

# Dialogue in theatre

**CHAT** Radha Ramaswamy says *Theatre of the Oppressed* is the answer to the problems in education

A passion for theatre, education and social justice led Radha Ramaswamy in her quest to work with Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) to resolve interpersonal conflicts and initiate change in communities.

After giving up full time teaching in Mount Carmel College in 2005, Radha trained under the well-known theatre facilitator Marc Weinblatt in 2010. In 2011, she established the Centre for Community Dialogue and Change (CCDC). Ever since, she has conducted over 25 TO workshops, which has included participants from a cross-section of society. Having been a teacher for over 25 years, Radha's focus is to conduct workshops with people involved in education. "My dream is to include TO in the curriculum of every school."

"I came to TO through my experiences in the classroom. I observed that students enjoy learning outside the classroom. Teachers are often held responsible for problems in education. I have a problem with this formulation. Teachers feel oppressed too. TO empowers a teacher to believe that change is possible," says Radha.

Radha will for the first time conduct a trainer's workshop, titled "Breaking Patterns, Creating Change". The participants are from varied professional backgrounds from different Indian cities.

"It was high time I conducted a trainer's workshop. I want more 'multipliers' to emerge, as Augusto Boal called us," says Radha, who conducted her recent TO workshop in a medical college in Kathmandu.

Radha says that TO is different from other theatre forms. It neither entertains nor preaches. It is a tool that enables one to reflect and put his or her insight into action. "There is no right or wrong way of playing a game. An individual responds to the game based on his or her experience."

Effective dialogue is another important aspect to TO. "I have observed that most struggle with communication in their personal lives. Boal developed a game called the 'Rainbow of Desire' that helps in resolving interpersonal conflicts. Both individuals need to be at the same level for true dialogue to happen. Sometimes active listening helps in dialogue, it allows one to move towards understanding the other."

Radha says that oppression occurs at different levels. There is a clear distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed.

But some times, oppression takes place at a subconscious level. "Boal developed a game 'Cop in the Head' in Europe for the middle class, for whom oppression wasn't external, it was internalised."

Most are afraid to express their fears and desires, but TO removes that guilt. "Everything happens within the format of the play. There are spect-actors who come from the audience and take the place of the actor. One can express emotions from real life, but because they do so within the format of the play, they feel safe. It is a rehearsal for real life."

Some people allow the pain to surface to deal with it, while others prefer to be in an anaesthetised state, to the latter Radha has this to say: "Dealing with pain is like the ground breaking after a long, hard winter and a little sapling trying to make its way out to the surface. It is a natural process that must happen," Radha concludes.

The workshop will be conducted from June 2 to 7 at Vidyadeep College, CRI Brothers Institute of Theology, 128/1, Halasuru Road. For details call 25370408.

SRAVASTI DATTA



**ENABLING** Theatre for the Oppressed empowers a teacher to believe that change is possible, believes Radha Ramaswamy PHOTO: SAMPATH KUMAR G.P.