

# **Community Theatre as Cultural Intervention:**

**The case of the Samre Community Theatre Project on Evil-Eye Organized  
by the Tigray Arts School**

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## Table of contents

List of Tables.....	i
List of figures .....	ii
Acronyms .....	iii
Acknowledgment .....	iv
Abstract .....	V
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Hypothesis and Research Questions .....	2
Objectives of the Study .....	3
Significance of the Study .....	4
Term Definition.....	4
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	6
Theatre in Africa .....	6
Theoretical Framework .....	10
Community Theatre.....	10
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	26
Area of the Study.....	26
Sources of the Data .....	26
Instruments .....	28
Data Analysis .....	28
FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH .....	29
Background to the Tigray Arts School.....	29
The Tigray Cultural Association.....	29
The Objectives of CAT .....	31
The Establishment of TAS .....	31
The Objectives of TAS.....	33
The Theatre Department.....	33
The Particular Rationale of the Department.....	34
Objectives of the Department.....	34
The Curriculum of the Department .....	34
Staff Development of the Department .....	37
Student Intake Capacity of the Department .....	37
Experiences of the Department .....	39
Background to the Samre Community .....	39
Topography .....	40
Population.....	40
Resources .....	41
The Oral History and Cultural Values of the Community .....	44
Ethnic Diversity and Social Discrimination.....	48
The Cultural Context of Evil-Eye within the Community .....	48
The Community’s Overall Reaction to Evil-Eye .....	56
The Samre Community Theatre Project.....	57
Rationale of the project .....	57
Reason to Select the Samre Community as the Area of Intervention .....	58
Objectives of the Samre Community Theatre Project.....	59
Steps followed to Start Implementing the Project.....	59

Cooperation with NGOs and Other Organizations .....	59
The Actual Process of the Samre Community Theatre Project.....	60
Findings of the Audiovisual Material.....	62
The Feedback of Evil-Eye People to the Performance.....	67
<b>DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>68</b>
The Objectives of TAS.....	68
Reconstructing Cultural Identity .....	68
Promoting Community Development .....	70
Curriculum of the Theatre Department .....	70
Theatre as an Aspect of Development.....	70
Theatre as an Aspect of Culture in Tigray .....	71
Theatre as an Aspect of Art in General .....	73
Other Supportive Courses .....	73
The Samre Community Theatre Project.....	76
The Organizers' Ideological Interest.....	76
The Organizers' Understanding of Community Theatre.....	77
Representational Authority in the Performance .....	80
Culture as a Basic Stem of Ideologies.....	83
The Socio-Economic Importance of Blacksmiths and Potters.....	86
Summery .....	87
Cultural Reconstruction as an Objective of TAS .....	87
Outcome of the Samre Community Theatre Project .....	89
<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>REFERENCE .....</b>	<b>I</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1: The Committees that established the Tigray Arts School.....	32
Table 2 Course offerings of the Theatre Department.....	35
Table 3 Student intake in the three Department of the School.....	37
Table 4 The size of schools in terms of classrooms in the Woreda from 1994-1995 E.C .....	42
Table 5 The coverage of health institutions of the Woreda .....	42

## List of figures

Figure 1: The Samre Community's assumptions on symptoms of sick person caused by buda .....	51
Figure 2: The Community's traditional therapies to cure the sick person caused by buda.....	52

## Acronyms

- TAS- The Tigray Arts School
- CAT- The Cultural Association of Tigray
- AAU- Addis Ababa University
- EPRDF- Ethiopia Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
- TPLF- The Tigray People Liberation Front

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## Abstract

It seems that the traditional canon of conceptualizing theatre along the line of ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ ends up in this epoch. Instead its practical relationship with the cultural, socio-economic, and political realities of societies is becoming more apparent and persistent. Thus, the need for community-based-theatre also emanates from its pertinent efficacy in bringing changes within a defined community. These types of theatres are developing and are frequently applied for issues akin to the process of community change, in the third world countries. Especially, most community-based theatres echo the very principles of Paulo Freire’s (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which underscores the importance of community’s direct participation and their authentic values in education systems.

By the same token, the Theatre Department of the Tigray Arts School (in Tigray) had organized a community-based theatre in 1999 within local community of one rural Woreda, *Samre*. The objective of this community theatre project was meant to specifically deal with the traditions of harmful perceptions particularly related to ‘evil-eye’- with a view to bringing attitudinal change amid the cultural context of the whole community and to consequently benefit the target communities in the Woreda. Therefore, this thesis inquires into the efficacy of the Samre Community Theatre Project as a means of cultural intervention made to benefit the direct victims of ‘evil-eye’ in the given Woreda.

Key terms: Community Theatre and Evil-eye.

# INTRODUCTION

## Statement of the Problem

Two of the nine principal objectives of the *Cultural Policy* (1997, p.37) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia read hereunder as they are:

- To create favorable situation to creative artists and researchers working in the cultural sector;
- To step-by-step abolish traditional harmful practices

These objectives of the *Cultural Policy* sound more palatable as compared to the existing panorama of the Country's social and cultural diversities. The need to have creative artists (engaged in myriad artistic genres) involved in cultural endeavors and the need to have this aspiration inscribed in the *Cultural Policy* is also the right track, for art and culture is inalienable part and parcel of a given society. Indeed, as indicated in the objectives of this Cultural Policy, art and culture can harmoniously be deployed to realize development, peace, and democracy and strive against harmful traditional practices. Theatre, as being the component of art, is believed to carryout such social functions.

Nevertheless, the objectives of this *Cultural Policy* seem hardly successful particularly to cultivate exemplary theatre practitioners working within communities at grassroots. It could be logical to say that theatre in Ethiopia has been imprisoned in the dark halls of modern buildings in the Capital City by elitist theatre artists (Sara, 2005, p.25). As it is a young experience introduced along with the epoch on which western-educated local intellectuals appeared to the political arena of the Country (Aboneh, 1996,p. 33), theatre is not well systematized in a way grass root communities would have opportunities to use it for their own purpose.

Some NGO sponsored stage theatres, Radio or TV dramas which are currently run (in Addis) and considered as community theatre by some theatre enterprises are more of handouts dominantly bear the personal artistic and ideological realms of playwrights (Medihanit, 1997,p15). Community theatre in the true sense of community's cultural values, authorship, and participation is seldom accustomed in Ethiopia. The Theatre companies or enterprises established in the Capital under the umbrella of Theatre for Development are always found developing entrepreneurial and capitalistic motives; instead of popularizing and handing it over to the community to use it as a means in least costs for its own purpose.

However, it could be misjudging to debase all the attempts underway sponsored by NGOs and other concerned organizations. It is worthy rather to acknowledge their efforts. But, their toil of using community theatre will take the right direction (in its myriad alternative approaches) when it is supported by researches.

The experience of the Tigray Arts School in relation to using community theatre against the tradition of 'evil-eye' is a rare case in Ethiopia, which needs the light of research in regard to its holistic process. This research, therefore, will spark little light on the problem that could illuminate, however in a small scale, the social value of community theatre.

## **Hypothesis and Research Questions**

Community theatre is believed to serve as a means of cultural intervention. Particularly its experiment shows that it creates opportunity for disadvantaged and marginalized groups to represent themselves in an effort to ascertain their own cultural, socio-economic and political equality. Community theatre achieves so when its

production process encompasses the variables of *performance, community,* and culture whose ultimate end gears forward to address the real issues of the community through the direct participation of the community. Therefore, in the final analysis, the whole process of a given community-theatre is expected to generally project: self-determination/self-expression; empowerment; and challenges to the dominant culture

On the basis of this hypothesis, the research questions of this study are clustered into four categories:

1. What was the initiative for the Tigray Arts School to Organize the Samre Community theatre Project?
2. How the overall process of the Samre Community Theatre Project was conducted?
  - How the issue of 'evil-eye' was selected as a focus of discussion in the Woreda as compared to the dominant culture of the whole community?
  - Who decides to have the issue of 'evil-eye'?
  - What are the roles inscribed in the performance to represent the issue of 'evil-eye'?
  - For which audience does the performing took place? And where?
3. What is the Context of Evil-Eye within the Samre Community?
4. What is the collective readings /understandings/ of the audience on the performance text?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this research is:

- To explore what happened in the event of producing community theatre -as cultural intervention-within the *Samre* community;
- To understand what were the ways linking the collective readings of the audience to the general cultural context of the given community; and
- To explore the very objectives of the Tigray Arts School and the role it played to the production of the Samre Community Theatre Project.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is believed that, this research thesis will contribute to the arena of the Ethiopian theatre in showing the significance of community theatre to cultural, economic, and political endeavors. It could also illuminate the pictures of how to making a community-based theatre to Ethiopian theatre practitioners.

### **Term Definition**

#### **Evil-Eye in the Ethiopian Context**

Ronald A. Reminick (1974) defines the term evil-eye according to the Ethiopian context:

*The buda own no land and therefore work in handicrafts, making pots from clay, fashioning tools from iron, and weaving cloth from hand-spun cotton and sheep's hair. They are known generally as tayb. The term is derived from the noun tebib which means "craftsman". It is also associated with an idea which means "to be wise" or "to be very clever". The terms tayb and buda are synonymous. To be buda is to have the "evil-eye". "Evil-eye" designates the power to curse and destroy and reincarnate, harnessing the labor of the dead for one's own ends (p. 280).*

Labeling artisans, particularly the smiths and potters who traditionally smelt irons and make pots, as buda or evil-eye is common in most parts of Ethiopia. Alula Pankhurst (2000) also adds that these people engaged in iron work and potteries are still living in the southern part of Ethiopia in addition to the northern part of Ethiopia; and these people

are downgraded everywhere. In general the term evil-eye refers to those smiths and potters. The Samre Community Theatre project organized by the Theatre Department of the Tigray Arts School has dealt with this issue, evil-eye. This research will investigate as to how the issue was threatened in the theatre.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Theatre in Africa

The European colonizers had rampantly expanded the performance of different genres of art in Africa. Particularly, West Africa was introduced to several styles of theatre such as popular, musical, commercial, modern, and traveling theatres (Barber, Collins, and Ricard 1997, p.1). However, the expansion of all these artistic genres was at the expense of the indigenous African values. Michael Etherton (1982), in congruous to this, says “the colonialists first confirmed the greatness of the indigenous kingdoms, and then obscured it by conquering them, denigrating their heroes, rejecting their values and belittling their institutions” (p.144). This is really a historical upheaval that testifies the tragic loss of African identity.

Richard Schechner (1985), in his book *Between Theater and Anthropology*, elaborates that indigenous performances are not simply the composition of the physical movements and gestures of man’s flesh. Rather, they are the sum total of several bits of movements that bear in-themselves realms of life (p.296). Schechner further elaborates the textual chains of these performances that gear forward mirroring out the interfaces of communal values.

*A person sees the event; he sees himself; he sees himself seeing the event; he sees himself seeing others who are seeing the event and who, may be, see themselves seeing the event. Thus there is the performance, the performers, the spectators; and the spectator of spectators; and the self-seeing-self that can be performer or spectator or spectator of spectators (p.197).*

Therefore, to have the contemporary activism of theatre performances capable of engendering value based blossoms in Africa to the grassroots, there has to be a need to bridge between theatre and grassroots-community. Byam (1999) substantiates this

idea saying: “Theatre, in order to be organic, needs to find the relevance of its foundation in popular culture” (p.9).

Thanks to the pioneering activists and educators of cultural restoration, theatre in Africa is getting more attention for its betterment of rendering its power to the community. Byam (1999) believes that in the post-colonial Africa attempts have been made to revitalize the holistic purpose of education, culture, art, and politics along the line of African life p.6). Indeed, however with pros and cons, challenges of colonial heritages and professional criticisms, theatre in Africa is swaying to the hands of social workers, activists and practitioners working with communities (Byam 1999).

Comparing different seminars held on Arts and Development in several parts of Africa in different years, David Kerr (1999) gives more credit to the workshop held at *Chalimbana* in 1979 in Zambia in that this workshop “provided a venue for the marriage between two types of activist-adult educators and social workers on one side...and the university-based artists with their roots in traveling theatre” (p.78). Further more the *Chalimbana* workshop, which in effect its methodology spread over Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, ended up by developing a methodology as to how community-based theatre addresses community issues. The methodology (Kerr, 1999, p.80) includes:

- Research into a community’s problems;
- Using a workshop technique to create a play contextualizing those problems;
- Presenting the play to the community;
- Using the post-performance discussion as the basic for initiating action to solve the problems.

For instance, the Mauritius theatre, which was interchangeably suffering from the torment of the French and British oppressive cultural actions, has been committed after

independence to promoting cultural promotion and national language (Mooneeram 1999, p.24). Eritrea emerged as independent state in 1993 has established community-based projects under the auspice of the government since the realization of its separation from Ethiopia. For that matter, the Eritrean, in the times of their guerilla, fighting was using popular theater to propagate and agitate the Eritrean secession ( )

However Ethiopia was not colonized, theatre was introduced to Ethiopia with Western educated scholars. Almost a century is counted since theatre has been introduced to Ethiopia by foreign school teachers and Western-educated Ethiopian scholars. Teklehawariate Teklemariam is believed to be the first an Ethiopian intellectual to pioneer a ‘well-to-do’ modern script of theatre. However, as being a western-educated scholar, Teklehawariate had two main objectives whilst he planed to transcribe his thought into a theatre play:

- To introduce the ‘now-how’ of making a theatre along the Western tradition against the indigenously choired musical performing in which he was invited to watch it as a theatergoer; and
- To, accordingly, criticize the incompatible political personality of *Lij Iyasu*.

No more objections cold follow to his second objective. Teklehawariate’s notion, in his first objective to override the self-tailored local performance by introducing the Western theatre tradition, could be considered as an unconsciously committed mistake. His trend has been bequeathed to generations and has been continuing dominantly to the present arena of the Ethiopia theatre.

However, Teklehawariat’s notion was opposite to alternative concepts of theatre that foster the structural proximity of theatre to authentic values and needs of any community.

The practical implementation of such alternative approaches of theatre has also been theorized to formulate empirical methods as to how anyone suits the use of theatre for its own values and purpose.

Nowadays theatre in Africa is getting developed (Etherton, 1982). Byam (1999) elaborates that, beginning with the experiment of the Botswana's *Theatre for Development* project in 1973, several African countries followed the step to address socio-economic matters (p.37). Byam adds that countries like Tanzania, Malawi, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Cameroon, and Ghana have tested the efficacy of theatre for development concerns and attained some results (Ibid).

The experience of theatre in Ethiopia is however a bit different from other African countries. Since the genesis of its introduction to Ethiopia, theatre has been serving the class of the elites (Aboneh, 1996:33). Western styles of writing and directing theatre is still considered as a standard to measure the highest quality of theatre productions.

Albeit, there have been in-and-off attempts of using community theatre by some NGOs and theatre activists (Sara, 2005). Particularly, the inclusion of *Theatre and Society* course in the Department of Theatre Arts at Addis Ababa University has contributed skills in the application of theatre for development and community issues (Aboneh, 1996: 35). According to Aboneh, there were also attempts, in the past regime of the *Derg*, of establishing amateur theatre groups working with the Farmers' Cooperatives and Proletariats. But, the major shortcoming of these theatre groups were resulting from the hard and fast commandment of the political system to use theatre for agitation and propaganda purposes (pp. 37-39).

## Theoretical Framework

### Community Theatre

Theatre was born societal. The embryo from which it has grown out is the collectively motivated performance of massive societies. And its function also had no value in isolation to that society. That is why Augusto Boal (1979) heavily underlines on the social function of theatre. The divorce between theatre and society begins with the traditional assumption that says that theatre as any branches of art is fundamentally tied to the imperatives of 'Art for Art's Sake'. This assumption is however, as many postmodern theatre scholars agree upon, part of the bourgeois culture, which deliberately galvanizes the archaic identity of theatre and alienates its value from the society.

However, as opposed to this predated conceptual frame work, that demands the servitude of theatre for pure artistic purpose, several types of new perspectives have been developing. Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), Bertot Brecht;'s *Epic Theatre* (1874), Grotowisky's *Poor Theatre* (1968)...etc are some but few of the newly flourishing concepts of theatre. In spite of their minor technical differences, all these new concepts shout hosanna for the reunification of theatre and society.

In congruous to this, Baz Kershaw (1992) says:

*... We must move beyond formalist analysis-which treats theatre as if it were independent of its social and political environment-and consider performance as a cultural construct and as a means of cultural production (p.5).*

As Kershaw claims the conception of art that theater is independently of the socio-political environment is by itself the product of cultural and political environment that have struggled for the art to be an invisible shield to the interest of different social groups.

