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Playing your own drama

By Ganesh Nagarajan

EVER got involved in a play? Ever gone beyond merely clapping or laughing at the lines? Sterling Playback Theatre group gives you a chance to be yourself, to see your own experience through the actor's histrionic abilities.

Well, Sterling is a unique group with artists playing what the audience wants. You want to vent your anger over the communal clashes in Gujarat? Just tell them what to do and they will enact. Ever felt happy about being an Indian? Go tell them, and they will play for you, unlike other drama troupes that have a pre-determined theme and innumerable rehearsals before being staged. Sterling doesn't want mute spectators. They want co-artists. And they bring out the one in you.

S Cyril Alexander, the director of Sterling Playback, was also the *suthradhar* who asked the audience to come out with a story idea to be enacted immediately. The whole play was sectioned into two. The first section was all about acting out a situation given by one among those present. Here,

Alexander asked the person to narrate the sequence and asked the individual to come out with his/her feelings when the incident (in this case the recent Gujarat riots). Based on the replies, the artists enact the scenes.

One person in the audience suggested that the troop enact an accident which happened in the city recently. When a doctor couple and their child met with a casualty on the road, nobody from the public came forward to help them. When finally a youth came, it was too late. The audience was literally moved to tears when this bit was staged.

Sterling Playback Theatre, Chennai was started in the year 2000 by a group of like-minded people. "We have regular workshops for the volunteers where they are trained. And no artist is paid. In fact they have to contribute for the expenses when a show is hosted," says Alexander.

Alexander, who was previously involved with street plays finds this kind of medium more interesting. "Street plays do not make any impact on the audience. Only when you have a dialogue with the audience, will they come out with their innermost emotions, which helps them a lot."

Sterling Playback Theatre has performed nine plays in the past twelve months. They have also performed at orphanages and old age homes. Next year, Alexander plans to take Sterling Playback Theatre to rural Tamil Nadu.

This play was performed on March 17 at ICSA in Egmore.

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