcoming oppression. At its best discussion becomes woven in the process of scenario-making, of "Writing the World" through improvisation and collective critique, rather than an artificial ritual of finishing the play with a happy ending. Some theatre work in this category, however, is limited by its organisational context. While it does spark authentic participation and critical insights it operates without an organisational vehicle to convert discussion into action.

The second stage is to go for a kind of conscientisation showing the need for a People's Movement. It is a drama-within-an-organising process, one among a number of activities which serve a
broader aim of building a popular movement and transforming unjust structures. It helps to focus, to reinforce other means of organising and politicising but it is not the sole catalyst for social change. People are not only called together, they are drawn into an organisational framework in which they develop common objectives and work together. The performing arts are used in different ways at different stages of the organising process – from the initial stage of overcoming fear and the internal myths to the far advanced stages of organising support for mass actions.

When distinguishing Mass Media and grass root media, we must see on which side our class position swings. La Belle (1976) provides a useful clue to both models of development. One is called the "Deprivation-Development" and the other is called "Dependency Liberation." Both have had motivators and both believe in development but their views are contradictory. The solution 'Development' is to overcome their backward ideas and bad habits and replace them with new ways of thinking and behaving. The latter type of programme views dis-advantage as a consequence of structural inequalities that keep oppressed groups in a state of dependency and the economic and political decisions made by the dominant groups. The corresponding strategy is to awaken the consciousness of the oppressed about their rights and collective power so that they can challenge and transform the relationship of dependency (i.e., "liberation"). ARP follows almost similar strategy.
I will fail in my duty if I do not analyse folk Media and its impact on Popular classes especially in the Third World context. Folk media in my opinion was labelled to reflect the Communication potential of the traditional Performing Arts. Though said to be bottom up approach, one it was controlled by the ruling classes, it was manipulated as a top down approach and used to legitimise power structure by using reactionary essence of religion through the media. Folk performers were always supported and sponsored by the rural elite since they were harmless and had a tendency to romanticise the ancient past without looking into the future pragmatically. At one stage in India Folk artists were simply used to propagate for rich peasants communities on Green revolution that the other classes got bogged down as though the performers were brainwashed.

Ross Kidd in his analysis says that folk media has been used in the Third World during sixties and seventies against social discontent so that Green Revolution can be sold easily while depriving the rural and urban poor of employment, wage rise and tenancy rights. Folk media, though confined to Asia, yet became a one way communication forgetting participation of the audience as an important response to their message.
Some critics of Folk Media like Dr. Gunasekaran of India have proposed an alternate approach and used it effectively among the masses to convey powerful messages. They used it as an expression of popular critique for dominant development paradigm and also used the same media to study the class control of epics, mythological, literary oral tradition and contents and opened up the class nature of all these immortal epics as manipulative and exploitative in all spheres. With all these stages of transformation, the folk media values among the rural poor still remains an reinforcing feudal and hierarchial values among the rural poor and keeps them sub-servient.

Dr. Gunasekaran is of the opinion that the rich tradition of folk expression hidden among the ancient people of India such as Dalits and Tribals, have to be dug up and used creatively to throw a challenge to the manipulative Folk media of the upper castes and ruling classes. He says that the Consciousness of "Dalitness" or "Tribalism" is essential to reinforce the immortal oral tradition of these ancient people and redefine them again and again in performing arts to lift the Dalits to a high order moral and spiritual dimension.

ARP's EXPERIENCE IN POPULAR THEATRE WORKSHOP

Now let me explain vividly one of the Workshops or Practical Training in Theatre for Building Self Confidence and People's
Organisation in one of the Blocks (A council of Panchayat villages) in Tamilnadu during August 1992.

Though it is only one year old, it is certainly relevant to share the experiences with you to help you to understand how the alternate media can work miracles beyond our expectations.

1. The area is drought prone and failure of monsoon for nearly three years. The target people with whom ARP has been working since 1989 are mostly Dalit Landless peasants and some Tribals. The Dalit are the majority in each village but most oppressed and exploited in many ways. A few have been living in semi bondage conditions also. Nearly 90% of the labour force in this area belong to scheduled caste (Dalits) communities and 72% of them have no land whatsoever. Therefore they find employment only in the agricultural sector in the surrounding areas is being irrigated or cultivated. Most of the Dalit landless labourers do all kinds of farm labour. Some are daily wage earners, some are contract lab owners, some are share croppers and some are tenants. The Contract Labours do migrate to different parts of Tamilnadu and find employment and return home once a month and go away after a week. The families by and large live in their homestead.

The Association for the Rural Poor had been able to mobilise nearly 60% of the landless labourers and poor peasants to gain self
confidence and assert their rights and responsibilities through regular Popular Education programmes. Though the Life Education Programmes began in some twenty villages in 1989, ARP has been able to cover nearly one hundred and twenty three villages in the Northern District of Tamilnadu using the same methodology from 1989 onwards. After popular education programme, Popular Theatre performances are introduced after a period of one year. This continues for three to six months depending upon the interest of each village in learning and doing Popular Theatre.