Thus, the concept of Community Theater itself is an integral part of the change that basically constitutes cultural movements (Kershaw, 1992). On top of this, Kershaw examines the nature of Community Theater from three interrelated perspectives. Kershaw (1992) says:

*In order to stress the function of theater as a public arena for the collective exploration of ideological meaning, I will investigate it from three perspectives, drawn in relation to the concepts of performance, community, and culture (p.17).*

**Performance:** Kershaw's aspiration to examine the potential of Community Theater, taking performance as a separate perspective, emanates from the very worthiness of conceptualizing performance itself. When comparing the conceptual richness of performance to that of history, Richard Schechner (1985) says.

*History is not what happened but what is encoded and transmitted. Performance is not merely a selection from data arranged and interpreted; it is behavior itself and carries in itself kernels of originality, making it the subject for further interpretation, the source of further study (p. 51).*

So, what sort of performance in its nature are we speaking of? Here, the ultimate concern is not about the kind of performance embedded on the formalized theater. This kind of performance calls for the silently seated audiences in the darkened auditorium separated from the central stage. A performance in need what we speak of is, rather, the performance in the sense of community theater whose goal is designed to empower those who are seated silently in darkened halls in order to enable them dismantle the ideal blocks and mount to the stage to perform it by themselves.

*The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action (Boal, 1979, p.155).*

So, the concept of this performance in the sense of community theatre is best described as “ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience” (Kerschaw, 1992, p.16). Here in Kerschaw’s concepts of performance, two elements appeared as the unique qualities of performance in Community Theater: *ideology and transaction*.

*Ideology*: Kerschaw (1992) defines it: “Ideology is any system of more or less coherent values which enables people to live together in groups, communities and societies” (p.18). It is also inevitably true that the ideology that ties up any group or community also encompasses contradicting values within the same group or community. Therefore, ideology of a certain group or community may consist of both proponents and opponents (Kerschaw, 1992, pp. 19-21).

*Ideological transaction*: Ideology itself does not only constitute the same values but also contradicted values of group or community. Likewise the performance of community theatre is not also a one way vehicle that conveys, like that of “banking concept of education” (Freire, 1999), ideology from one corner to where there is a need to deposit it. Performance in the true sense of community theatre is, in stead, a two way vehicle, like that of “problem posing concept of education” (Freire, 1999), that transacts ideology between two corners. This is to mean that the audiences of Community Theater are not passive spectators. Rather, they are active participants; they have an authentic power to affect the emotional tone of the performance and act up on it. And therefore, a performance is ideological transaction by which the performers and the audience “make more or less common sense of the signs used in the performance, the means by which the aims and intention of theatre companies connect with the responses and interpretations of

their audiences” (Kershaw, 1992,p.16). Furthermore, Kershaw adds that it is a “framework within which companies encode and audience decodes the signifiers of performances” (p.17).

Therefore, if a performance is meant to be a mutual medium between the organizers and the community, it is axiomatic that it deals with the values, which is ideological by its nature, of that community (Kershaw, 1992, p. 18).

The essence of ideological transaction in the performance of Community Theater begins with the process of identification. This identification, which is to be between the theatre company and the community, assures as to how the organizers properly grasp the real needs of the community and also helps the community understand the role of organizers and demand their intervention (Kershaw, 1992, p. 62). This transactional nature of performance helps the organizers develop a shared ideology that gears toward identification, participation, and addressing real needs of the community. These three things (identification, participation and addressing real needs): “increase the potential of efficacy of community theatre by enabling the community to see the usefulness of performance to its interests” (Kershaw, 1992, p. 66).

**Community:** A community is “the concrete medium of face-to-face interactions through which we transact ideological business with the wider social structure” (Raymond Williams as quoted by Kershaw, 1992, p.29).

When Williams says community is a ‘medium of face-to-face interaction,’ it could not be viewed that the community serves as mere instrument by which any organizer of community theatre injects its own ideology. However, the word ‘medium’ is preferred because the organizers build a shared sentiment with the community and then transact

their ideology vis-à-vis the ideology of the community, on the one hand. And throughout the whole process of the performance the community remains as a polar issue and also a medium on which the community itself directly participates, addresses real needs and discusses on the issues, on the other hand. A community is, therefore, the other stem of ideology.

It is clear that community is one of the three (including performance and culture) elements of a community theatre and its ideology is the core of its meaning to be transacted with the organizer's identity. But the question is: what is the parameter for a certain group of people to be a 'community'?

Baz Kershaw (1992) says the following:

*All communities identify themselves by creating boundaries between what is included and what is excluded as part of the community. These boundaries are established through the constant use of appropriate symbols by the networks of the community, including the notion of 'community' itself. All individuals in the community may not necessarily agree to exactly the same decoding of the symbols; in fact the internal ideological dynamic of communities often derives from differences of opinion in this respect. But, to establish the boundaries that provide the basis of a sense of community, any particular community's member must at least agree to use the same symbols. Obvious examples of such symbols are... simply the name of a village or inner city district. (p. 30).*

It could be argued that symbols that are used by all members are the earmarks that identify the community within a given boundary. However, the term community remains a very debatable concept even among Community Theater practitioners. Some theater activists refrain from applying the term in the works of their theatre for different reasons. Bruce McConachie (2001) elaborates that some theater practitioners reject the term for its "too much historical baggage contradictory meanings" (p. 36).

Some also believe that the term community bears within it the spirit of "conservative, tradition-bound politics" (McConachie 2001, p. 36). Still others continue

that “racism, capitalism, imperialism” had devalued the implication of community to the practice of face-to-face communal performance so that it is aimless to handle such a theatre (McConachie 2001, p. 36).

But, as opposed to this, many theatre activists are still adherently continuing underscoring on the importance of community as a major element of community theatre. McConachie says, “people have always created images of community in order to shape and maintain their sense of belongingness and self-worth [and]... communities provide the necessary mediating element between individuals and the large society” (McConachie 2001:37).

Social workers also share this idea that a group of people can form a community within the context of common interests (Homan, 2004, pp.148-149).

Notwithstanding the myriad of approaches of community formation, a community can basically be formulated either on the basis of ‘interest’ or ‘location’ or both (Kershaw, 1992, p. 31). Taking both location and interest as a benchmark, Roberta M. Berns puts the concept of community from a social work point of view. She says:

*A community is more than a group of people living in the same neighborhood, town or city, or city under common laws; it is also a group of people having fellowship, a friendly association, a mutual sharing, and common interests (Berns, 1993, pp. 372-373).*

Here the physical environment is the determinant indicator of the community of location; whereas, interest on various social purposes can determinately bring together groups of people, regardless of their location, to the same melting-pot where they interact as a community to achieve their common interests.

It is very clear that a community may be established in various ways by different factors however community of location and community of interest are the common categories (Kershaw, 1992, pp. 31; McConachie, 2001, pp. 38; Berns, 1993, pp. 372).

At the heart of community, there comes the importance of symbols by which every members of the community feels belong innings. Nevertheless, Cohen's assumption (as quoted by Kershaw, 1992, pp. 30) that all members of the community "may not necessarily agree to the same decoding of symbols"-symbols that necessary bears their sense of communality- should be explained a bit further, yet. Why, some members of a community may disagree at some points of decoding their symbols if they are once part of the community? Baz Kershaw (1992) says: "Community is ... a potential site of ideological opposition to the status quo" (p. 30). Mark S. Homan (2004) also shares this idea from his social work perspective and says: "The community is a contributor of resources and allies and a provider of pitfalls and opponents" (p.148).

Behind the common identity of a given community there always exist concerns of representation. Laura Wiley and David Feiner (2001) call this power-oriented relationship of community members as *representational authority*. Representational authority evokes two basic questions: "who has the power to represent whom? And who should have the right to represent whom?" (p.122).This is always true particularly to the community of location where several clusters of communities may live under the umbrella of the larger community. Clusters of communities within the larger community can serve, as Alan Filewod (2001) argues, as a medium of ideological mappings to the different interests (p. 89). In congruous to this Kershaw also (1992) says that, "within or alongside the dominant ideologies other, oppositional, ideologies may struggle for

cultural space and may sometimes even modify the dominant ideologies to a significant degree” (p. 20).

It is on the basis of this overall conceptual complexity of *community* that Community Theatre is deemed to be an instrument for cultural intervention within a community.

**Culture:** Culture is the third element of community theatre which is closely related to the concept of performance and community. The inclusion of culture in the process of making community-based theatre is as paramount as performance and community are. Here, the intention is not to define what culture is in its all dimensions. The need is here to simplify the concept of culture in a way to use it properly as a basic and necessary element in the process of making community-based theatre.

Kershaw (1992), referring Williams’ idea, elaborates the concept of culture, proper to the function of community-based theatre, in the following way.

*[culture is] the system of signs via which groups, organizations, institutions, and of course, communities recognize and communicate with each other in the process of becoming a more or less influential formation within society.... ‘Culture’ is the medium which can unite a range of different groups and communities in a common project in order to make them in to an ideological force operating for or against the status quo. (p. 36).*

We can make sense out of the quotation that it is not only the human society that develops a common culture but also organizations and institutions have their own culture. In fact, in one or another way, the culture of organizations or that of institutions replicates the values and principles that are made out of the culture of human society. Whatsoever, but the most significant point of the quotation is that culture in any of its forms, whether it is organizational or human, creates a space for ideological alliance or confrontation to the already established values.

As an instance of this, Kershaw (1992) mentions the movement of the “British alternative and community theatre.” He explains that this theatre movement was an opposing process that brought change of ideologies on the predated culture of the British theatre. He goes on to elaborate that the cultural move of the British theatre companies “was part of the great cultural shifts of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in British” (p. 36). What is very important from Kershaw’s point of arguments is that the organizational apparatus of community theatre, as opposed to the culture of conventional theatre, had a bearing on the “oppositional cultural movement” of human society (p. 36).

Indeed, it remains also the same in Africa. The movement which had been operated both intensively and extensively to decolonize Africa politically and culturally was also accompanied by a rebellion of theatre against the alien culture which was attached to its content and structure. In congruous to this Byam (1999) says:

*Politicians at the time were calling for a national cultural revival in places such as Ghana and Nigeria in West Africa, Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa, and Zambia in the Southern region. Consistent with this trend was the emergence of many national dance companies and theatre troupes that traveled into the rural areas. The contemporary popular theatre movement, in some aspects, is an out growth of these efforts (p. 8).*

The historical concomitant ties of theatre and oppositional cultural changes gave way for the instrumentality of community theatre to be adherent to:

*the women’s and feminist movements, the community activist movement and various movements that fought for the rights of people with disabilities, the elderly, the hospitalized and other types of socially disadvantaged group (Kershaw 1992, p. 39)*

Of course, this is the point that makes community based theatre a process of cultural intervention. Kershaw pinpoints three factors by which he thought the nature of cultural intervention in the process of community theatre is determined.

First, community theatre is a unit of the holistic cultural activities which are ideological in their expression. Second, it creates its own context as there could not be an already established audience. Third, community theatre is “expansionist”; it calls to intervene in the larger cultural scenario of the community (Kershaw 1992, pp. 6-7). Yes, because of these or other potential factors, community theatre could intervene into the cultural panorama of the larger community. And, the ultimate goal of this cultural intervention is:

*to increase opportunities for marginalized and oppressed groups to represent themselves and the world around them as a means of asserting their own identity and achieving “cultural, social, economic, and political equity” (Wiler and Feiner, 2001, p. 122).*

Culture helps the process of community theatre begin with a new context and structure along with the ideological identification /transaction, direct participation, and real needs of the community. Above all, every activity that makes the community-based theatre has to be embedded on the cultural context of the larger community.

*According to Laura Wiley and David Feine (2001) the question of representation will get an answer when community theatre is based on culture. This intern answers the following questions: “Who performs, whose material is performed, and who decides?” (p. 13).*

In addition Wiley and Feiner comment as to how a community-based theatre should be based on culture. But, before that Wiley and Feiner (2001) advise us to make a shift in our understanding the concept of authenticity. They strongly claim that authenticity, since it is the base for the process of community based theatre, should not be conceptualized as genuine cultural products, which remain fixed and never change over time. Instead, they advise to conceive authenticity in such a way shat authenticity itself is an ever lasted process through which cultural products experience changes over time and accordingly

the community keeps building a new image upon which. And, therefore, the need to have authenticity constituted in the process of making community-based theatre helps the community create a theatre-community that appears local across the changes.

Wiley and Feiner (2001) also believe that the democratizing and decentralizing of the process of community theatre can help to broaden the space of the performance to accommodate representational authority of the community (p. 124). To accommodate this representational authority in the performance the dramaturgical process is very important.

*The dramaturgical process—conceiving, scripting, and staging a performance—is especially fertile for creating such interactions. When a group of people comes together to decide what stories to tell and how to tell them, they engage in a formal definition of culture. They learn one another’s values, experiences, taboos, and dreams, and they form new, shared perspectives and histories as they deliberate and collaborate to arrive at agreed-upon ways of representing their lives and the world around them. As they negotiate their play making, they are also negotiating and renegotiating community identity and culture (Wiley and Feiner, 2001, p.125).*

The direct participation of community members in this dramaturgical process has a couple of advantages. It helps to meet in the performance one of the decisive elements of community theatre such as “creating a sense of ownership in the participants’ own cultural heritage” (Kelin II 2001, p. 155). This sense of the community’s cultural heritage also bears signs and materials that could show, as Kershaw (1992) argues, the overall socio-political and economic structure of the community (p. 246). The participation of the community in the process of dramaturgy is thus very imperative in that it helps to capture the gist of the community’s storytelling, songs and dances. These storytelling’s, songs and dances are capable of demonstrating ideologies of the community that are both dominant and oppositional.

Because, as Kershaw (1992) elaborates, signs and materials constituted in the storytelling, dances and songs are indicators of the larger social order, which embodies both suppression and oppression (p. 246).

Furthermore, to enrich better the whole process of the community-based performance with the community's resources and history and to assure the cultural authenticity of the community undertaking research with the community is very important (Elam and Fowler, 2001).

In fact research with the community has been taken by most African theatre practitioners as fundamental element of theatre for development along the lines of the Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Byam (1999) adds that "theatre, when adapted to this pedagogy, must include research on the issue of the community with the community" (p.25). The overall implication of the community's direct participation in the dramaturgical process gives an answer at least to a lesser extent to the questions of the inclusion of representational authority and authenticity of the culture in a community theatre.

The ideas that we have dealt till with the concepts of performance, community and culture, altogether, as the three wheels of community theatre, have an ultimate point of contact where to arrive at. Their common interface is empowerment. Performance, community and culture as a very interrelated part and parcel of the concept of community theatre meet at this point to empower the community.

**Empowerment:** It is be clear that the concept of empowerment is very wide. Because of space and time, it is the limitation of this literature to accommodate all the pros and cons of empowerment from different dimensions. Nevertheless, an attempt will

be exerted to illuminate some basic points in an effort to better understand as to how the process of community theatre links to the goal of empowerment.

Sadan Elisheva (1997) strongly recommends interrogating beforehand the nature of power which is a core substance in the concept of empowerment (p. 33).

Based on contemporary theories of power, Elisheva (1997) inclusively puts the concept of power as follows:

*The purpose of power is to prevent groups from participating in the decision-making processes and also to obtain the passive agreement of these groups to this situation. A silent agreement, then, is not an expression of a desire not to participate, but evidence of a mute compliance with the situation. (p. 39).*

Power, as we understand it from the quotation, is something that opens wide opportunities to meet dreamed interests to those who owned it and have access to it, on the one hand. And power is also something that harnesses the opportunity and hinders accesses to meet dreamed interests to those who lost it and have no access to it, on the other hand. In the midst of this idea, we can find that domination lies at the interfaces of power relationship between those who are empowered and disempowered.

Based on Michael Foucault's theory on power, Elisheva (1997) puts the assumption related to the concept of power:

*Power is a general matrix of power relations in a given society at a given time. No-one is outside this matrix and no-one is above it. The prisoners and the jailers are subject to the same procedures of discipline and surveillance practiced in the prison, and act within the actual limitations of the prison architecture. Even though all are trapped in the grid of the power relations there also exist rule and domination (p.58).*

The concept of power enshrined in this quotation is not about a particular kind of power different people could have in their own specified situations of power- relations.

Instead, it talks about power that governs the highly interwoven networks of the society including the day-to-day activities.

In this case, it could be argued that:

*Power is a factor that intervenes between human agency (in the form of every person's inherent ability to influence the world around him) and social structure (in the form of the structures of domination that determine the degree of a person's ability to influence the world). These relations between human agency and social structure are dynamic and processual (Elisheva, 1997, p.69).*

Empowerment is, therefore, a remedial process that intervenes at different levels and through different mechanisms into the spectrum of power relations in a given society. It also gives an insight into accessing to power proper to the overall system of that society. On the other hand, empowerment does not mean making a complete or a partial shift of power from one section to the other. Empowerment is rather an interactive medium that makes smooth the power relations.

