

Instant Theatre Or Spontaneous Plays, Based On A Variety Of Themes, Offer A Lot Of Scope For Experimenting

These plays catch the conscience of society

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SOMEbody from among the viewers screamed "India Shining". Instantly, faces of kurta-clad youths of Playback Theatre lit up. They ran to the middle of the stage, waved their hands and looked around. "I am feeling happy. There is happiness all around. People are feeling good," was what they shouted in unison.

But then, is everybody really feeling happy? That too the team acted out. The same faces which lit up with happiness suddenly had expressions of rage. Artistes intertwined their limbs and pulled themselves in opposite directions—a depiction of conflict and violence resulting from liber-

alisation policies.

This is instant theatre or spontaneous plays—an innovative concept sans script or form which is increasingly being used as a therapy abroad. And the 'India Shining' slogan gave Sterling Playback Theatre much freedom to innovate on acting techniques as the viewers' reaction to the slogan was highly varied. Besides political themes, the 10-member troupe comprising college students and employed youths also enable viewers to watch an episode from their own lives performed on stage.



Artistes of Sterling Playback Theatre miming during a performance in the city recently - Express photo by P Jawahar

catching up in the city, enlightening Chennaiites - slum dwellers and stressed-out yuppies alike - in the process.

"A single emotion like anger, conflict or happiness is explained in five different ways by artistes.

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This not only gives insight into the individuality of the person who performs the act, but also provides a cathartic effect to the viewers," said a student who is part of the theatre group. Indeed, playback theatre is considered a therapy abroad, noted Syril.

"Sometimes screens are used in the background for stories which we already have in stock. Sterling Playback theatre, a pioneer of the concept in the city, started off by recruiting interested candidates from among college students four years ago," said Syril. "We have never had any drop-outs. All of them stayed on even after landing jobs," he added. John Buckthese, a priest, joined the troupe when he was a student of Loyola College. He said the troupe was being put together at that time and "we were trained by two psychology coun-

sellors from Australia and New Zealand".

He further said since then several performances had been organised in Old Age Homes, Juvenile Homes and others and received encouraging response everywhere.

Sri Vidhya, a project coordinator with the Tata Consultancy Services, joined only three years ago after she came to know about the theatre through a college friend. Instantly, she was hooked to the concept. Now, she devotes much of her off days to playback

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