While doing theatre for building People's movements, various methods are being used not only on the stage, but also in day to day lives of the people. Daily they have to realistically experience whatever they have enacted on the stage. Perhaps it would like going to the B.D.O for demanding a drinking water well, or it would be a meeting with the Revenue Officer to settle a land dispute or it would be a meeting with the Revenue Officer to settle a land dispute or it would be to ask for employment through food for work during drought, it would be a meeting with the Police Officers to demand justice against Harijan atrocities by the landed gentry, it would be to engage in agitation for stopping illicit arrack traders in the villages. While people are getting stronger and stronger in the process of community action and demonstration on issues related to injustices the idea of strengthening their mass action through a People's Movement emerges. The People's
Movement concept is not a new concept pushed from above. People have had Sanghams to govern over ages and control them.

Sangham as a collective body settled quarrels and disputes, passed judgements and set up rules and regulations for self discipline for the village communities. Sanghams have been so powerful that even police and law courts of the land never interfered to promote "State Rule." Many a time, Sanghams of ten villages or twenty villages have been linked with each other as "Village Councils" and promoted equal participation, social justice and collective decision making. There were Sanghams the most powerful since they have not been tampered by outside influence at any time. The Harijan Sanghams were often mocked at or even dominated by the upper caste hierarchy and never allowed to function independently. Sanghams have almost become a tool in the hands of the upper caste landed lords to unleash terror, repress youngsters and eliminate revolutionary potential. Though the end was sad, it is ARP'S intention to establish Sanghams once again clinching the heredity of Collective governance and civil rule.

RELIGION AND BELIEF SYSTEM BASED ON HOMOGENIZING CULTURE AND NATURE

Religion and culture were two disease of the same coin. Religion did not reach the people from above. It was there in the form of mystic spirituality based on animistic faith. People
worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars, the rains, the trees and the earth as Gods. People made sacrifices and had various celebrations to retain the ethos of religion and culture. One who disobeyed was punished in the village courts. Our villages, mountains forests, lakes remained our religion and it was our taboos, myths, legends and rites that strengthened our belief systems. These belief systems were able to sustain them against any heavy odds. Anything that grew out of the earth was "Life " and there was great respect and fear not to exploit the living sources of the earth. There was a constant fear and trembling that over exploitation of nature would result in angering the Gods and that it might lead to catastrophes.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RETAIN THE VALUES OF SUSTAINABILITY?

1. A struggle - community struggles - according to social diversity have to be waged by those who are marginalised and those who are impoverished. These struggles have already started in many places and in India among the People's Movement. This was common in the ancient India to establish legitimacy over Land, Water and food sources. Wherever there are landless who are deprived of land because of ethnic and class factors of greed and domination of the poor we have launched land grabbing movements to regain the prime land which were illegally taken by the landed gentry. A campaign to occupy Lands which were yet to be distributed in spite of
the Land Ceiling Acts will have to be organised. All lands redeemed will be declared as liberated zones and collective entitlement will be made. The community becomes the Trustee in terms of entitlement, reclamation and production. The slogan is Grab Land Campaign for Food Production" or "Land to the Tiller"

2. The second slogan which is becoming nationalised in India is "Protect Nature Protect Life". The State or any other dominant group will not be allowed to destroy the trees, the water systems, the mother earth in the name of modernization. Resistance groups will be formed in each village to be vigilant. People's Marches on Save the Western Ghats, Save Water etc., have become popular people's movements already.

3. Thirdly, reinforcing Panchayat Raj systems with greater autonomy to village communities and less state control mechanisms are well thought about and people are mobilised to retain grass root democratic principles at all levels.

The workshop began on Saturday at 17 hours. People in the Dalit village were returning home after their hard work for the day. Men, women and children all were returning.
Twenty of us [animateurs] and a few performing artists went around the villages collecting information from the village elders and others who while cleaning the house or feeding the cattle gave us vague answers without knowing why questions have to be answered. We realized that there were one hundred and thirty families living in eighty houses - some thatched, some tiled and some built by the Government. Yet two or three families cuddled in those small houses using the open space in front of the houses for sleeping, chatting and eating their food. Only the women and children have been using the room in the houses for sleeping and keeping their belongings.

The information that we gathered from different corners of the village was brought back to the central point of meeting at 8.00 pm where nearly 80% of the people were present trying to find out what would happen to them with our intervention. We began our questioning once again and the contradictions existed in them. Then we analysed each issue in terms of its wider connections and structures and drew a line between realizable and non-realizable goals. We discussed about power relations, the perception level of all these gathered and the leadership potential that has to be tapped to resolve the issue. After all this we set up priorities for each issue in terms of its historical context and the capacity of people's resistance. After sorting out possible solutions and the constraints and obstacles, we started improvising for one hour between ourselves as to how we should depict each problem in front
of the people to make them feel that the issue is people based and people could play a major role in tackling it. We also wanted to show on stage what would happen if the problem is resolved and what would be the consequences if it was not resolved. We took some youth and middle aged women who were interested in acting and went to the other corner of the village to rehearse the dramas. The major issues to be highlighted were:-

1. Poor Housing:- Reason is no land for house patta [plots] Government Land was available in the village and therefore the Harijan Welfare Department has to intervene, buy or acquire more land and offer it to those who have no houses. Then the same department should help them to submit applications to Tamilnadu Harijan Housing Development Corporation to build free Group Houses.