Congruously adjacent to this idea of empowerment, Baz Kershaw (1992) explains:

*The intention of community theatre is to strengthen the self-determination of the community, to contribute to the empowerment of the community, and through that to argument the ideological survival of the community within- or against- the dominant socio-political order. (p. 66).*

The very objective of community theatre is not to empower one section of the community at the expense of other sections of the community. The need for a community theatre to deepen its base on culture is an indication in itself that shows the process of community-based theatre attempts to encompass all ideological interests of the community.

As Paulo Freire (1999) elaborates, dialogue serves as a medium to generate critical thinking that creates a milieu of smooth communication among community members. wherein responses of interests could be decoded mutually. Because, "Founding it self

upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequences” (Freire, 1999, p. 72).

Nevertheless, the process of empowerment in community-based theatre creates a dialogue that has to bring the participants in to the realm of consciousness and makes the community able to see the down-to-earth reality (Byam, 1999, pp.18-23). This consciousness, as the immediate result of empowerment, helps, as Jane Heather (2001) claims, “groups of people who are deprived of effective voice by the social and economic relationships of power can speak and be heard” (p. 159). The opportunity of speaking and being heard, which actually makes up the true essence of dialogue, also results in critically questioning the general structure of power. If it happens so, the very mission of community theatre, i.e., as Kershaw (1992) proposes, challenging the dominant culture, becomes a practical reality.

Empowerment can be carried out at several levels. Elisheva (1997) explains that individual, group, organization, and community could be used as a various levels of strategies for empowerment.

*Empowerment is an interactive process which occurs between the individual: and his environment, in the course of which the sense of the self as worthless changes into an acceptance of the self as an assertive citizen with socio-political ability (Elisheva, 1997, p.175).*

In this case empowerment is a means that sharpens both the internal and external realms of the individual: it helps the individual look at himself internally and develop self-dignity to his own personal identity. Empowerment makes also an individual be exposed to the external environment and then acquire skills and information by which he cops up with the process (Elisheva, 1997, p. 76).

*Community empowerment is the increased control of people as a collective over outcomes important to their lives. The test of community empowerment, then, is the active participation of the people themselves in the processes of decision making that affect the community, starting from the stage of formulating the goals, through to the stage of evaluating the outcomes of the effort (Elisheva, 1997, p. 90).*

In all cases, empowerment is taken as a determinant tool that equips individuals, groups and community with spiritual and physical ability.

However, the last statement of Sadan Elisheva about community empowerment substantiates the concept of empowerment in the context of community theatre. When it is said that community theatre has to empower the community, it does not mean that empowerment would be over handed from organizers to the community. Rather, the whole process of empowerment in a community based theatre begins with the full consent and active involvement of the community and ends up with the consciousness of the community in understanding the realities at the ground. The organizers, as Wiley and Feiner (2001) argues, are there with the community to play the role of ambassadorship representing their shared ideologies and the authenticity of the community (p. 138).

Therefore, notwithstanding community theatre relies on the subjective nature of contextuality, Kershaw (1992: 66) elaborates that the whole process of community theatre, within the application of the above three elements, is generally supposed to render its power to the community in:

- a. Building self-determination;
- b. Enhancing empowerment; and
- c. Enabling to cop with the dominant culture.

# **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

## **Area of the Study**

The main study areas of this thesis are Tigray Arts School in Mekele (the capital city of the Tigray National Regional Government 800 km from Addis Ababa to the West) and the Samre Community, which is found in the southern zone of Tigray 60 km from Mekele to the South-west. And, the targets are: one, the Theatre Department of the Tigray Arts School, as an organizing agent of the Samre Community Theatre Project; and two, the Samre Community, as an area of cultural intervention through the Samre Community Theatre Project.

## **Sources of the Data**

As this research is a qualitative single case study, it demands the collection of data from extensive source to the best of the researcher's ability. Accordingly, an attempt has been exerted to record details about the context surrounding the case, the Samre Community Theatre Project. These details include information about the physical environment, cultural, political, social, and historical factors, which are believed to have a bearing on the process of the Samre Community Theatre Project. Accordingly, the data of this thesis include interviews, documents, audiovisual materials and observation.

## **Interview**

**In depth interview:** To gather primary qualitative information on the objectives and the overall process of the Samre Community Theatre Project, in depth interview was designed as a best tool. Then 12 interviewees (9 Diploma graduates and 3 teachers of the

Theatre Department of TAS) who directly participated in the Samre Community Theatre Project were selected and interviewed.

**Key informants interview:** As a means to understand and cross check whether or not the issue of evil-eye had been treated in the theatre project based on the community's ideological and cultural values, key informants interview was designed as a tool. Accordingly, 12 persons were selected as key informants who are believed to be knowledgeable in displaying the cultural and oral history and who are able to show the cultural context of evil eye within the Samre Community.

### **Documents**

Documents were used as basic sources of data in relation to information about the establishment and objectives of TAS, the nature and the curriculum, and specific objectives of the Theatre department of TAS.

### **Audiovisual Material**

Two video cassettes that have completely recorded the whole process of the Samre Community Theatre Project were used as sources to describe the performance-text and the spectators' reaction and the performance presentation.

### **Observation**

The researcher stayed for 10 days with the Samre Community. In his stay, the researcher attempted to observe some geographic places which were believed to be part of the cultural values of the community; and such places were photographed by the researcher to corroborate the information gathered from key informants.

### **Secondary Data**

Published book and journals and senior essays are used as sources of secondary data to develop theoretical framework.

### **Instruments**

Based on the literature open-ended questions were prepared for in-depth interview and key informant interview.

### **Data Analysis**

**Organization of details about the case:** The data related to the establishment of TAS and the cultural and oral history of the Samre Community has been arranged logically as the specific facts of the case.

**Categorization of the data:** All the data have been clustered into meaningful groups that had been designed in the interview check list based on the literature. And the data have described according to the logical order of their patterns.

**Interpretation of single instances:** Some specific data have also been interpreted along with the description for the specific meaning they may have in relation to the case.

**Discussion of identified patterns:** The data and their descriptions have been discussed for underlying themes and patterns that have been characterized the case categorically.

**Synthesis and summery:** Lastly, but not least, an overall picture of the case has been constructed on the basis of the results and the merits of the literature. And conclusion and recommendation have been also drawn thought to have implications to the social work principle, for beyond the case understudied.

## **FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

To give a brief background about the rationale, establishment and objectives of the Tigray Arts School (TAS), an attempt was made to look at some written documents. Accordingly, two unpublished official documents and one published document of TAS were used as sources of information.

### **Background to the Tigray Arts School**

According to the documents, the root of the establishment of the Tigray Arts School is directly associated with the establishment of the Cultural Association of Tigray (CAT). The Kernel of the Cultural Association of Tigray was also sown including by the higher government officials of Ethiopia. In fact, the CAT is a none-profit, none-governmental organization free from any kind of discrimination, be it political, religious and gender. However the involvement of some higher government officials, as any responsible citizen who belongs to the culture of Tigray, might have contributed a lot to the realization of the Association with a very wide mission and vision that would further build up a strong cultural identity of the Tigray people.

### **The Tigray Cultural Association**

In the opening ceremony of the conference of the founding members of CAT, the former President of the Tigray National Regional Government delivered an opening speech regarding the cultural richness of the Tigray region. In this conference, the former President delivered the following remarks:

*The people of Tigray both at the rank of Ethiopia and the world are one of those people who have prestigious and splendid culture. Our living heritages of the Axum and other historical legacies that are found in all directions of our region are the great testimonies to the pride of our culture. There are statues, excavated buildings, temples and mosques that display the civilization of the architecture. The indicators*

*of our classical literature transcribed on stones and scroll are also still present. Several types of melodies that served as a foundation of our modern music also originated in our region and are still in use (Keidi Mesreti Mahiber Bahil Tigray1988, p.3).*

The former President in his remark goes on to say that in spite of all these rich cultural and historical heritages of the region, the people of Tigray has been made behind cultural and economic development. The President also pointed out that the culture of Tigray was in its highest civilization particularly on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Axumait era. In his view, the weakness and finally the downfall of the Axumait Empire had an impact on the cultural development of the Tigray people. He adds that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there were severe attempts of exterminating the language and the culture of Tigray. He explains that these are some of the root causes for the bitter struggles of the Tigray people against their oppressors. Consequently, he moves on to say that in the times of armed struggles of the Tigray people against oppressors and reactionaries, giving highest respect to the language and culture of Tigray was strategically included in the their political program (*Keidi Mesreti Mahiber Bahil Tigray1988, pp. 4-5*).

On top of this, they strongly adhere to the existing political milieu which is the result of the people's armed struggle in the sense that Tigray has got the unprecedented political empowerment with its own regional government that keep the people's holistic interests and revert to the hegemony of their cultural identity (pp.16-17).

Ato Samuel Redi, one of the founding members of the CAT and the former director of the Tigray Arts School, explains about the thoughts that have been the basis for the foundation of the Association.

*The conference of the founding members ended up by endorsing the foundation of the Cultural Association of Tigray which has been vested with the mission that makes the people realize that they have prestigious culture and heritage by which they can express their happiness, heroic deeds, friendly social interactions and their sorrow and courage. CAT has also been responsible to raise the people's consciousness that however all these material and spiritual elements have been through generations embodied in the people's language and literature, folklores, music, architecture and performing arts, they have never explored and used them, yet. Rather, their culture in its totality had been disregarded by repressive and reactionary rulers (Interview).*

Accordingly, CAT was established in 1988 EC with its own objectives.

### **The Objectives of CAT**

1. To profoundly study the literature and language of Tigray; to make Tigrina instructional medium for teachers, journals, radio etc; and to establish a regular school of Tigrina language.
2. To study the art of Tigray and establish schools that can produce painters; and to encourage and support those who are engaged in artistic endeavors.
3. To study the music of Tigray and reach to the people; to establish music school that produces professionals of music; to develop the music of Tigray in scientific ways; and to encourage and support traditional musicians, amateur musicians and clubs.
4. To study the drama of Tigray and activate for its expansion; to establish school of drama; to establish drama clubs in high schools and other institutions; and to encourage and support playwrights and actors.
5. To study the architecture of Tigray and develop; to encourage and support those Tigreans engaged in this job.
6. To study the history of Tigray and make the people and the new generation understand it; and to encourage and support those professionals who are studying the history of Tigray.
7. To conduct research for detail discovery of cultural and historical heritages of Tigray and support to the preservation and renewal of those heritages
8. To study the Tigray traditional sports and entertain the people; to study the problems of modern sport and develop it on mass-basis and encourage and support sport clubs.
9. To making our culture a means of development

### **The Establishment of TAS**

In the final analysis of its foundation, CAT has been established with two major branches, which were supposed to accomplish its underlying objectives.

*The idea was to establish an academia of Kunama, Saho and Tigrigna languages with three research departments and also the Tigray Arts School that have constituted three departments, such as Music, painting and Sculpture, and Drama, with an office of dean of students, a registrar and a research coordinator (Samuel, 1995, p.8).*

On top of this, a central committee was established, to open the Tigray Arts School, consisting of people who are living in Addis Ababa. Consequently, three different sub-committees were also set up under the accountability of the central committee. These sub-committees were categorized in to Music Committee, Painting Committee, and Drama Committee.

**Table 1: The Committees that established the Tigray Arts School**

<b>Sub committee</b>	<b>Committee members</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Working Place</b>
Painting and Sculpture	Tadesse Belayneh	Instructor	Addis Ababa Art School
	Equbay Berhe	Executive Manager of Mega Amphitheatre	Addis Ababa
	Desta Hagos	Artist	
Music	Eyasu Berhe	Vocalist	Addis Ababa
	Asres Tessema	Teacher	
	Samuel Redi	Teacher	Mekele
	Lakew Yirga	Expert of Music at Ministry of culture	Addis Ababa Minister of Culture
	Wubie Kassaye	Curriculum Bureau	
	Getachew Geshin	Yared Music School	Addis Ababa
	Shalequa Tsige Feleke		Addis Ababa
Drama	Abonseh Ashagrie	Associate professor of Theatre at A.A.U	Addis Ababa

**Source:** *Based on the unpublished document of TAS (1995)*

According to the document of the school, all those people have contributed a lot particularly in designing the curriculum. However there is no a recorded document that could indicate as to how these people were selected as members of the committees, but they are the right people both in terms of their qualifications and work experience to be able to design the curriculum. Furthermore, the curriculum designed by these committee members for each department (Music, Painting, and Drama) was sent to the College of Education and Curriculum at Addis Ababa University for comments and suggestion.

Besides, the process of designing the curriculum took a very long time because more emphasis was given to the nature of the curriculum in an effort to make it consistent to the realities of indigenous knowledge in Tigray (Samuel, 1995, p.10).

Then the Tigray Arts School with three departments of Theatre, Music, and Painting and Sculpture was established in 1989 EC in Mekele City.

### **The Objectives of TAS**

Based on the official written document of TAS the following points are identified as the underlying objectives of TAS:

- Assist in publicizing both locally and abroad the ancient monuments, historical relics antiquities of the region;
- Reflect the socio-economic and cultural reality being carried out;
- Promote cultural and educational cooperation with other institutions both locally and in order to create conducive conditions to the development of arts of music, theatre, painting, sculpture and graphics, based on the educational and training policy of the region;
- Provide mental nourishment by training talented and interested segments of the youth in the region;
- Produce capable artists in music, theatre, painting, graphics and sculpture who perform a variety of tasks in different social settings;
- Assist in the realization and promotion of the five-year development plan by training skilled manpower in the above fields.

### **The Theatre Department**

Two key informants were also interviewed to deeply understand the overall structure of the Theatre Department. From these key informants the following results are identified.

### **The Particular Rationale of the Department**

According to the informants, the rationale for the establishment of the Department is the direct extension of the rationale of TAS. They explained that the very essence of Theatre Department was established along the line of development concepts (Interview).

We mean theatre that could render its power to the hands of the mass people. And accordingly, unless theatre is overtaken by the people and used by the participation of the people along with the underlying characteristics of popular theatre, theatre for development and community theatre, it could not make any more change. So, the Department of Theatre was proposed to continue in this new direction from the out set of its establishment (Interview).

### **Objectives of the Department**

One of the founders and the former Director of TAS explains the objectives of the Theatre Department in the following way:

*The objective of our Department was not to promote the ideal concept of Art for Art's sake. As opposed to this, for four academic semesters, four consecutive Theatre for Development courses are given to the students, of which the three are practicum oriented. In our first academic semester the students are introduced to the literature of theatre for development, and as the result the students are exposed to the surveillance of ample literatures which acquaints them to the pioneers of the concept of theatre for development, and also several countries of the world where theatre for development brought realistic changes. At the beginning of its establishment we used to call this Department as the Department of Theatre for Development. Our initial assumption was that the objective of the Department would be to engender community theatre practitioners who can work with the urban and rural communities of Tigray (Interview).*

### **The Curriculum of the Department**

To gather evidence that displays the nature of the curriculum of the Department in-depth interview was made with the first graduates, teachers, and curriculum designers of the Department. The written document of TAS was also taken as supportive source of information. Accordingly, the following results are identified.

**Table 2 Course offerings of the Theatre Department**

<b>Year I Semester I</b>		<b>Year I Semester II</b>	
<b>Name of Courses</b>	<b>Cr. hours</b>	<b>Name of Courses</b>	<b>Cr. Hours</b>
History of World Theatre I	3	History of World Theatre II	3
The History and Development of Tigray	3	Theatre for Development(Practical) II	4
Theatre in Tigray I	2	The Art of Performance II	3
The Art of Performance I	4	The Art of Stage Craft	3
Theatre for Development (Theoretical) I	4	Playwriting for Stage and Radio	3
College English I	3	College English II	3
Tgrigna I	2	Tgrigna II	2
Total	21	Total	21
<b>Year II Semester III</b>		<b>Year II Semester IV</b>	
<b>Name of Courses</b>	<b>Cr. Hours</b>	<b>Name of Courses</b>	<b>Cr. Hours</b>
Survey of Tigray Literature	3	Aesthetics	3
Theatre for Development (Theoretical) III	4	Children Theatre	3
Theory of Play Production	3	Theatre for Development (Theoretical) IV	6
The Movement of Theatre Genres	3	Traditional Drama and The Culture of Tigray	3
Theory of Play Directing	3	Readings of Selected Plays	3
Fundamentals of Literature in Amharic I	2	Fundamentals of Literature in Amharic II	2
Total	18	Total	20
<b>Grand Total Cr. Hours 80</b>			

**Source:** *Based on the Official Document of TAS, 1997*

According to the document of TAS, designing the curriculum of Theatre Department and providing with necessary teaching facilities was entirely carried out by associate professor Aboneh Ashagrie (Samuel, 1995, p.10). As we see in table 1, only Aboneh Ashagrie has been put as a member of drama committee during the endeavors of the establishment. And, it is also inevitable that the curriculum of this department could be designed predominantly based on his academic experiences.

*The curriculum of Theatre Department was designed basically in reference to the curriculum of the Department of Theatre Arts at Addis Ababa University.*

*Nevertheless, it was frequently claimed to revert the rationale of all detail courses from Amharic to English. Actually what makes a problem is not the language in as far as the contents of the courses are consistent to the overall objective realities of our region (Samuel, 1995, pp.20-21).*

As we discussed in the section of the Tigray Arts School, four consecutive course of Theatre for Development have been introduced in the Department of Theatre. Except the first course of Theatre for Development I, which focuses on theoretical aspects, the remaining three, Theatre for Development II, III& IV, are entirely devoted to the practicum aspect. The inclusion of these courses into the curriculum of the department was not in a random decision. Rather, it was intentional and has its own objective.

Aboneh Ashagrie, one of the principal designers of this curriculum, says:

*The cultural Association of Tigray, which was in charge of establishing the Tigray Arts School, was strongly demanding to open up a theatre department whose objective would be tied to the imperative duties of development other than the stereotype of the academia. At the time when the need raised to establish the Department, there was a fresh and an authentic desire to realize cultural, social, economic and political changes on the region of Tigray; and the Department of Theatre was intended to be an artistic instrument to the vehicle of this change. For this reason, the Department was named as the Department of Theatre for Development, from the on set. That is way more emphasis was given to the frequency of offering Theatre for Development courses, which are practicum in their nature. In fact, the academic wing of the department was not completely eroded (Interview).*

Within two academic years of the diploma program, the Theatre Department of TAS offers the course Theatre for Development for four consecutive semesters. In the first semester, students will be introduced to the theories of Theatre for Development whereas in the remaining three academic semesters the students will go out to the fields and exercise the practical aspects of the course (Interview).

## Staff Development of the Department

Table: The profile of the staff when the School was launching its work

Department	No. of Teachers	Qualification	Language skills	Ethnic background
Theatre	2	B.A. in Theatre Arts from A.A.U	Tigrigna, Amharic, English	Tigray
Music	7	10+4 from Yared Music School		None-Tigray
Painting and Sculpture	2	10+4 from Addis Ababa Arts School		None Tigray
	2	Graduated from the former Soviet Union		

**Source:** Based on the official of TAS, 1995<sub>EC</sub>.

According to Ato Samuel Redi, who was the director of the School and one of the founders of the School, these teachers were finally recruited as staff of the School from fifty applicants. Nevertheless, Ato Samuel complains that the recruitment process was not properly conducted. And, as the result, applicants were short-listed only based on their professions and qualification although the selection ought to have been also on the basis of the applicants' cultural exposure. Samuel adds that the two teachers of Theatre Department were from Tigray, there was no communication barrier in relation to the language and culture of Tigray (Samuel, 1995<sub>EC</sub>, p.13).

## Student Intake Capacity of the Department

Table 3 Student intake in the three Department of the School

Department	Year of Intake	No. of accepted students		Total	No of students graduated		Total	Years of graduation
		M	F		M	F		
Painting and sculpture	1989	23	2	25	19	2	21	1992
	1993	23	4	27	22	3	25	1995
Music	1989	24	1	25	22	1	23	1992
	1993	19	9	28	16	6	22	1995
Theatre	1989	17	8	25	14	5	19	1992
	1993	17	8	25	17	6	23	1995

Total								
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**Source:** *Based on the document written by Samueal Redi (1995)*

When the Tigray Arts School launched its academic program in 1989 (E.C), students were admitted to the three Departments from all zones of the region, Tigray. According to Samuel, a committee was set up consisting of staff members of each Department. This committee toured throughout the four zones of the region, turn by turn, and recruited students. Completing twelve grades was the domain for the general application to the diploma program of the School; whereas passing the auditioning given by the committee, as per the nature of the disciplines of each department, was the final entrance examination for admission. Except promulgating the program of the School to the whole zonal cities of the region, the Tigray Education Office did not formulated admission protocols or entrance exam standards for applicant students of the School. For that matter, the School was not under the structural management of either the federal or the regional state-owned higher academic institutes. The highest management body of the School was the Cultural Association of Tigray; and the School was running its program under the full auspices of the Association (Interview).

As indicated in the table 2, the Department admitted two different batches of students from 1989 to 1995 EC. And, all the three Departments of the School admitted students in their respective programs almost an equivalent number of students in the two different years. However, the TAS was closed at the end of 1995 EC. In September 1997 (EC) the Theatre Department reopened and started its program with two fresh theatre graduates of AAU and admitted –students (Interview).

## **Experiences of the Department**

*Studying this new approach of theatre for development began in Tigray with the establishment of Tigray Art School assisted by two teachers: Tsehay Abay and Kidane Yinkak. After completed the theoretical sessions of the class, these two teachers had proposal for students to conduct practical experiments by going out to the rural settings of the region. Accordingly, the students were clustered in to two groups and went to two different rural areas of Southern Tigray, in 1990 (Solomon, 1992,p.29).*

*Betmara and Saharti Samre* were the two rural Woreda opted as the site of the field work practice of these students (Solomon 1992, pp. 29-31). While explaining about the selection of these two Woreda, Enkuslassie (1992) says:

*Concerning these rural Woreda, preliminary information was collected that indicated the presence of social problems such as early marriage, the belief of evil eye and lack of electricity. However, for an agreement was reached, that early marriage at Betmera and evil eye at Saharti Samre were timely social problems, two groups of students were deployed to Bemtra and Samre (p.19).*

In the short-lived existence of the Tigray Arts School, the Theatre Department carried out these two theatre projects to the credit of its utmost experimental fieldwork experiences (Interview). In these two theatre projects *early marriage* and *evil eye* were the major topical issues to be experimented in the projects in the hope that they would create a challenge to the already existing traditional practices, in relation to early marriage and evil eye, of Betmara and Saharti Samare communities, respectively (Interview).

In addition to the Betmara and Samre Theatre Projects, the Department also attempted to conduct other theatre experiments in addressing the issues of pure-drinking water, environmental sanitation and HIV/AIDS in Mekele city.

## **Background to the Samre Community**

The Samre Community was one of the intervention areas where the Theatre Department of TAS organized community theatre projects. Before describing the process

of the Samre Community Theatre Project, it is important to give background information about the social setting of the Samre Community. To do so, official document of the Samre community local administration used as source of information and 12 persons, based on the social stratification, were interviewed as key informants. The following are results of the data from documents and key informants.

### **Topography**

The overall geographical setting of the Samre Woreda is called Saharit Smare. The Saharti Samere Woreda is found in the Southren zone of the Tigray National Regional State. Particularly it is found at a distance of 60 km from Mekele, the capital city of the Tigray Regional Government, to southwest extreme of the region (Kibrom, 1996, p. 31). The largest part of the Woreda's topography is also found above sea level 1500-1600m. The overall geographical territory of the Woreda lies within 1716.5 square km of which 47% is arid 50% is semiarid and the remaining 3% is temperate (Based on the Samre Woreda Strategic Plan, 1996).

The Samre Woreda is bounded by the Woreda of *Hintalo Wajirat* and *Degu'a Temben* (of the Tigray region) in the north, by the Amhara National Regional State in the south, by the Woreda of *Alagie* (of the Tigray Region) in the east, and by the Woreda of *Tanqua Abergele* (of Tigray Region) in the west (Based on the document of the Samre Woreda, 1996).

### **Population**

Based on the 1987 (E.C) National Census, the size of the population of Seharit Samre is 110620 from which 54534 are males whereas 56086 are females. From the total

population of the Woreda 94.5% or 104498 are living in the very rural areas whereas 5.5% or 6122 are living in small towns. The livelihood of those who are living in the rural setting is entirely agricultural. Actually, a large size of the communities of this Woreda is highly dependent on agriculture except inconsiderable size of the communities in the towns are involved in trade and trade-related sectors as a means for their livelihood (Based on the Samre Woreda Strategic Plan 1996).

The Samre Woreda, in general, has constituted nineteen local administration stations and sixty five kebeles. The large numbers of community stations of the Woreda are rural hamlets settled within the bottom and top sides of the chained mountains. The Samre town itself is found at the hilltop surrounded almost in its all directions by line-of-hills (see the photograph in the appendix). Every Saturday is the day of an open air market at the center of Samre town wherein both the rural and urban communities of the Woreda is bartering , goods, consumptions , clothes both locally made and manufactured, manually produced housing furniture's, farming equipments and various livestock.

### **Resources**

The Woreda of Samre consists of 171966 hectare land from the total of which 33071 hectare is farmland, 15105 hectare is grazing land, 27365 hectare is forest land, whereas the remaining 96425 hectare is a composition of residential houses, reserved lands for future housing expansion, and other unused lands. The Woreda has also possessed seasonal and permanent big rivers, which are called *Zamra*, *Gereggiba* and, *Arquay* (Based on the Samre Woreda strategic plan, 1996{E.C}).

Based on the 1989/90 (E.C) inventory, it is estimated that the Woreda could have 479304 livestock. Of which it is approximately expected that 282363 are goats, 103279 are sheep and 81882 are cattle (Based on the document of the Samre Woreda, 1996).

### Infrastructure in the Woreda

**Table 4 The size of schools in terms of classrooms in the Woreda from 1994-1995 E.C**

Fiscal years	Cycle	Not of classroom
1994 and	1-4	13
1995	1-8	15
	9-10	1
Total		29

**Source:** *Based on the Strategic Plan of the Samre Woreda, 1996*

**Table 5 The coverage of health institutions of the Woreda**

Type of health	Qua.	Ration of the people
Health station	1	1:110620
Health ---	9	1:12291
Total	10	

**Source:** *Based on the Strategic Plan of the Samre Woreda, 1996*

Professional agriculturalists employed by the government in the Samre Woreda are also giving training services to peasants in regard to scientific soil conservation, reforestation, and animal raring (Based on the document of the Samre Woreda, 1996). According to the informants, all these mentioned infrastructures came to existence in the Woreda along with the coming of the present Ethiopian ruling party, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front –EPRDF, to power. W/r Amleset in the interview says that:

*Some areas of the Samre woreda, which are partly found to the northwest of the woreda including the Samre town, were strategic positions for the logistic and military fortifications of TPLF [The Tigray People Liberation Front, the dominant sect of the present ruling party of Ethiopia] during the armed struggle. So, most of the times, especially, from 1972 [E.C] on wards this area [The Samre Woreda] was under the control of TPLF. Consequently, the area was standing aloof of infrastructures. But now it is nostalgia.*

The other interviewees also agree that part of the Samre Woreda was, as they call it, a *liberated land* of the TPLF liberation fighters begging from 1972 [E.C] almost to the

downfall of the Derge Military Government. In fact the researcher met, during his stay in the Samre Woreda, two grade nine male students born in 1970s but have never seen the rules of the Derge regime in the Samre Woreda. The researcher has also witnessed a statue, implanted at the center of the Samre town bearing the pictures of some protagonist military heroes and heroines- *Major General Hayelom Arwaya, Tagay Marta* (female) and others- of the TPLF liberation fighters.

However, some interviews believe that the Samre did not get enough infrastructures from the government. They said that the people of the Woreda have still been exposed to forced displacement as the result of the fact that the Woreda has frequently been bitten by draught and famine. In congruous to this, the Samre Woreda Administration office also stated in its strategic plan the common problems (Based on the Samre Woreda Strategic Plan 1996):

- Deforestation
- Limited coverage and poor quality of education
- Absence of skilled manpower
- Food insecurity at every household
- Lack of enough health stations
- Absence of women in the leadership of the Woreda
- Traditional distorted perceptions
- Absence of a 24 hour electricity
- Series draught and famine

Of course, in spite of some visible changes undertaken by the government of the region, the people of Samre Woreda are still living under multiple problems. As the Woreda receives a very short-lived rain season once in a year and also its temperature is arid and semi arid, draught and famine, illiteracy, malaria, diarrhea, HIV/AIDS, and other disease are also common problems with the people.

## **The Oral History and Cultural Values of the Community**

Kibrom Solomon (1992), one of the graduates of the Theatre Department of the Tigray Arts School, attempted to illustrate the picture of the history of Samre very shortly in his senior paper. Based on his informants, he said that however there is no empirical evidence that would indicate the exact date of its foundation, but some old-aged people of the area believed that Samre was founded even before the foundation of Mekele (p. 31). If it is according to Kibrom's informants, Samre could be taken as one of the ancient villages of Tigray because Mekele itself is the ancient town which had served as the place for royal palace of Yohanes II, King of Kings of Ethiopia, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> C.

## **The Founders of the Samre Community**

In regard to the meaning of the word Samre, Mela'eke –Tsehay Daniel Tesfaye, a 62 years old priest and chief administrator of the Samre Saint Marry Church, says:

*Samrawian is the name of the Felasha people who used to live in the upside of the Samre village. We had been informed by our ancestors that these Felasha people were not natives; they rather came from Israel. However, these Felasha people used to live here and they were also called Samarawian, and consequently this area has got its name after the name Samarwian and remained as it is to the present (Interview).*

The 84 years old man, who is native and one of the dignified elders of the Samare community, also said in the interview that the Arch of the Covenant, which was brought from Israel in the regime of King Solomon, was taken to Axum- the ancient glorious city of the Axumait Dynasty of Ethiopia– through the Samre village. In congruous to this, Kibrom Solomon (1992) also elaborated in his senior paper that another Arch of Saint Marry also came to Samre, by one local chief leader called *Debay*, accompanied the Arch of Covenant and remained in the Samre villiage, which has been called, to the present, the Samre Saint Marry Church (p. 32).

This oral history of the Samre community seems a bit factual when it is viewed from Graham Hancock's (1992) point of argument on the historicity of the Arch of the Covenant, which has been believed to have existed in the *Axum-Tsiwon* Saint Marry church. Hancock (1992) elaborates that the Arch of Covenant had been brought from Israel carried by the Israel migrants through Egypt to the basin of Blue Nile, in Ethiopia. He adds that after staying for hundreds of years in the monasteries of *Tana*- a natural lake and the origin of Blue Nile- the Arch of the Covenant was taken to Axum along the routes of Tigray. According to Hancock the journey to Axum was also accompanied by the people of these Israeli migrants. So, it could be guessed that Samre might have been visited as a transitory center to the journey to Axum, as Smare is found in the southwest part of Tigray near to Gojam and Gondor where the Arch stayed for many years.

Therefore, on top of this, it could be argued that the legendary and oral history that the Samrawian people were living in Samre may be plausible.

### **The Jobs of Samrawian**

Among the Samre community it is also believed that these Samarawian people were smelting irons. In relation to this Mela'eke Tsehay Daneil says:

*The people of Samarawian were involved in iron smelting activities. They were living from here [inside the resident we made the interview] down to the way to the church [St. Marry church, found on the hill at the end of the town]. There, you can see the place where they used to smelting and making iron ores. The place is now very black as the result of smelting irons on it. We call the metallic remnants found there as 'ye bireret are' [which means residue of the iron] (Interview).*

Priest Woldemariam Kelemework, one of the clergymen of Samre, also says that the village of the Samre Community was clustered then in to two parts. The native people were living surrounding the church while Samrawians were confined to the place, down

to the Church, where they were smelting irons; and they were not Orthodox Christian (Interview).

### **Observation on Historical Places of Samrawian**

The researcher has also observed the place where the Samarawrians used to make metals into different domestic instruments. As it has been said by the interviewees, the place is really sheeted naturally by plain rocks. And pieces of rounded materials, which look brown, are found only within this place. It is very difficult to detect by naked-eye whether the ingredients of these materials are iron or stone (see the photograph in the appendix).

Immediately at an approximate distance of 200m from this black colored place to the west side of the hill there exists an excavated cave. The cave is not well engraved. Its width probably may not exceed five meters. It has got also two pillars, which are the natural part of the same rock where the cave itself was engraved. The pillars stretched inside from the roof of the cave to the floor. Their length may be 2m to 2.5m. The sizes of the pillars get tiny in their middle and increases in width both in their ups and bottoms. More or less they are round. Other than the main inside part, the cave has two rooms with two gats. In spite of the two gats, there is no partitioning between the two rooms. The roof of the cave has been turned into black. All the inside parts of the cave has a very rough texture. More of its part has not been smoothened.

Leterufael Debesay, a 38 years old Wonan – but physically looks at least 45 plus years –who is elementary school teacher and the Chairperson of the Samre Woreda Women, says that the Samre people used the cave to protect and hide themselves from the air bombing of the *Derge* military jets as the area was a strategic fort for the TPLF

fighters in the 1970s E.C. She adds that the Derge military jets were frequently bombing on the people in order to make TPLF fighters evacuate from the area. And consequently, the people, particularly elderly and women were hiding out themselves in the cave. The blackness of the cave's roof, she explains, resulted from the smoke of fire-wood that were used by the people inside the cave at the time (Interview).