The Drama has to be enacted stage by stage raising fundamental questions like who deserve the next Batch of Housing? all those who are homeless or one in each family? How do they prioritize? This is a tricky question and yet villagers have to face it pragmatically and decide collectively who deserves housing?

2. The second scene is to show how applications have to be made and how to approach the Revenue officials of the Harijan Welfare Department - who has to go and when? Thirdly which
land would they show when the officials arrive to mark land site. Would there be any dispute with the upper caste over this issue and would it be easy to acquire? How much each family would they offer as deposits which is precondition for housing.

The Methodology used is based on the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONSTRAINTS, INTEREST, POTENTIAL OF LEADERSHIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE PLAY CULMINATING DECISION MAKING STAGE BY STAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION WITH THE AUDIENCE AND LISTEN TO THEIR RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEXT DAY ACTION DISCUSSED AND STRATEGIESED.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOLLOW UP ACTION WITH REFLECTION ON SUCCESS AND FAILURE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the drama was enacted on the first night at 10'O'clock people did not feel sleeps, but were very curious to watch how we would tackle the housing issue. The programme was good. The message was covered. People also asked many questions and clarified many misconceptions that we have had. But the defects were as follows:-
1. Nearly 40% of the people who watched our play were passive and never responded enthusiastically.

2. The outsiders like us gave the messages on development. But it was not taken so seriously.

3. The drama was not of high standard. Dialogues came without the coherence of thought.

4. The limited interaction from the villagers could not produce a strategy for working together on the next day. We felt that within one night community mobilisation over a long standing issue was not so easy.

On the second day, we did not go away from the village. We decided to remain there and study the situation again. Instead of we, as outsiders enacting the play, we trained the villagers, both young and old to bring out the impediments, lethargic attitudes, the fear complex etc., through acting. There was an overwhelming response over the issue and the perspective became much more clear. The collaborative work which can be called as "Transformational Drama", worked very well and made them to decide that they should go and meet the Revenue official the next day.

In the course of these interventions and participatory research, artistic skills in acting and singing and dancing were taught and people became confident not only for acting but also to do it on real stage.
People started suggesting new skits and improvised new issues so far hidden and unchallenged. The Revenue officials came on the third day and discussion over the issue of Housing was briefed and long discussion with fullest participation of the villagers went on for three hours. The Revenue officials seeing the strength of the People and then bargaining capacity agreed to recommend a piece of Government land for housing plots.

Some of us were also emotionally involved in the issue and began to show our community organisational skills in sharpening the insights and negotiation methods with the villagers. In the meantime, the socio-political analysis has clearly emerged. It revealed their acute poverty, powerlessness, unemployment, landlessness, migration level fatalism etc.,

On the third day, more issues such as drinking water, receiving low wages from rich peasants, caste atrocities, exploitation in terms of alienating "The Depressed Class Land" from the Dalits etc., were brought to the surface. Women who came to the open through drama and community organising, began their active resistance against men's oppression. We discovered women as new leaders and key organisers. The whole afternoon animating and improvisation continued. Liberation songs were taught and respected by youth and children. On the third day selection of volunteers for the performance became a serious problem. A few new and old actors were chosen. It was emphasised that those who were given the
chance of acting, should be able to march on the next day to meet
the officials and redress grievances. Rehearsal was realistic and
at people's level. There was enough spontaneity.

On the third night drama was a great success. Actors played
their role elusively. There was no fear on the stage. Nothing
was repeated or over acted. The message was conveyed emotionally
but with greater determination.

We could see that something which has been hidden for ages was
rekindled and reborn. There was hope and joy in all this. There
were Elders, middlemen, women youth and children were active for
the first time in their lives, forgetting defeatism, contradictions
and differences. We felt at though we have discarded apathy,
fatalism, inferiority feelings and re-initiated a community of
people with dignity and respect and selfhood.

When the fourth day was born we found more disciples following
us while we bade farewell. Women and children wept and men stood
firm on their feet and told us we shall continue to live as humans!
We shall resist! We shall never be cowed down. We shall spread
this message to others. Our lives will not only be full of dance
and drumming and drama, but we will go forward to question the
domination and demoralization of the landlords who have controlled
us so far.
That was the climax of a Workshop of People's Theatre. We went back to our respective areas to reflect what had happened. We were sure that under expertise in this field of alternate media we could change a dumb and mute group of individuals to speak, to act, to question, to think and to pave a way for change within themselves. People's consciousness has been stirred. They have stabilised a loose culture of different ages into a solid factor of their own destiny and self-worth. They are now on a war-path to emancipate themselves from centuries of oppression and humiliation. The March has began - the end is not near - it may be prolonging - but people will endure it and see the success themselves.