Moreover, Mela'eke Tsehay Daneal adds that the cave had also served as a church for a short time when the Arch of Saint Marry (not the Covenant) came to Samre (Interview). Thinking that the cave might have been excavated by the Samrawin people, for the reason that their place of melting irons is near to it, Priest Daneal was asked that who is believed by the Samre community to have engraved the cave. Priest Daneil replied:

*We believe that the cave might have been done by an individual or may be by a religious monk who gave up his secular life and lived for his spirituality. We guess that, had the cave been excavated by a lord of local states in the region it would have been done intensively and extensively and its size would have not appeared as it looks now. It is common in Tigray that every peasant does single-handed a similar attempt to make such a cave out of hill sides. Even today the attempt is there (interview).*

From the view point of Priest Daneal, the Samarwians did not make this cave, for the reason that the cave is very small as compared to their massive existence in the area. It is also expected that in side the cave there is a grave which has held bones of dead persons. Still the community's assumption is that the bones could be of some monks. Currently, the cave is reported to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture of the Ethiopian Federal Government for archeological inquiry (Interview).

In any ways, the cave and the place, used to smelt iron, may be taken as the historical assets of the Samre Community, in general.

### **Ethnic Diversity and Social Discrimination**

According to the interviewees, notwithstanding the entire community of the Samre Woreda appears homogenous in terms of ethnicity and religion (as most of the people is seen claiming to be *Tigre* and Orthodox Christian, respectively, and still speaking the same language, Tigrigna), but there exists labeling of social categorization within the community. This social clustering is directly or indirectly associated with the socio-economic positions and status of the Samarawian people who used to live in the Samare Woreda.

According to key informants, as it was true in the times of the Samrawian people, still the social division exists between those who are presently smelting irons in their cottage industries and the rest of the people in the community who are involved in farming, trading, shopping, giving services and other ‘none’ crafting activities. This social division is manifested in the residential settlement of the people within the same geographical setting of the community. One of the interviewees says, “there is a village of evil-eye people, and there is also a village of chewa [which implies dignified] people in the Samre” (Interview).

### **The Cultural Context of Evil-Eye within the Community**

To understand the cultural context of evil-eye within the Samre Community open ended questions were instrumented for key informant interviewees from the community. Based on the results of the preliminary interview sessions, the community was divided into artisans and none-artisans. From the artisans two blacksmiths were selected as key informants. From none-artisans side, religion and communal ceremonies were taken as the best categories to represent the perceptions of none-artisans on the issue of evil-eye. Accordingly, four religious leaders and chief traditional community leaders were selected

as knowledgeable persons for key informant interview. Besides, to understand the relation of evil-eye to overall social settings, six persons were selected from the school, local administration, and health station of the community. The results are hereunder.

### **Evil-Eye in the Eyes of None-Artisan People**

**The Meaning of Buda (Evil-Eye):** Mela'eke Tsehay Daniel explains about the meaning which is culturally attached to Evil Eye.

*In our church, any men involved in the activities of crafting are called serategna [Meaning artisan]. And we also call those who are smelting iron serategna. But culturally, people labels these iron makers buda [meaning evil eye] with the intention of implying that they "eat" other people when they gaze their eyes intentionally at some one. This labeling was, also related to the Felasha people (Interview).*

In the eyes of those people who claim to belong to the clan of *yechewa-atint*, which means clean-bone, in the Samre community, other members of the community who are involved in crafting activities such as weaving, pottery, tanning, and iron smelting are down graded, for they are believed to belong to the clan of 'unclean-bone'.

When asked about the literary meaning of buda, Mela'eke Tsehay Daniel Says:

*In Geez these people who smelt irons are called Nehabi. The word buda is not found either in Geez or Tigrigna languages. In both Geez and Tigrigna manuscripts these people are referred as artisans. I think the source of the term buda is the Amharic language (Interview).*

However, Mela'eke Tsehay Daniel argued that the word buda is found neither in Geez nor in Tigrigna lexicography, but he did not negate the belief, that these buda, evil-eye people, kill other people, is also a very deep rooted assumption in the people of Tigray over the whole region. Of course, as he argued, the word *buda* is common amongst the Amharic speaking people and *Serategna* is also common both amongst Amharic and Tigrigna speaking people, but with slight difference in pronouncing it. However, the connotation remains the same in both speakers.

**Unique Characteristics of ‘Evil-Eye’ People:** Actually, there is no any peculiar biological earmark visible on the physical appearance as an identification of these buda, evil-eye people. But, the jobs of traditional iron smelting and pottery are the only identifications of any person in the community as buda, evil-eye. Other than their jobs, these evil-eye people have no any particular way of life, be it rituals, religion, language, that uniquely marked to them within the Samre Community. They are marked persons as buda, which resulted from the culturally instigated discrimination, merely against their jobs. Far beyond this, there are many mythical interpretations discoursed often times by the Samre Community concerning the biological texture of these evil-eye people. All the interviewees believe that the Buda people are very charming, and especially their eyes is attractive, for the external part of their eyeballs is naturally circled by shining black color.

**Problems affecting the Community as the result of ‘evil-eye’ People:** The exceptional labeling that have been attached to the blacksmiths who are smelting irons and making pottery is *buda*, evil eye. Evil-eye has been culturally believed by the rest of ‘none-evil-eye’ people that these iron makers and potters have the natural power, which is believed to be associated with their eyes, to kill none-evil-eye people, particularly beautiful children. It is also believed that these evil-eye people can also cause serious illness and destruction of one’s properties and animals (Interview).

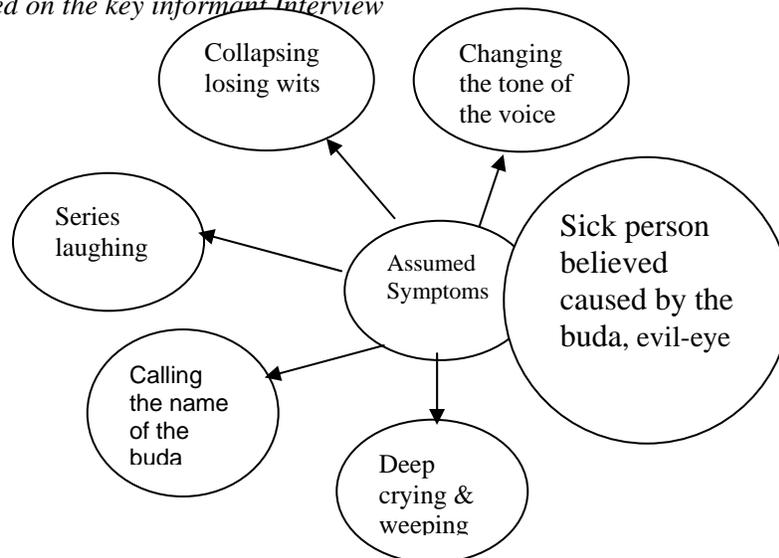
The Samre Community also believes that there are known symptoms that can be easily detected when some one becomes sick caused by evil-eye (see the diagram below).

Teacher Leterufael Debesay explains that there is a high rate of school dropouts and reparations among the students of the Samre community as the students frequently pretend to become sick caused by buda. But, she does not believe in this traditional

persecution. Two grade 9 students in Samre also said that they are always afraid of buda and consequently unable to attend their education regularly (Interview). W/r Amleset, a health assistant in the Samre health station, believes that the real cause either for the school dropout or repetition is not the buda. According to her, the Woreda is highly exposed to draught and famine, malaria and other related diseases. And, all these social problems have an adverse impact on the health of the community. But the community does not realize this.

Figure 1: The Samre Community’s assumptions on symptoms of sick person caused by buda

**Source:** Based on the key informant *Interview*

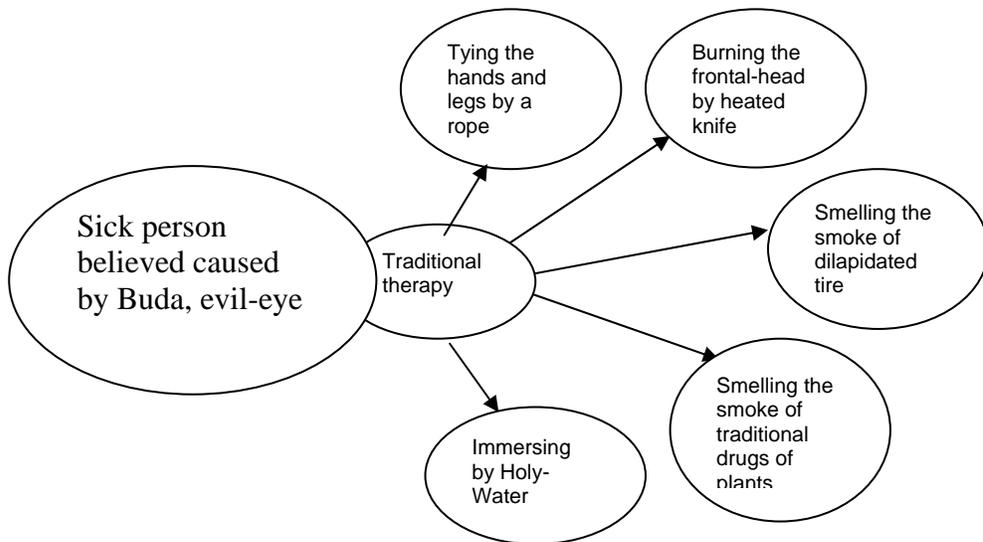


Within the Samre Community it is often times believed that any person ‘eaten’ by buda laughs for a long time, cries profoundly, projects his voice loudly in a different tone that sounds like the hyena’s, calls the name of the buda person and sometimes loses his wits and collapse. If some one shows all or some of these symptoms, the community immediately asserts its assumptions that the person is damaged by the powerful sight of the buda person, and then takes a measure, traditional medication, without the proof of

modern medical diagnosis. W/r Amleset who is working as health assistant in the Samre Health Station explains that the Samre community has developed almost unavoidable traditional perception in regard to the relationship between their health and evil-eye people. She moves on to elaborate that as this perception has been deeply instilled into the community's mind, they usually apply their own traditional therapies or drugs rather than seeing the health station (Interview). Ayiney Bitew, 44 years old who is working as vice Chairperson of the Samre Woreda Women, also says that this traditional perception of the community even sometimes leads to forced action of killing and property destruction on the evil-eye person who is believed to cause the sickness or death. Especially, the quarreling becomes highly exacerbated when one's illness believed caused by evil-eye person evokes death. But, the sick person gets beforehand traditional therapies or treatment (see diagram 2 below).

**Traditional Therapy as Coping Mechanism of the Community against 'Evil-eye':**

**Figure 2: The Community's traditional therapies to cure the sick person caused by buda**



**Source:** Base on the key informant interview

In the Samre community, when a sick person shows the symptoms illustrated in diagram 1, the sick person will be tied on his legs and hands by a rope. And, in order to make the sick mention clearly the real name of the buda person who exactly caused, the traditional therapist will burn the frontal-head of the sick, smell him the smokes of firing tire and various types of roots and leaves of plants, and immerse the sick in Holy-Water. According to Mela'eke Tsehay Dainel, there are also other traditional drugs called *Hashish* or *Ethse-Fars* and *Etse-Menahi*. These plants are found in the rural areas and known only by few people, mostly by some clergymen and older people. And, the drugs made out of these plants are also used as traditional treatments to the sick person who is believed caused by buda.

When the sick gets trapped by the traditional therapeutic mechanisms, listed in the diagram 2, will start shouting and calling the name of any person who is to be buda. All these traditional therapies are able to cause physical pains. However, when the sick suffers and shouts as the consequence of the therapeutic methods, the community believes that the buda him/herself is getting suffering from the pain and calls his/her name through the body and the mouth of the sick, respectively. Accordingly

**Dialogue between the therapist and the spirit of evil-eye:** Based on the key informant interview the dialogue goes in the following manner between the traditional therapist and the spirit of the buda.

Therapist: *who you are?*

The spirit of buda: *I am buda*

Therapist: *What is your real name?*

Spirit: *I am X* (mentions)

Therapist: *Where did you find the sick?*

Spirit: *On the market when he /she buys* (something or mentions any situation).

Therapist: *Now do you leave him*

Spirit: *Yes, I do*

Therapist: *Vow in the name of ... (God and several saints)*  
Sprit: *I swear in the name of Marry, George... (Etc)*  
Therapist: *Vow seven times*  
Spirit: (he/she does the order)  
Therapist: *Tell us your medication*  
Spirit: *It is the residue of Tela (locally made alcohol)*

When the spirit of buda mentions the residue of *Tela*, they put it somewhere hiding and untying the sick. Immediately, the sick starts finding the residue. And, without being guided the sick gets and gulps it at one-go. After a while the sick starts recovering and gathering his wit but never recalls what was happening to him including the drinking (Based on the interview).

### **Evil-Eye in the Eyes of Artisan People**

The two smiths who are selected as key informants express their felling as related to the perception of the community on the works of iron smelting and making pottery.

*It is we who are making the ploughshares, knives, hoes, ornamental jewelers and other important items to the community. It is our job we have learned from our ancestors. It is our skill we depend on for our livelihood. And we are like other people. There is nothing exceptional to us. We all the Samre community belongs to the same clan, the same forefathers who were smelting irons. But, now most of the people in the community have completely avoided smelting irons just fearing the societal perception and social discrimination. We are people just like them. We have nothing to do with their healthy. How on earth? (Interview).*

Both the two smiths, age 52 and 47, who participated in the interview said that they are given low social status in the community. Their students also can not comfortably attend their education as the result of the social exclusion. They are always targeted and marked as buda by other students of different families. These two interviewees sorrowfully mention that their students are victimized of the psychological trauma as the consequence of the rumor they face at schools and other social settings.

**Relationship to the Community:** According to those two interviewees, giving up the job of iron smelting and engaging in a different economic activity is frequented as a

coping mechanism of tolerating the psychological stigma and social discrimination. In general, the sections of the Samre community who are culturally labeled as buda have no marriage alliance with the rest of the community. It is socially execrated to have a marriage relationship with the buda family. Even, these people, labeled as buda are not willing to have a marriage with the other section of the community. However, except marriage alliance, there is no an overt restriction on their social, cultural and economic interactions with the other people; rather the discrimination is very covert.

**Social Discrimination:** The two smiths participated in the research explains that, in spite of the fact that their manually manufactured products have been the fundamental consumptions of the community, smiths and potters have not yet received societal respect and value. In the Smare community, TPLF liberation fighters had been attempting at the times of their armed struggle (in the 1970sE.C) to demystify the community's traditional perception that have been culturally developed on smiths and potters. As the fighters were living in Samre, in-and-off, they were educating the community to develop their consciousness and make them avoid their misgiving that smiths and potters are buda who kill others (Interview). One of the smiths says that the TPLF liberation fighters were attempting to the extent of marrying into smith families in an effort to be exemplary and to create the essence of social justice and equity to the community (Interview).

**Complaints of Smiths:** However the smiths believe that their local government is good for them in many aspects, they argue that the local government is not able to tackle their problem in relation to the social discrimination. The strongly say:

*We have a complaint to our Government in regard to one issue. In fact it is undeniable that the Government has constructed us a road, built us health station, schools and other facilities. This is so imperative and we like and respect our Government. What I am saying is not simply to thank the Government; we have irreplaceable government. This is one thing. The Government is not able to protect the human and natural rights of smiths and*

*potters in this community. We must not bargain over our natural rights. No attempt we have seen carried out by the local administrators of the Woreda to confirm our self-worth. This is our complaint (Interview).*

Of course, what the interviewee says seems credible in that the three years strategic plan of the Samre Woreda did not design any strategy in relation to smiths and potters when it included some strategies aimed to solve health problems, sex discrimination, early marriage, the spread of HIV/AIDS and other agricultural issues of the community (Based on the Samre Woreda Strategic Plan, 1996 E.C).

### **The Community's Overall Reaction to Evil-Eye**

The issue of evil-eye within the Samre Community is very controversial. No one in the community is able to give any objective reason or scientific evidence to the belief. But every body can provide various reasons from the mythology about the being and becoming of buda, evil-eye. In fact, mythology has strong power among traditional communities, like the Samre. Obviously, mythologies are the ground basis for the values, ideologies, and philosophies of traditional societies.

When the researcher conducted interview sessions with different sections of the Samre Community, it was observed that even those interviewees who claim not to believe in the traditional perception of buda show an equivocal stand on some aspects of the issue. For instance, one of the interviewees says:

*I do not accept the saying that these people who are labeled as buda can change the dead person into a donkey, a house, or any instruments and use them for their own service. I think this is very legendary. But, I am quite sure that they have the power to kill or cause illness (Interview).*

In substantiating this, Mela'eke Teshay Daniel has his own point of argument:

*As we understand from the interpretations of Holy Books in our church, there were people called Hindorawian in the land of Israel during King Solomon. And, this people had est (a plant) by which they used to raise the deceased, whom they killed from graves. The rumor that the buda can kill people and also change the dead into animals so forth has, I think, originated from the legend of Hindbrains. But, I do not think these people can do so the same (Interview).*

However, these smiths in the Samre Community claim that they have neither any plant nor drug nor any magic power. They underscored that what they inherited from their ancestors is only the skill of smelting irons and making pottery that ever body can do (Interview).

As Aluala Pankhurst (2000) explains, “The practice of smelting iron ore has a long history in Ethiopia, dating back several centuries” (p.11). And as the result, almost all traditional agricultural technologies of iron products have entirely been dependent on the work of smiths (Ibid). Likewise, the Samre community has been diametrically dependent on the traditional iron and ceramic products of smiths and potters. The community’s agricultural and domestic tools, and also traditional housing furnishers and or ornaments are the principal products of these smiths and potters that primarily satisfy the high demands of the community at a very cheap price.

### **The Samre Community Theatre Project**

To collect information that could show the whole process of the Samre Community Theatre Project, audiovisual materials that have recorded the whole project were primarily used as sources. In addition, an in-depth interview was also made with the first diploma graduates of TAS who participated in the project. From the data of the audiovisual materials and in-depth interview the following results are identified.

#### **Rationale of the project**

All participants of the interview explains that one of the basic rationales of the Department of Theatre was to equip the students with the skills of theatre for

development and practical lesson from different community theatre projects undertaken by the Department.

These graduates who participated in the interview replicated that the Department has significantly nurtured and instilled in their mentality with the provocative insight against into the conventional formalism of art, in general. The Department, rather, based on its underlying objectives, has constructed them in a way they would develop an attitude to the didactic aesthetics of theatre as a vehicle of better life for grassroots community.

### **Reason to Select the Samre Community as the Area of Intervention**

The research participants explain the reason why the Samre Community was selected as target area for the experimentation of their theatre project. They say:

*Before the Samre Community was selected, we students of the Theatre Department discussed on the different traditional harmful practices that we believed to have existed in Tigray. Accordingly we reached at a decision that the traditions of magic, witchcraft, and buda {evil-eye} have predominantly existed in some parts of Tigray such as Maichew, Axum, and Samre. And based on this conclusion we selected the Samre Community, as it is near to us, to intervene in to the culture of the community via community theatre project and mobilize the community to solve the problem of buda (Interview).*

Atakilti Nega, Temsgen Yesuf and Frowoini Haile Silassie, who participated as actors in the Samre Community Theatre Project argue that they chose Samre for its proximity to Mekele.

The participants argue that they chose Samre for its proximity to Mekele and also selected the issue of evil-eye, as the major theme of the project, for they had various personal predisposition and experience on the issue of evil-eye (Interview). Especially, Atakilti Nega, who played the role of blacksmith in the performance, claims that he had

reinforced much on the issue of evil eye to be selected as the theme of the project. He moves on to elaborate that he insisted on for the reason that he himself has an equivocal understanding on the issue of evil-eye. He adds that he observed the situation when his sister was possessed by the spirit of evil-eye and when consequently she transfigured herself and projected a male voice in an unusual manner (Interview).

### **Objectives of the Samre Community Theatre Project**

However there is no written document that could indicate the pre-stated objectives of the project, participants of the research argue that the project had two major objectives: One, to expose the students to the practical fieldwork lessons of community theatre; second, the project was also meant to solve the traditional harmful perceptions, on evil-eye people, of the Samre Community.

### **Steps followed to Start Implementing the Project**

The participants explain that they were first introduced to the theories of theatre for development in the classes. Next, the students were ordered by their instructors to collect from the library researched outputs and choose different social problems to be used for the theatre project. After collecting preliminary information from the library, the students discussed and reached at an agreement that evil-eye to be an issue for their theatre project. Finally, they identified the Samre Community as an area of intervention. Based, on their preliminary findings, a group of 16 students was formed and deployed to Samre for research.

### **Cooperation with NGOs and Other Organizations**

As the two instructors and coordinators of the project elaborated there was an attempt to implement the Samre Community Theatre Project in partnership with NGOs. However, they added that as the project was student-oriented they were not able to convince NGOs to be partners of the project. In addition as they had very short time, the project was implemented without having partner organizations.

### **The Actual Process of the Samre Community Theatre Project**

Of the 16 students of the group of the project, in-depth interview was conducted with 9 students in order to clearly portray the actual process of the Samre Community Theatre Project. Accordingly the following results are identified.

### **Methods of investigating evil-eye as a theme of the project**

The participants explain what the project team did in its initial visit to Samre to find out some facts about evil-eye from the community.

*In our first arrival at Samre, members of the project team were clustered into three groups and deployed to three areas of the community. One group went to the open air market, as the day was Saturday, a weakly market day of the community. The second group went to the houses of local alcohol drinking. And the third group, I was there, went to the Samre Saint Marry Church. What I did in the church is pretended as if I were sick caused by buda. I was laid down on the ground and emitted the reaction over the pain of stomachache. I was also interchangeably laughing and crying just to make seem that I was harmed by buda. Then some people who were in the church came and stood around us. When they asked my whereabouts, my colleagues answered as if I would come from Addis to trace my family there. Soon, these people said that the buda might have harmed me as I was a new-comer to the area and also a bit eye-attracting {smiling}. All the people there had no any doubt that I would be harmed by the buda (Interview).*

The methods of searching the truth about evil-eye were not also exceptional to the other two groups. All the research groups applied the same procedure that every members

of each group pretended to be sick and asked the community what would be the cause (Interview).

### **The Community's Participation in the Process of the Project**

The participants were also asked about the participation of the Samre Community in the actual process of the project. The questions were in terms of the following social clusters of the community.

**Local Administrators:** In their attempt of thematic investigation the students introduced their objectives to be there to the local administrators of the community. They simply reported to the community's local administration and secured the promise of the administrators to support them in summoning the community to the second visit of the students for the performance show (Interview). However, the students added, as the result of time and financial constraints they did not make further contact with religious and chief community leaders, and community-based organizations of the Samre Community.

### **The Culture and History of the Community in the Performance**

The participants were asked about the cultural and historical facts of the community in relation to their research. The participants explained that they had no such understanding about the importance of culture and history as elements of community theatre. They said that they only attempted to assess some fact about the nature of evil-eye.

### **Major Steps of the Dramaturgical Process**

The participants were also asked to explain the basic dramaturgical steps they followed to present the performance-text to the community. Accordingly, the following points are identified.

**Script development:** The participants elaborated that after collecting the data they came back to the School and held discussion among themselves and their instructors. After analyzing the data that they gathered they started developing the scenario of the performance based on the findings of the analysis, and finally two students were selected to write the performance-text.

**Rehearsal:** After having completed the script they divided roles among themselves and started rehearsing the script. They took several days for the rehearsal session to cop with the ways of speaking and dressing of the Samre Community. And, finally when the rehearsal ended up they moved to the community to present the performance (Interview).

### **Findings of the Audiovisual Material**

To understand the theme, characterization, and the participation of the spectators, the researcher watched three times the audiovisual document of the Samre Community theatre Project. Based on the video document, the performance-text, the performance presentation, and the reaction of the spectators are identified as results.

### **The Performance-Text**

The performance-text begins with the introduction of the narrator.

*Narrator: Dear spectators, we are students at the Tigray Arts School in Mekeke, 60 km from here. We came to Samre to discuss with you on the community's traditional perception in relation to buda. As you know, God created us in his image but we are not perfect as He is. Rather, we are living under many problematic circumstances of life such as hunger, disease, poverty etc. And, buda is one of these problems. For example, today, we see Ato Hagezom whose wife was died before ten years and whose son is now suffering from unknown disease. However, the son calls time and again the name 'Edila'. But, as you see (stretching his hands to the collected pottery) Edila is a woman who makes these pots, jars and dishes. Edila's products are our basic services to fetch water, prepare delicious foods, mouth-watering Tela and so forth. So, what do you think is to happen today? Let us see together (Base on the Video document).*

After saying this, the narrator joins the spectators and sits with them. Now, Edila is on stage arranging her different types of pots. In the meanwhile, Hagezom with his dead wife's brother comes out from the middle of the spectators carrying his sick son. Edila becomes shocked when she looks at the severe sickness of the son and asks them that what happened to the son. Laying down the son on her front, Hagezom cleans his throat and says:

Hagezom: (very politely) *W/r Edila, we came here seeking your help. Please, would you mind in doing to us a favor?*

Edila: (sympathetically) *why not, if it is of my ability.*

Hagezom: (pointing his finger down to his son) *Help us to cure my son.*

Edila: *Oh, my goodness! What else may I do to you? Why don't you take him to the Holy Water or to the health station?*

Hagezom: (Insisting on) *please, please, please, cure my son now, you have the medicine.*

Edila: (she becomes perplexed) *For goodness sake, what a medicine do I have? If I know a medicine... am I not helpful? Is your son is not like my son?*

Hagezom: (Increasing his emotional tone) *Now, I tell you, it is you who caused my son to become sick, like this.*

Edila: (Being highly alarmed) *How come? What do you mean?*

Hagezom: (In confidence) *so, why my son calls your name time and again?*

Edila: *Is he not a sick? What if he happens to call whatsoever unconsciously?*

Hagezom: *Don't try to cover it. It is a watertight fact and we know it that you make the pots out of the bone and blood of human beings.*

Edila: *For heavens sake, how dare do you say this heartbreaking speech? I am a simple fellow! Is a sin to make a pot? Is working for my family's daily bread a curse? How on earth do I harm your son? (Pause). I know.... it is not new for us. We have living for centuries along with your dishonorable gossip. Now, please, take away your son from me.*

Along all the way the two sides' dispute, the sick moans very severely laying on the ground. Unable to communicate each other, the dispute becomes complicated between the two sides, Edila on the one side and Hagezom and his accompany on the other side. In the mid of their oral conflict, Hagezom starts to look at one of the jars which was in

the middle of the other pots. He surprisingly advances toward the pots and then picks it up and handles it by its neck and steps back.

Hagezom: (Showing the jar to his dead wife's brother) *do you know this jar? Do you know who this jar is?*

Brother: (Sorrowfully looking at the jar) *please, don't instigate me to reminisce the past. Now let's get your son cured.*

Hagezom: *Look, Edila has changed her into a jar. She is your sister who was died before ten years. My wife was too sick harmed by Edila. And she also changed my wife into a jar after her death (putting the jar on the ground) Edila, Now revert this jar to its real being and give us my wife.*

Brother: (Stepping to Edila and speaks diplomatically) *W/r Edila, it is not an enigma and don't try to pretended to be ignoramus. You should be satisfied with the rest of the pots. You can carry water, brewing tela, storing liquids, and distilling liquor by them. But, now, change only this jar and give us my sister. (Gesturing his hands) just do it, take your plant and bit the jar to turn it to my sister.*

Edila: *What a miracle is you speaking of? (Being hot-tempered) I have no such a power. I am a human being.*

In the mid way, Edila's husband appears from the corner of the spectators carrying on his shoulder a plough share, one of his handmade iron products. When he immediately grasps what happened to his wife he speaks pitifully his discontent.

Husband: *Now, the gossip I was hearing came to my home. My neighbor Hagezom, We have become unable to go to churches as the consequence of your gossip; we have been unable to interact with the community for fear of your rumor. To whom shall we appeal this case; to whom shall we address our traumatic life? There is not justice in this country? Where is to go for us?*

However, neither Edila's nor her husband's solicitous spirit and tender hearted dialogue to make peace do change Hagezom's stubbornness into hospitable negotiation. On the opposite, the animosity becomes more escalated following Hagezom's decision to burn the frontal head of his sick son by heated knife at the presence of Edila and her husband. However, Edila and her husband strongly reject and defend not to burn the body of the sick. Here, Hagezom's temptation to burn his son's body is because it is believed

that to burn the sick would be transmitted to the body of the buda person, who harmed the sick and it leaves a discolored skin on the face of the buda, so that the sick becomes healthy. On the other hand, Edila and her husband firmly strives against the attempt of burning the sick, for fear that the effect would cause the son to die at their home. And, it would be amoral, inhuman and guiltiness for them to remain aloof when the sick is burnt at their presence. Throughout the dispute, between the two opposite fronts, burning the sick on his face remains as conflict instigating scenario of the performance and also as a point of debate to the spectators. Subsequently, the performance reaches at the point of its climax when the antagonism between the two forces is kindled further by Hagezom's attempt to murder Edila and her husband using a fire gun.

At his juncture the narrator interferes in between the two forces as a mediator and ceases the squabbling. And accordingly, the narrator with a handheld microphone steps to the audience and agitates the spectators to propose a resolution to the conflict.

*Marrator: Look, the son is almost on the virtue of death while they obstinately quarrel each other. Do you remain silent when the son dies? Don't you have a solution what to do to the son? What do you think whether it is important to burn the face of the son or not? Please, help us/*

### **The Performance Presentation**

There exists a big acacia tree in the town of Samre (see the photograph in the appendix). The tree is found on the hilltop and the land in front of the tree has been naturally arranged in slanting manner. The performance of the Samre Community Theatre was staged under this tree. Under the tree approximately 1500-2000 people of the town were seated as an audience. Most of the spectators are females. The female spectators are seated closer to the center of the performance area, while the males were sealed on the top of the hill back to the females.

The spectators see when the performers implant a tent and arrange sound instruments such as sound-systems and microphones; and also when they arrange stage properties such as pots, jars and dishes, which are made of potters.

### **Spectators' Reaction**

In addition to the three invisible actors who dressed very traditionally like the community and seated with the spectators, three women from the community, who may be grouped under the ages of 50-60, stand in the middle of the spectators and say that it is better to take the sick to health station rather than applying the backward and traditional harmful therapy on the body of the son. The three women argued in different ways of expression that this traditional perception on buda is the legacy of the past feudal and aristocratic rulers. They also added that this perception would have to be toppled. Two men, who dressed in a modern fashion, also take the chance and discourse one after the other that these smiths and potters have culturally and socially been discriminated against their job. They added that this discrimination is amoral and inhuman.

Except these few individuals how clearly articulated their view, all the rest of the spectators project their voice in a crowd manner and strongly adhere to burn the face of the sick and then uncover the secret of smiths and potters. But, in some parts of the spectators some individuals, both women and men, are seen looking depressed and stressed bending their heads to the ground. To the contrary, a large size of the spectators is laughing over smiths.

## **Resolution of the Performance**

In general, the performance is concluded over the spectators' two different views on the issue of buda. A very few spectators are seen when they adhere to exterminate the perception while the majority remain with their misgivings on the issue.

## **The Feedback of Evil-Eye People to the Performance**

The two blacksmiths were asked about their feedback to the importance of the Samre Community Theatre Project particularly to their problem. And they expressed their feedback to the performance in the following way.

*Yes, we attended the theatre. We do not want to remember and speak what happened. The event was an embarrassment for us. The performers were replicating what the people say about us. And, as the result the people were satirically laughing at us there in the gathering. We were so ashamed and highly alarmed when we overtly hear and see the hearsay what the people say about us at their home. In this condition what we could say other than remained seated graceless. They wittingly disgusted us (Interview).*

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **The Objectives of TAS**

The objectives of TAS emanated from the very objectives of CAT. Amid the overall discourse of the conference of the founding members of CAT, the question of identity is over emphasized. The founding members of the Cultural Association of Tigray based their discourse on the historical reminiscence that has a political undertone, of the past regimes, to set out the objectives of TAS, along with the sense of reconstructing cultural identity and promoting community development.

### **Reconstructing Cultural Identity**

The published document of TAS explains that the people of Tigray had been made not only to experience the calamities of the violation of political and economic rights, but they had also been deprived of their natural rights to speak in their own language and promote their own cultural identity (*Keidi Mesreti Mahiber Bahil Tigray*, 1988, p.11). From this view point, it could be argued that the foundation of the Cultural Association of Tigray has politically been stimulated in the sense that the rationale behind its establishment is meant to revitalize the development of the Tigray people's language and culture, which had been politically obscured. All the discourses presented at the conference of the founding members of the CAT emphasized not only the strategies as to how the language and culture of Tigray could be developed but also highlighted the nature of atrocities as to how the language and culture of Tigray had been reduced to the extent of extermination (*Keidi Mesreti Mahiber Bahil Tigray*, 1988, p.12). Part of the statement of the founding members of the Cultural Association of Tigray reads here under:

*Our language and literature is the one that had been hindered from development and sentenced into death by the aristocratic rulers. However, it has been reserved through the toil and the power of the people and rescued from death by the struggle of the Tigray people. And it is also one of our resources that have presently got hope of development for the future, from now on wards ((Keidi Mesreti Mahiber Bahil Tigray, 1988, p.12).*

At the center of this, we find **language** and **culture** and **art** as principal and highly prioritized concepts of CAT to be promoted and developed with the academic institution of TAS.

From the overall listed objectives of the Cultural Association of Tigray, there are eight major strategies, which are assumed to be carried out by TAS as the process of cultural reconstruction, economic development and ideological integration. These eight strategies are: Institutionalizing **language** and **literature**, **music**, **drama**, **painting**, **traditional and modern sports**, **cultural and historical heritages**, **architecture** including the traditional, and **history** of Tigray (*Keidi Mesreti Mahiber Bahil Tigray, 1988, p.22*). And these components have their own specific objectives that symbiotically integrate one another to build up the cultural identity of Tigray. The very establishment of TAS constituting the three departments thus has been vested with these far-reaching objectives.

The Cultural Association of Tigray is on the right track in systematically selecting these components as strategies of its objectives. All these components both as integral ingredients of art or as a separate genres bear in themselves the material and spiritual culture of a given society. So, when art in general is aimed as an agent of social development within the matrix of a given culture, it creates an authentic social environment that builds the society's sense of belongingness to participate in the process.

### **Promoting Community Development**

Far beyond that they also have underscored that their culture is the general matrix of their common identity where all the means by which they can bring change at all levels are embedded. So, promoting their culture with the development of the arts is also believed to be an instrument to promote community development within the region. The three departments of TAS are entrusted with such objectives.

However, the TAS has not yet achieved these objectives. In stead it is currently closed due to lack of budget and manpower.

### **Curriculum of the Theatre Department**

We may group all the courses of the Department, listed in the curriculum, under four major categories, in relations to the objectives of the Tigray Arts School and particularly to the Department of Theatre.

#### **Theatre as an Aspect of Development**

- Theatre for development I (Theory)
- Theatre for development II (Practical )
- Theatre for Development III (practical )
- Theatre for development Iv (Practical)

This is an indication of the fact that the highest commitment of the Department has been given to the responsibility of engendering theatre activists and practitioners who are expected to engage themselves with community works at grassroots level. Certainly, the Samre Community Theatre Project is one of these endeavors which have been exercised by students and teachers, as an experiment of the course to interrogate the efficacy of theatre and its concept of development (Interview). So, this could bet taken as a strong side of those who designed the curriculum of Theatre Department of the Tigray Arts School. Here, it seems that Aboneh Ashagrie's wide experience in the importance of

Theatre for Development has been reflected in shaping the value of this Department, along the line of theatre as a means for change and social development.

*Popular Theatre in Ethiopia (1989) Theatre for Education in Ethiopia (1994), Theatre-Therapy in Ethiopia (2004), Theater for Population (1996)* are some of Aboneh's academic researches that have interrogated the belittled exposure of Ethiopian dramatists to the theoretical and practical values of theatre for popular issues, education, health and other social problems.

### **Theatre as an Aspect of Culture in Tigray**

- Theatre in Tigray
- Traditional Drama and the Culture of Tigray

Here, we can see the intensity of the curriculum designer's concern as to how they attempted to set up the Department with an over-emphasized local flavor. However, the first course, Theatre in Tigray, may probably appear problematic in the teaching-learning process. A couple of reasons could be raised in this regard. First, there is no a clearly stated existing parameter- although it can be conceptualized in ideal terms for academic sake- to study the nature of theatre in Tigray differentiating from the nature of theatre in other regions of Ethiopia. Second, theatre in its modern sense is a recent phenomenon even to Ethiopia, which have never seen yet multidimensional research and publication.

Moreover, there are no well established teaching materials neither to the course of Theatre in Tigray or Theatre in Ethiopia. Of course, some people strongly mention some theatre activities of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), which were undertake during the armed stragle, as part of theatre in Tigray.

*However, there is no clear evidence that displays the beginning of theatre in Tigray, there are facts on which some theatre people agreed. The theatres presented beginning from 1966 to agitate and propagate the political system of Derge, and on*

*the contrary the theatre presented by TPLF in the armed struggle to entertain and raise the consciousness of the army and the people of Tigray are some of the facts that clearly indicate the beginning of theatre in Tigray (Enkuslassie Amare 1992,p.15).*

However, this further leads to further investigation of the nature of those theatres presented in both oppositional ideological fronts, in stead of concluding them as historical evidences for the genesis of theatre in Tigray. What makes them a theatre of Tigray? is a big question that demands the clarity of many complex issues in relations to the history, ideology and contents of these theatres. But on the other hand, the foundation of the Tigray Arts School could be taken as a turning point to begin with studying Theatre in Tigray both in its structural and ideological context since the clearly stated objectives of the Tigray Arts School are the parameters that could measure the local essence of theatre to be in Tigray.

The second course of this category, *Traditional Drama and the Culture of Tigray*, seems more plausible and paramount. Traditional performing arts that comprise dance, music, folklore etc, are basic grounds to carryout the process of community theatre as a means of cultural intervention and social development. As it is a common practice in most African countries, traditional performing arts could have been socially celebrated events in the culture of the Tigray people. So, the juxtaposition of traditional drama with the culture of Tigray relates to the intended objectives of the School in that the course enables the students to be exposed to their own culture. The students' exposure to the matrix of culture in turn may enable the student to grasp the wisdom of traditional dramatic elements that have been embedded over a period of time on cultural entitles of the people. Thus, if theatre is in tandem with vehicle of culture, it may become an arena for the direct participation of the community to address their real needs. Beyond other

concerns, this course may have a paramount contribution in preserving the wisdom of traditional performing arts. Because, the course may serve as one of the possible ways through which students go back in time and search for the nature of traditional performances from the cultural endowment of Tigray.

### **Theatre as an Aspect of Art in General**

- The History of World Theatre I& II
- The Art of Performance I& II
- The Art of Stagecraft
- Playwriting for Stage and Radio
- Theory of Play Production
- The Movement of Theatre Genres
- The Theory of Play Directing
- Children Theatre
- Reading of Selected Plays

In one or another way, these courses are associated with the techniques and theories of theatre in general as an aspect of artistic features. So, within these courses the students could be exposed to the different thoughts and philosophies of theatre that have occurred all over the world. In fact, the thought that deals with the concept of theatre as a means of social development and community empowerment is part of the theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the presence of these courses could give to the students a provocative insight into looking for a new paradigm of theatre for change and development.

### **Other Supportive Courses**

*General:*

- College English I & II
- Aesthetics

The inclusion of College English in the Theatre Department of TAS could be to meet the standard of higher institutions in Ethiopia. Aesthetics, as a course is basically related to

the philosophy of beauty. This course is so crucial in that it is a matrix of very wide perspectives that justify the beauty of art in various ways. The concept of Art for Arts sake is one dimension of the course. This perspective of the arts also deals with the aristocratic conventions of the western culture.

The students' exposure to the culture and theories of the western arts by itself may be valuable as an academic knowledge. However, adapting the western's parameter and measuring the aesthetics of the arts in Ethiopia could be misleading the test of indigenous audiences.

Hence, offering *Aesthetics* as a course in the Theatre Department of the TAS could be important to broaden the students' academic realm. Albeit, there should be, on the other hand, an alternative theoretical orientation that constructs the student's capacity of developing local paradigms to maximize the aesthetic utility of their own local arts. In fact the following courses may have such a function.

*Specific to Tigray and Ethiopia:*

- The History and Development of Tigray
- Tigrigna Language I and II
- Survey of Literature in Tigray
- Fundamentals of Literature in Amharic I and II

The inclusion of these courses in to the curriculum of the Theatre Department of TAS is concomitant to the objectives of the School's foundation. It could be also taken as an indication of the curriculum designer's critical reflection towards the local essence of the very objectives of the Cultural Association of Tigray. The founding members of the Cultural Association of Tigray have ultimately stated while founding the association that:

*There should be a need to conducting studies and researches to develop the culture of certain people. Disseminating extensively the results of these studies and researches to*

*the massive people helps all the people to be tempted to know, preserve, and develop their own culture. Development that bases on a well studied culture demands a wide range of efforts. To support this endeavor, there should be a need to generate different skills; and to this end it is a must to establish training schools of different branches of our culture (Keyidi Mesrati Guba'e Mahiber Bahili Tigray 1988, p. 18).*

The nature of these courses listed out above seems to be designed along with the framework of CAT whose streaming order has been deemed to cross within the cultural boundary of the region. Thus, studying the language, literature, history and development of Tigray may be an imperative duty for the students. A couple of reasons could be given to this view. First, students of Theatre for Development are not dreamers, who are supposed to deal with the products of their fantasy and imagination. Especially, the principle of theatre that aims at developing and empowering the community has nothing to do with the realms of personal fantasy and imagination.

The last, but not least, course listed in this category as *Fundamentals of Literature in Amharic* may bring in its own role the attention of students into the thinking box of common cultural values and symbols of common identity that could tie them with the peoples of other regions of the country. So, it could be claimed that the inclusion of all the courses in the curriculum might have been calculated in terms of the potential merits of their functions.

In the interview Ato Aboneh says that there was an attempt to deliberately balance the curriculum of the Theatre Department to make it constitute standard courses related to the arts of theatre but along with the socio-cultural context of Tigray (Interview). In fact, as it is a regional School established within the interest of the people of the region, the attempt is so imperative in making the curriculum accommodate subjects that have a bearing on the socio-cultural facts of the region, Tigray.

## **The Samre Community Theatre Project**

As it is discussed in the background section of the Samre Community, evil-eye is one of the traditional perceptions of the community that socially and culturally discriminates blacksmiths and potters. It seems that this passive turmoil subtly implanted between these artisans and none artisan people of the Samre Community is an ideological confrontation that have been constructed on the basis of mythical reasons. And, it is also inevitable that the traditional perception of the community towards evil-eye could have the support of traditional institutions of the dominant culture.

Therefore, it is clear that the artisans' voice for the confirmation of self-dignity and self-worth and for social justice and equity is an ideological challenge to the ideology of the dominant culture. On top of this, it is also clear that the Samre Community, as a whole, needs empowerment to create a space within the dominant culture that could be capable incorporating the survival of each community members. Having this in mind, the concern will be now directed to the Samre Community Theatre Project which was organized by the Tigray Arts School Theatre department, as cultural intervention in to the traditional perception of the Samre Community, on the issue of evil-eye.

## **The Organizers' Ideological Interest**

Theatre Department of the Tigray Arts School had its own interest when it deployed its students to organize the Samre Community Theatre Project. It is also true that the interest of the Department, in organizing this theatre project, bears in the center the ideological motivation of the Department. The Theatre Department has developed its own identity based on the concept of theatre as community's instrument for the cultural reconstruction and economic development. To do so, the Department strategically planned

theatre projects of field experiments to expose the students to the potential efficacy of theatre (Interview).

In this regard, two basic ideological interests of the organizers can be identified from the Samre Community Theatre Project. One, the primary interest of the Department directly relates to the Department's set of objectives that gear toward generating theatre practitioners and activists along the line of theatre for development concept. Second, the realization of this objective implies that students should attest and then acquire, in their staying in the department, the potential efficacy of theatre as a means for change and development. And to this end, it is also axiomatic that the students would engage themselves in organizing community theatre projects on the spot with grassroots communities.

### **The Organizers' Understanding of Community Theatre**

The organizers of the project who participated in the interview said that the Department has significantly nurtured them with the provocative insight into against the conventional formalism of art, in general. They believe that the Department, based on its underlying objectives, has constructed them in a way they would develop an attitude to the didactic aesthetics of theatre as a vehicle of better life for grassroots community.

Of course, the first diploma graduates of the department have acquired the necessary skills of theatre as a means of development. Their attempt in developing training aids and teaching materials, along the line of theatre for development concept, for the Mekele, amateur artists is an indication of these graduates' adherence to the growing ideology and paradigm of theatre for cultural and socio-economic development of a society.

However, the organizers knowledge of community theatre seems very general. In the interview they said that they had no clear understanding on the importance of culture and histories of the community to the production of community theatre. As the result of this, the Samre Community Theatre was organized without constituting the culture and history of the community. In this regard the following points are identified as indicators of the students' lack of the skills of community assessment, which is the key element of community theatre.

**Thematic investigation:** Almost all members of the project-team who participated in the interview explain that they have the same observation and experience in regard to the evil-eye issue (Interview). Here, the students selected the Samre Community for its geographical proximity and the issue of evil eye for its mythical characteristic. However, there may be a question as to how the students' personal view on the issue of evil-eye impacted on the thematic investigation of the Samre Community Theatre Project. This point again leads us to another point of argument i.e., in whose interest evil eye should be addressed as a theme of the theatre project? And, whose interpretation and ideologies of the different clusters of the community have been entertained more or less in the performance? One of the participants of the Samre community Theatre Project explains how they investigated the issue of evil-eye:

*In our first arrival at Samre, members of the project team were clustered into three groups and deployed to three areas of the community. One group went to the open air market, as the day was Saturday, a weakly market day of the community. The second group went to the houses of local alcohol drinking. And the third group, I was there, went to the Samre Saint Marry Church. What I did in the church is pretended as if I were sick caused by buda. I was laid down on the ground and emitted the reaction over the pain of stomachache. I was also interchangeably laughing and crying just to make seem that I was harmed by buda. Then some people who were in the church came and stood around us. When they asked my whereabouts, my colleagues answered as if I would come from*

*Addis to trace my family there. Soon, these people said that the buda might have harmed me as I was a new-comer to the area (Interview).*

From the on set the students went to the community having their personal predisposition. Consequently their methods of gathering the data and interrogating the potential ideologies of the community in relation to the issue of evil-eye was highly influenced by the students' judgmental and preoccupied thinking. Here, the students' basic concern would have not been to mirror out their pre-determined picture of evil-eye and present it to the community. Herein, the students made a couple of defaults. In the first place, conducting a research through cheating raises the issue of **ethics**. Secondly, there may be also wide opportunity for the cheating ways of inquiring to result in **misleading findings**. The basic point which was missing is that the students did not realize that the community could not transpose its facts, values, notions and beliefs without its ideological commitment to their methods of inquiring the issue of evil-eye.

It is the fact of sociology that members of a community can play different roles differently at different given circumstances. By the same token, any person as passer-by may respond in one way to the incident of some body's sickness. The same person as concerned and involved decision maker may also react to the same incident in another way. Here the determinate factor is not only what a role is played but also how the role is played.

However, the thematic investigation was the stage the students would have to establish **identification** and build an **ideological transaction** by introducing their organizational identity and by clearly presenting the ideology of their interest of being there with the community. And the community also would have to transact its values and ideology.

Moreover, rehearsing the performance which is one of the dramaturgical processes is also another way of acquiring the history of the community, the mythical and legendary stories, and the potential oppositional and dominant ideology of the community if the community is involved in it. But, this opportunity was missing in the Samre Community Theatre Project.

### **Representational Authority in the Performance**

The performance of the Samre Community Theatre Project was presented in an open air space under the shadow of the big three in the middle of the Samre Town. The Selection of the place could be the right place for it may bear the aura of the spectators' sense of communalism as such big threes have been customary for the Ethiopia traditional society to gather under it for ritual ceremonies, communal festivals, reconciliations and conflict resolutions.

Nevertheless, in spite of the convenience of the place selected for the performance, there was a huge gap of intimacy between the central performers and the spectators. As it is seen in the section of the Performance-Text, the whole presentation of the performance was dominated by the role of the organizers. There was a very simple and minor involvement of very few members of the spectators in the performance. The involvement of these few members of the spectators was not in the sense of ideological engagement and direct participation taking different role of the scripted characters. Rather, these few persons of the spectators indirectly participated in the performance as the result of the means used by the narrator to break down the line of performer-spectator division. In fact, as the result of this break down few spectators seized the opportunity and forwarded some opinions. However, these forwarded opinions merely represent the

partial and provisional views of the community. In other words, these few spectators participated indirectly only in responding to the immediate invitation of the narrator to say something or comment on the central theme of the performance. Their opinion responded to the plot of the performance was not critical to evoke the ideological thoughts of the larger spectators to the pros and cons of the debate lighted by the performers. Except these few spectators who suggested almost the same view points, the larger spectator was not provoked to clearly articulate their view in relation to the debate on evil-eye. Rather, the nature of the larger spectator's reaction to the performance was reflected in two ways. In one way, they were laughing and applauding including at some tragic episodes of the performance. On the other way, a considerable number of the spectators also remained silent, even when others laugh, and seemed to be irritated and engulfed in their inner turmoil. Why they remained so when there was a chance to speak their own view points? We will deal with the answer of this question in the next topic.

The following points are identified as indicators of the absence of representational authority in the performance.

**Opponent and proponent ideologies in the Performance:** Not only in terms of the geographical setting but also in terms of language and ethnicity the Samre Community has been tied to its communalism. In addition to the community's settlement on common geographical location, the entire community also speaks the same language, Tigringa, and also claims almost to the same ethnicity, Tigre. And this homogeneity of the community's ethnicity and linguistic helps to have a dominate ideology within the community. Nevertheless, it is also true that, as Kershaw (1999) argues, communities are the potential sources of oppositional ideology, and the Samre Community could be taken

as an instance of this fact, for the fact that at least these smiths and potters have their own ideology as opposed to the ideology of the dominant culture within the community.

However, when we see the Samre Community Theater Project, the opportunity for the accommodation of representational authority of **opponent** and **proponent** ideologies of the community was entirely missing. And this absenteeism has also been reflected in the passive and silence reaction of the spectators in the performance. It could be argued that the reason for the spectators to remain reserved from suggesting their opinion might have resulted from the absence of their ideological representational authority in the performance.

From the point of the organizers it was believed that the students carried out a research on the community that could be able to depict the over all picture of evil eye, through rehearsing and performing only by the students (Interview). But from the on set, the community did not participate in the students' attempt of thematic investigation. Consequently the Samre Community was simply an invited spectator to the performance although the narrator declared that the performance was held to deal with the traditional perception of the community on evil-eye. But the basic question is who gave the organizers the authority to represent the community in the performance?

For example, Priest Daneal, the chief administrator of the Samre Saint Marry Church, does not accept that smiths and potters are evil-eyes who can kill people, but he argues that there is a natural *est*, a plant, which was believed to have been used by *Hindorawin* to make miracles including killing people. And, according to Priest Daneal, not only the smiths but also anybody who could have this plant can do the same thing (Interview). Here, it indicates that members of the community have their own logic to

argue over the issue of evil-eye. However, the performance of the Samre Community Theatre Project was presented without constituting the community's authentic values, as it was a theatre for the community, not a theatre with the community.

### **Culture as a Basic Stem of Ideologies**

As it is discussed in the Oral History of Samre, the area of the Community has got its name after the people of Samrawian, the ancient people of Israel, who used to live in Samre. The 84 years old man, who is experienced in customary laws in Samre, says: "It has been said that the ancient people of Israel came to this area about in 1482, and it is also believed that the Samre Communities have been descendents of these people" (Interview).

In congruous to this, Priest Wolde Mariam Kelemework, a 57 years old, who claims as one of the *balabates*, natives, of Samre, says:

*Debay begot Mer'awie, Mer'awie begot again Debay, Debay begot Zer'om, Zer'om begot Shumnegeday, Lia, and Amuny. Except Amuny's, as he was sterile, the descendants of others are living in Samre. And Debay came here with Samrawian from Hager Samr, in Israel, in 1286 (Interview).*

However, there is certain variation in citing the date, the two interviewees' narration indicate that the areas might have been founded by these people who came from the land of Isreal. Priest Wolde Mariam elaborates also that the cave was excavated by Debay (Interview).

When these participants of the interview asked about the descent of the present smiths who are smelting iron in Samre, they replied that the present smiths of Samre came from a different area. But, as opposed to this, one of the smiths of the Samre Community argues that they also belong to the same stock of the Samre Community. He

adds that most of members of the community have avoided working irons and pots fearing the labeling of buda and the social discrimination (Interview).

These arguments of the Samre Community on its oral history and culture can serve as a base to formulate both opponent and proponent ideology in a community theatre. No matter how they are oral, the arguments are part of the community's culture and history. Consequently, it is also inevitable that this oral history and culture of the community is the potential stem for both the dominant and the oppositional ideologies of the community. From this point of view, the oral history and culture of the community would have been used as the potential source of enrichment for the text and inter-texts of the Samre Community Theatre Project.

Nevertheless, none of the elements of these oral history and culture of the community was included into the texts of the performance. Even, in the students' attempt of conducting research, they did not assess the historical and cultural integration of the community. The students simple focused on the issue of evil-eye, as a text of the performance. But, as a text for the performance of community theatre, it would have been nurtured with the history, culture and community of the Samre Community.

This is the Kernel of community theatre what was missing in the Samre Community Theatre Project. The culture of smelting iron ore and making pots are believed to have been the culture of the Samrawian people who are believed to have founded Samre. This iron smelting and pottery could not be taken only as traditional skills. But, there embedded in them are also cultural values, ideologies and thoughts of the practitioners. This implies that the issue of evil-eye is an integral part of the history and the culture of these smiths and the whole community at large. Therefore, creating a text of evil-eye for

the performance of a community theatre should be constructed on the basis of this culture and history. But, the Samre Community Theatre Project only concentrated on the very external profile of evil-eye and consequently ended up in bewilderment, without the spectators' clear reflection on it.

This discrepancy aroused from the fact that there was a strange relationship between the performers and the spectators. The strangeness would have been detached had the community participated in every process and had each ideological sects of the community been authentically represented in the performance. The community's direct participation is the key element to empower the community through community theatre. So, community participation is one missing point in the Samre Community Theatre.

**Text:** In general, evil-eye as the text of the performance may be the right decision for the organizers. However, taking the text of evil-eye in the performance as the challenge to the domination and as a means of empowering the consciousness of the community needs the inclusion of other inter-texts to the performance.

**Inter-text:** For instance, the oral history of the Samrawian people and their culture of iron smelting would possibly create inter-texts. And these inter-texts would serve for the spectators to go backdates and ponder about the foundation of the Samre Community itself. This would challenge the dominant ideology that discriminated members of the community against 'clean-bone' over 'unclean-bone'. These inter-textual elements would also empower the smiths and potters to loud up their voice to express their self-identity and self-dignity by questioning the sectarian ideology about the real basis of the social discrimination.

### **The Socio-Economic Importance of Blacksmiths and Potters**

The socio-economic importance of the smiths' and potters' production to the community was not also ideologically articulated in the performance. The economic and political upheavals of Ethiopia which created the labor forces of smiths, potters, and in general artisans did not get any space of discussion in the performance. This historical fact would raise the spectators' consciousness and help them demystify the community's mythical perception behind the product of smiths and potters.

To some up, as the first attempt, the students of the Tigray Arts School Theatre Department had many constraints that range from financial to technical while organizing the Samre Community Theatre Project. But, within these constraints, they attempted to bridge the relationship between theatre and community.

However, community theatre needs integration with other development partners. Far beyond the efforts of the students, the Samre Community Theatre Project ought to have been supported by NGOs that are working with communities and other local human service organizations. As the issue of evil-eye is related to health issues, health experts would have to also participate in the project of the theatre.

In addition, as the project itself started in a distorted direction, its production also ended up without drawing a post-production paradigm that would evaluate the post-production behavior of the community in regard to the issue of evil-eye. Actually, in relation to this, Temesgen Yesuf says in the interview that the project-team was financially constrained to stay with the community for many days and make the project in-depth.

## **Summery**

An attempt is made here to synthesis the overall picture of the discussion with some facts of the literature.

### **Cultural Reconstruction as an Objective of TAS**

The CAT founding members' concept of culture is congruous to Paulo Freire's (1999): "society can not be reconstructed in a mechanistic fashion; the culture which is culturally recreated through revolution is the fundamental instrument for this reconstruction" (p.139). The process of reconstructing society, according to Freire, is a revolutionary process that transforms the society in to the realm of consciousness wherein the society could be able to see the oppressive reality of the past and then render its power to the new future. But, this could not be achieved in isolation to the "dialogical cultural actions" that constitutes the material and spiritual realms of the society (Freire, 1999, pp.140-141).

So, culture is the general matrix that brings a given society together as a center of reinforcement for change and development. The reason engraved in the zeal of the founding members of CAT to associate the survival of reconstructing heir culture with the ideology of their regional sate still relates to Freire's (1999) concept of Cultural Revolution. The process of reconstructing culture is carried out through ideological conflicts and agents of social forces, who are involved in the process. By the same taken, the people of Tigray firmly believe that they have ideologically struggled to reconstruct their culture and then promote social changes. And this process of cultural reconstruction is believed to have been ideologically represented by their regional government that assumed political power after the struggle. Since, as Freire (1999) claims, such a process "develops the practice of permanent dialogue between leaders and people, and

consolidates the participation of the people in power” (p.141), they adhere to the protection of their ideology as a means of survival for their cultural identity.

Here, no question could follow to the attempt of the founding members of CAT to create a bridge between their actions of reconstructing their culture and protecting the ideology of their regional power. However, there could be a question that interrogates the nature of the strategies of the Cultural Association designed to achieve such a very significant but difficult mission.

Of course, it takes to an extreme pole of thinking to analyze the scenario of this mission along with the line of reconstructing ‘national culture’ within the Ethiopia context. And consequently, one may doubt that such a separate process of reconstructing cultural identity may create sectarianism that potentially produce dissonance to the national cultural; and also ask as to how the instrumentality of art could be deployed to realize such cultural incongruity. Indeed, “as a society becomes more and more conscious, it is able to self determine its philosophy, its way of life, its personality- its culture” (Byam 1999, p.23). However, the process of such a consciousness is not to justify the supremacy of one’s cultural identity at the experience of other’s. But on the contrary, we have to ask, what is the context to have a ‘national, culture’? And, who are decoding the meaning of a ‘national culture’? If it is, as Paulo Freire(1999) argues, meant to be built up on the basis of *cultural invasion* by which “ the actors draw the thematic content of their action from their own values and ideology” (p.162), a national culture inevitably becomes a domination over others. As opposed to this, if the sense of a national culture is meant to be established, as Freire (1999) claims, on the ground of “cultural synthesis”, both difference and unity will be enriched positively (p.162).

### **Outcome of the Samre Community Theatre Project**

The Theatre Department of TAS had two objectives to organize the Samre Community Theatre Project. The first objective was to introduce the students to the practical skills of organizing community theatre projects. The second objective was to solve the problems as related to the issue of evil-eye through community theatre.

However, it is difficult to conclude that the Department met its objective in introducing the skills of community theatre or solving the problems of evil-eye people. In relation to this the following measurements are identified to evaluate the outcomes of the Samre Community theatre Project.

### **Methods of Community Assessment**

As it was discussed in the curriculum section, the students of Theatre Department took 80 cr. hours of courses related to theatre for development, language and literature and other supportive courses. However, there is no any course in relation to the methods of community assessment. The absence of the methods of community assessment in the curriculum adversely impacted on the students' way of organizing the Samre Community Theatre Project. In fact, it is the nature of the curriculum that determines the qualities of students and their outcomes.

The following points are identified as indicators of the students' lack of community assessment skills.

**Research with the Community:** Research with the community has becoming accustomed by higher academic institutes in Africa. Etherton's (1992) explanation could be taken as an instance of this fact:

*Research into the culture was centered in the institutes of African studies, which a large number of Universities set up under a variety of names, many of whom were able to support traditional performers and even whole performing companies (p.63).*

Personal realm or ideology is akin, as Freire (1999) argues, to the practice of “anti-dialogical banking educator” the contents of whose ideology are confined to personal interests (p.74). Of course, schools with such orientations work for the ego satisfaction of “elitist” dramatists and also make “drama itself elitist” (Etherton, 1982, p.64). However, schools objectively established to bring social change and cultural reconstruction, like the TAS, should be tied to the historical realities of their ecology. Research with the community is the best method to understand the real needs of the community. However, the students were not able to conduct research with the community as they lack the skills of community assessment.

#### **Ideological Transaction:**

In part of the literature, it has been discussed that performance of a community theatre is a framework for the ideological transaction between the organizers and the community. This ideological transaction is believed to help establish very clear identification and develop a shared ideology between real interests and needs of both the organizers and the community. This identification in itself has also paramount importance to capture the positive consent of the community to understand the purpose of the project and directly participate in every steps of the dramaturgical process, from thematic investigation through nurturing the process with the authentic culture and history of the community to addressing real needs and proposing resolutions. This the second missing point in the Samre Community Theatre.

#### **Community Participation:**

In the dramaturgical process of the Samre Community Theatre Project the community did not participate in the theme investigation, script development, rehearsal

and presentation of the performance. Rehearsal is one of the fundamentals of community-based theatre that maximizes the chance for the community to directly participate and shape not only the structure but also the contents of the performance. Kershaw (1992) says that performance is ideological by its nature in that it is a medium of dialogue and physical reaction which constitute, as Schechner (1985) argues, the cultural and biological involvement of those who participate in it. Here, the questions are how the students could be able to accommodate or represent the instinct cultural and biological attributes of the community in isolation to the involvement of the community in rehearsing the performance? This gap might have raised from the fact that some community theatre practitioners assume themselves as performance experts. However, performance knowledge is part of the oral tradition (Schechner, 1985). What are needed to be included in the performance of community theatre are also the skills of traditional performing arts. And nobody could be more skillful in the arts of traditional performance other than its community. In concomitant to this Byam (1999) argues: “In the absence of true dialogue [that is an authentic dialogue of the community], it is difficult to investigate the themes and subsequent generative themes of the participants” (p.60).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

**Traditional performing arts:** Performing arts is one of the earliest traditions of human society. Performances of traditional dances and music related to harvesting, hunting, conquering, birth, death, communal festivals and ritual ceremonies have been used particularly by traditional societies all over the world. The implications of these communal performances are not also as simple as they appear very traditional. As many scholars of performance anthropology emphasize, every bits of physical movements and gestures that constitute the structural and textual wholeness of the performance are in themselves the product of cultural values, which ties up the holistic integration of the community for which it serves.

**Implication to social work:** What holds paramount herein is not only the predated symbiotic relationship between performing arts and societies, but also the functional power of such performances in controlling the aura of people's communalism, and passing on cultural values to generations. It is also inevitably true that the genesis of the contemporary performing arts is these traditional performances. The recurrent advocacy of social workers, community activists, and theatre practitioners to deploy the instrumentality of performing arts to community empowerment and cultural promotion also emanates from the very nature of this concomitant relationship between performance and community.

Today as it was true in the past-times, the role of performing arts, in spite of its myriad approaches, is authentically outreaching socio-cultural, economic, and political issues. The entertaining and participatory nature of performing arts has been capturing the enthusiasm of multi-disciplines of social and natural sciences to use symbiotically

performing arts as a medium to convey social and political consciousness, community empowerment, and multiculturalism. Therefore, the share of performing arts in the sphere of cultural, socio-economic and political actors could not be viewed as mere entertainment. Its vital role is, rather, an integral part of the effort which has been exerted by the world community to secure peace and democracy, economic development, tolerance, mutual understanding and respect across our planet.

Herein lays the symbiotic relationship between social workers and community theatre practitioners. Empowering the community, promoting social justice, striving against social, economic and political discrimination and helping the disabled and disadvantaged individuals and groups are at the heart of the profession of social workers and community theatre practitioners.

The Samre Community Theatre Project can be taken as a testimony of this fact. Actually, the very objectives of the establishment of the Tigray Arts School are in themselves indicators of the schools commitment to build a bridge between the instrumentalities of the arts and other multi disciplines for cultural reconstruction and community development.

As the result of the school's devotion for community development, the Theatre Department, one of the wings of the School, organized the Samre Community Theatre Project. The project had two main specific objectives. One, as part of the students' exercise of field experiment, it was targeted to expose the students to the efficacy of community theatre for change. Two, the project was accordingly meant to empower the smiths and potters of the Samre Community through the issue of evil-eye as a performance-text. In this project, what the students carried out as theatre trainers has also

an implication to the profession of social work. Facing the grassroots communities and work to empower the community is central to the realm of social work profession.

**Community assessment skills:** Some limitations of the students in achieving the Samre Community Theatre Project are the results of constraints and lacks of some understandings in the concepts of culture and community assessment skills. However, this shortcoming could be avoided through farther trainings and experience sharing. Here, the social workers' experience sounds very significant to be shared with community theatre practitioners.

**TAS:** The genesis of reforming modern theater in Ethiopia has counted not less than a solid century. The same is true also for the beginning of modern schools in Ethiopia. Modern schools that range from kindergarten to higher academic commissions are nowadays moving up at better standards both in terms their enumeration and qualities of producing literate people. However, as compared to the ongoing advancement of modern education, institutionalizing theatre in Ethiopian has been found almost in its rudimentary stage. What is very astonishing here is that performing theatre was the most important extracurricular activity almost in all schools of Addis Ababa in the very eyes-breaking times of modern education in Ethiopia. Albeit, the contemporary Ethiopian theatre has not yet received enough attention for its betterment either as a branch of knowledge in the academies or as part of human services in the organizations

It is with this kind of situation that the TAS was opened in 1989 (E.C). And this was a change that opened a second chapter in outreaching art to the arena of academic at a school level. Nevertheless, after 1996 EC on wards, the Tigray Arts School has been found no more in its status quo. Presently it is replaced by Mekele Teachers Education

without constituting the arts as a part or restructuring them as independent body. It is strongly recommended that:

- The Tigray Arts School should be reorganized;
- Particularly the Theatre department of the School should be provided with necessary teaching materials, staff and budget; and
- To fulfill the objectives of CAT, the Department should increase its student intake capacity.

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